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Connecting Adolescents’ Voice through Social Media and the Implication on Government Policy Making

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Abstract

Citizen participation is simply understood as taking part in government decision-making process. The development of social networking affords a new way for the youth to engage in policy formulation. This study highlights the way teenagers can use social media to legitimately participate in politics. The Survey comprised 120 teenagers drawn from the 13-19 age group in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The survey entailed observation of teenagers' status on Facebook and Twitter. Study findings show that there has been a shift in the way teenagers participate in politics. Social networking has become major influence in teenagers' participation in politics owing to its due its practicality, flexibility and ability to enable them express their political and social concerns in personal ways. This findings highlights the importance of social networking as space which the government can use to engage teenagers' voice into policy formulation. This article, examines contextual issues teenagers encounter in their lives, coupled with review of literature review on adolescents participation in politics, to determine whether social media is an effective policy-making tool in community political participation

Keywords: Adolescent, Social Media, Participation, Policy-Making
Introduction

Social media has become an embedded part of modern childhood. A lot of extant research has established the fact that teenagers who use social media tend to have a wider circle of real-life friends, a higher sense of identity and belonging and development of essential technical skills citizens need in the digital age is also higher. Moreover, teenagers who use social networking sites are shown to have higher confidence traditionally on the edge of friendship groups. By using social media, teenagers tend to find computer-mediated communication more comfortable than making face to face encounters as benefits have been associated with practicing social skills in a less threatening environment.

This study examines the patterns of teenagers that develop from expressing their political participation through social media. Considering the fact that during adolescence period, teenagers are in constant search for identity as well as endeavoring to find out who they are, makes understanding the way teenagers articulate their opinions on political issues vitally important. Besides, research, which explores the idea of digital footprint and teenagers, has far-reaching policy implication for government.

Teenager: Who are they?

Teenager or adolescence comes from the Latin word that means to grow up. Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development generally occurring during the period from puberty to legal adulthood. The period of adolescence is most closely associated with the teenage years. The term adolescence is commonly used to describe the transition stage between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines teenager or adolescents as young people between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Other scholars such as Chavda, Haley and Dunn (2005) grouped teenagers as young people of the ages of 11 to 16 years old. In addition, Wee (1999) divided teenagers into three stages which are early teens (13 to 14 years), middle teens (15 to 17 years) and late teens (18 to 19 years).
By categorizing teenager according to their age group, Piaget (1970) highlighted that teenagers progressed to more adult-like thought patterns and were capable of complex thought about concrete and hypothetical objects and situations. Moreover, Roedder (1981) notes that teenagers under the age of 19 years are grouped into the reflective category, which means that they have the ability to make their own decisions in a more adaptive manner as well as employ rational and sophisticated influence strategies in the right situations and in giving answers to objections from adult.

Thomas Tan Tsu Wee (1999) gives several common characteristics of teenagers. Firstly, teenagers are adjusting to a physically maturing body including awareness of sexual feelings and physical courage. Secondly, adolescents have ambivalent feeling towards the dependency and security of childhood and the independence of adults. Thirdly, the growing importance of peer groups as far as their opinions and values are concerned in regard to winning acceptance. As a social group, teenagers have similarities in taste, language and attitude (Ong, 1996; Wee, 1999).

Social Media and Teenagers

Today's teenagers are the first generation to know more about technology than adults. Connecting and communicating through social media incites hardly any fear for this age group and has in fact given teenagers global reach as they connect with various parts of the world. What initially took center stage in the 1990s with the development of online newsgroups, forums and chatrooms, subsequently evolved to include discussion boards and social networking websites (O'Reilly, Berger, Hernandez, Parent, & Seguin, 2012). These online spaces are a conduit for social activity and represent electronic versions of "town forums," defined not by a common geography or physical location but by a
commonality of interest and involvement in products, services, issues or lifestyles (Kozinets, 2002)

Teenagers have grown up on internet, email, mobile phones and computer games (Clarke, 2003), which make them very well informed. Through internet and social media, teenagers are already plugged into cyber relationship with other teenagers in space that is characterized by easy access to knowledge and information. Consequently, teenagers have a broader worldview and deeper understanding of global issues. Global communication changes the course of events as teenagers actively strive to connect with each other across the world.

The growing number of social media nowadays has significant influence on teenagers’ behavior, which has led to their being categorized as a media-savvy generation (Gray, 2009). Teenagers put so much emphasis on social media because in this stage of age they are very conscious of how others think and assess them in their constant search for acceptance and identity and increased concern for others, their independence and self-reliance. Their sense of who they are and their search for identity is therefore a key aspect of their lives. The needs of these young people for autonomy, identity and a sense of belonging can obviously be found in their status on Facebook or twitter.

Teenagers’ quest for identity underlines a claim for individuality, which is in fact highly conformist in terms of their adaptation to social media. This group of age is at a time when teenagers are asking, “who am I? or who do I want to become?” Therefore, by having and get involved in social networking such as facebook and twitter, teenagers have the opportunity to develop their self-identity. Social networking helps them find out what they are passionate about, gives them access to people all over the world sharing ideas and gradually they can build their online reputation: signing up to campaigns or joining groups to make their voice heard.

Methodology
The data discussed here were collected from a survey on teenagers at three different school levels. This included students in junior high schools (grade 9), senior high school (grade 10, 11, 12) and first year university students in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Teenagers constitute 20 percent of the estimated 388,088 population living in approximately 88,464 households in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

A questionnaire, which was based on Wee’s category, was administered to 120 teenagers under the age of 19 years between November and December 2011. Teenagers in this survey form an important segment in the population with a great drive to use social media as a way to communicate with others and express their thoughts, perspectives or even sentiments. The purpose of the survey was to gain deeper insight into the mindset of today’s teenagers with respect to issues of serious concern such as, values, social media habits and political participation. The question set covered issues such as social networking usage (length of usage, frequency, purpose) and attitudes towards social networking (usefulness, reliability and limitation).

Prior to distributing the questionnaire, researchers requested for permission from respondents to add researchers on their Facebook and follow their Twitter friends’ lists. By becoming their online friends, researchers were given access to observe the status of respondents, thereby enabling them to gather necessary information. The observation exercise took 30 days.

**Social Networking Usage**

Internet is central to teenagers’ search for information on any subject. However, less obviously, this new virtual sphere has also become an alternative to more traditional meeting points for teenagers such as the school yard (Peattie, 2002). For many, social media is a primary way of communicating often rendering face-to-face interaction unnecessary (Forrester Research, 1999).
Media including music, television, internet and having social networking such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn are an important part of the teenagers' life. The survey results showed that 74.2 percent of teenagers surveyed had at least a Facebook and Twitter account. However, only a few were actively involved in other social networking such as LinkedIn. Survey findings indicate that the intensity of accessing social networking sites varies among teenagers. This research found that more than 50 percent of teenagers accessed social networking sites every day, less than 34.2 accessed between 1-3 times a week and only less than 12 percent of teenagers visited these sites once in more than a week (Table 1). Teenagers who are in their first year at the university has the highest frequency in accessing Facebook and Twitter, which is daily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 times a Week</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; Once in A Week</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, although 70 percent of teenagers accessed social networking sites after school hours, 30 percent of the respondents acknowledged that they were connected to their peers through Facebook and Twitter during school hour and after school hour as well. Teenagers between 16-20 years of age constituted the largest percentage in this category. This study also revealed that teenagers spent an estimated 3 to 4 hours per day exposed to social networking while at the same time increasingly attending to more than one form of media at a time for instance writing instant messages on mobile phones whilst chatting on Facebook or Twitter.

The survey also asked teenagers their purpose of accessing social networking sites. Results showed that more than 50 percent teenagers accessed the sites
daily in order to update their status (48.3 percent), obtain information related to sociopolitical issues (21.7 percent), make comments on other people’s status (19.2 percent), and upload photos (10.8 percent).

Attitudes towards Social Networking

The rapid development of social networking has played a crucial role in teenagers’ learning process and has influenced their political participation. As teenagers are characterized by change, the ultimate effects will depend on the extent to which positive possibilities can be harnessed and negative influences minimized. According to Clarke (2003), change can be seen from their aspiration, language they speak or what they consume. Teenagers grow from being at the cooperative and entertaining stage, searching for an identity and finding out who they are. To that end, their form of communication is different. Teenagers actively seek new ways to express their aspirations such as a sense of apathy towards politics and politicians, taking a stance on what is going on in international issues such as war in Iraq and Palestine, mutual love and respect for someone, conflict or even disagreement (McMahon, 1996).

The survey found that social networking sites have become media where for teenagers to share their problems that relate to personal, lifestyle, education, business, work and other social and actual issues (Table 2).

Table 2. Teenager’s Most Problems Shared in Facebook and Twitter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Boy [%]</th>
<th>Girl [%]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Issues</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-Related</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey finding indicated that many teenage girls, sited problems that related to personal and education, with issues concerning their school tasks and expressions of personal feelings (love and hate) about their parents or friends. On the other hand, issues teenage boys frequently discussed related to lifestyle and actual issues. They shared issues that included national football and sports players, national leadership, religion, corruption, political parties, television, movies or even sarcastic humor. Based on most statuses posted for instance, teenagers reflected on contents of Television news on concerning corruption, national leadership and the bickering within Indonesian national football association had adverse influence on teenagers as it portrayed violence, unfairness and lack of positive role models. On the contrary, their status on Facebook or Twitter can also serve as venues for education and valuable information on such key issues as health, violence prevention, mental health concerns, religious and political activities, organization activity at the school or university level and international current affairs. In short, a conclusion can be drawn that all the problems teenagers post on their status reflect a form of interaction with their peers.

Furthermore, the research result showed that teenagers are enthusiastic in using social media sites to discuss political issues. There were 54.2 percent of teenagers argued about political matters at the school/university level, 36.7 percent examined politics at the national level and 9.1 percent discussed politics at the local level. To have a better understanding of teenagers' political participation through Facebook or Twitter, the survey categorized political issues that were mostly shared on their status. Categories varied from issues related to election, political appointments, political behavior, to politics at school or university (table 3).

### Table 3. Political Issues Discussed on Social Networking Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political-Related Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responding the news</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expecting comments</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triggering discussion</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey has also unveiled the reason behind teenagers’ posts on their Facebook or Twitter social network sites that are related to political issues was in response to news broadcasts on television and newspapers, expecting comments from friends, triggering any discussion with friends and other reasons (Table 4). Moreover, respondents in the research were motivated by positive responses they frequently received from their friends whenever they posted comments on political issues. In addition, writing on online networking sites instilled sense of independency in teenagers and courage in expressing their concerns.

Table 4. Intention behind the Status

Teenagers’ Voice and Political Engagement

Traditional measures of political participation such as voting, campaigning and donating money are seen as the cornerstone of democracy (Dahl, 1989; Putnam, 2000). However, many studies have demonstrated that this type of political participation seems to be declining particularly among young people (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006). Today,
the conduct of political participation is done in various ways which young citizens find more practical, flexible, and personal in addressing social issues. To that end, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have found evidence that supports the notion that teenagers use social network sites to express their political and social concerns (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010).

Results of this study corroborate findings of previous research on the subject of teenagers, social network site use, and political participation. Teenagers in the study were highly likely to post political content on their social networking sites, hence showed the tendency to use them as media for traditional political activities. This finding is easy to explain as Facebook and Twitter serve as an important public space for teenagers to express their ideas about political issues with fun and simply and without fear. This new pattern also highlights the increasingly important influence of teenagers in political engagement. To that end, various types of political talk and activities on social networking sites are a manifestation of political participation for teenagers who may feel unwelcome in traditional political space (Schlozman et al., 2010). The findings of this research also lend support to the fact explained in Seongyi and Woo-Young (2011) to the effect that lifestyle structure of teenagers today tends to encourage them to learn more about social issues and nurture cognitive abilities through new media than adult generation.

Participation is an important prerequisite for effective democracy. Hence, participatory democracy accords citizens equal and sufficient opportunities to influence each stage of the political process, from issue formation to policy implementation (Dahl, 1989). The eagerness shown by the teenagers’ intensity to post or write comments on any political issues can be considered as manifestation of the existence of political talk among them. In line with this, Barber (1984) and Dahl (1989) identified political talk as central to the process of influence by spurring teenagers to engage in political activities. The posting, commenting and mentioning political contents on Facebook and Twitter to their peers, helps teenagers to develop their own opinions, understand alternative perspectives and become more receptive to political differences (Mutz, 2002). Without such dialogue and participation, teenagers’ voice would be ignored or
misunderstood and decisions of political leaders highly unlikely to reflect the will of teenagers.

**Teenagers and Everyday Political Participation**

Many studies on democracy have found that traditional political participation among young people in decline has been identified in many. Compared to other age groups, people of young age are less likely to show interest in political participation. Teenagers tend to be less satisfied with the government than older citizens and show little trust in other individuals (Bennett, 2008). The trend of political engagement among teenagers is characterized by their decision to choose to participate in ways that are less obviously recognized and less frequently measured. Scholars have recognized the condition in which young people need alternative political participation forms (Bang, 2005; Bang & Sørensen, 1999). Hence, the emergence of social networking as an alternative form of in the daily life of the teenager is seen as a way to fill this gap.

Research results underscore the fact that teenagers in Yogyakarta are well aware of the existence of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and use them effectively as a media of political participation. The contents of discussions on the sites showed the concern of teenagers and knowledge about current local, national and international issues. This reality seems adequate to qualify as strong democracy as described and portrayed by Barber (1984). Barber (1984) emphasizes political participation as a way to make any group of citizens to feel obligated to participate, to hold independent beliefs and opinion and to engage in political activity to address their own concerns and needs. To that end, the activity of writing and posting their status about current issues may serve as a form of self-expression and engagement of teenagers in addressing social needs through political action. Bennets (2008) describes this type of teenagers as actualizing citizens or those who want to be involved in immediate ways. This preference for engaging citizenship may lead individuals to participate in an expanded range of political activities.

Teenagers in this study are aware of the fact that their everyday activity on Facebook and Twitter has political significance, which are why the sites are used.
and a vital media and space to express interests in a wide variety of political topics and activities. Furthermore, this research uses teenagers' perception to capture their definition of politics. Research findings indicate that teenagers understand politics as any government activities, corruption, incidents of conflicts affecting political parties or national football association, elections, or even relating to the issue of Palestine. The political participation of teenagers can be observed from their discussions of issues that are mentioned in their status updates.Milbrath (1965) describes this kind of political participation as a spectator activity. This level of activity is a very basic form of political participation as it requires least involvement through such activities as having discussions but not attend a political rally or donating money.

Communicating about politics should be understood as a form of political action (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004) and political actions should be understood as a form of expression and communication as they are often publicly visible (Hayes, Scheufele, & Hagen, 2006). Data used in this research support these ideas because teenagers' motives for posting any political issues in their status seemed as much related to self-expression as to getting involved in the traditional type of political action. Teenagers acknowledged the importance of Facebook and Twitter as a great forum where friends can get involved and can collectively voice their opinions about current political issues. It is also worth noting that some teenagers also use Facebook and Twitter to disseminate their vision and mission for the purpose of school election exercise. Observation of teenagers' status provides strong evidence that such actions are beneficial in mobilizing potential votes from their friends. In particular, the language used, and functions, of posts generated strong responses in terms of acceptability and political participation among teenagers. Since Facebook and Twitter friends typically know each other from other contexts, it seems reasonable to suggest that political interaction on these sites is bears semblance to conversations that take place between friends or family than those between anonymous individuals (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Such casual conversations are indeed an important part of political participation (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999).

Change and Self-Identity
Experts on teenagers observe that during teenage years, most of them are calm, predictable and purposeful most of the time. At this younger age, changing and looking for self-identity characterize them. Social networking sites, through the process of creating profiles and communication with others, offers them one way for teenagers to manage their identity, change and choices (Boyd, 2010). Survey data survey and exhaustive observation of 120 teenagers support the notion that political expression on Facebook and Twitter constitutes part of identity management. Some teenagers acknowledged the fact that the way they react to and responded to political contents, and participate in political discussions on Facebook and Twitter had implications for relationships with their peers. Moreover, such activities ensured that they were up-to-date with current political issues at the local, national and international level. In light of that, activities on social network sites has significant influence on whether or not the teenager's identity is accepted and acknowledged by their friends.

Social networking has immense capacity to spread information on current political issues among teenagers. This is not surprising as Boyd (2007, p. 119) notes that social networking has power to reach unintended audiences. Boyd (2007, p. 119) notes, “Everything you say is going to be heard by a lot of people. In fact, it's going to be heard by more people than if you stood out on campus on the stump and said something on the bullhorn. You're not going to reach as many people as you would if you posted on Facebook". This study found that teenagers' political activities on social networking have social meaning and importance for their experiences in other context as political participation on Facebook and Twitter is not an isolated experience. Political talks and conversations can affect other political conversations elsewhere and teenagers learned and practiced rules of political conversation and engagement throughout these participation processes on Facebook and Twitter. Interestingly, the findings of the research show that by actively writing any posts about any political issues on Facebook and Twitter has positive implication for the capability teenagers have in making effective presentation of political opinions and arguments. The acquisition of such skills offers advantages for teenagers' development in interpreting change and increasing their understanding about
self-identity.

**Empowering Teenagers' Participation in Policy Making**

The broad definition of government and the relationships between communication and action on social networking has positive influence on the participation of teenagers in politics. However, further questions arise on how to design, measure, and describe teenagers' participation in politics and relate it to government policy making. It is worth acknowledging that traditional definitions of political action are not entirely useful for understanding politics on Facebook. Yet, the observation of teenagers' Facebook and Twitter status in this research encountered the difficulty to identify the number of users who were actively involved in traditional political activity such as attending political party meetings, signing petitions or donating money. Measuring the number of teenagers who are involved in the above activities does not reveal much about the meaning behind their status. Rather, teenagers consider social networking sites as a means of expression and interaction.

However, although political posts and activities on social networking sites are not necessarily comparable to traditional political activities, and considered as a form of political expression of teenagers, the government could use their ideas, opinions and expressions as an input in the policy making process. Unfortunately, the limitation of this study made it difficult to determine the way the government can accommodate feedback from young people to formulate policy. Policy formulation and implementation for young citizens are by and large discussed from adult's point of view. The government spends little effort in managing and accommodating the voice of teenagers through social networking. This is the case, despite the fact, social interaction through Facebook and Twitter is a vital part of the political landscape which can serve as media to obtain feedback from citizens. In fact, the government can use status as lessons learned in capturing personal concerns about some issues which it can then incorporate in the process of making the right decisions that benefit teenagers.

Issues such as corruption, conflict, elections, and deviant behavior of leaders, which this research found can be interpreted both as acceptance and rejection of
teenagers of the current condition in the country. To that end, the government should possibly arrange and create a dialogue to educate teenagers as well as provide space for their voice to be heard. Observation of teenagers’ Facebook and Twitter underscores the lack of discussion on political and policy issues, which makes the need for a comprehensive dialogue necessary. Dialogue is needed in order to equip teenagers with the capability to define and differentiate between “good” and “bad” political attitudes. This dialogue is one of the ways, which the government can use to collect citizens’ contribution. In other words, dialogue becomes an important process through which individual citizens impact on the collective decisions in the policy process (Dahl, 1989).

Current Changes and Trends in Citizen Participation

Communication plays the role of connecting citizens and government, which is essential in maintaining government functions. The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has changed policy framework as well as creating a digital government. By bringing many opportunities through more information, ICT reinforces government-citizen relationship and raises citizen participation. To that end, the government can take advantage of the rapid growth of social media today to create and exchange information in innovative ways, and to increase citizens’ accessibility to government policies. Social media can accelerate the dissemination of information related to policy making. Macintosh (2004) developed three levels of citizens’ participation using technology. Firstly, e-enabling. This focuses on citizens to have accessibility and understandability about government information. Secondly, e-engaging, which relates to the top-down consultation by using technology for citizens’ deeper contribution and deliberative debate on policy issues. Lastly, e-empowering, which supports active participation with the bottom-up perspective to influence policy agendas. Research results of this study suggest that citizens in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, are at the first level of participation in using technology, which is e-enabling. This level implies that citizens are using information and communication technology to express their voice but have yet to influence
policy-making process. Study findings also highlight the importance of the growth of citizens' awareness and demand for participation in the policy-making. Social media website is the way citizens take part in and express their opinion, using their convenient tool. At the same time, social media has added a new common as a virtual space for citizen communication.

The development of social media as a mode of expression of citizen voice has generated opportunities for a more egalitarian public discourse. David, Elin and Reeher (2002) highlight that internet and the availability of social media afford ordinary citizen the ability to short-circuit political elites and deal directly with one another as well as public officials. Hence, political participation is very much in evidence. Observation of teenagers' status on their Facebook and Twitter accounts revealed certain patterns of behavior of the young generation pertaining to current issues. In addition, the study also identified activities of young people who by articulating their concerns for government tried to influence policy indirectly. The government can use such reality to initiate a regime of equal voice for each citizen in policy-making process on determining preferences, concerns and needs for all citizen and become one of the basic principles of democracy (Scholzman, Verba, & Brady, 2011).

Voice and Government Policy Making

It is widely argued that increased community participation in government policy-making generates many important benefits. Findings of this study indicate that teenagers as citizens have used social media as a medium to show their keen interests in contributing to the government policy process by collaborating with their friends and in some way reaching consensus to bring about positive social and environmental change. Based on the language teenagers use to express their opinions in their status, underscore the fact that they are well informed about any current social issues in the country. The formulation of policy-making process is usually the responsibility of representativeness of citizens in some organizations. However, the process should anticipate the shift in traditional policy-making process caused by the development of the
Internet and technology such as social media website as a new medium for citizens to participate in the government policy-making. Teenagers as well as other age groups are citizens who have the right to articulate their opinions. The choice of social media website is made because of its simplicity. Accommodating teenagers' participation will ensure that policies that are formulated are more realistically grounded in citizens preferences, and the public will become more sympathetic evaluators of key decisions that government administrators make. In any case, increased public support might create a less contentious public policy regime easier to govern and regulate (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). The advantage in understanding citizens' voice is the belief that citizen involvement in democracy will produce more public-preference policy making on the part of administrators and a better appreciation of the larger community among the public (Box, 1998). Furthermore, King and Stivers (1998) notes that improved citizens' voice can increase public trust toward the government policy-making process. Therefore, debate swirling around citizens and voice is no longer representative of government versus citizen participation, but what type of citizen-participation process is best (Konisky & Beierle, 2001).

The argument of enhancing citizen voice through new medium such as social media focuses on the benefits of the process itself and can be indicated as a transformative tool for social change. In addition, teenagers and other age groups are expected to produce better decisions and thus more efficiency benefits to the rest of society by sharing their contribution about daily social matters through social media. Irvin and Stansbury (2004) consider the advantage of citizens' participation in government policy-making as presented in table 5.

Table 5. Advantage of Citizen Participation in Government Policy-Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy-Making Process</th>
<th>Advantages to Citizen</th>
<th>Advantages to Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education (learn from and inform government representatives)</td>
<td>Education (learn from and inform citizen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persuade and enlighten</td>
<td>Persuade citizen, build trust and allay anxiety or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of decentralization, connecting community's voice and public service delivery will result in better use of resources if policy making and policy implementation reflect the needs and priorities of those most affected - citizens. This belief is, however, based on an important assumption that citizens' voice has an influence on the decision the government makes concerning resources use and service delivery. In any case, it is well established that representative democracy is a vital instrument for establishing citizens' needs and preferences. However, many studies have established results that show that policy making usually occurs behind closed doors with citizens playing a minimal role(Devas & Grant, 2003). In other words, participation and accountability mechanisms are often dominated by local elites, hence exclude citizens' voice of any age group. The traditional model of local government in which representatives is the only force that makes policy on behalf of citizens with little input from any media is still the one that prevails in many countries. Moreover, mechanisms representatives use are often found to marginalize women, minorities, and vulnerable groups such as teenagers. Thus, notwithstanding the reality that local governments have provided space for consultation and participation in a systematic and inclusive manner, there is still need to consider social media as a source of information. Nonetheless, there is need for bureaucracy and administrators who have the requisite ability to use technology to garner public
Moreover, they should base their decisions on sufficient knowledge of the range of views of citizens. In addition, policy decisions for teenagers should incorporate their views and priorities. By establishing such teenager-friendly policy, will go a long way in enhancing accountability. In any case, strengthening citizens’ voice through enhanced accountability will help improve and increase the responsiveness of government to citizens.

Conclusion

Participation is the main means by which citizens can express their needs. In the transition age, teenagers require new, more simple, flexible, and personal media which is a substitute for traditional political action. Consequently, Facebook and Twitter have become essential space for political engagement for teenagers to express their ideas and concerns about political issues. Moreover, social networking sites provide space for young people to talk about politics. Political talk at this stage of their development help teenagers to understand change and self-identity better. Study results show that current issues in the country have become interesting topics of discussion on Facebook and Twitter. As a conclusion, an argument that can be made is that social networking sites played a significant role in increasing engagement of teenagers in local, national and international political issues and talk. To that end, the government should not ignore teenagers’ political engagement, but should instead use it as an input in the policy-making process.

Rapid development of communication and technology means that citizens today have the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of options in exercising their political voice. Lessons learnt from this study underscore the need for the government to adopt various mechanisms in the governing process which should include various initiatives with the capacity to accommodate the diversity of citizens’ voice. By instituting changes in citizen participation in the policy making process, will help in increasing citizens’ understanding and trust of the government. However, to achieve public support through satisfying citizens expectations, the government should at the same time endeavor to
increase transparency and accountability. In short, information and technology development, increase in of citizens' awareness and demand for participation, serve as requisite conditions for bureaucracy to change the context and mechanisms used in the policy-making process. The expectation is that changing mechanisms of understanding citizens' voice, will help in creating more accountable government-citizenship arrangements.

Reference


