Political communication through non-political social media: Testing an expressive citizenship model

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Abstract

Substantial studies have investigated nature of citizenship and various aspects of conceptualization of citizenship from informed, dutiful to self-actualizing models. The main reason to this shift is political changes and their impact on civic engagement in political participation. Young generation in digital era is identified as transformed citizens from informed to expressive citizens with heavy use of social media, especially Facebook. This study examined the association between young Facebook users' social and entertainment expressive Facebook use and their interactive political expression as an alternative model to traditional citizenship models.

Keywords—Citizenship models, Expressive use, Political expression, Social media

1. Introduction

The debate on "a good citizen" and to what extent good citizenship is malleable has been subjected to change over time and shaped by political and social forces. Since the behavior of citizens is affected by rapidly changing political systems, the notion of good citizenship has changed over the course of history. The sine qua non of good citizenship today as socially constructed and maintained are likely to be changed with evolving social and technological conditions (Bennett et al, 2009). Further, with the ascent of social media, increasing scholarship has contended that democratic citizenship models have shifted from informed citizenship to expressive citizenship (Yu and Oh, 2018). This is mainly due to the recent statistics which shows that people are less politically engaged than in the past because they increasingly turn away from news consumption while embracing social- and entertainment-related activities especially among young generation (Stoycheff et al, 2016). Hence new forms of citizenship models are important as this situation should not be viewed as a decline but rather as a change in the form of political engagement which has to be studied (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2017).

The conversion from traditional "dutiful citizen" model to new "actualizing citizenship" model suggests that expression related to social and personal interests within peer-to-peer networks is likely to trigger political behaviors. (Yu and Oh, 2018) Technological improvements and the increased opportunities offered by digital

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media for people to express interests and cultivate social relations lay the foundation for expressive forms of civic and political participation. Therefore, this study focused on how non-political expressive acts on Facebook are associated with political participation to understand the newest form of expressive citizenship model.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Traditional vs new citizenship models

 Citizens of any nation act their role in public life depending on the internal and external environmental factors, hence not in static nature. They act differently and most often based on political culture and opportunities of their time and place (Schudson, 1998). With globalization and industrialization, the changes are rapid. Therefore, scholars have done many studies on various citizenship models describing various aspects of civic engagement. In the middle of the twentieth century these models were introduced as hierarchical, dutiful, politically formal citizenship and towards the end of it to more personally defined and self-expressive models (Bennett, 2003). These different citizenship models are in other words theories or systematic set of ideas that can help which civic perceptions or behaviors cluster together, and how they should be interpreted (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2017). He also states that like in other theories, citizenship models also have their own descriptive and normative aspects. Descriptively it explains current voting turn-outs, or levels of young people's political knowledge, yet closely connected to normative assumptions such as how should a "good citizen" act.

The concept of citizenship has three components named membership, participation, rights and duties; that stands and fall together (Bellamy, 2008). As Bellamy (2008) explained Membership is tied to a political community. Rights and duties are attached to this membership together with the possibility of free and equal participation in the community's political processes. Therefore, citizenship is best explained when it is tight to authority.

Some argued that citizenship can refer to any group, but where citizenship is enacted is commonly understood as political (Bosniak, 2006). When defining politics which is socially constructed "Power" is an important component of the concept, especially if linking political participation to an understanding of citizenship as a relation to some kind of authority. Political community as an ensemble of people concerned with the organisation of society make sense of these concerns in a similar way. When people participate and act upon shared meanings, address issues of the structure of society and the just division of its common goods, they enter into the practice of citizenship.

 In theoretical aspect, the early theories such as representative liberal theory explain that a good citizen is the informed voter, who can choose intelligently between candidates and parties (Ferree et al, 2002) whereas, in discursive theory good citizens participate in public discourse, and do so while maintaining civility and mutual respect. With multiplicity of definitions of a good citizen, the new citizenship models explain that a good citizen is either informed and membership-oriented, or

participatory and expressive (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2017) However this is also under criticisms. A good citizen can be the same who vote and is informed. Also the one most likely to engage in participatory modes of politics (Cohen & Kahne, 2012). The informed citizenship are knowledgeable participants in several aspects of political life. Thus, only informed citizens can enable a healthy democracy. In dutiful citizenship models, the motivation for political action is more strongly based on a sense of duty or obligation to defined social groups (Bennett, 2003)

2.2 Social media and citizenship models

It is said that individualism is to be blamed for civic withdrawal away from formal politics and according to Bauman (2001) this equals to citizens' withdrawal from community sensibilities as well. It seems that political participation has increasingly become part of an individual self-realization project which has opened new arenas for political participation. As explained by Dahlgren (2001), these arenas seem to be more short-lived and single-issue oriented such as signing petitions, voicing concerns and protests by creating and joining new groups and associations outside the Parliament. The political engagement is therefore mobilized around one particular issue, attracting new forms of temporary collectives.

In informed or dutiful citizenship models, the role of (traditional) media was mostly as a source of information mainly including information like political ads, and primarily the news. The dutiful citizen's political expression is limited and aimed at specific institutional target through voting, or through membership in formal civic organizations (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2017). In these traditional models the media is primarily receiving political news through newspapers, television or radio.

In the new era of digital age peer socializing and entertainment activities on platforms like Facebook have become deeply woven into the fabric of social media users' daily lives. According to statistics in Sri Lanka, 86.65% of Facebook users are recorded in October 2019 (Statcounter, 2019). People use Facebook mainly for social or entertainment purposes. However, in the context of changing citizenship models, this non-political Facebook use has a significant role to play in political participation.

As stated by Zuckerman, (2014) those who use digital media to share perspectives on a daily basis (e.g., sharing a photo about lunch) are more likely to employ the same tools to engage in civic activities (e.g., sharing photos about collective actions). Therefore social expressive use of Facebook (disclosure of everyday personal experiences related to school, work, family, and relationships) and entertainment expressive use of Facebook (expression of personal interests, such as gaming, sports, and music) has an association between political communication on the site, which is interactive political expression, such as sharing content about political and social issues (Boyd, 2014). According to reference (Bennett users who frequently engage in social and entertainment expressive activities on Facebook (like, share or comment) will also be more likely to engage in interactive political expression on the site.

With young people the above preposition is much valid. According to Bennett (2003), young peoples' orientation towards public life is much less about participation in

conventional political action (Dutiful citizenship) and more about expressing complex identities through personally resonant activities, consumption, and self-expression. Hence the following hypothesis were developed to measure the association between social and entertainment expressive Facebook use of young people on their political expression on Facebook.

H1: Social expressive Facebook use is positively associated with interactive political expression on Facebook.

H2: Entertainment expressive Facebook use is positively associated with interactive political expression on Facebook.

3. Methodology

The current study used data collected through Facebook with young Facebook users in Sri Lanka in September 2019 using aged 18 – 30. 150 individuals who self-identified as Facebook users were included in the online survey.

Different types of expressive Facebook usages were captured by asking how often respondents engage in three activities on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently), including "liking," "commenting on," and "posting or sharing," in loops in reference to two topical domains: personal life (e.g., work, school, relationships, or family) and entertainment interests (e.g., sports, movies, food, or music).

Three items asked how often respondents expressed opinions about politically related topics (e.g., elections, government, human rights, and economics) on Facebook. Three modes of political expression, including "liking," "commenting on," and "posting or sharing" were asked in loops in reference to political and social issues. The response scale ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently). Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).
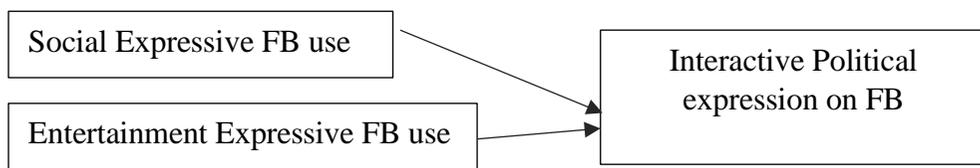

Figure 1: conceptual framework tested

Substantial research findings explain that political communication can be interactive or political communication through social media or political talk in face-to face settings. Political communication in expressive citizenship models transform political observers to political participants (Shah et al, 2007).

Table 1: Operationalization

Independent Variables

Social Expressive Facebook Use	Scale
how often you have engaged in Facebook,	
• "liking" someone's personal life (work, school, relationship, family)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
• "commenting on" someone's personal life (work, school, relationship, family)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
• "posting or sharing" your personal life (work, school, relationship, family)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
Entertainment Expressive Facebook Use	
how often you have engaged in Facebook,	
• "liking" someone's entertainment interest (sports, movies, food, or music)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
• "commenting on "someone's entertainment interest (sports, movies, food, or music)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
• "posting or sharing" your entertainment interest (sports, movies, food, or music)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
Interactive Political expression on FB	
• "Liking" political and social issues (elections, government, human rights etc.)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
• "Commenting on" political and social issues (elections, government, human rights etc.)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*
• "Posting or sharing" political and social issues (elections, government, human rights etc.)	*1 (never) to 5 (very frequently)*

Two hypotheses were tested using regression analysis (H1: Social expressive Facebook use is positively associated with interactive political expression on Facebook; H2: Entertainment expressive Facebook use is positively associated with interactive political expression on Facebook)

The face validity, the questionnaire was given to 25 adolescents. The criteria for inclusion were as follows: Female gender, age range of 18-30 years, and willing to participate in the study. In addition, the questionnaire was given to three university academics, who were familiar with the concept under investigation and instrumentation. Then the participants were required to evaluate the items with respect to problems, ambiguity, relativity, proper terms and grammar, and understandability using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (highly important).

4. Results and Conclusion

Examining the demographic profile of the respondents, the age of the sample in the study is younger (M= 24), income and education reflect the sample respondents are earning average of monthly Rs. 35,000 and the education reflect the majority has a degree. Hence the regression results explain the educated youth expressive citizenship use of Facebook and their political communication.

Among newspapers, television and web news use as forms of news media the descriptive statistics explain that how many days the respondents consumed news in past week from new paper(s) (M= 2.39), television (M= 5.43) and websites (M= 4.57) reflecting the television is taking the lead.

The reliability analysis explain that the three latent variables are reliable with above 0.7 Cronbach alpha value as explained in table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach alpha
Social Expressive FB use	0.805
Entertainment Expressive FB use	0.812
Interactive Political expression on FB	0.756

The correlation analysis of the association between social and entertainment expressive use and interactive political expression on FB explain that there is a significant positive relationship between expressive use of FB and political expression on FB (table 3).

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Significance
Social Expressive FB use	0.564	0.000
Entertainment Expressive FB use	0.432	0.000

In the first and second hypotheses, it is predicted that social (H1) and entertainment (H2) expressive Facebook use were positively associated with interactive political expression on Facebook, respectively. As Fig. 2 shows, both social (ß=0.31, p < .05) and entertainment expressive Facebook use (ß=0.30, p < .001) are positive predictors of interactive political expression on Facebook, supporting H1 and H2.
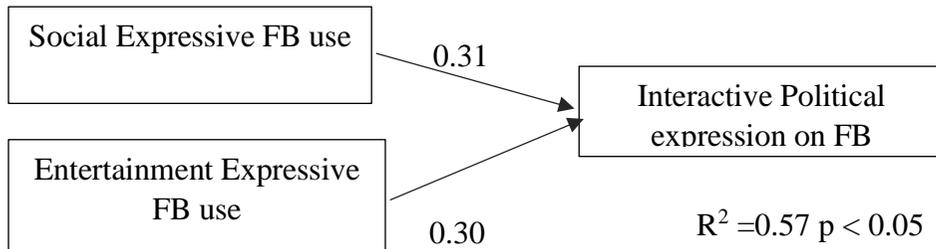

Figure 2: Hypothesis Testing

The coefficients of both hypothesis (H1 and H2) is accepted with the significant value of H1 and H2 are being both less than 0.05. Therefore, the regression results show that the emergent expressive citizenship models can be supported by empirical data.

Several implications can be drawn from these findings. While supporting the expressive-citizenship models, in particular Facebook users who frequently share about their personal life and entertainment interests online are also more likely to engage in interactive political expression on the site. These findings are contrary to prior work suggesting that the use of digital media for social or recreational purposes may distract citizens from public engagement (Shah et al, 2007). One possible explanation for the conflicting findings is that the results of earlier work (Shah et al, 2007) may not be generalizable over time because in the early years of Internet use, those who had Internet access may have had few friends and family members with similar access, which would have limited the opportunities for meaningful interactions (Kraut et al, 2002).

The results also prove that the young generations' political communication is through non-political social media is accurate preposition. Hence the results accept both hypotheses. Moreover, it is clear that the traditional dutiful citizenship models cannot be applied to young generation. Hence expressive citizenship models are much valid.

Several potential limitations are noted. The sample should be more diverse explaining the youth characteristics. Also, the control variables should be tested. Future research can consider the affordances of different social media sites other than Facebook and further examine whether the findings are consistent across different sites and countries. Another limitation of this study is its lack of test-retest reliability, so it is recommended that test-retest reliability be done in future studies.

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