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Tapiwa CHININGA*
Ellen RUNGANI**
Norman CHILIYA***
Tinashe CHUCHU****

Facebook Communication and Marketing Influence on Decision-Making and Choice of University Student Representatives: A Student's Perspective

Abstract

Facebook has become the main platform for young adults to sustain their social presence as well as expand their social networks. The impact of social media on youth decision-making has attracted much attention in research and academia. The research setting was at University of Fort Hare, a university located in South Africa. Before and during a student representative council (SRC) election at the university, the six student parties contesting for the leadership office utilised Facebook in communicating and marketing their campaign messages to fellow students. This research therefore empirically investigated how Facebook influenced university students' intention to vote and elect an SRC for the institution. The survey methodology was adopted in collecting data and non-probability sampling, a form of convenience sampling was utilised in selection of suitable participants for the study. A total of 381 students participated in the study responding to questions examining potential drivers of selection of a particular student representative party (SRP). A conceptual model was developed with Facebook constructs that included "medium credibility of Facebook", "peer communication on Facebook" and "user trust of Facebook" among other factors that influence students' choice of an (SRP). The main findings established that identification with peers was observed as having the most significant impact on youths' intention to vote for student representatives. Message credibility was found to have weak impact on student's intention to vote for a particular (SRC) candidate. Implications emerged from the findings and further research suggestions were provided.

Keywords: medium credibility, Facebook, communication, marketing, information credibility

Introduction

The adoption of online communication platforms by universities and faculties when communicating with students has become imperative (Eger, Egerova & Kryston, 2019). Social media facilitates communication among university employees and students as well as the general public though websites (Eger et al., 2019). Understanding the role of social media in

* University of Fort Hare (South Africa).
** University of Fort Hare (South Africa).
*** University of de Witwatersrand (South Africa).
**** University of Pretoria (South Africa), tinashe.chuchu@up.ac.za (coresponding author).

the context of marketing communications is vital for both researchers and leaders (Fong & Burton, 2008; Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). The most popular social media website, Facebook, enables individuals to connect with their current friends, reconnect with people they might have lost touch with and to maintain existing relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Facebook has become the chief medium for young adults to maintain their social presence and extend social networks (Feng, Wong, Wong & Hossain, 2019). The use of social media in marketing is now acknowledged as a research theme; however, there is a lack of theoretical and first-hand research into consumer psychology regarding local usage of social media in political marketing strategies and practices (Aghara, Nwaizugbo, Chukwuemeka & Onyeizugbe, 2015; O'Cass & Pecotich, 2005). In addition, to the lack of literature on social media impact on voting there is also a lack of proper evaluation of its impact on voters (Ediraras, Rahayu, & Natalina, 2013). Facebook is used widely by consumers and in the process influence their purchase decisions (Gupta, 2013). This study, however, views Facebook from the perspective of marketing communications. Most studies that have been carried out on electronic word-of-mouth focused on consumer purchase intention of commercial products (Fuschillo & Cova, 2015; Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Lim, Hwang, Kim, & Biocca, 2015). However, the findings from the abovementioned literature do not necessarily address conditions in a developing country such as South Africa. The present research investigates how social media such as Facebook influenced student voting intention. Social media use is becoming popular with the youth interested in governance (Mengü, Güçdemir, Ertürk, & Canan, 2015). Social media platforms such as Twitter are preferred in election propaganda due its ability to facilitate instant messaging and effective communication (Mengü et al., 2015).

Student participation in university governance is considered one of the most fundamental values in European higher education (Klemenèiè, 2012). It dates back to medieval universities and it remerged with the student revolts in 1960ies (Klemenèiè, 2012). The use of social media in election campaigns is not a new phenomenon. During the 2008 US Election, young voters used Facebook to obtain campaign information and or share campaign news with their peers, exchange their political views, and express support for a candidate (Kohut, 2008; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). The present study investigates student politics. Student politics comprises of student representative associations and student activism on political causes (Klemenèiè & Park, 2018). The present research looks at social media's impact on elections help within a student environment. Students who vote, or run for office, in student school elections start to think that they can make decision for the school and possibly pave way for their future political ambitions (Saha & Print, 2010). Student politics refers to the activities associated with power dynamics between students and members of society in and out the higher education systems; more specifically, it pertains to the relationships between students and university authorities, as well as the communications between students and government officials (Klemenèiè & Park, 2018). The main social media platform of interest in this paper was therefore Facebook. Facebook has provided an innovative means of communication to institutions of higher learning (Eger, Egerova & Kryston, 2019). Young adults tend to use Facebook daily for social interactions (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009).

Prior research examining the use of Facebook in political campaigns established that Facebook users encounter news online mostly by chance while they are using the Internet for other things (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Lu, & Lee, 2019; Matsa & Lu, 2016). Past research has assumed that Facebook users believe that their Facebook friends are interested in their lives and activities as well as their problems (Brailovskaia,

Rohmann, Bierhoff, Schillack & Margraf, 2019). This therefore re-enforces the assumption that users of Facebook rely on their friends to make decisions. The importance of the role played by students in university governance and leadership is a relatively neglected area of inquiry (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009). Prior research on student voting intention (Morar, Venter, & Chuchu, 2016), defined voting as the likelihood that a person will act in a certain manner. In addition, literature on student participation in university governance has also examined perceptions toward student representatives, in terms of whether they help or hinder their effectiveness as student members of departmental committees. (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009).

Within the context of the present study under investigation, the influence and impact of Facebook on students' choice of student representatives is assessed. This then highlights the relevance that Facebook has to modern communication and public relations. Eger, Egerova and Kryston (2019), who suggested that the usage of social media has changed approaches to communication and publication relations by organisations, support this assertion. In the following sections the literature and grounding theory for the study were provided.

Theoretical Grounding

There are three common theories, which explain why the experience of student governance is related to future political ambitions of students (Saha & Print, 2010). The first theory is the "structural explanation" (Putman, 2000), followed by the "participation explanation" (Hahn, 1998; Print, Ørnstrøm & Nielsen, 2002). The third theory is the "development explanation" (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Structural explanation assumes political engagement is related to social capital (Putnam, 2000). Social capital can be fostered through institutional structures which facilitate spontaneous collective action of school students who later on develop political ambitions when they become adults (Saha & Print, 2010). According to the participation explanation, participation in school elections improves a student's awareness and experience of how politics works, and therefore increases the likelihood that students will be politically active as an adult (Saha & Print, 2010). Participation explanation assumes that participation in student governments allow students' to have a sense civic identity therefore understand their society better (Saha & Print, 2010).

Social Media, Marketing and Facebook

There is a substantial amount of attention and interest in the effects of social media on university student development and success (Abramson, 2011; Kamenetz, 2011; Junco, 2012). Furthermore, social media is a significant part of the process by which younger voters discuss about their ballot choices (Rainie, 2012). Social media has offered opportunities for organisations to forge close relationships with their customers resulting in customers' engagement with their brands (da Cunha Brandão, Faria, & Gadekar, 2019). Social media users usually discuss consumption matters on sites such as Facebook, which in turn influence their behaviour towards products and services (Boulianne, 2015). Furthermore social media it influences customers' loyalty and satisfaction, and assists in expanding the reach of organisations (da Cunha Brandão et al., 2019. Facebook, the most widely used social networking platform in

the world (Cosenza, 2018), serves as a contemporary medium to study social comparison (Song, Cramer & Park, 2019). When a Facebook user engages with a post on the platform (e.g. leaving a comment on the post), that post will most likely appear the user's friends' News Feed (Choi & Greene, 2017; Khobzi, Lau & Cheung, 2019; Hsu, Wang, Chih & Lin, 2015). This therefore implies that Facebook users are influenced by the activities of their friends on the social media platform. The Internet and social media have changed how consumers and marketers communicate to their target audiences as a result of consumers' access to large amounts of information (Boulianne, 2015).

The influence of reference group peers on consumer behaviour especially in social networks has also been well documented (Crawshaw, 2012; Hofstra, Corten & van Tubergen, 2016; Meacham, 2016; Momoc, 2013). The present study sought to understand how social media affect the intention to vote in the context of electronic word of mouth. The main objectives included measuring the influence of predictor variables such as medium credibility, message credibility, tie strength with peers, identification with the peers, peer communication, user trust, information credibilit on the intention to vote. Consumer socialisation through peer communication using social media platforms is increasingly becoming popular in marketing communications (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Social networking tools have revolutionised interpersonal interaction by greatly facilitating communication between users (Al-kandari & Hasanen 2012; Boulianne, 2015). Peer communication refers to the interactions consumers have on social media with regard to products and services (Bramoullé, Djebbari, & Fortin, 2009; Sarapin & Morris, 2015; Wang et al., 2012).

Tie strength with peers refers to the degree that a person is eager to associate with peers on social network sites, whether close or distant colleagues (Wang et al., 2012). Strong ties on social media leads to the transfer of more helpful information and therefore has larger impact on receivers than do weak ties (Huszti, Dávid & Vajda, 2013; Marder, Joinson, Shankar & Houghton, 2016). On the other hand, Identification with the peer group refers to a situation when a person develops we-intentions and wants to maintain a positive, self-defining relationship with a group, values relationships with the community, and is willing to engage in community activities (Rodríguez-González, Ruiz & Pujadas, 2015; Brundidge, Baek, Johnson, & Williams, 2013; Gromark & Schliesmann 2010). Information credibility is the perception of information received by a consumer being objective and credible (Li & Suh, 2015). The present research assumes that student voter intention is influenced by perception of information received being credible. Message credibility refers to the perceived trustworthiness of the communicated message, such as informational quality, accuracy, or recency (Kang, 2010). Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus & McCann, 2003). Medium credibility refers to user's perceived level of trustworthiness toward a specific medium (Li & Suh, 2015). Social media has its own share of challenges in terms of credibility as highlighted by Li and Suh (2015) who suggested that it suffers from a relative lack of professional fact-checkers to monitor its content. Trust refers to the belief that a person has or how an individual perceive attributes of a product or service (Flavián, Guinalíu & Gurrea, 2006)

Student Participation in University Governance and Elections

Much of the prior research on student participation in school governance has been conducted from a European perspective (Altbach, 2006; Klemenèiè, 2012; Planas, Soler, Ful-

lana, Pallisera & Vilà, 2013). Some of the research on student involvement in university governance was from the perspective of both the professors and the students (Planas et al., 2013). The present research in question looks at student participation in university solely from a student point-of-view. Higher education systems provide a range of formal and informal mechanisms for student participation in school leadership (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009). The modern provisions for student involvement in university decision-making have their origins in the wave of university evolution that spread across universities in North America, Western Europe and parts of the British Commonwealth in the 1960s and early 1970s (Altbach 2006; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Students are now viewed as a collective body are in some way represented in higher education governance in basically every European country (Klemenèiè, M. (2012). Leadership capacitybuilding is a central player in sustainable school development and the leadership contribution of students is an integral part of a genuine distributed conception of school leadership (Lizzio, Dempster & Neumann, 2011). Student politics refers to students organising themselves into representative student associations, such as student governments, graduate student employee unions, party-affiliated student organisations, or other student interest groups (Klemenèiè & Park, 2018). Activism, on the other hand, denotes practices of student collective action through different forms of political engagement, whereby students act in support of or in opposition to specific causes and hold the authorities accountable for their actions (Klemenèiè & Park, 2018).

This study examined student intention to vote and elect representatives, similar to prior research that also investigated the concept of "intention" within the context of elections (Ganser & Riordan 2015). Research on student elections has been receiving much attention (Saha & Print, 2010). The ways in which higher education institutions are governed, and the roles of various parties in this process, are an enduring and often contested area of both practice and inquiry (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009). It is widely accepted in most nations across the globe that there is some form of student representation in running of schools (Saha & Print, 2010). Participation in student government varies substantially from country to country (Saha & Print, 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehaman, Oswald & Schulz, 2001). Student leadership is not only limited to universities but also extents to high schools. For example, prior literature established schools in the UK, USA, Denmark and Germany had more than half of the students holding leadership positions on some form of student council, as prefect (or Student Captains), or in student clubs. The following section presents the hypotheses developed for the research. This is then followed by the research methodology section.

Hypotheses Statements

The study consisted of six proposed hypotheses in with potential antecedents of intention to vote for a student representative organisation.

H_1: Medium credibility of Facebook is positively and directly related to Intention to vote for a student representative organisation

H_2: Peer communication on Facebook is positively and directly related to Intention to vote for a student representative organisation

H_3: User trust of Facebook is positively and directly related to Intention to vote for a student representative organisation

H_4: Identification with Peers on party Facebook page is positively and directly related to Intention to vote for a student representative organisation

H_5: Tie Strength with peers on Facebook is positively and directly related to Intention to vote for a student representative organisation

H_6: Perceived information credibility is positively and directly related to Intention to vote for a student representative organisation

H_7: Perceived Message credibility is positively and directly related to Intention to vote for a student representative organisation

Research Methodology

This study followed the positivist approach as it was quantitative in nature utilising the survey methodology for collecting data. The collection of primary data was conducted through a self-administered survey distributed at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa. Even though Facebook was the most feasible channel for distributing the survey it was however distributed as a physical self-administered questionnaire on campus. This was to comply with ethical considerations since Facebook has numerous uncontrollable factors such as privacy concerns it could not be used for data collection. Based on a total population of 11, 818, an adequate sample size of 377 was recommended. This sample size was determined though the Raosoft® sample size calculator which recommends a sample of 377 for an estimated population of 20 000 (Raosoft, 2018). The calculator assumes that the data is normally distributed, response rate is at least 50%, margin of error is at 5% and the confidence level is 95%. The final obtained sample was 381 and therefore met the above mentioned criteria for a scientifically representative sample.

Population

Inclusion criteria for the research dictated that all participants have access to social media by some or other means of electronic device and be a user Facebook. The university used has six student political organisations namely SASCO, Youth Communist League, ANC Youth league, DASO, PASMA and DENOSA. All these organisations used Facebook to market themselves to students and have active Facebook pages

Measurement Instrument and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was designed based on the proposed model for this research. The scales and variables for peer communication, Tie strength with peers, identification with peers and intention to vote were adopted from Wang et al. (2012). The user trust scale was adopted from Flavián et al. (2006). Furthermore, questions for information credibility, medium credibility and message credibility were provided as adaptations from literature in order to suit the context of the study. Descriptive statistics were generated through SPSS while structural equation modeling was conducted through AMOS in order to test proposed hypothesis. The results of the study are presented in the following section.

Results

Sample Profile

Data was collected from a selected university in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa with 11, 818 registered students. The results represent all the participants' response to questions regarding how Facebook advertising influenced their choice of student representative organisations.

Table 1. Sample Profile Characteristics.

	Representation	
Male	194	50,9%
Female	187	49.1%
Total	381	100%
18-25 years	308	80.8%
26-35 years	73	19.2%
Total	381	100%
Number of Facebook Friends		
10 or less	3	0.8%
11-50	2	0.5%
51-100	24	6.3%
101-150	27	7.1%
151-200	44	11.5%
201-250	10	2.6%
251-300	71	18.6%
301-400	80	21.0%
More then 400	120	31.5%
Total	381	100.0%
Time Spent on Facebook per day		
0-14 mins	1	0.3%
11-50 mins	11	2.9%
30-44 Mins	50	13.1%
45-64 Mins	37	9.7%
65-74 mins	42	11.0%
75-84 mins	100	26.2%
over 85 mins	140	36.7%
Total	381	100.0

It can be observed in the table above that the ratio of male to female distribution was fair however, most of the participants were from the 18 to 25 years. A key observation from the sample was that 300 out of the 380 respondents had more than 400 Facebook connections. This indicates wide the reach and impact as well as the possible amount of influence it has. Lastly, it was observed most of the participants spend more than an hour a day on Facebook.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) in order to test the study's proposed hypotheses. SEM was carried-out in two-stages; first, was confirmatory factor analysis then followed by the hypothesis testing. SEM has recently become a respected statistical approach to test theory in several areas of knowledge (Nitzl, 2016; Zhang, Shao, Zhang, Li, Yin, & Xu, 2016). According to Guin et al., (2016) SEM is applied to assess the hypothesised relationship in the research model (Liao & Hsieh, 2013). The In terms of confirmatory factor analysis the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Tests were not conducted since the study utilised adapted scales from previous research that had already met suitability criteria for analysis. In addition, these tests are to identify factors from the data through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and this research did not require (EFA) since it used factors taken directly from the literature that are already available for use. Therefore, this research made use of confirmatory factor analysis to assess the suitability of the data and model fit. Model fit required to allow for further analysis was achieved. Table 2, presents the model fit results.

Table 2. Model Fit.

CMIN/DF	GFI	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
1,143	0,935	0,929	0,892	0,991	0,985	0,990	0,019

CFA Model : Confirmatory factor analysis model; CMIN/DF: Chi-square; GFI: Goodness of fit index; NFI: Normed Fit index; RFI; Relative Fit Index; IFI: Incremental Fit Index; TLI: Tucker Lewis Index; CFI: Comparative Fit Index. RMSEA: Root Measure Standard Error Approximation.

The measurement model produced a ratio of chi-squared value over degree-of-freedom of 1.413, which is acceptable as it falls below the recommended value of 3 (Ullman, 2001). Other model fit indices that included the GFI, NFI, RFI, IFI TLI and CFI were 0.935, 0.929, 0.892, 0.991, 0.985 and 0.990 respectively. All these model fit measures were above the recommended threshold of 0.9. The RMSEA was 0.019, which fell below the recommended threshold of 0.08 (Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008). Accuracy analysis Statistics, are in table 3 following by hypothesis results.

Table 3. Accuracy Analysis Statistics.

		Descriptive Statistics				Cronbach's Test		C.R. Value	Factor Loading
		Mean Value		Standard Deviation		Item-total	? value		
PC	PC1	3,512	3,664	1,185	1,115	0,722	0,831	0,834	0,832
	PC2	3,638		1,174		0,710			0,810
	PC3	3,843		0,985		0,656			0,731
UT	UT7	3,430	3,411	1,176	1,215	0,362	0,715	0,735	0,374
	UT10	3,115		1,327		0,628			0,790
	UT11	3,228		1,347		0,685			0,919
	UT12	3,871		1,011		0,362			0,403
ICRED	ICRED1	4,010	3,952	0,937	0,964	0,474	0,692	0,708	0,644
	ICRED2	3,940		0,959		0,554			0,682
	ICRED3	4,047		0,911		0,530			0,688
	ICRED4	3,811		1,049		0,361			0,428
IDP	IDP1	4,034	3,693	0,822	0,978	0,542	0,826	0,831	0,607
	IDP2	3,661		0,991		0,738			0,864
	IDP3	3,504		1,050		0,720			0,820
	IDP4	3,572		1,050		0,623			0,662
TSWP	TSWP1	3,913	3,925	0,952	0,944	0,770	0,854	0,831	0,848
	TSWP2	4,018		0,869		0,738			0,874
	TSWP3	3,843		1,011		0,659			0,711
IV	IV1	3,782	3,836	1,070	1,008	0,255	0,522	0,542	0,342
	IV2	4,005		0,921		0,369			0,557
	IV3	3,719		1,032		0,393			0,680
MEDC	MEDC1	3,144	3,765	1,283	1,176	0,526	0,798	0,596	0,437
	MEDC2	3,121		1,221		0,481			0,414
	MEDC3	3,596		1,026		0,492			0,433
	MEDC4	3,982		0,835		0,533			0,590
	MEDC5	3,879		1,001		0,317			0,416
	MEDC6	3,879		0,995		0,422			0,548
	MEDC8	4,031		0,984		0,381			0,547
	MEDC9	4,215		0,744		0,463			0,606
	MEDC10	4,370		0,731		0,479			0,665
	MEDC11	3,302		1,216		0,485			0,443
	MEDC12	3,276		1,159		0,423			0,379
	MEDC13	4,381		0,926		0,375			0,524
MSG	MSG4	3,745	3,163	1,195	1,248	0,218	0,638	0,934	0,844
	MSG5	2,661		1,337		0,623			0,896
	MSG6	2,567		1,327		0,658			0,809
	MSG7	3,677		1,132		0,223			0,875

KEY: MED: Medium credibility, MSG: Message credibility, TSWP: Tie strength with peers, IDP: Identification with the peers, Peer communication, UT: user trust, ICRED: Information credibility, IV: Intention to vote.

As indicated above in the accuracy analysis table, mean values were close to each other and ranged between three and four confirming that the data was fairly distributed. In addition, the standard deviation values ranged from 0,835 to 1,995, which fell between the recommended thresholds of -2 to +2 also proving fair distribution of the data. The Cronbach's

alpha coefficient and the item to total values provided reliability measures. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged from 0,638 to 0,854, surpassing the required 0.6. However, intention to vote (IV) had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.522, which narrowly fell short of the recommended 0.6. This short fall on intention to vote could have been a result of some responses that were contradictory, maybe due to lack of understanding of this variable or differences in opinions by respondents. All the Composite reliability values ranged from 0.708 to 0,934 exceeding the recommended 0.6 confirming robust reliability of the research data. Lastly, most of the factor loadings exceeded 0.5 proving that the items of the study loaded reliably.

Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested using correlation coefficients. Statistically, significant correlation co-efficient range between zero and one. In this study, the independent variables were Medium credibility, Peer communication, User Trust, Identification with peers, Tie strength with peers, Information credibility and message credibility while intention to vote represented the dependent variable tested. Table 4 below presents the findings from hypothesis testing thereafter a discussion of those findings provided in detail.

Table 4. Hypothesis Table.

Hypothesis	Estimate	P-Value	Result
MEDC –> IV	0,073	***	Supported and significant @ p<0.01
PC –> IV	0,723	***	Supported and significant@ p<0.01
UT –> IV	0,099	***	Supported and significant@ p<0.01
IDP –> IV	0,283	***	Supported and significant@ p<0.01
TSWP –> IV	0,083	0,014	Supported and significant@ p<0.05
ICRED –> IV	0,208	***	Supported and significant@ p<0.01
MSG –> IV	0,004	***	Supported and significant@ p<0.01

KEY: MED: Medium credibility, MSG: Message credibility, TSWP: Tie strength with peers, IDP: Identification with the peers, Peer communication, UT: user trust, ICRED: Information credibility, IV: Intention to vote.

Hypotheses Results

In table 4, all postulated hypotheses were supported and significant. In addition, all relationships were significant at p<0.01 level of significance with the exception of H2 (Tie strength with peers and the intention to vote for a student representative organisation) which was significant at p<0.05The first hypothesis, Medium credibility of Facebook and the intention to vote for a study representative organisation). This hypothesis was supported and had an estimate of 0.073. This implied that the more young people perceived Facebook as a credible medium to receive information the more likely they would make voting decisions based on it. The second hypothesis tested the relationship between peer communication on Facebook and the intention to vote for a student representative organisation. The finding was that the two constructs were positive and directly associated suggesting that young people made their decisions to vote after some level of consultation with their friends on social media. Interest-

ingly this was the strongest antecedent of intention to vote for a student representative organisation. The third hypothesis, H3 (User trust and intention to vote for a student representative organisation). This relationship was also supported and significant suggesting that the more Facebook users trusted the platform the higher the likelihood of them making decisions based on the platform. This finding was supported by Liang, Choi & Joppe (2018) who confirmed that trust was positively directly associated with intention.

As for the fourth hypothesis (Tie strength with peers on Facebook and intention to vote for student representative organisations), it was observed that the relationship was significant and supported with at an estimate of 0,283. This suggested that the closer the users are on Facebook the more they would be able to influence each other to make voting decisions. The fifth hypothesis, H5 Identification with peers on party Facebook page and intention to vote for student representative organisations) was also supported and significant. Similar to H4, this outcome suggested that Facebook users who were similar in terms of their preferences tend to follow and support each-other's decision-making. The sixth hypothesis, H6 (Perceived information credibility and intention to vote for student representative organisations) was significant and supported suggesting that if information is perceived to be credible it would in-turn influence young voter's decision-making. The last hypothesis, H7 (Perceived message credibility and intention to vote for student representative organisations) was significant and implied that if the messages posted by the student representative candidates on Facebook are viewed as being credible young voters to return the favour by supporting them. This finding echored that of (Yoon, Pinkleton & Ko, 2005) who established that voters' perceptions of a candidate's credibility are likely to influence their behaviour when casting their votes.

Limitations

The study faced certain limitations. The first limitation was that the research was only conducted from the perspective of one social media website, Facebook, which alienated users of other social media platforms thereby reducing the sample size and potential contribution of the study. The second limitation was that the research was conducted at a single university, which could have provided sample bias. This means that some of the responses were probably redundant due to the fact that all participants were exposed to the same physical and social environment restricting diversity of responses. Last, not distributing the survey on the Facebook website was a major limitation because this would have provided the much needed real-life experience and context of a study on Facebook consumers. Responses could have been more interesting if consumers responded on the Facebook platform rather than on a self-administered survey based on Facebook questions.

Conclusions and Future Avenues for Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence that Facebook has on young audiences' selection of student representative councils at tertiary institutions. It was therefore observed that identification with peers and peer communication had the most significant impact on youth's intention to vote for their student representative body with the later (peer communication) having the strongest influence on them. Numerous implications emerged from the research findings. First, it was observed that youth preferred to select a student representative

organisation at their institution based on what their peers believed and possibly shared on Facebook. This implied that marketing organisations are therefore compelled to encourage their employees to consider what peer networks of their audience are saying on social media. This then suggests that young consumers of social media content are less influenced by professional marketing organisations but by their friends, families or colleagues. Another finding from the study was that young people made voting decisions based on whether they perceived Facebook to be a credible medium for information. This implied that content creators on Facebook (e.g. Marketers), have to ensure that the information they post is proper fact-checked and referenced is it has an influence on users' decision-making. One could infer that youth perceptions towards Facebook influenced their perceptions of the content they viewed there and what they believed a campaigning student representative body would do after being elected. This then gave rise to an important implication for organisations that seek support on Facebook to ensure that their image and reputation must always be kept clean, trustworthy and credible at all times. Like most research, this study was not immune to limitations.

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