Master's Thesis Marketing

SOCIAL NETWORK SITES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The political behavior on Social network sites and the mediating role of internal

online political efficacy and political expression

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Table of contents

1. Introduction

Social media, despite wide recognition of the term, are not one single entity. They contain different types, such as microblogging, social networking, and media sharing (CS Park, 2017). 'Social Network Sites' (SNS) are identified as efficient and effective tools to provide information to the citizenry due to the fact that they provide numerous ways to communicate and enable fast as well as easy sharing and republication of information (Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010; Eyrich, Padman& Sweetser, 2008; Graham & Avery, 2013; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). The most important of SNS is the visible profile and the friends list while the most common SNS activity of users is to read and respond to messages, posts and comments and

browse friends' profiles, official pages as well as message boards (Ellison, 2007; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008). Online social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram, have enabled people to not only use the platform for interaction with one another but also to read and share news, discuss important events and engage in political discussions (Yaqub et. al., 2017). Furthermore, by attracting millions of users who integrate these apps in their everyday life, SNS have a massive audience reach (Ellison, 2007; Graham & Avery, 2013; Griffith & Liyanage, 2008; Banday & Mattoo, 2013), which makes them "an interesting venue for marketing and political campaigns" (Utz, 2009, p. 221). While each platform offers the public various means of expression, all platforms are centered on the idea of social networking.

Many politicians use SNS as political tools, to communicate and interact with citizens. It is argued that interactivity is the most important criterion to distinguish SNS from old (mass) media and that "the notion of interactivity is often linked to the political ideal of active citizenship through the possibility for citizens to become active agents in the government" (Vesnic Alujevic, 2012, p. 466). Citizens can directly engage in politics online via SNS, and engagement is "not only desired but required for effective democracy and ultimately policy-making" (Lee, Loutas, Sánchez-Nielsen, Mogulkoc & Lacigova, 2011, p. 127). For example, many politicians try to engage people via online video streaming. They have taken to regular live streaming on Facebook and Instagram as a way to interact with voters and non-voters alike. Social media video empowers politicians to break their own news and have conversations with constituents in real-time. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (who is part of the Bernie Sanden's team and serving as the U.S. Representative for New York's 14th congressional district since 2019) makes plenty video streaming and IG stories on her social network sites, and interacts with her followers (Appendix I, p.66). Also, Anna Eskaman (Florida House Representative), has extensively used Facebook Live throughout the COVID-19 situation to keep followers informed about unemployment benefits and more. Rather than just talk at followers, live video encourages both meaningful and personable conversations (Appendix II, p.66). Another example is the ex prime minister of Greece Alexis Tsipras, who used his Youtube channel and the online newspaper "Avgi" to present online his political plan. With online video streaming on YouTube, he communicated

and connected with people who wanted to make him questions about his political program. At the same time, people were participating through zoom and discussed with him in real time. An example can be found in the Appendix III (p. 67). Except from the use of social media and SNSs from politicians, SNSs like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube have raised the question about the role of the SNSs in sparking dissert, protests, and other forms of contentious politics (Valenzuela, 2013). A strong example is the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall street movement, the Spain's indignados and Black lives matter.

1.1.*General users* versus *Content creators*

Being a member of a political party has been found to be strongly related to various forms of engagement, both as a source of political participation and as consequence of taking part in civic activities (Putman, 2000). Notably, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014a), talked about civic engagement, explain it as "the participation of citizens in various informal community based associational activities that do not involve political organizations, parties, or officials, and that are conducted voluntarily for charitable or social purposes" (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014a, p.491). Hence, it is necessary to make a distinction between the use of SNSs by general people and the "content creators". In the first case we talk about the information-oriented use of SNSs by people who read news and share information, and in the second case we talk about people who work for politicians and have already register in their political parties. The first users are called "general users" of the SNSs. General Users use the social network sites, with the capability to develop online political relationships, interact, engage, search information, share opinions and knowledge (Dabula, 2017). On the other hand, the content creators are users who are already members of a political party, who work for political parties and leaders, are part of their campaign and get to interact and engage with voters, creating closer relationship and connection with citizens (Dale & Strauss, 2009).

On this master thesis, the research will be focus on the "general users" of the SNSs, and specifically on people who use Facebook to seek political information during the election campaign period of their country. I focus on "general users" because citizens who are registered in a political party have already signaled their

willingness to participate in a political process (Dale and Strauss, 2009). Also, when thinking about the interplay of SNSs and political participation, Twitter and Facebook are often the first to come up given their histories as powerful political tools, but this research focus on Facebook, because it stills the most used social network sites worldwide (Statista.com) and also, Twitter does not offer money transfer services enabling direct donations to political organizations (Segesten and Bossetta, 2016).

1.2. Research Question

Traditional political participation theories concentrate on the individual characteristics that differentiate between participants and non-participants, such as levels of education and income (McClurg, 2003). Political participation is considered important for at least three reasons: the equal protection of interests in public life, fostering the creation of a community, and the educational advantages for developing individual capacities (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1999). Voting, engaging in, or contributing to a political campaign, participating in a protest or march, contacting an elected official, or signing a petition, are a few examples of the many political actions citizens can undertake (Lies Maurissen, 2018).Online political participation has been defined in the same way as conventional political participation, except that the activities are occurring in an online context (Brady, 1999; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Using the Internet, social media and SNSs to seek information, including news, has been linked to greater political participation (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010, Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). Writing emails to politicians, visiting campaign websites, donating money online, and so forth are examples of online political activities (Gibson et al., 2005). Segesten and Bossetta (2017) ,conceptualized political participation as a process whereby citizens' latent activities become manifest, concrete political actions aimed at influencing political outcomes. They present three phrases of political participation: first, reading about political and social issues and discussing political and social ones (latent activities), second, calling on others to take political action (mobilization phase) and third, protesting, voting, donating, standing (manifest phase).

Many researchers have begun to ponder the motivations users have when spending time on social networking sites from a uses and gratifications perspective (studies have found that uses of online media satisfy entertainment, information, and social

interaction needs), while few have considered the political implications from such use (Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). These political implications of SNSs are considering political behaviors in SNSs (Bode, 2014). Pew (2008), studied how young people reported using social networking sites as a source of political information, suggesting that these sites may influence political behaviors in multiple ways – both from identity formation and expression as well as informational exchange. Conroy et al. (2012) found out that political Facebook groups increase offline political participation among their members, making groups the ideal tool to increase and strengthen the public's involvement in the development of the government - the fundamental principle of democratic rule.

This master thesis focuses on the political use of Facebook, as a platform of political information seeking. Thus, the research question of this thesis will be the following,

RQ: To what extent the political use of SNSs for seeking information, specifically of Facebook, can lead general users to three phases of political participation, namely latent, mobilization and manifest phase?

In order to answer this research question, this master thesis consists of several chapters including the introduction. The second chapter presents a political historical background of the use of social network sites in the US elections by politicians and general users. The third chapter contains the theory and literature review of prior research, also the hypothesis and conceptual model is given in this chapter. In the fourth chapter, the method section will be discussed including the research design, the number of participants, procedure, material, measures, statistical analysis and the research ethics. In the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth chapter, the whole PLS-SEM analysis with the conclusions will be analyzed. In the last chapters, the general conclusions, the limitations, the practical implications and the future research will be discussed.

2. Historical Background

Social media provides political parties with the advantage of addressing voters directly and rapidly, as politicians themselves can now easily publish their opinions

on personal websites, weblogs, micro-blogging sites and social networking sites, thus mobilizing voters and circumventing the selection criteria of journalists (Vergeer, 2012). Because of the great success in utilizing social media during political campaigns, political parties used SNSs as an interactions tool, to help "personalize" campaigns and allow votes to generate feeling (Zillmann& Brosius, 2000). Also, to the extent that voters feel that they know an individual politician on a personal level, they are more likely to cast a vote for them and by extension their party (Balmas & Sheafer, 2010). Consequently, with the emergence of new information and communication technologies political leaders, political parties and politicians are increasingly employing social media to inform, communicate, and connect with citizens to stimulate political engagement and participation (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012; Gibson et. al. 2005).

In 2008 and 2012, Barack Obama made the start with the use of SNSs as political tool. The Internet became a campaign battlefield between him and McCain in 2008 and Romney in 2016, where the fight was to "likes," "tweets," "retweets" and "posts". These US election campaigns and Barack Obama's engagement with interactive communication and empowerment of citizens through his campaigning strategy, has led to new thinking around how political communication can be performed (Koc-Michalska, et. al., 2016). For example, when Barack Obama won the elections in 2008, his Facebook page fan contained over 3.1 million people, while his competitors, John McCain had only 614.000 followers of this page on the day of the elections. Obama's Twitter account had 113.000 followers and his YouTube channel the BarackObama.com had 20 million views (Hughes et. al, 2009). The secret of the success of the Obama's campaign was effective use of social media and SNSs and getting the support of volunteers who want to make a difference and the technology became an indispensable part of the strategy to collect donations. Obama won with the support given to messages to which election volunteer's email and online Obama's sent day through social media and SNSs. Communication, creation and engagement was the plan of Obama's campaign (Hughes et. al., 2009)

Looking back in the 2016 presidential elections of the US, social media played a crucial role in enabling candidates to target their audiences (Kreiss& McGregor, 2017). Facebook and Twitter, created new ways to market political campaigns and new channels for candidates and voters to interact (Christine B. Williams, 2017). For

example, Hillary Clinton in 2016 elections, made plenty posts in her social network sites about the abortions. Clinton managed with a successful way to increase her posts, interact through twitter with her women population and focus on the abortion issue. She talked about women's right, despite of Donald trump. As a results, many women protest on the street about this issue (Williams, 2017). The same topic was covert by Bernie Sanders in 2016 too.

With over 79% of US adults on Facebook (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016) and roughly two-thirds of Americans getting their news on social media (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017), these platforms were central to campaigns' communicative strategies that political parties used. Kreiss (2016) notes that during the elections both major parties in the United States have been heavily focusing on digital media to craft effective advertising strategies and make data-driven decisions about communicative strategies.

With the rise of the internet, campaign operatives began to harness digital technologies and tools to mobilize voter turnout, engage young people, raise money, and support grassroots ground operations (Karpf, 2016; Kreiss, 2016; Tufecki, 2014). Both major political parties in the United States developed large, sophisticated data and digital operations (Kreiss, 2016).In 2016, though, most polls that conducted by various organizations showed Hillary Clinton leading Donald Trump (BBC News, 2016), however, after analyzing the Tweets, had been found the opposite (Yaqub et. al. (2017). The number of Twitter followers in billions for both Hillary Clinton and Donald trump can be found in the Appendix IV (p. 67), (Statista.com, 2016).

Lastly, the presidential elections in the United States on 3 November 2020 have caused extensive discussions on social media and SNSs. Analyzing the 2020 US elections, the main hashtags of John Biden's campaign (#voteforBiden #voteblue #biden2020 #teamJoe #BidenHarris #2020Victory #votebluenomatterwho #settleforbiden), was mentioned 2.2 million since June 1, according to Awario.com. Knowing the impact of social media on generation Z voter, Biden followed a unique approach for his campaign by using influencers, who helped him to "humanize" himself through the use of his personal one-on-one conversations.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Political participation

Traditional offline political participation is usually conceptualized along four dimensions: voting, campaign activity, contacting officials, and collective activities (Verba & Nie, 1972). It refers to activity by ordinary citizens that has the intent or effect of influencing political outcomes such as policies and government action (Verba et al., 1995). According to Maurissen (2018), some political actions that citizens can undertake not only offline but online too, are voting, engaging in, or contributing to a political campaign, participating in a protest or march, contacting an elected official, or signing a petition. Political participation is fundamentally about citizens and their attempts to influence politics (Segesten and Bossetta, 2017). Democratic political theory argues that political participation is important for a democracy to thrive (Maurissen, 2018). Without citizen involvement, a democracy lacks legitimacy (Almond &Verba, 1989; Dalton, 2011).

Social network sites have gathered attention for their ability to be tools for political movements and campaigns, which have used social media to amplify information and invigorate groups into action. With the rise of Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Twitter, and their increasing politicization, there are more opportunities for these platforms to act as vectors for political action. Lim (2008), argue that ''people participate in political or civic activities because they are asked or encouraged by someone with whom they have a personal connection'' (p.961). This encouragement process is usually facilitated by discussion within social networks (Yonghwan and Chen, 2015). Boulianne's (2015) meta-analysis of this research found that most of the studies examined reported a positive association between the political use of social media and political engagement.

Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012), argue that using SNSs for information seeking has a 'significant and positive impact' on citizens' involvement in politics. Segesten and Bossetta (2017), present three phrases of political participation, and they said that, first, examples of latent participation include reading political news, informally discussing politics among friends, and other activities that contribute to political awareness and potentially lead to individual or collective political action. Latent participation is an important influencer and precondition for manifest

participation, which refers to the citizens' concrete activities aimed at affecting "politics and political outcomes in society, or the decisions that affect public affairs" (Ekman &Amnå, 2012, p. 289). Second, mobilization phase is when users calling on others to take political action and third, protesting, voting, donating, standing for office, of citizens belongs to manifest phase.

This master thesis, focus on these three phases of political participation of the "general users" in SNSs, namely latent phase, mobilization phase and manifest phase.

3.2. Social Network Sites

Social networking sites (SNSs) are a way for people in the offline world to stay connected regardless of geographical distance, difference in time, or other context-specific barriers(Watermeyer, 2018). SNSs enable users to meet and communicate with their family, friends, co-workers, and strangers, and in general may expose them to various points of view. They are virtual communities where users can create individual public profiles, interact with real-life friends, and meet other people based on shared interests (Griffiths et. al., 2014).It can be noticed from the diagram in the Appendix V (p.67) that the number of SNS users, increased rapidly over the years from 2010 to 2020 (Statista.com, 2020).

Except from the use of SNSs for social reasons, SNSs mainly Facebook can be used for political reasons, especially for political-related information seeking. Bode et. al. (2014), develop the concept of ''political SNS use,'' which can be defined as using a social networking site for explicitly political purposes, like seeking political information, learning about politics online and displaying a political preference on one's profile page. For example, during the 2003 Iraq war, people who felt their views differed from the mainstream media turned to the Internet for information and as a source of discussion and expression, which facilitated anti-war political activism (Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Gil de Zuniga, and Shah, 2006). Social network sites allow general users to share news and information and talk to various people within a broadened network, which may in turn lead to increased levels of political behaviors. Vraga et. al. (2014), argue that political SNS use, becomes especially consequential if it is providing new ways for especially adolescents to get involved politically, or

conversely, if it is hindering a process better served through face-to-face communication.

Many researchers have found a generally positive relationship between social media use for news, especially Facebook, civic and political participation (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúniga et al., 2009; Valenzuela et. al. 2009). Yonghwan and Hsuan-Ting (2016), argue that the relationship between the political use of SNSs and online political participation is positively related (latent phase, mobilization phase and manifest phase). Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012) found a positive association between Facebook - as a source of political information - and political participation (latent phase). Also, Conroy et al. (2012) argue that political Facebook groups increase offline political participation among their users, making groups the ideal tool to increase and strengthen the public's involvement in the development of the government - the fundamental principle of democratic rule (manifest phase). Tang and Lee (2013), found that general users who exposed to shared political information through Facebook were more likely to have participated in political activities (latent and mobilization phase).

Thus, in this research, the political use of SNS by *general users,* and specifically for political-oriented information seeking, will positively relate to the three phases of political participation. Thus, following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The political use of SNS by general users has a direct positive effect to the three phases of political participation, namely latent, mobilization and manifest phase.

3.3. Internal online political efficacy

Political efficacy has long been regarded as one of several antecedents to participation in institutional politics (Blais, 2010; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Kenski& Stroud, 2006; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Political efficacy has also been considered an important outcome in theories of deliberative democracy (Gil de Zúñiga et. al., 2017). The more one discusses politics, the more likely one is to come away from those experiences feeling more confident in their political skills, eliciting a "virtuous" circle between participation and individual self-efficacy (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Morrell, 2005; Smith, 1999).Political efficacy consist a

political attitude and it can be defined as the belief in one's personal ability to make a difference when dealing with political and social issues (Bandura, 1997, Hahn, 1998, Kahne & Westheimer, 2006, Maurissen, 2020).

There are lots of categories of political efficacy. Scholars differentiate internal, external, epistemic, and situational forms of political efficacy (Balch, 1974; Converse, 1972; Morrell, 2005; Pingree, 2011), but they mainly focused on two types—internal and external efficacy (Hoffman & Thompson, 2009). The former refers to feelings of self-competence to understand and participate effectively in political processes (Park, 2014), it refers to one's belief that the Internet can facilitate political change (Chen et. al., 2019). The latter means the perception of the responsiveness of political officials and organizations to citizens' demands. Because this study measured participation with items of voluntary involvement in political processes, internal efficacy was thought to be more relevant than external efficacy (Park, 2014). It can be seen that internal online political efficacy refers to a social media user's subjective feeling, which does not necessarily correspond to the objective reality. By its definition, internal online political efficacy reflects a user's cognitive as well as behavioral self-acknowledgment (Chen et. al, 2019).This psychological self-acknowledgment may be positively related to the user's willingness to participate (Chen et. al, 2019).

The Internet has developed the interests toward politics of its users and improved internal political efficacy of the respondent which create their online and offline political engagements. Bimber and Copeland (2011) emphasized on the role of new media for providing the platform for political participation and changing their political efficacy. The use of the Internet has become the main source of political efficacy and political participation, enhancing awareness about voting and campaigning (Ahmad, et. al., 2019).

Few scholars studied the mediating role of online internal political efficacy, while most of them focused on the moderating roles of political talks and discussions. To answer why information-oriented use of social media and SNSs is able to lead to a user's internal online political efficacy, the literature offers two prominent explanations. First, political sharing on SNSs facilitates political discussion, which promotes a user's self-efficacy online in reference to political issues. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) show that sharing political information on Facebook or Twitter is very

likely to generate comments from one's contacts and further stimulate discussion. Through a series of conversations with others, discussants may be better informed and believe that they are able to influence politics (Luskin et al., 2002; Smith, 1999). As proponents of citizen deliberation once suggested, it is through discussion that participants gain confidence to express their ideas, which increases their sense of self-efficacy and consequently makes them feel more capable of influencing policy (Finkel, 1985). Second, a user's sharing of information helps them to achieve a higher sense of self-efficacy by assuming a helper role (Halpern et al., 2017; Sundar, 2008). On Twitter or Facebook, it is common to see posts asking for help. When providing information to others, users feel more confident in dealing with issues, which is probably able to increase their sense of self-efficacy (Chen et. al., 2019). Thus, Chen et. al. (2019), argue that internal online political efficacy, has a mediating role in the relationship between SNS use and political participation.

Based on the study of Chen et. al. (2019), in this thesis the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The internal online political efficacy mediates the relationship between the use of SNS by general users and political participation (latent phase, mobilization phase and manifest phase).

3.4. Political expression

The core purpose of online political expression is always promoting specific political views (Ekström and Östman, 2015; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Online political expression is defined as the expression of political views through sharing political news, posting political comments, sharing political videos and pictures, and exchanging political opinions (Yamamoto et al., 2015). This engagement in politics can be a high-risk activity, as the information produced by users might be misunderstood in the context of audiences with different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds (Boyd, 2010; Thorson, 2014). In fact, Pingree posits that "Expression, not reception, may be the first step toward better citizenship," considering that expression can "motivate exposure, attention and elaboration of media messages" (Pingree, 2007).Online political expression can transform people

from observers to participants. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) discovered that social network sites political expression was a strong predictor of online political participation.

In alignment with the literature connecting social network sites use to online political expression and linking online political expression to political participation, it is hypothesized that increased online political expression partially mediates the association of social media use with political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014).The findings indicate that other than informational and interactional uses of social media, the use of social media can also promote the likelihood of active political participation through the mediation of online political expression (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Papacharissi's (2011) work in understanding people's conception of themselves in a networked world is useful in making a new connection between general social media use and expressing oneself politically. Other scholars indicate that mainly young people actively expressing political opinions online are very likely to become political participants, who are important to sustain the healthy development of democracy (Cho et al., 2018; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009).Political expression on SNSs has been found to positively influence other political behaviors such as traditional types of political participation (de Zúñiga, Bachmann, Hsu, & Brundidge, 2013), including political mobilization (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009) and electoral campaigning (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014). Political expression influences other forms of political behaviors (Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005) and cognitions (Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005). Political expression, while itself important, is also considered a key component of political participation (Bode et. al, 2014). Furthermore, Alex Yue Feng Zhu et. al (2019) , examined the mediation role of online political expression in social media use and political participation in young people and their findings showed that engaging in social media production can increase the likelihood of political participation by improving online expression.

In this research, political expression is defined as the expression of political views through sharing political news, posting political comments, sharing political videos and pictures, and exchanging political opinions, and it has a positive mediating role in the relationship between SNSs and political participation. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3: Political expression on SNSs has a mediating role in the relationship between the use of SNS by general users and political participation (latent phase, mobilization phase and manifest phase).

3.5. Conceptual model

This study is focusing on the political use of social network sites, specifically Facebook and the political participation. The independent variable is Political participation and the dependent variable is SNSs. The political participation is divided into latent phase, mobilization phase and manifest phase. Also, the conceptual model includes two mediators: internal online political efficacy and political expression. Figure 2 shows the conceptual model of the present research.
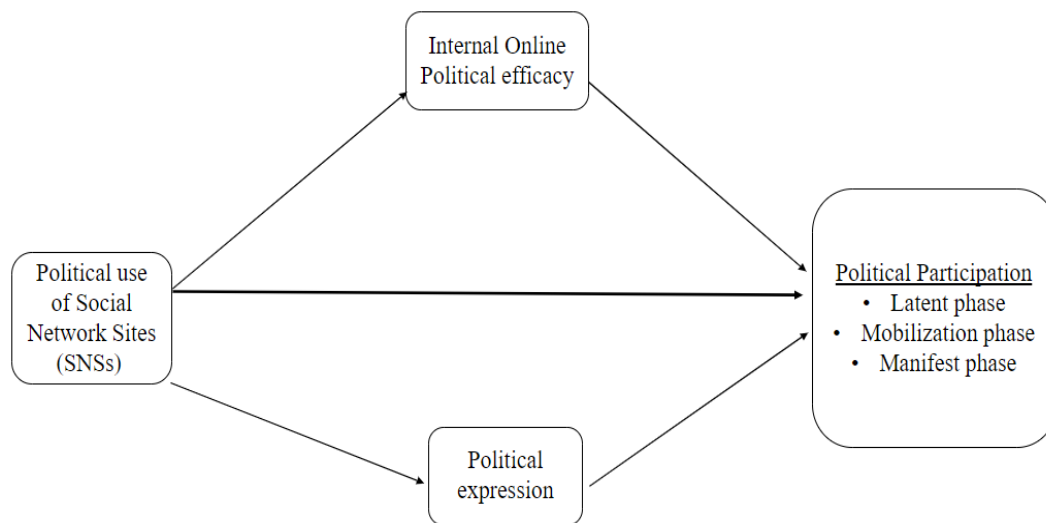

Figure 1: Conceptual model

4. Methodology

4.1. Introduction

In this part, the method of the current research is presented. For this research a quantitative method is followed. Therefore, an online questionnaire is created and spread across a large group of respondents. This online questionnaire is carried out in 2021 using the online website Qualtrics.com. The questionnaire is created with the aim to discover the behaviors and tendencies of people. The survey will be focus on the social network site Facebook. The selection of this site is based on the fact that Facebook is still the most popular network site (Statista.com, 2020) and Twitter does not allow the online donation transport (third phase of political participation). In addition, the purpose of this questionnaire is to collect original data that would reflect how the political behavior in SNSs can lead general users to the three phases of political participation. A sample of the questionnaire can be found on the Appendix VI (p. 68) and an example of the online form in the Appendix VII (p. 71)

The questionnaire will be created and spread across a large group of respondents. The study will be conducted at international level, and the language of the questionnaire is in English in order to reach a wider audience. The questionnaire will be mainly spread through different Facebook groups with political and non-political content, via word-of-mouth and online forums. The information that obtained, will be analyzed using the statistical software package SPSS, the ADANCO software and the statistical results from Qualtrics.com.

4.2. Political Participation

For measuring the online political participation, Bakker & De Vreese (2011) and Zhu (2019) measured it by six online and ten offline political activities, including an online poll, signing an online petition, distributing political flyers, and contacting a politician or a civil servant, using 5-point likert scale(1=often, 5=never). Yongwhan(2016) , based on Jung et al., 2011; Kaufhold et al., 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2012, measured political participation by political activity items which tapped into individuals' political activities related to the campaign and the elections on the Internet. Their respondents were asked whether they had performed the following activities on the Internet in the past year: looked for more information online about candidates' positions on the issues or voting records; shared photos, videos, or audio files online that related to the campaign or the elections; forwarded someone else's

political commentary or writing to others; forwarded someone else's political audio or video recordings to others; and subscribed to receive campaign or political information. This research will focus on the measuring method of Yongwhan et. al. (2016), and the following questions are present *"During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you perform the following activities: Forwarded someone else's political commentary or writing to others, forwarded someone else's political audio or video recordings to others, subscribed to receive campaign or political information, contact a politician or a civil servant, calling others to take political actions, participate in an online video streaming of a politician, sending campaign-related e-mails.", "During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you perform the following activities: Organizing/Participate to an Internet-based protest, or boycott, vote in online polls, standing for office, donating to political causes."*

4.3. SNSs use

The questions about SNS will focus on political behavior in SNS and will be measured in 5-point Likert scale (1= Often, 5= Never). Chang Sup Park (2015), measured informational use of SNSs by two items: (1) to obtain election information and (2) to keep up with important social issues. Responses were coded on a 5-point scale (1=totally agree, 5=totally disagree). Also, Yonghwan measured the SNSs use by asking the respondents questions about their manner on SNSs. These questions tap into the political behaviors that people carry out on SNSs (e.g., Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010). Using the stem ''Thinking about what you have done on social networking sites like Facebook," participants were asked if they had gotten any campaign or candidate information from these sites, started or joined a political group or group supporting a cause on a social networking site, revealed on a social networking site which presidential candidate they had voted for, and discovered from the sites which presidential candidate their friends had voted for. Thus, in this research the following questions will be present: *"During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you use Facebook to obtain political information" , "During the election campaign period of your country, how often do*

you use Facebook to see political information from specific candidates and political parties' pages? (5-point Likert scale, 1=Often, 5=Never).

4.4. Internal online Political Efficacy

Political efficacy reveals respondents' political beliefs, political ideologies, and their feelings about the political system. Political Efficacy includes the most universally used and tested (Morrell, 2003, 2005) items for internal efficacy dimension. Gil de Zúñiga et. al. (2017), used the questions: *"I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our country" , "I think that I am as much informed about politics and government as most people", "I feel I could play an active role in a group dealing with political issues" ,and "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics".* Using a 5-point likert scale I will define 1=totally agree and 5=totally disagree. Chen et. al. (2019), used the question *"Because of the Internet, people can understand politics more easily and can better understand what the government has done." How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?"* to measure the online internal political efficacy. Also, Verquez et. al., measured it by asking respondents about their level of agreement (0=totally disagree, 5=totally agree), with the following: (1) "People like me can influence what local government does." The questions about internal online political efficacy of this master thesis are based on Chen et. al. (2019) and Gil de Zúñiga et. al. (2017).

4.5. Political Expression

For measuring the online political expression, Zhu (2019) depending on Yamamoto et. al. (2015) -who measured online political expression across three aspects: sharing political thoughts online, sharing political information online, and exchanging political opinions online- he adopted four items from his study to measure these three aspects, asking how often participants write posts on online social networks about political issues, share political news online, exchange opinions about political issues online, and share political video clips, photos, and computer artwork online. Thus, using the SNSs, namely Facebook, the following question is present in the questionnaire *"During the election campaign period of your country, how often do*

you use Facebook to: write online post about political issues, share political news online, exchange political e-messages with friends and/or family, exchange opinions about political issues online, share political video clips or photos?" questions are measured based on 5-point likert scale where 1=often, 5=Never.

4.6. Control variables

There will be plenty control variables. Firstly, the participants will be asked *"how frequently do they use Facebook"* (1 = About once a day, 2 = More than once a day, 3 = Few times a week, 4 =Few times a month, 5 = Less than a month, 6=I don't use Facebook). Secondly, other control variables will be demographic characteristics and social factors: *the age in years, gender, education level and nationality.*

4.7. Statistical Analysis

Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is a second-generation multivariate data analysis method that is often used in marketing research because it can test theoretically supported linear and additive causal models (Chin, 1996; Haenlein and Kaplan, 2004; Statsofr, 2013). For the statistical analysis of this master thesis, a PLS-SEM method will be used. PLS-SEM consists of two models, the measurement model (representing how measured variables represent the constructs) and the structural model (showing how constructs are associated with each other) (Hair et. al., 2018). The **structural model** examines the structure of interrelationships expressed in a series of equations, similar to a series of multiple regression equations. The researcher draws upon theory, prior experience, and the research objectives to distinguish which independent variables predict each dependent variable. The second basic model is the **measurement model**, which defines the latent constructs. Also termed a latent variable, a latent construct is a hypothesized and unobserved concept that can be represented by observable or measurable variables (Hair et. al., 2018). First the measurement model is analyzed and then tested the structural model depicting the relationships among latent variables.

In this research is employed a reflective measurement model and its adequacy was assessed in terms of convergent validity, composite reliability and discriminant validity. To assess the measurement model with reflective indicators, indicators'

reliability, construct reliability and construct validity including convergent and discriminant validity were established as suggested by Hair et al. (2017). To assess the structural model using PLS-SEM, key criteria are the size, sign, and significance of path coefficient, the R2 values, and the effect size f2 (Hair et al., 2017, Ali et al., 2018). To evaluate the significance of the path coefficients was used the bootstrapping technique.

The model has two mediator namely political expression and internal online political efficacy. For the analysis, the advantages of using PLS-SEM for mediation are that bootstrapping makes no assumptions about the shape of the variables' distribution or the sampling distribution of the statistics, and all the mediated relationships are tested simultaneously instead of separately, which reduces bias (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, and Kuppelwieser, 2014). Moreover, mediation testing using PLS-SEM can be applied with smaller sample sizes while yielding higher levels of statistical power compared to prior testing methods (Matthews, 2018). In this research, we have multiple mediation. The bootstrap technique is the latest simple and promising method for the multiple mediation testing models (MacKinnon et al., 2012; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). It offers a computer intensive analysis and hence is more statistically precise and a better technique for mediation testing than conventional methods such as those used by Sobel (1982), and Baron and Kenny (1986). Furthermore, once the mediation effects are defined, the procedure developed by Nitzl et al. (2016) was used to test the mediation effects on PLS-SEM. This procedure has two main steps, the first one is determining the significance of indirect effects and their magnitude, and the second step is determining the type of effect and/or mediation. In the first step, the indirect effect must be significant to establish a mediation effect. If zero is not included in the confidence interval, the indirect effect is significant. In the second step, when the indirect effect is significant, the mediating effect exists and the type of mediation is full or partial mediation (complementary or competitive). If the direct effect is not significant and indirect is significant, the mediation is full mediation, so only the indirect effect via the mediator exists. In a complementary partial mediation, both direct and indirect effects are significant and point in the same direction (positive or negative), whereas in a competitive partial mediation, both effects point in a different direction. Mediation analysis can be extended to evaluate the statistical difference between two specific indirect effects

(Lau & Cheung, 2012; Chin et al., 2013: Rodrigez-Entrena et al., 2018, Cepeda et al., 2018). Castro and Roldan (2013) provide research on how to test such multiple relationships in a PLS path model.

4.8. Research Ethics

The general principles that guide ethical practice in online research are essentially the same as those that guide any research involving human beings and include respect for autonomy, justice, and beneficence (Kitchin, 2007). The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and data must be given always due consideration (Jensen, 2002). In this master thesis, the participants will participate in the research through an online questionnaire. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the restrictions and the social distance, the online survey is the most applicable way to collect data. The online survey offers plenty advantages over traditional (offline) methods, including cheap, flexible, rapid access to large, diverse, geographically disparate and otherwise difficult to access samples, reduced social desirability and experimenter expectancy effects, and the ability to impose complex conditional logic on the presentation of items and stimuli (Skitka & Sargis, 2006; Tuten, 2010). An important advantage of the online questionnaire is that the researcher will not interpose while the participant fills out the questionnaire. In other words, every participant should be able to make their own decisions to participate in research and the persons who are unable to make these decisions should be protected (Kitchin, 2007). In the questionnaire, it is provided an initial page before the survey starts, which contains a brief summary of the research and the information from the researcher. Also, in this initial page which will be the introduction, the researcher will explain the purpose of this research, what will happen to the data and who the research benefits. In this introduction it will be made clear that this questionnaire is only for general users of SNSs and not for people who work in political parties. In addition, the researcher will guarantee the anonymity and of the participants and confidentiality of the experiment. The participation in this research is completely voluntary and the participants will be informed that the questionnaire last between 5 to 10 minutes to fill out. Furthermore, the participants are allowed to quit the research any time.

5. Results

The number of people who participate in this survey was 200. All participants answered every question, which is important when interpreting this set of data. Most of the participants (84.10%) declared that they use the Facebook "More that once a day".

5.1. Demographic Information

The sample (N=200) consisted of 54.59% females, and 31.12% male participants. The 14.29% of the participants chose "other" as an option. Also, to gain more demographic understanding, in the survey participants asked to select their age range, their level of education and their nationality. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 26. From the analysis, we can observe that 35.5 percentages of the participants were 25 years old and that this number has been declared 71 times. Also, 15% were 24 years old and 12% was 26. Age is likely to have an effect due to differences in how age groups vote, although PEW suggests that younger people might be more likely to attend rallies or marches (PEW, 2020). This is important when interpreting the results.

Regarding the level of education, most participants had either completed bachelor's degree or master's degree. Most of the respondents were having a master degree (38.46%, 75 people out of 200).

Finally, participants asked to declare their nationality, revealing that 38 % of the participants were Greek. Nevertheless, we can observe from the bar chart below that there was multiculturalism between the respondents.
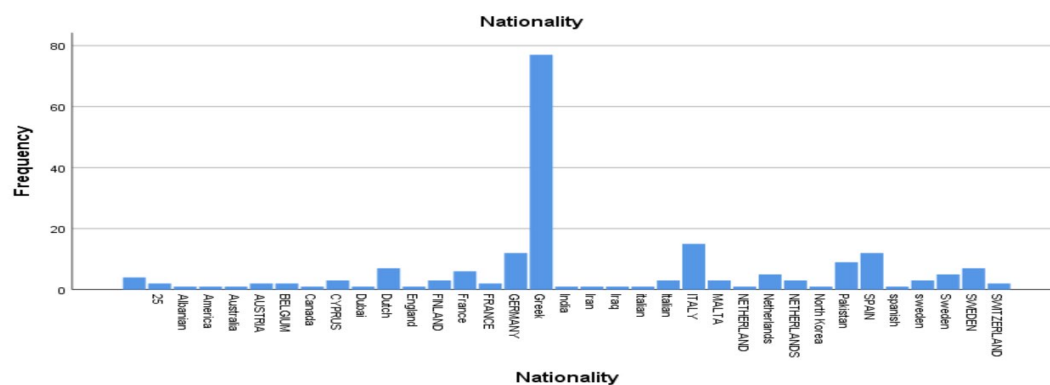

*Table 1:* The nationality of the participants

6. PLS-SEM Analysis

6.1. Model specification

The model specification gives a clear overview of the structural model as well as the measurement model. This provides useful information about the latent variables and the indicators which are used to conduct this research.

6.1.1. Specifying the structural model

The structural model gives information about which latent variables will be included in the Partial Least Squares (PLS) path model. In this research, the PLS analysis will be run three times, thus, the following three models will be tested, where SNSs_Facebook = the political use of Facebook, IOPE=Internal online political efficacy, PE=political expression, Latent_phase= latent phase, Mobil_phase= mobilization phase, and Manifest_phase= Manifest phase.

1.

2.
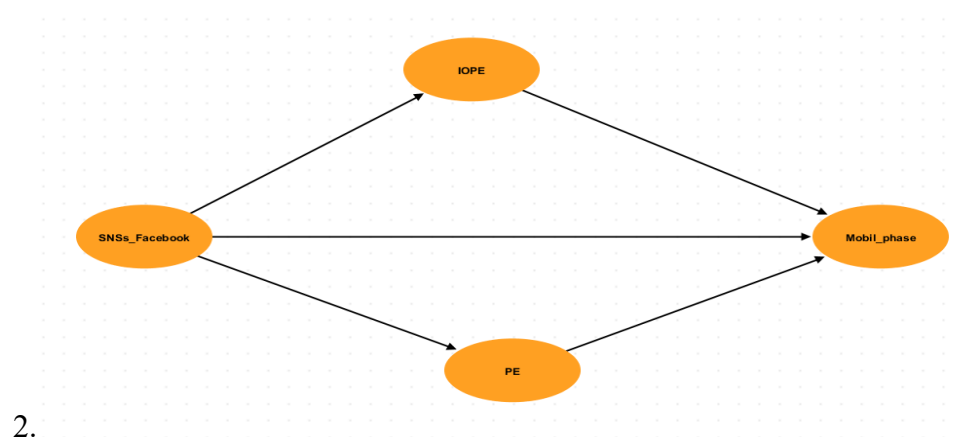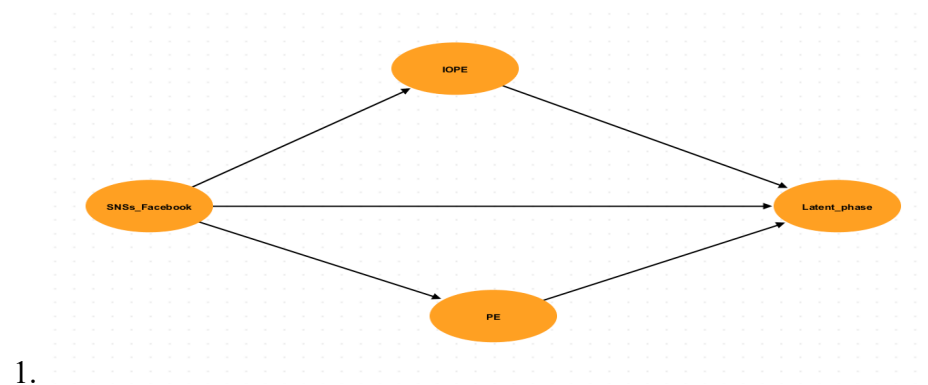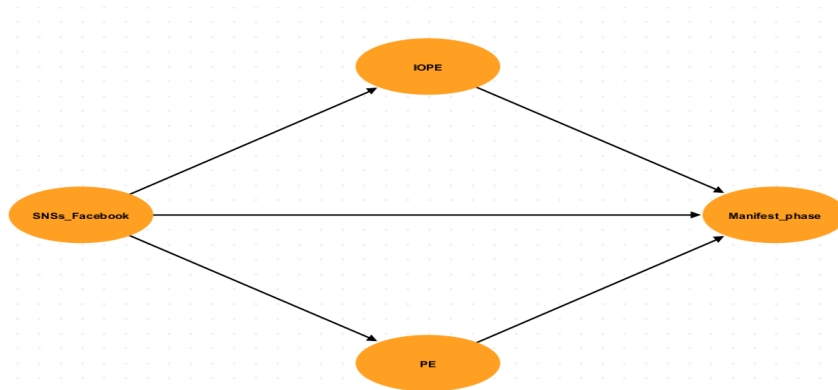
3.

6.1.2. Specifying the measurement model

There are two types of measurement models, namely composite measurement models and reflective measurement models. In this research, all the constructs involved are reflective measurement models. There are multiple indicators assigned to each latent variable. The measurement models are given separately below in the analysis:

1.
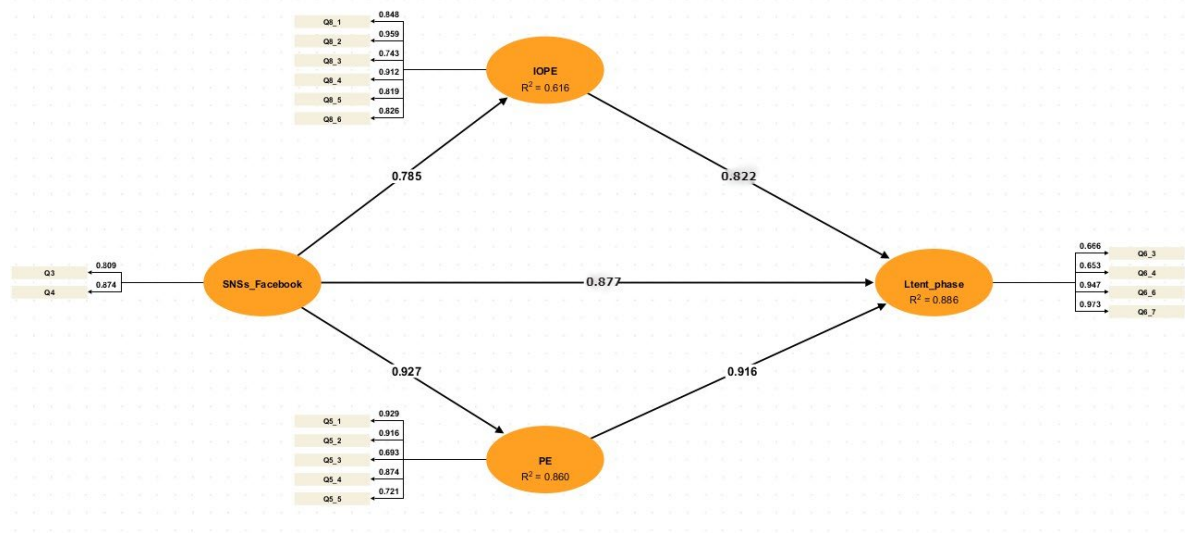
2.
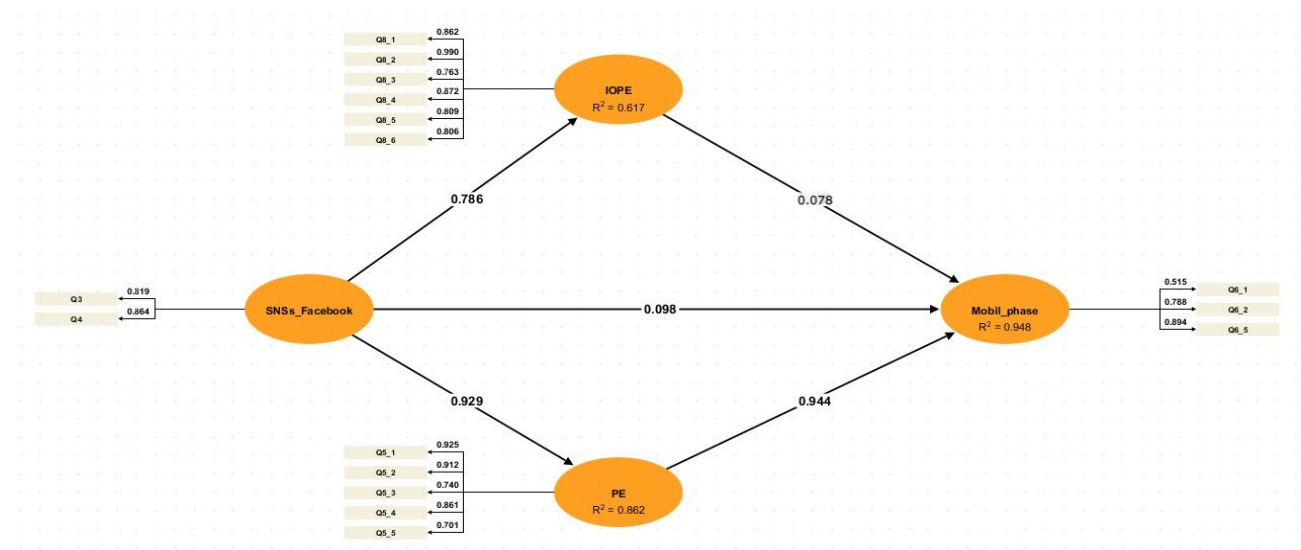
3.
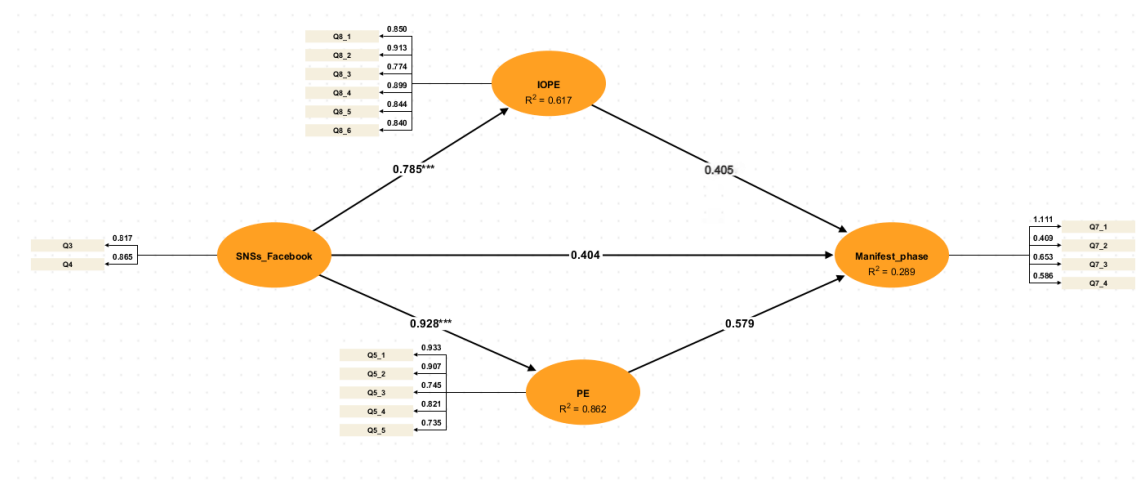
6.2. Ensuring requirements

Before the outcomes of the analysis can be interpreted, it is important to check some important requirements. There are two important requirements, namely sample size requirements and data requirements.

6.2.1. Sample size requirements

The recommended sample size can be checked by applying the rule of thumb of ten times the number of maximum arrowheads pointing on a latent variable. When this rule is met, we can assume that Partial Least Squares (PLS) can handle the model adequately, no matter how complex the model is. The number of arrowheads can be derived from the structural model.

The table below shows the output of SPSS for all indicators when the cases are excluded listwise. The sample size consists of 200 valid cases. It can be concluded that this sample size is sufficiently large enough to be allowed to interpret data of the Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis.

Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Q3	200	2,15	,051	,728
Q4	200	2,29	,062	,876
Q5_1	200	2,21	,079	1,123
Q5_2	200	1,68	,088	1,239
Q5_3	200	2,08	,059	,829
Q5_4	200	1,64	,085	1,203
Q5_5	200	2,71	,072	1,025
Q6_1	200	2,73	,061	,861
Q6_2	200	2,30	,063	,896
Q6_3	200	2,98	,068	,959
Q6_4	200	3,09	,067	,944
Q6_5	200	1,74	,090	1,269
Q6_6	200	2,30	,081	1,151
Q6_7	200	2,40	,089	1,253
Q7_1	200	3,60	,069	,972
Q7_2	200	3,62	,077	1,092
Q7_3	200	4,38	,086	1,222
Q7_4	200	4,50	,082	1,165
Q8_1	200	1,32	,050	,706
Q8_2	200	1,39	,059	,831
Q8_3	200	1,29	,046	,653
Q8_4	200	1,50	,069	,977
Q8_5	200	1,45	,066	,939
Q8_6	200	1,49	,070	,987
Valid N (listwise)	200			

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

6.2.2. Data requirements

The dataset is gathered by an online survey. The answers are measured used a 5-point scale, these are called Likert-scale items. Based on the results, there were no missing cases and no invalid data. This can be concluded based on the minimum and maximum value of the variables. This is between 1 and 5, which is correct when conducting an interview with a 5- point scale.

The measurement level of the data is also sufficient. Part Least Squares analysis can be conducted with quasi-metric data. Likert scale items are an example of these types of data. Because the dataset only consists of data derived from Likert scale

items, all data which is used in this research is quasi-metric. Therefore, we are allowed to interpret the results of the analysis.

7. PLS analysis-Latent phase

7.1. Assessing the measurement model

In the figure below the total base model is visualized. The model includes the SNSs_Facebook, the internal online political efficacy (IOPE), the political expression (PE) and the first phase of political participation (Latent_phase). We observe the effect of SNSs_Facebook on latent phase and our two mediators are political expression and internal online political efficacy.
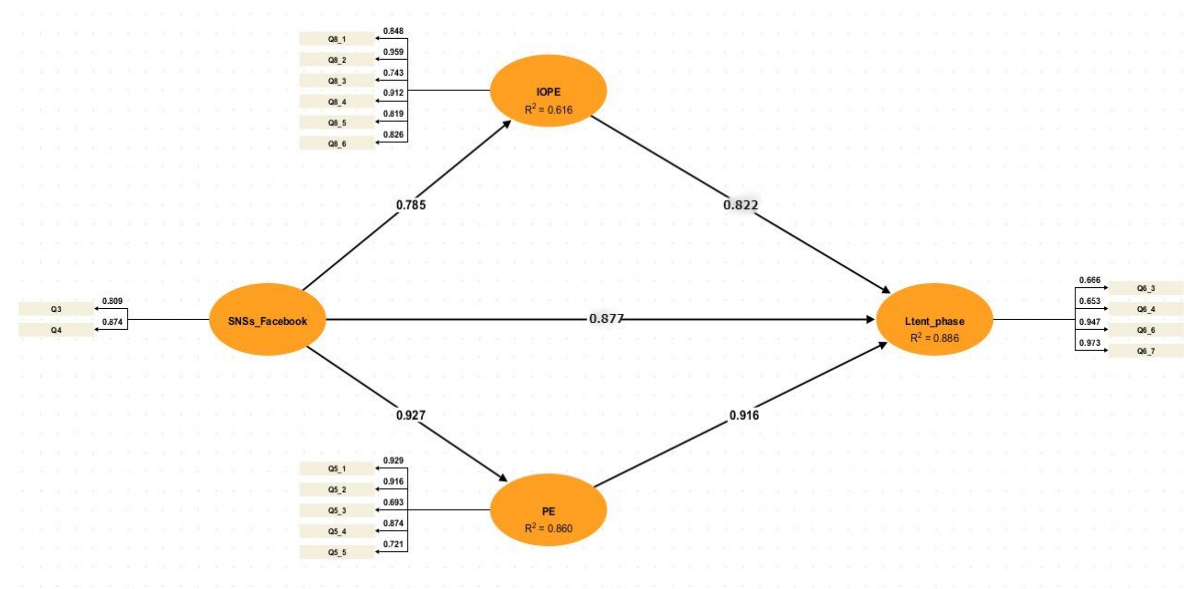
Figure 2: Latent phase

To assess the approximate fit, the SRMR measurement method is used. This method indicates if the correlation matrix implied by our model is sufficiently similar to the empirical correlation matrix. The decision that is made is that there is a good model fit. This decision is based on the critical value of 0.08 and the SRMR value of 0.07. The results showed the value of 0.075, which is lower than the score of 0.08, this indicates a good approximate fit.

7.1.1. Reliability and Validity

To assess reliability and validity of reflective measurement models, four types of analyses are used namely A. construct reliability, B. indicator reliability, C. convergence validity and D. discriminant validity.

A. Construct reliability

To determine construct reliability, the analyses Joreskog rho and Cronbach's alpha are used. For Likert-type scales with 5 levels, Cronbach's alpha underestimates sometimes reliability; consequently, its use is not always recommended (Gadermann et al., 2012). Composite reliability (CR) provides a more appropriate measure of internal consistency reliability compared to traditionally Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Hair et al., 2017). Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs range from 0.715 to 0.948, indicating good reliability. Composite reliabilities range from 0.837 to 0.959 higher than the 0.70 threshold level of acceptability. Therefore, both Cronbach's alpha and Joseskog rho are calculated to give a better image of reability. Based on the data in the table below, the decision is made that the model has good construct reliability. This decision is based on the critical value of 0.7 and the construct reliability indicators out of the empirical data for the latent variables SNSs_Facebook, IOPE and PE, Latent_phase. Joreskog's rho is higher than 0.7 for all variables (SNSs-Facebook .82, IOPE .94, PE .91, and Latent_phase .89. Cronbach's alpha is also higher than the critical value of 0.7 for all the variables (SNSs-Facebook .82, IOPE .094, PE .91, and Latent_phase .88).

Construct Reliability

Construct	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρ_A)	Jöreskog's rho (ρ_c)	Cronbach's alpha(α)
SNSs_Facebook	0.8318	0.8296	0.8284
IOPE	0.9457	0.9414	0.9415
PE	0.9280	0.9176	0.9157
Latent_phase	0.9205	0.8907	0.8884

B.Indicator Reliability

The indicator reliability denotes the proportion of indicator variance that is explained by the respective latent variable. Based on the results, the conclusion that is made is that the variance that is explained by the respective latent variable is very high. All the variables (Q6_3, Q6_4, Q5_6, and Q5_7) scored very high (0.6-0.9),

which means that the indicator variance explained by the respective latent variables is very high.

C. Convergence validity

The average variance extracted (AVE) is comparable to the proportion of explained variance in factor analysis. The decision that is made is that the convergent validity is good. This is based on the critical value for convergent validity of 0.5 and, as we can see from the table below, the empirical AVE values for SNSs_Facebook, IOPE, PE and Latent_phase. The AVE-value for SNSs_Facebook is .7, which is significantly higher than the critical value of 0.5. The AVE-value for the variable IOPE is 0.7, which is significantly higher than the critical value of 0.5. The AVE-value for the variable PE is 0.6, which is higher than 0.5., and the AVE-value for the Latent_phase is 0.67 which is higher than 0.5.

Convergent Validity

Construct	Average variance extracted (AVE)
SNSs_Facebook	0.7091
IOPE	0.7295
PE	0.6931
Latent_phase	0.6781

D. Discriminant validity

To assess the discriminant validity firstly is used the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which is used to check if the AVE of each construct is greater than the squared correlation coefficients between constructs. Discriminant validity or Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio of correlation (HTMT) is an estimate of the construct correlation. In order to determine discriminant validity, the AVE-value between the different constructs is checked. Based on the table below the decision is made that discriminant validity is fine. This decision is based on the critical value for htmt of lower than 0.85 and the AVE-values between the constructs. The results showed that all the AVE-values between constructs are significantly lower than the critical value of 0.85.

Moreover, the cross-loadings were examined; where each measurement item should load highest on the construct it is associated with (Hair, et al., 2017). The results showed that the cross-loading of each measurement item on its construct are higher than cross-loadings on other constructs. Hence, the discriminant validity has been established. Thus, it is concluded that the constructs of this study showed significant evidence of reliability and of convergent and discriminant validity.

7.2. Assessing the structural model

To assess the structural model several parameters are used. First, we looked at the adjusted R2. The adjusted R2 of IOPE is 0.61, which means that the model explains 61% of that variable. The adjusted R2 for the variable PE is 0.85, which means that the model explains 85% of the variance of that variable. The adjusted R2 for the variable Latent_phase is 0.88, which means that the model explains 88% of the variance of that variable.

Structural Model

R-Squared

Construct	Coefficient of determination (R^2)	Adjusted R^2
IOPE	0.6165	0.6145
PE	0.8602	0.8595
Latent_phase	0.8858	0.8840

To test the direct effect, we look at the Beta (path coefficient). The results indicate a statistically significant positive effect between the variables. All direct effects are statistically significant at the 5% level and the value 0 is not included in the 90% confidence intervals.

Also, to test the direct effects the percentile bootstrap and bootstrap were calculated. Results reveal a strong and positive effect of SNSs_Facebook on Latent_phase (b = 0.8772, p=0.000), so **H1** is supported. The results indicate a statistically significant positive effect of IOPE (b = 0.822) and PE (b = 0.916) on Latent_phase. SNSs_Facebook has a positive and significant effect on IOPE (b = 0. 785) and on PE (b =0.927). All direct effects are statistically significant at the 5% level and the value 0 is not included in the 90% confidence intervals.

7.2.1. Cohen's F2

After evaluation and confirmation of the predictive relevance of the structural model, the size of the effects (f2) was analyzed. Size of the effect f2 or Cohen's Indicator evaluates how much each construct is useful to the model adjustment. The f2 is computed by noting the change in R2 when a specific construct is eliminated from the model. The f2 effect size values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are considered as small, median and large. Effect size values of less than 0.02 indicate that there is no effect (Hair et al., 2017). The value of Cohen's F2 for the relation SNSs_Facebook-PE is 6.1, which is significantly higher than .35, which indicates a strong effect. The value of Cohen's F2 for the relation IOPE- Latent_phase is .25, which is lower than .35 which indicates a moderate effect. The value of Cohen's F2 for the relation PE-Latent_phase is 0.74 which is significantly higher than .35, which indicates a strong effect. Lastly, the relation between SNSs_facebook- latent_phase has indirect effect of 0.79 which indicates a strong influence, but also has a direct effect. In order to determine the significance of the effect size the Bootstrap analysis was used.

With bootstrapping the conclusion are simulated by drawing a sample out of the sample that is used in order to make it possible to generalize the result. Based on the Bootstrap analysis, we concluded that all relations are significant. This decision is based on an alpha of .05 and the p values of 0. 00. All the p-values within the analyses are lower than .05 which indicates a significant effect.

7.3. Mediation analysis

To test the mediation hypothesis H2 and H3 was applied the procedure described by Nitz et al. (2016). First, we specify and compare effects through mediators (political expression and internal online political efficacy) and then examine the total and direct effect of political expression and internal online political efficacy on latent phase (political participation). To determine the effect of mediation, it is necessary to evaluate the size and the significance of the indirect effect. Then, to determine the type of mediation (full or partial) must be examined the significance of the direct effect.

To evaluate the influence of political expression as a mediating variable in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and latent_phase, first the indirect effect was

calculated. The indirect effect was statistical significant (b=0.067; p=0.014), confirming the mediation effect of political expression. To know whether the mediation is full or partial, since the direct effect is statistically significant, and as both effects are significant, a partial mediation relationship was established. Results indicated complementary partial mediation because the product of indirect and direct effect was positive. This findings provides empirical support for the mediating role of political expression in the model, thus the hypothesis **H3** is supported. To assess the influence of internal online political efficacy as a mediating variable in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and latent_phase (political participation), results indicate that the indirect effect is statistically significant (b = 0.037, p = 0.044) and direct effect is statistically significant (b=0.324, p=0.000). As both effects are significant and the product of indirect and direct effect is positive, these indicate that the extent of the usage of internal online political efficacy represents a complementary partial mediation. Therefore, the hypothesis **H2** was supported. Thus, for the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Latent_phase, internal online political efficacy serves as a complementary mediator. The political behavior in Facebook increase the political participation (latent phase) but also increases the internal online political participation, which in turn leads to latent phase of political participation.

Also, the results indicate that the effect of SNSs_Facebook on latent_phase mediated by internal online political efficacy and political expression is statistically significant (b= 0. 399, p=0.004), so internal online political efficacy and political expression do jointly mediate the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and latent_phase.

Furthermore, for measuring the mediating effect size, in this study was used the variance that accounted for (VAF) value (VAF = indirect effect/total effect, and total effect = indirect effect + direct effect) (Hair et al., 2014). As suggested by Hair et al. (2014), a VAF that is above 80% is considered as full mediation, a VAF between 20% and 80% is considered as partial mediation and a VAF below 20% is considered as no mediation. The results showed a partial mediation in the structural model.

Finally, to test whether the political expression have a stronger mediator effect than internal online political efficacy, the differential effect and the confidence

interval of the differential effect were calculated (Coefficient= 0.029). Results do not indicate a significant difference between both effects.

7.4. Conclusion of the Latent phase

The reason of this part was to test the direct and indirect effects of the political behavior on Facebook on the latent phase of political participation. The results of the structural model confirmed that the political behavior on Facebook has a direct and positive effect on the latent phase of political participation. So, the use of Facebook to obtain political information, to seek political information about candidates and political parties can increase the political participation of people. The results of mediation analysis confirmed the mediation of political expression and internal online political participation. These two variables, jointly mediate the relationship between Facebook and latent phase of political participation. Thus, writing online posts online about politics, exchange opinions, exchange political e-messages with friends /family, feeling that you can play an active role in a group dealing with political issues, understanding important political issues that your country is facing and consider yourself well qualified to participate in politics, underlies the relationship between the political behavior on Facebook and the latent phase of political participation. Also, the results indicated a non-significant difference between both indirect effects, so political expression was not a stronger mediator than internal online political efficacy.

8. Mobilization phase
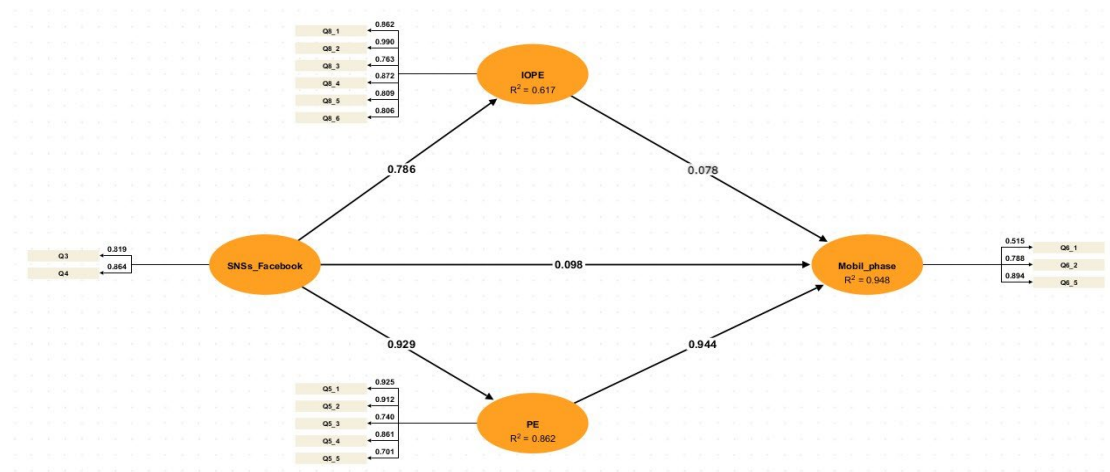
8.1. Assessing the Measurement model

Figure 3: Mobilization phase

To assess the approximate fit, the SRMR measurement method is used. This method indicates if the correlation matrix implied by our model is sufficiently similar to the empirical correlation matrix. The decision that is made is that there is a good model fit. This decision is based on the critical value of 0.08. The results indicated an SRMR value of 0.075 for the model, which is below the minimum value of 0.08 recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), indicating an appropriate fit of the model to the data.

8.1.2. Reliability and validity

To assess reliability and validity of reflective measurement models, four types of analyses are used, namely construct reliability, indicator reliability, convergence validity and discriminant validity. To determine construct reliability, the analyses Joreskog rho and Cronbach's alpha are used. Based on the data in the table below, the decision is made that the model has good construct reliability. This decision is based on the critical value of 0.7 and the construct reliability indicators out of the empirical data for the variables.

Construct Reliability

Construct	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρ_A)	Jöreskog's rho (ρ_c)	Cronbach's alpha(α)
SNSs_Facebook	0.8300	0.8289	0.8284
IOPE	0.9461	0.9411	0.9415
PE	0.9266	0.9179	0.9157
Mobil_phase	0.8279	0.7860	0.7762

In the table, we can see that the variables SNSs_Facebook, IOPE, PE, Mobil_phase, have ρc and α more than 0.7, which indicates a good reliability.

Indicator Reliability

The indicator reliability denotes the proportion of indicator variance that is explained by the respective latent variable. Based on the results, the conclusion is made that the variance that is explained by the respective latent variables is very high for all the variables (Q3, Q4, Q5_1-Q5_5, Q6_1, Q6_2, Q6_5, and Q8_1-Q8_6). All the variables scored very high (0.6-0.9).

Convergence validity

The average variance extracted (AVE) is comparable to the proportion of explained variance in factor analysis. The decision that is made is that the convergent validity is good. This is based on the critical value for convergent validity of 0.5. The AVE-value for SNSs_Facebook is .7, which is significantly higher than the critical value of 0.5. The AVE-value for the variable IOPE is 0.7, which is significantly higher than the critical value of 0.5. The AVE-value for the variable PE is 0.69, which is higher than 0.5., and the AVE-value for the Mobil_phase is 0.56 which is higher than 0.5.

Convergent Validity

Construct	Average variance extracted (AVE)
SNSs_Facebook	0.7080
IOPE	0.7285
PE	0.6934
Mobil_phase	0.5619

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity or Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio of correlation (HTMT) is an estimate of the construct correlation. In order to determine discriminant validity, the AVE-value between the different constructs is checked. Based on the table below the decision is made that discriminant validity is fine. This decision is based on the critical value for HTMT of lower than 0.85 and the AVE-values between the constructs. All the AVE-values between constructs are significantly lower than the critical value of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). From the analysis, all HTMT values are

lower than 0.85. Moreover, the cross-loadings were examined. The results showed that the cross-loading of each measurement item on its construct are higher than cross-loadings on other constructs. Hence, the discriminant validity has been established. Thus, it is concluded that the constructs of this study showed significant evidence of reliability and of convergent and discriminant validity.

8.2. Assessing the Structural model

After the analysis of the measurement model and verifying its reliability and validity, the proposed model structural model was examined. To assess the structural model several parameters are used. First, we looked at the adjusted R2.

R-Squared

Construct	Coefficient of determination (R^2)	Adjusted R^2
IOPE	0.6170	0.6151
PE	0.8622	0.8615
Mobil_phase	0.9483	0.9475

The adjusted R2 of IOPE is 0.61, which means that the model explains 61% of that variable. The adjusted R2 for the variable PE is 0.86, which means that the model explains 86% of the variance of that variable. The adjusted R2 of Mobil_phase is 0.94%, which means that the model explains 94% of the variance of that variable. The path coefficients are interpreted in the same way as the Beta or standardized coefficient in regression analyses. This value indicates the direction and strength of a relation. To test the direct effects the percentile bootstrap and bootstrap were calculated. Results revealed a strong and positive effect of SNSs_Facebook on mobil_phase (b = 0.9852, p=0.000), so **H1** is supported. The Beta coefficient between the variables SNSs_Facebook and IOPE is 0.7855 which is strong and positive relation. The Beta coefficient between the variables SNSs_Facebook and PE is 0.9285, which is strong and positive effect. The Beta coefficient between the variables IOPE and Mobil_phase is 0.7391 which indicates a strong positive effect and the Beta coefficient between the variables PE and Mobil_phase is 0.9437, which indicates a positive and strong relation.

8.2.1. Cohen's f2

To determine the effect size of each effect Cohen's f2 is calculated. This decision is based on the critical values of .35 for a strong effect, 0. 15 for a moderate effect, .02 for a weak effect and the values for Cohen's F2. Looking at the effect overview of all relationships, we can see that the SNSs_Facebook show a strong effect on IOPE (f>0.35), on PE and on Mobil_phase. There is also a strong effect between IOPE on Mobil_phase and PE on mobil_phase (f>0.35).

8.3. Mediation analysis

To test the mediation hypothesis, the procedure described by Nitz et al. (2016) was applied. To assess the influence of internal online political efficacy as a mediating variable in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and mobil_phase, results indicate that the indirect effect is statistically significant (b = 0.781, p = 0.029) and direct effect is statistically significant (b = 0.078, p = 0.000). As both effects are significant and the product of indirect and direct effect is positive, these indicate that the extent of the usage of internal online political efficacy represents a partial mediation of the relationship from SNSs_Facebook to Mobil_phase. Therefore, **H2** was supported.

To evaluate the influence of political expression as a mediating variable in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and mobil_phase, first, the indirect effect was calculated. The indirect effect is statistically significant (b = 0.098; p = 0.014), confirming the mediation effect of political expression. To know whether the mediation is full or partial, since the direct effect is statistically significant, and as both effects are significant, a partial mediation relationship was established. Results indicated complementary partial mediation because the product of indirect and direct effect was positive. This finding provides empirical support for the mediating role of the political expression in the model, thus **H3** is supported.

The results indicate that the indirect effect of SNSs_Facebook on Mobil_phase mediated by political expression and internal political efficacy is positive and statistically significant (b = 0.010, p = 0.017) so political expression and internal political efficacy do jointly mediate the relationship between SNSs_Facebook on Mobil_phase.

For measuring the mediating effect size, in this study was used the variance that accounted for (VAF) value .As suggested by Hair et al. (2014), a VAF that is above 80% is considered as full mediation, a VAF between 20% and 80% is considered as partial mediation and a VAF below 20% is considered as no mediation. The VAF value was between 20-80% (36.03%) indicating a partial mediation in the structural model.

8.4. Conclusions of Mobilization phase

The aim of this part was to test the direct and indirect effects of the political behavior on social network sites (SNSs_Facebook) on the mobilization phase of political participation.

The results of the structural model confirmed that 'SNSs_Facebook' has a direct and positive effect on mobil_phase. The results of mediation analysis confirmed the mediation of political expression in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Mobil_phase. Thus, general users who seek political information on Facebook during an election campaign period, can end up calling others to take political actions, forward someone else's political audio or video recordings to others, or forward someone else's political commentary/writing to others. Also, the mediation analysis indicated that internal online political efficacy represents a partial mediation of the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Mobil_phase. The results indicated a non-significant difference between both indirect effects, so political expression was not a stronger mediator than internal online political efficacy in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Mobil_phase. The results indicate that political expression and internal online political efficacy do jointly mediate the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Mobil_phase.

9. Manifest Phase
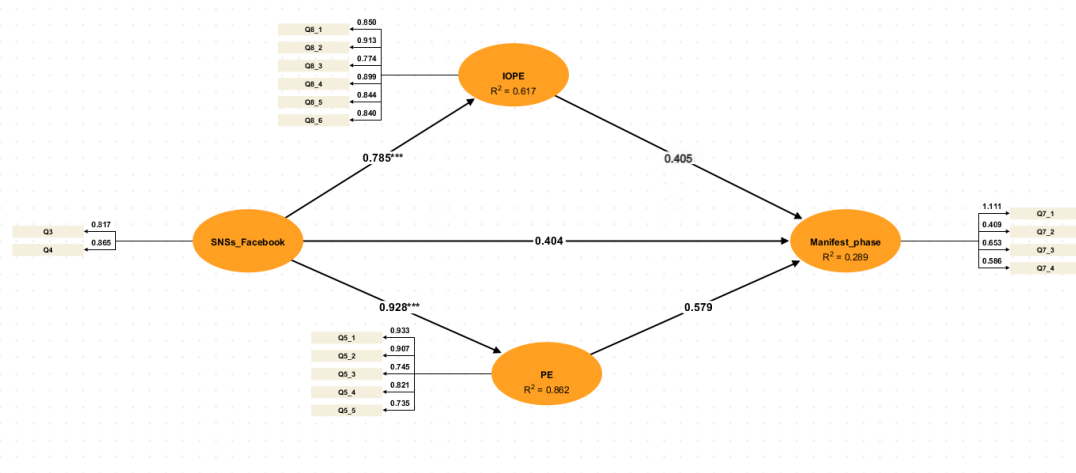
9.1. Assessing the Measurement model

Figure 4: Manifest phase

To assess the approximate fit, the SRMR measurement method is used. This method indicates if the correlation matrix implied by our model is sufficiently similar to the empirical correlation matrix. The decision that is made is that there is a good model fit. This decision is based on the critical value of 0.08. The results indicated an SRMR value of 0.071 for the model, which is below the minimum value of 0.08 recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), indicating an appropriate fit of the model to the data.

9.1.1. Reliability and validity

To assess reliability and validity of reflective measurement models, four types of analyses are used, namely construct reliability, indicator reliability, convergence validity and discriminant validity. To determine construct reliability, the analyses Joreskog rho and Cronbach's alpha are used. Based on the data in the table below, the decision is made that the model has good construct reliability. This decision is based on the critical value of 0.7 and the construct reliability indicators out of the empirical data for the variables.

Construct Reliability

Construct	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρ_A)	Jöreskog's rho (ρ_c)	Cronbach's alpha(α)
SNSs_Facebook	0.8310	0.8293	0.8284
IOPE	0.9433	0.9419	0.9415
PE	0.9278	0.9179	0.9157
Manifest_phase	0.9190	0.9071	0.9037

Indicator Reliability

The indicator reliability denotes the proportion of indicator variance that is explained by the respective latent variable. Based on the results, the conclusion is made that the variance that is explained by the respective latent variables is very high for all the variables (Q7_1, Q7_2, Q7_3, and Q7_4). All the variables scored very high (0.5-0.9).

Convergence validity

The average variance extracted (AVE) is comparable to the proportion of explained variance in factor analysis. The decision that is made is that the convergent validity is good. This is based on the critical value for convergent validity of 0.5. All the variables had a value more than 0.5.

Convergent Validity

Construct	Average variance extracted (AVE)
SNSs_Facebook	0.7086
IOPE	0.7304
PE	0.6938
Manifest_phase	0.7668

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity or Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio of correlation (HTMT) is an estimate of the construct correlation. In order to determine discriminant validity, the AVE-value between the different constructs is checked. Based on the table below the decision is made that discriminant validity is fine. This decision is based on the critical value for HTMT of lower than 0.85 and the AVE-values between the constructs. All the AVE-values between constructs are significantly lower than the critical value of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). From the analysis, all HTMT values are lower than 0.85. Moreover, the cross-loadings were examined. The results showed that the cross-loading of each measurement item on its construct are higher than cross-loadings on other constructs. Hence, the discriminant validity has been established. Thus, it is concluded that the constructs of this study showed significant evidence of reliability and of convergent and discriminant validity.

9.2. Assessing the Structural Model

To assess the structural model several parameters are used. First, we looked at the adjusted R2. The adjusted R2 of IOPE is 0.61, which means that the model explains 61% of that variable. The adjusted R2 for the variable PE is 0.86, which means that the model explains 86% of the variance of that variable. The adjusted R2 of Manifest_phase is 0.28, which means that the model explains 28% of that variable.

R-Squared

Construct	Coefficient of determination (R^2)	Adjusted R^2
IOPE	0.6165	0.6146
PE	0.8618	0.8611
Manifest_phase	0.2894	0.2785

Path Coefficient

The path coefficients are interpreted in the same way as the Beta or standardized coefficient in regression analyses. This value indicates the direction and strength of a relation.

To test the direct effects the percentile bootstrap and bootstrap were used and calculated. The results revealed a strong and positive effect of SNSs_Facebook on Manifest_phase (b = 0.4042), so **H1** is supported. The results indicate a statistically significant positive effect of PE (b = 0.5790) on Manifest_phase. IOPE has a positive and significant effect on Manifest_phase (b = 0.6432). Also, SNSs_Facebook has a positive significant effect on IOPE (b=0.7852) and on PE (b=0.9283). All direct effects are statistically significant at the 5% level.

9.2.1. Cohen's F2

After evaluation and confirmation of the predictive relevance of the structural model, the size of the effects (f2) was analyzed. Size of the effect f2 or Cohen's Indicator evaluates how much each construct is useful to the model adjustment. The f2 is computed by noting the change in R2 when a specific construct is eliminated from the model. The f2 effect size values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are considered as

small, median and large. Effect size values of less than 0.02 indicate that there is no effect (Hair et al., 2017).

The table below presents the results of f2 effect sizes with respect to all the relationships in the model. SNSs_Fcebook show a strong effect size (f2 = 1.60) on IOPE and on PE (f2=6.2). SNSs_Facebook show a weak effect on Manifest_phase . IOPE shows a moderate effect on manifest phase (f2=0.32) and PE shows a weak effect on manifest phase.

Effect	Cohen's f^2
SNSs_Facebook→IOPE	1.6078
SNSs_Facebook→PE	6.2357
SNSs_Facebook→ Manifest_phase	0.0317
IOPE→ Manifest_phase	0.3233
PE→ Manifest_phase	0.0482

Table 3: Cohen's f2

9.3. Mediation analysis

To test the mediation hypothesis, the procedure described by Nitz et al. (2016) was applied. To determine the effect of mediation, it is necessary to evaluate the size and the significance of the indirect effect. Then, to determine the type of mediation (full or partial) must be examined the significance of the direct effect.

To evaluate the influence of political expression as a mediating variable in the relationship between Social network sites (facebook) and manifest phase, first, the indirect effect was calculated. The indirect effect is statistically significant (b=0.067, p=0.014), confirming the mediation effect of political expression between SNSs_Facebook and Manifest_phase. To know whether the mediation is full or partial, since the direct effect is statistically significant (b = 0.4052, p = 0.002), and as both effects are significant, a partial mediation relationship was established. Results indicated complementary partial mediation because the product of indirect and direct effect was positive. This finding provides empirical support for the mediating role of the political expression in the model, thus **H3** is supported. To assess the influence of internal online political efficacy as a mediating variable in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Manifest_phase, results indicate that the indirect effect is

statistically significant (b = 0.037, p = 0.040) and direct effect is statistically significant (b = 0.4042, p = 0.002). As both effects are significant and the product of indirect and direct effect is positive, these indicate that the extent of internal online political efficacy represents a complementary partial mediation of the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Manifest_phase. Therefore, **H2** was supported.

For measuring the mediating effect size, in this study was used the variance that accounted for (VAF) value. As suggested by Hair et al. (2014), a VAF that is above 80% is considered as full mediation, a VAF between 20% and 80% is considered as partial mediation and a VAF below 20% is considered as no mediation. The VAF value was 26.03% indicating a partial mediation in the structural model.

Finally, to test whether the political expression has a stronger mediator effect than internal online political efficacy in the relationship between SNSs_Facebook and Manifest_phase, the differential effect and the confidence interval of the differential effect were calculated. Results do not indicate a significant difference between both indirect effects.

9.4. Conclusion of the Manifest phase

The reason of this part was to test the direct and indirect effects of the political behavior on Facebook on the manifest phase of political participation. The results of the structural model confirmed that the political behavior on facebook has a direct and positive effect on the manifest phase of political participation. So, the use of Facebook to obtain political information, to seek political information about candidates and political parties increase the political participation of people. The results of mediation analysis confirmed the mediation of political expression and internal online political participation. These two variables, jointly mediate the relationship between facebook and manifest phase of political participation. Thus, writing online posts online about politics, exchange opinions, exchange political e-messages with friends and family, feeling that you can play an active role in a group dealing with political issues, understanding the important political issues facing your country, consider yourself well qualified to participate in politics, underlies the relationship between the political behavior on Facebook and the latent phase of

political participation. Also, the results indicated a non-significant difference between both indirect effects, so political expression was not a stronger mediator than internal online political efficacy. Furthermore, participants select more the answers "Organizing/Participate to an Internet-based protest, or boycott" and "Vote in online polls", than "Standing for office" and "Donating to political causes".

10. General Conclusions and discussion

The aim of this master thesis was to examine if the political use of Social Network Sites (specifically of Facebook), for seeking information, can lead general users to the three phases of political participation, namely latent, mobilization and manifest phase. Another important part of this master thesis was to investigate if the political expression and internal online political efficacy serve a mediating role between the relationship of social network sites (facebook) and political participation. The results of the PLS-SEM analysis showed that the main research question is being answered and all the hypotheses were successfully being supported. Looking at the demographic characteristics, we can observe that even though most of the participants were from Greece, there was multiculturalism between the respondents, given a clearer conclusion about the results of the research. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 26. Most of the participants had either completed bachelor's degree or master's degree and the majority of them were females.

From the SEM-PLS analysis, we can observe that the results of the model confirmed that 'SNSs_Facebook' has a direct and positive effect to all three phases of political participation. So, during an election campaign period of a country, the political participation of general users can be increased due to the political use of social network sites like Facebook. For example, during an election campaign period, general users who obtain political information or seek information about candidates and their parties online on Facebook, can end up, for example, subscribing to a political page in order to receive more information with political content or participate in online video streaming made by a politician or policy makers. By participating in these online associations and conversations, people will learn democratic norms and values, develop democratic competencies, and become more active in politics.

Furthermore, the results of mediation analysis confirmed the mediating role of political expression in the relationship between SNSs Facebook and the political participation (all three phases). Thus, the political expression, like writing online posts about political issues, share political news online, exchange political e-messages, exchange opinions about political issues online and share political video clips or photos, represents a mechanism that underlies the relationship between SNSs Facebook and these three phases of political participation. Also, the mediation analysis indicated that internal online political efficacy represents a complementary partial mediation of the relationship between SNSs Facebook and the three phases of political participation. The more able people feel to perform a number of political behaviors the more likely expecting to bring a desired political outcome. And, of course, the more able they feel to perform these behaviors; the more likely they are to engage in political participation of some kind. Thus, internal online political efficacy like being well qualifies politically, believing that you can influence the government's decisions, playing an active role in politics, understanding what politicians say, it's important and it can explain part of the effect of SNSs_Facebook on political participation. Moreover, the results indicated a non-significant difference between both indirect effects, so political expression was not a stronger mediator than internal online political efficacy in the relationship between SNSs Facebook and the three phases of political participation. The results indicate that political expression and internal online political efficacy do jointly mediate the relationship between SNSs Facebook and the three phases of political participation.

In conclusion, social network sites use has been shown to be an important variable in predicting political participation in a context where individuals feel capable of performing a number of political behaviors that will bring some kind of political effects. Social network sites promote the dissemination of mobilizing information, assist with the organization and coordination of collective actions and also provide the means for political discussion and exchange of views among interested individuals.

11. Limitations

Before discussing the practical implications of the study, there are several limitations that need to be mentioned. The scope of this study is limited to Facebook users. Different social network sites, like Twitter or Instagram, may lead to different

results. Moreover, other factors such as income, marital status can influence the level of political behavior and participation. Also, this research is only for general users, and not for people who belongs to another category like content creators. Scholars have developed numerous classifications of Internet users and usages (Kraut, *et al.*, 1998; Shah, *et al.*, 2001). Their classifications can help in the development of a comprehensive categorization of the various non-political usages of Internet and SNSs.

12. Practical implications

There are certain practical implications that this research presents. This study helps both researchers and practitioners to develop a clearer understanding of how network features in SNS affect political participation. As the models showed, using social network sites politically increases the likelihood of participating in politics. Political parties can use SNSs as an advantage. From the part of politicians, this means that campaign strategies will continue to capitalize on this influence, and that the public will increasingly try to monitor its effect on them. Political candidates are able to directly engage with and impact the voting public through the use of various social media platforms and social network sites. Also, Facebook positively affects this shared belief about the group's capabilities to perform a collective action ("called others to take action"-Mobilization phase). Thus, from a civic lens, this study also has practical implications since this platform may be used by civic-oriented organizations to increase participatory behaviors. Similarly, general users that are using social network sites as deliberative spaces for discussing and encouraging civic participation could motivate users to participate more through Facebook. This in turn, could also help politicians or organizations foster norms of reciprocity and trust with their audiences, creating more opportunities for civic engagement. In the same way, civic-oriented organizations may prefer to use Twitter for communicating information, as this platform may be particularly useful for increasing internal efficacy.

13. Contribution

Despite these limitations, this study makes important contributions to the literature by explicating the mechanisms from different Facebook uses to political participation. It attempts to bring some conceptual order to a research area that has been extensively explored in recent decades. First of all, this study presents a new model in which the relationship among social network site facebook, political expression, internal online political participation, latent phase, mobilization phase and manifest phase has been tested. Second, despite previous studies, this research combines two important mediators, political expression and internal online political participation. These two variables are jointly mediating the relationship between social network sites and political participation. Thus, this master thesis contributes to a better understanding of the role of social network sites use in political engagement and political participation.

14. Further Research

There is room for more research on how social network sites affects campaigns and how campaigns use social media and SNSs effectively. Also, future research may focus on how SNSs will affect the future of politics as more people of all ages use social media and new technologies. Moreover, future studies can examine how age affects the way that people get their news online on a daily basis, especially during the election campaign period of their countries. Another important thing is that future researchers may focus on whether the use of SNSs will stay consistent as people in the age groups get older and change to a different age cohort. Clearly, the rise of the internet in the last thirty years, and the introduction of social media and social network sites in the 21st century have changed the political landscape significantly, and further research into how and why social network sites influences decisions will be interesting.

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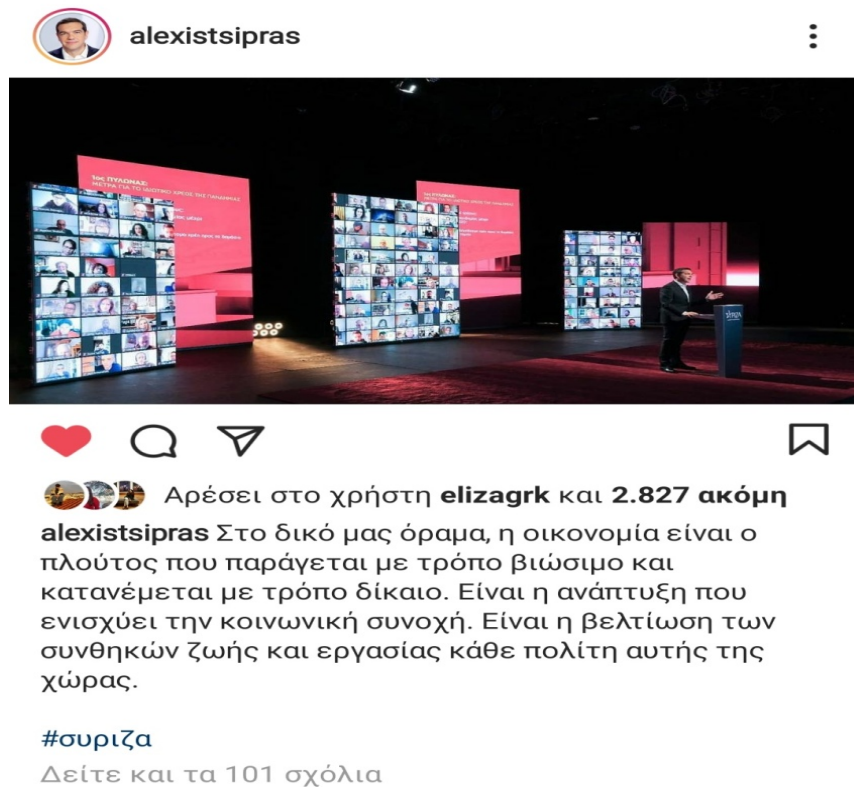
Appendix

Appendix I: Live video streaming of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Image from Twitter Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2020.
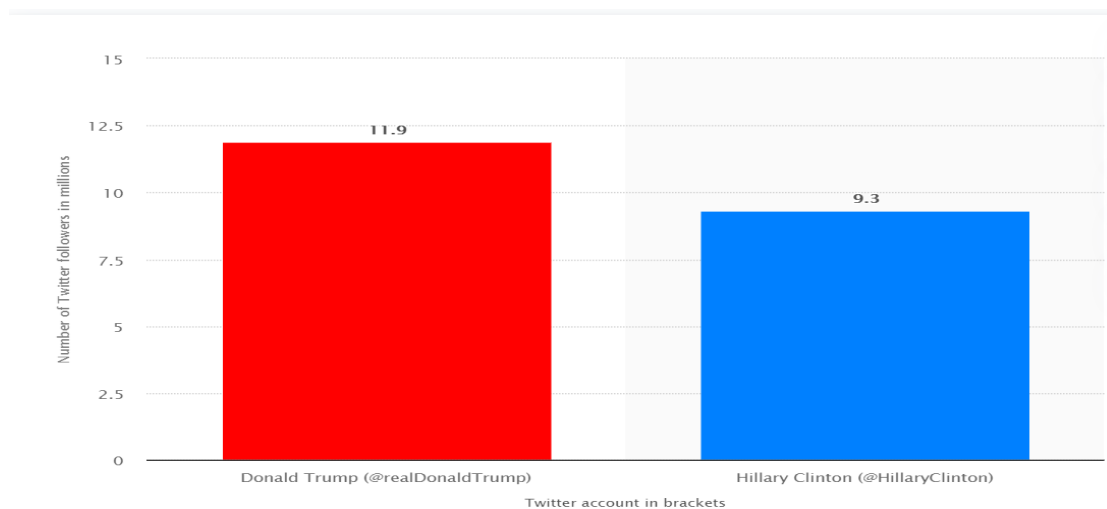

Appendix II: Anna V. Eskamani's live video streaming. Live video from the Facebook account of Anna V. Eskamani, 2020.
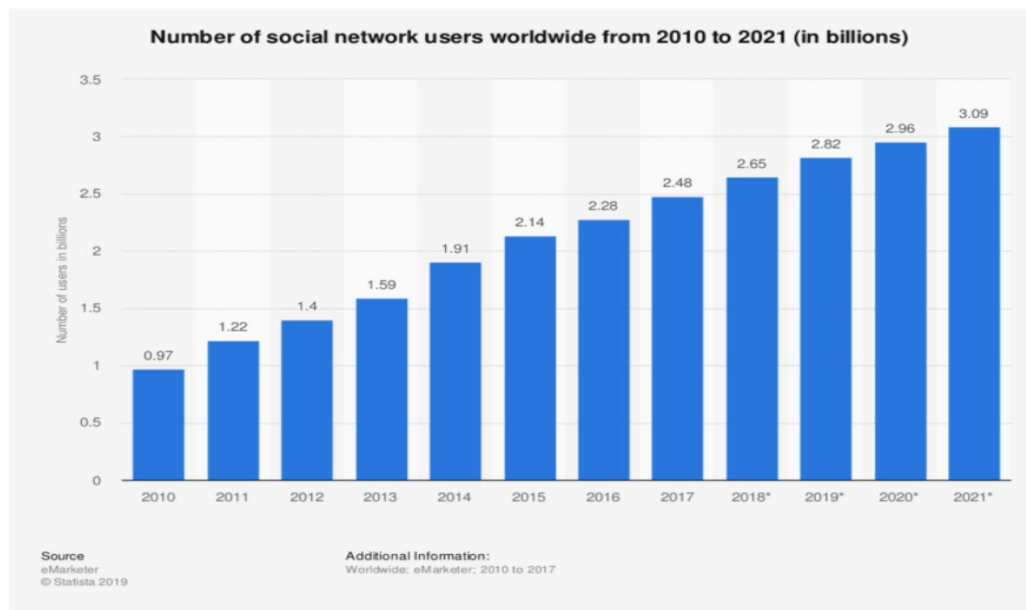
Appendix III: The video streaming of ex PM of Greece Alexis Tsipras. Photo from the Instagram account of Alexis Tsipras, 2020.

Appendix IV: The number of Twitter followers in billions for Hillary Clinton and Donald trump, Statista.com (2020)

Appendix V: Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2021 Statista.com, 2020.

Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2021 (in billions)

Year	Users (billions)
2010	0.97
2011	1.22
2012	1.4
2013	1.59
2014	1.91
2015	2.14
2016	2.28
2017	2.48
2018*	2.65
2019*	2.82
2020*	2.96
2021*	3.09

Source
eMarketer
© Statista 2019

Additional Information:
Worldwide; eMarketer; 2010 to 2017

Appendix VI: Questionnaire

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study! My name is Stella Xyda and this questionnaire is part of my Master's thesis in Marketing at Radboud University of Nijmegen, under supervision of Dr. Michael Börsig.

In this study, I would like to learn about the political behavior on the Social Network Site (SNS) Facebook, and if this site can affect general users and lead them to the three phases of political participation, namely latent, mobilization and manifest phase. Latent phase is reading political news and discuss them with others, mobilization phase is about calling others to take political action and manifest phase is voting, protesting, standing and donating.

I would be thankful if you could help me to complete my Master Thesis. This study will take around 10 minutes. Your data will be treated anonymously, safely and with great care. It will be used only for scientific research. Of course, you are allowed to quit the questionnaire any time you want.

NOTE: This questionnaire is only for people who are not members of any political party, or work for politicians and their general campaigns (e.g. create content on their social media, write articles etc.)

Thank you so much!

1. How frequently do you use Facebook?

-About once a day

-More than once a day

-Few times a week

-few times a month

-Less than a month

-I don't use Facebook

2. During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you use Facebook to obtain political information?

3. During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you use Facebook to seek political information from specific candidates and political parties' pages?

4. During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you use Facebook to:

-Write online post about political issues

-Share political news online

-Exchange political e-messages with friends and/ or family

-Exchange opinions about political issues online

-Share political video clips or photos

5. During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you perform the following activities?

-Forwarded someone else's political commentary or writing to others

-Forwarded someone else's political audio or video recordings to others;

-Subscribed to receive campaign or political information

-Contact a politician or civil servant

-Calling others to take political action

- Participate in an online video streaming of a politician

- Sending campaign-related e-mails

6. During the election campaign period of your country, how often do you perform the following activities?

- Organizing/Participate to an Internet-based protest, or boycott

-Vote in online polls

-Standing for office

-Donating to political causes

7. Because of the Internet, people can understand politics more easily and can better understand what the government has done." How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?

8. I feel I could play an active role in a group dealing with political issues

9. I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing my country

10. I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics

11. I think that I am as much informed about politics and government as most people

12. People like me can influence what local government does

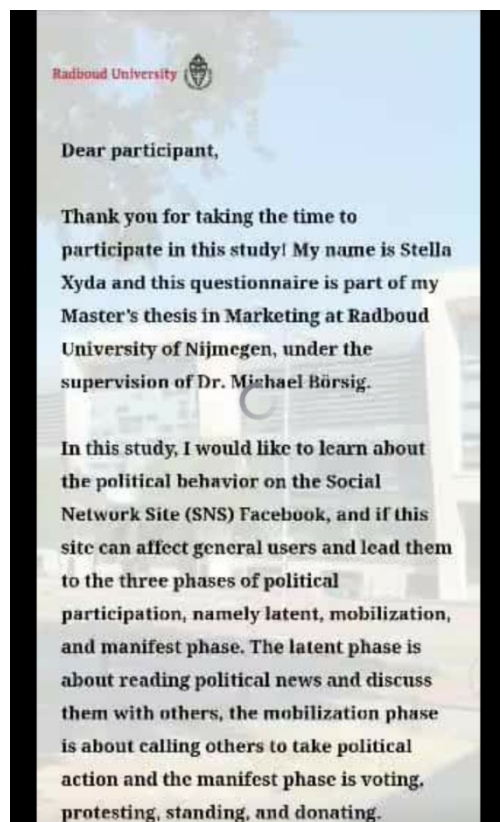13. Gender: Male, Female, Other

14. Age

15. Education level:

     - High school diploma
     - Bachelor's Degree
     -Master's Degree
     -Phd
     -No education

16. Nationality:

Appendix VII: Online form of the survey in Qualtrics.com