IJAFAME
International Journal of Accounting, Finance,
Auditing, Management & Economics

The Impact of Political Marketing Communication via Facebook on Youth Political Participation in Morocco

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International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics - IJAFAME
ISSN: 2658-8455
Volume 4, Issue 3-2 (2023)

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www.ijafame.org

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Abstract

Between proponents and detractors of the existence of a positive impact of marketing communication via social networks on youth political participation, the theory of connective action (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008) as well as the theory of attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011) stipulate the existence of a positive impact on political participation behavior especially through digital social networks. Our objective is to put these theoretical contributions to the test in the Moroccan context. On the one hand, it is to analyze the perception of Moroccan political actors in relation to the political attitudes of youth. On the other hand, this research consists of evaluating the impact of marketing communication in the era of social networks on the political participation of Moroccan youth. In other words, has this communication campaign acted in favor of a positive change in the political attitudes of young people towards more political participation?

This exploratory qualitative study is conducted with young political actors and marketing communication professionals in Morocco. Conducted over a two-month period during the last election campaign in September 2021, the 12 semi-structured interviews were subject to thematic analysis via NVivo 12. This study suggests the existence of a positive impact of marketing communication via social networks, particularly Facebook, on the political attitudes of young people in Morocco and consequently on their political participation. However, this political participation remains limited to online political participation. In fact, marketing communication via social networks is a necessary but not sufficient condition to encourage and stimulate offline political participation behavior, particularly membership and effective engagement in political parties and voting. In fact, these participatory activities are considered highly engaging. Hence, permanent and interactive marketing communications are important. These results must be the subject of a confirmatory quantitative study in order to promote their generalization.

1. Introduction

As an "ongoing campaign" (Blumenthal, 1982), political marketing refers to communication withparty members, media, funding sources and voters (Lock and Harris, 1996). Indeed, good governance of activities and relationships with different stakeholders requires mutual exchange of information and promises (Nimmo, 1999). Hence, there is a need to rethink members relationship management (Johansen, 2016) since they participate in the design of the communication policy and attract new members. Joathan and Lilleker (2020) argued for a new shift in "permanent communication" in the age of social networks.

In the political context, communication strategy is at the intersectionof two disciplinary fields: "political communication" and "marketing communication". Onthe one hand, according to Kotler *and al.* (2014), marketing communication refers to the means used by a company to inform and persuade current and potential customers, directly and indirectly, and remind them of the brands, products and services marketed. Belch, Belch and Guolla (2013) extend the scope of marketing communication to ideas and consider that "marketing communication ensures the coordination of all the salesperson's activities in order to establish information and persuasion channels that will be used to sell products and services or to promote an idea". On the other hand, political communication is defined by (Gurău and Ayadi, 2011) as a set of "information flows of the political system towards voters and the people". This way, it helps create interactions and develop relations between the political system and the various stakeholders (Gurău and Ayadi, 2011; Emmer and *al.*, 2012; Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018). Shama (1976) states that marketing communication and political communication refer to promotion, that is, the apparent and fairly extensive use of media by the vendor and the candidate for the purpose of informing, reminding, influencing attitudes, and facilitating sales activities directed at target groups of buyers and voters, respectively. In this sense, political marketing communication is the practical side of marketing communication in the political field.

Bennett and Iyengar (2008) found that political communication is experiencing a shift from traditional to digital communication, marked by the use of the Internet and social media. Indeed, based on a Pew research in the United States, Rainie et al. (2012) concluded that young people are more likely than older people to use social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, to promote political content and share their own ideas. Moreover, Tolbert and McNeal (2001) confirmed that the Internet has a positive effect on voter turnout. Nevertheless, some authors suggest that the Internet does not have a significant impact on voter turnout (Bimber, 2001) or has no effect on political participation (Bastien, 2004).

The lack of agreement regarding the impact of political actors' (parties and politicians) use of media and in particular social networks on political participation which is defined by Oser, Hooghe and Marien (2013) as "all online or offline activities of citizens that directly or indirectly influence political decisions", arouses the curiosity of the researcher and invites us to further investigate this issue in the Moroccan context. In fact, this research question was strongly brought up by the last electoral campaign in Morocco on September 8, 2021. This campaign was marked by the use of social networks by Moroccan politicians and parties, particularly Facebook, as a preferred means of communication due to health restrictions related to Covid-19. Our intention was to answer the following question: "What is the impact of political marketing communication via social networks, particularly Facebook, on the political participation of young Moroccans? To answer this question, this article first presents a literature review that allows us to specify conceptual and theoretical frameworks capable of better defining the premises of this scientific research and deducing the research proposals. The next section presents the methods used and results of this research. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practicalimplications of our results and avenues for future research.

2.   Theoretical framework and research proposal

2.1.   The theory of connective action

Bennett and Iyengar (2008) point out that the political communication landscape has undergone a paradigm shift with the exponential growth of the Internet and Communication Technologies. Social media offer several advantages. First, they allow for direct communication with the public (Giasson et *al.*, 2019). This offers the opportunity to control and shape the content of a message without fear of distortion by journalists (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Druckman, Kifer and Parkin, 2009; Golbeck, Grimes and Rogers, 2010). Second, Auter and Fine (2018) presented other advantages, such as the lower cost of social media compared to traditional media, near-immediate dissemination of information and responses to critiques, and reduced cost of user acquisition and retention. These authors add that "cascading" as a characteristic of social media stimulates the dissemination of marketing communication (Auter and Fine, 2018). Indeed, seeing political messages "liked" by your friends can be more persuasive (Bond et al., 2012). In this sense, communication via social networks such as Facebook can positively impact the political attitudes of young people (Sude and *al.*, 2021). Furthermore, the use of social network influencers shapes public opinion in the digital age and generates significant influence capital (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). Therefore, marketing communication via social networks can have a positive impact on public opinion and social norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011a). This marketing communication via social networks by political actors is also considered as a "facilitating" factor of youth political participation (Boyadjian, 2020). This ease of performing a particular behavior (Celuch and Dill, 2011) is referred to as "Perceived Behavioral Control" (Ajzen, 1991).

2.1.1   The "information" dimension of political marketing communication

According to connective action theory, social networks provide youth with a daily sense of belonging and a greater visibility of daily connections with friends (Robards and Bennett, 2011). Similarly, Dahlgren and Olsson (2006) showed that the Internet provides youth with an alternative political identity and source of information.

Moreover, Boyd (2011) considered that creating a profile on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter facilitates and encourages the sharing of political ideas in a network and among peers (Ellison and *al.*, 2011; Towner and Lego, 2016). This indicates that social networks, particularly Facebook, are factors that facilitate youth political participation. These authors even suggest that the use of social media by youth can change political organizations. They state that when young people avoid formal membership in political organizations, they turn to social media to obtain political information (Abdullah et al., 2021) and use it as a new form of political participation (Theocharis et *al.*, 2021).

For Clarke (2010), social networking sites are used to inform and involve the citizen in political life. Indeed, Facebook has provided alternative ways to learn about public interests and opinions, making it easier for citizens to engage in the political process (Westling, 2007). Therefore, communication via social networks is a prerequisite for the development of a favorable social framework that facilitates the political participation of young people.

2.1.2   The "mobilization" dimension of political marketing communication

Several studies argue that digital marketing impacts campaigns (communications, elections and fundraising) on several levels. First, Iyengar (2011) considers that new media have had a positive impact on the mobilization of political supporters, whereas traditional media, especially television, remain the preferred channels of appeal to voters. However, Barak Obama's campaign in 2008 changed this fact when his MyBO internet strategy helped get the support of millions of voters in USA. Vaccari (2010) considered that MyBO consisted of stimulating online volunteers capable of adopting and responding to Obama's political

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message to the target outside the web. To achieve this, the platform provides volunteers with the means and arguments necessary for their success (Vaccari, 2010). According to Giasson et *al*. (2019), the use of social media is mainly guided by the communication objective of the parties towards their targets. They added that it is an effective tool for online mobilization, increasing the visibility of the party and voting for the party (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2021).

Auter and Fine (2018) suggested that social media enables rallying online and offline youth and dynamic members. For instance, the Arab Spring is illustrative of citizens' use of social media (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) to engage political structures and mobilize collective action. Furthermore, Abdelhay (2012) highlighted the ability of social media to facilitate discussions and mobilize collective action.

2.1.3 The "interactive" dimension of political marketing communication

Connective action theory marks the shift from collective action organizations to individualization based on connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). It states that in addition to everyday sociality, social networks through their interactive and micro-casting features have become preferred tools for new activists in political participation (Kaye, 2013; Thorson, 2014).

Research on interactivity suggests that conversations lead to relational exchanges and community building (Macdonald, 2003). Indeed, interaction is based on multidirectional communication between multiple participants where control and power are shared among users. Instead of traditional top-down communication, social networks allow for two-way communication (McMillan and Hwang, 2002) and promote greater interactivity between the political party and the public in general and its supporters in particular (Ferber et al., 2007).

Another reason for the appeal of social networks to young people is that they are flexible, interactive, peer-based political engagement tools (Livingstone and *al*., 2007; Harris, 2008; Östman, 2012). Hence, they are perceived as a favorite means of appeal to participate. Moreover, Stromer-Galley (2000) wrote that the Internet encourages various forms of interactivity and removal of barriers to participation and connectivity. He suggests that the Internet could increase democratic engagement and cognitive participation in politics as well as create and strengthen ties with political parties and their leaders. Furthermore, Jackson and Lilleker (2009) consider online sociability through young people's interactions via social networks as merely an extension of their offline sociability.

2.1.4 The "personalization" dimension of political marketing communication

Connective action theory states that social media provides a high level of personalization (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013) of information distribution patterns to young people who may not have access to political news and information through other means. This "personalization" function is defined by Rahat and Sheafer (2007) as a "shift in the presentation of politics in the media, expressed in increased interest in individual politicians and decreased interest in parties, Organizations and institutions". According to Le Bart and Lefebvre (2015), this creates proximity between the politician and the voter or supporter.

Moreover, in exploring the motives for politicians' use of social networks, (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013) argue that the primary motive is "politician marketing." According to these authors, as a marketing tool, Facebook has been the first choice for politicians in terms of both presence and activity. They conclude that marketing on social media is more "personal" than on traditional media. These authors consider that candidates were willing to promote their politics by communicating their "private identity" as well as their political personality by sharing pictures of their private lives. Indeed, sharing personal updates and photos via Facebook has attracted much more attention from readers and voters than updates that contain political statements (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013). In this regard, social media is another venue for

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promoting politics and a way to reach other groups of voters, especially young people (Karlsen, 2011). Based on these conclusions, we make the following Hypotheses:

Hypothesis1: Marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on the political attitudes of young people
  - *Hypothesis 1.1: The "information" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook hasa positive impact on young people's political attitudes.*
  - *Hypothesis 1.2: The "mobilization" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook hasa positive impact on the political attitudes of young people.*
  - *Hypothesis 1.3: The "interactive" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on young people's political attitudes*
  - *Hypothesis 1.4: The "personalization" dimension of marketing communication via Facebookhas a positive impact on young people's political attitudes*

Hypothesis 2: Marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on the social norm.
  - *Hypothesis 2.1: The "information" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook hasa positive impact on the social norm.*
  - *Hypothesis 2.2: The "mobilization" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook hasa positive impact on the social norm.*
  - *Hypothesis 2.3: The "interactive" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook hasa positive impact on the social norm*
  - *Hypothesis 2.4: The "personalization" dimension of marketing communication via Facebookhasa positive impact on the social norm*

Hypothesis 3: Marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on perceived behavioral control.
  - *Hypothesis 3.1: The "information" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook has   a positive impact on perceived behavioral control.*
  - *Hypothesis 3.2: The "engagement" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on perceived behavioral control.*
  - *Hypothesis 3.3: The "interactive" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on behavioral control*
  - *Hypothesis 3.4: The "personalization" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on behavioral control*

2.2. The theory of reasoned action

To increase the prediction of behavior, Fishbein and Ajzen (2011) proposed a model that includes a number of personal, social, and informational factors including communication via media. These factors affect the attitude or affect expressed toward a specific behavior, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. An individual's intention to engage in a behavior in a given situation and possibly the behavior itself depends on his or her attitude toward that behavior, his or her perception of the norms governing behavior in that situation, and his or her degree of compliance with those norms. Behavioral intention is considered the variable most closely related to behavior, whereas the other variables are assumed to contribute to behavioral intention.

2.2.1. Attitudes,   social   norms   and   behavioral   control   determine   political participation intentions

This model has undergone several developments in recent years. The most important one marks the shift from the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975) where

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behavioral intention is influenced by attitude and subjective norms to the theory of planned action (Ajzen, 1991). Indeed, Ajzen (1991) considered that even if the attitude towards a behavior and the subjective norm favor behavioral intention, the perceived ease or difficulty of acting can positively or negatively impact behavioral intention. Hence, we included a third variable, perceived behavioral control. However, it is still necessary to define?? the concepts of social norms, perceived behavioral control and attitude.

First, attitude toward behavior presents it as a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of one's intended behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Specifically, this evaluation results from beliefs, emotional states, and behavioral tendencies towards that behavior (Vaughan and Hogg, 2005). Second, subjective norm refers to the normative views of the social setting that an individual is exposed to when engaging in a particular behavior (Wolf *et al.*, 2015; Bergan, 2021). Finally, perceived behavioral control can be defined as the difficulty or ease of performing a particular behavior (Celuch and Dill, 2011). By applying this theory to the present study, the target behavior is "political participation." Hence, we propose the following *hypothesis*:

Hypothesis 4: A Favorable political attitude positively impacts Moroccan youth's intention to participate in politics
Hypothesis 5: A Favorable Subjective Norm Positively Affects Political Participation Intentionof Moroccan Youth
Hypothesis 6: A favorable perception of behavioral control positively impacts the political participation intention of Moroccan youth

2.2.2. Behavioral Intention Promotes Political Participation

For Fishbein and Ajzen (2011), " attitudinal, normative, and control considerations determine an individual's intentions". Intention can be assessed by an individual's estimate of the probability or perceived probability of performing a given behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011). These authors believe that the higher the subjective probability, the more likely it is that the behavior will actually be performed.

An individual's behavioral intention is defined as planned or anticipated future behavior (Lam and Hsu, 2006). In this study, it will refer to a Moroccan youth's intention to engage in online and/or offline political participation activities. Ajzen & Fishbein (1975) found that an individual's behavior is facilitated by his or her intentions and perceived control (Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) defines behavior as the observable response of an individual in a given situation to a given target. Based on these elements, we suggest the following research Hypothesis:
Hypothesis 7: Favorable behavioral intention positively impacts the political participation behavior of Moroccan youth.

3. Methodology:

According to Lambin (1990), "an exploratory study, conducted through a qualitative approach, is often an indispensable prerequisite to delimit the research question, to become familiar with this question or with empirical opportunities and constraints, to clarify theoreticalconcepts or to make research hypotheses explicit". In management research, empirical methods (observation, interviews, surveys, simulations, quasi-experimentation, a combination of different techniques or multi-methods) are more frequently used to explore and develop new theoretical objects than to test them (Snow and Thomas, 1994). In this sense, qualitative studies are always rich in terms of data collection and the exploration of new research avenues. From this perspective, we conducted semi-structured interviews with politicians and experts in digital political marketing communication campaigns in Morocco. In fact, the aim is to

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explore their beliefs regarding the political participation of young Moroccans and the influence of the social norms and behavioral control on this political act. It then specifies the impact of political marketing communication via social networks on beliefs, social norms, and perceived behavioral control, and consequently, on the political participation behavior of Moroccan youth. This exploratory study is also an opportunity to specify the nature of communication (information, mobilization, interactivity and/or personalization communication) that could have more impact in terms of revealing or even changing the attitudes of young Moroccans towards political participation.

3.1. Semi-structured interviews

The average duration of the interviews was one hour. The interviews were then recorded fully and transcribed. According to Cossette (1994), the main advantage of this method is "the validity of the data produced, as they were generated spontaneously by the respondents inresponse to open-ended questions; they are more likely to reflect what he or she thinks.

The interviews took place between October and November 2021, a year marked by the preparation of Moroccan parties' political programs, electoral lists, and the election campaign for the September 8 local, regional and parliamentary elections. This exploratory study was conducted through twelve interviews with politicians and experts in digital institutional communication campaigns. The sample characteristics are listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

Number of the interview	Profession	Political affiliation	Duration of the interview	Date of interview
E 1	Professor of technical education at the Ministry of Education	Candidate of the P.A.M. "Party of Authenticity and Modernity" in the elections of September 2021	3H	2/11/2021
E 2	Expertin Institutional Digital Campaigns	No political affiliation	1H30	15/10/2021
E 3	Financial Analyst	President of the youth of the P.I. "Party of Independence" in Ile de France.	1H30	14/10/2021
E 4	University professor	Member of the preparation committee of the electoral program of the political party P.P.S." Party of Progress and Socialism" and candidate in the regional elections.	1H	21/10/2021
E 5	Director of a media agency and political specialist	No political affiliation	1H16	2/11/2021
E 6	Branch Group Manager at AlBarid Bank	Member of the electoral commission and the drafting commission of the electoral project of the political party M.P. "Popular Movement"	2H58	25/10/2021
E 7	Administrator at the provincial hospital of Taounate	candidate of the U.S.F.P. "Socialist Union of Popular Forces" in the local elections, the commune of Taounate.	45 minutes	2/11/2021

E 8	Commercial activity	Member of the national youth council of the "Independence Party" and candidate for the 2021 elections.	58 min	27/10/2021
E 9	University professor	Deputy of the list of the P.S.U. "United Socialist Party" in the local constituency Al-Hayy Al-Hasani-Casablanca.	1H	27/10/2021
E 10	Journalist	Candidate to the regional elections of Agadir Idaoutanane of the list of the P.S.U. "United Socialist Party" September 2021.	37 min	01/11/2021
E 11	Secondary school teacher at the Ministry of Education.	Founding member of the political movement "Maan" (Together)	37 min	02/11/2021
E 12	Specialist in political and institutional communication	Head of the social media department and member of the P.J.D. " Party of Justice and Development "	50 min	2/11/2021

Source: Authors

3.2. Development of the interview guide

To ensure proper data collection, an interview guide was developed based on the objectives of this research. The themes of the interview guide **(Appendix 1)** were based on the following sections:
- Moroccan Youth Attitudes Towards Political Participation;
- The impact of political marketing communication via social networks on attitudes towards political participation of Moroccan youth;
- The impact of political marketing communication via social networks on the social norms, perceived behavioral control, intention, and political participation of youth in Morocco.

It is important to note that a code of ethics was agreed upon by all participants in the study.The participants were informed of the objective of the present study and the potential uses of the data collected. In addition, the personal data confidentiality clause helped the study to run smoothly.

3.3. The Coding Process

Content analysis can be based on different methods that differ in the choice of coding units and type of analysis of the results (Thiétart, 2014). This qualitative research adopted thematic coding. This technique involves systematically identifying, grouping, and discursively examining the themes discussed in an interview transcript (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2012).
Content analysis assumes that the repetition of discourse analysis units (words, expressions or similar meanings, sentences, and paragraphs) reveals the interests and concerns of interviewers. The four main stages of the content analysis proposed by Bardin (2013) can be distinguished. First, the transcripts of the interviews were cut up and ordered according to the themes adopted following a sequenced thematization (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2012). This technique consisted of randomly drawing a sample of interviews to create a thematic sheet. This will be applied to all interviews, with the possibility of adding a limited number of themes.

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The different themes were then classified into a limited number of categories linked to the research objectives and focus of the analyses. The third step consists of conducting counts, statistical analyses, or more qualitative analyses of the context in which the words appear. In their qualitative analysis manual, Miles and Huberman (2003) suggested counting items to determine their recurrence: "Numbers [...] are more economical and user-friendly than words; the general trend of the data is more quickly and easily seen by examining their distribution. Finally, the researcher interpreted the results by comparing the results of the qualitative analysis with the theoretical predictions.

The analysis of the interviews can be summarized in a tree structure with ten headings, broken down into themes, sub-themes, and control sentences (verbatim). In addition to the implementation of this approach, the use of the NVivo 12 software made it possible to quantitatively measure the number of coded references within a unit of analysis (theme, sub-theme, and/or verbatim). These units are grouped into two types of nodes. On the one hand, the "context nodes" (**Table 2)** allow us to characterize the Moroccan political context in terms of political attitudes, the reasons for using communication via social networks, and the main social networks used. On the other hand, the "impact nodes" allow us to highlight the impact of social network communication on the political participation of young people in Morocco. It is important to note that the files indicate the number of interviews that addressed the theme or subtheme among the twelve interviews, and the references indicate the number of times the unit ofanalysis was mentioned during the interviews (**Table 3)**.

Table 2: List of "Nodes - Policy Context"

NOEUDS	FILES	REFERENCES
Negative attitudes of youth towards political participation		
Political mistrust	6	8
Bad image	3	4
Political depression	3	3
Reasons for using social networks		
the youth target	3	3
Facing the competition	2	2
Create political image	3	4
Covid-19	8	8
Social networks frequently used in communication campaigns		
YouTube	2	2
WhatsApp	3	3
Twitter	3	3
Tik Tok	3	3
LinkedIn	1	1
Instagram	4	4
Facebook	11	12

Source: Authors

Table 3: List of "Nodes - Impact"

Nodes	FILES	REFERENCES
Dimensions of the communication invested in the campaign		
Personalization communication	3	4
Mobilization communication	11	11
Interactive communication	6	6
Communication of information	12	12

Dimension of communication with a strong impact on young people's attitudes		
Personalization communication	0	0
Mobilization communication	3	3
Interactive communication	6	6
Communication of information	4	4
Communication via social networks has a positive impact on young people's attitudestowards political participation		
Stimulates attitudes	7	7
Changes attitudes	11	13
The impact of communication via social networks on the social norm		
Personal conviction	11	12
Support from family and friends	9	12
Support from friends' entourage	3	3
Peer and group influence	6	7
The Impact of Communication on Perceived Behavioral Control "PBC		
Positive impact of the communication on the **"C.C.P.**	12	14
Impact of attitudinal change, family support, and positive perception on youth political participation in Morocco		
Vote	0	0
Online support	2	2
Political information search	1	1
Participation in the election campaign	1	2
Party membership	0	0
Reasons for youth political participation		
Young opportunists		
- Search for political positions	2	2
- Monetary consideration	4	4
Young people motivated by change	8	8

Source: Authors

4.   Results

This study identified a two-fold peculiarity in the Moroccan political context. While social networks are considered the new tools of political and electoral campaigns, in Morocco, the use of social networks is considered "a solution imposed by Covid-19". The second aspect is the absence of "personalized" communication. Indeed, for cultural reasons, the private sphere of a political candidate is not the subject of posts shared on social networks. Furthermore, the results of the study confirm the existence of a link between marketing communication via Facebook, Moroccan youth's political attitude, their perception towards theparticipatory act, social norms, intention to participate, and actual political participation. These links can be presented as visual models, as shown in **figure 1**. The foundations of the theory ofconnective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013) and the conceptual framework of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011) provided the theoretical support for developing this conceptual model.

**Figure 1: Conceptual model, the impact of marketing communication on political participation of youth (P.P.Y.)**
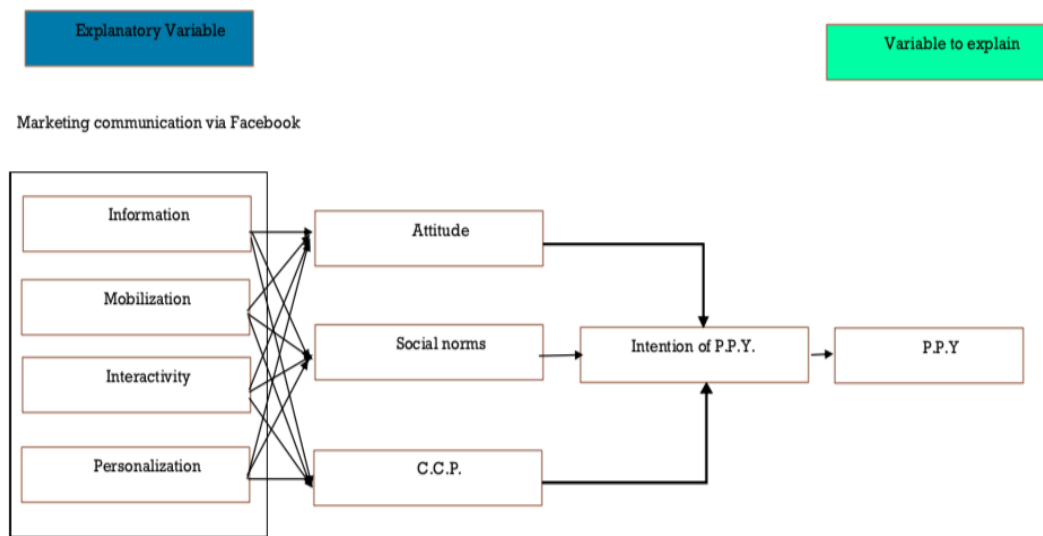
Source: Authors

4.1. Social networks, a Covid-19 imposed solution to Moroccan youth political mistrust

Political actors are aware of the prevalence of a negative attitude among Moroccan youth toward political participation. On the one hand, political distrust prevails in the Moroccan political context, especially among young people. As a politician (E9) points out, "the prevailing attitudes are distrust, insults, and violence, especially towards female politicians. In addition, young people consider that "politicians are mainly seeking their personal interests" (E1). This distrust is global, as shown by (E6): "the loss of confidence touches at the same time political participation, politics, and politicians". On the other hand, young people have negative perceptions of politicians. According to the political actor (E1), young people avoid politics because of the "bad image". Generally, "the term 'politician' is an obstacle to communication with young people because the term 'politician' is associated with theft, opportunism, swindling and corruption" (E11). It should also be noted that according to (E4), "young people are against current political practices" and that "young people want to practice politics but are afraid and have lost confidence".

Being aware of this attitude of young people but constrained by the elections of September 8, 2021, political parties and candidates have invested heavily in social networks. Thus, marketing communication occurred mainly on Facebook (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2: Social networks used during the communication campaign
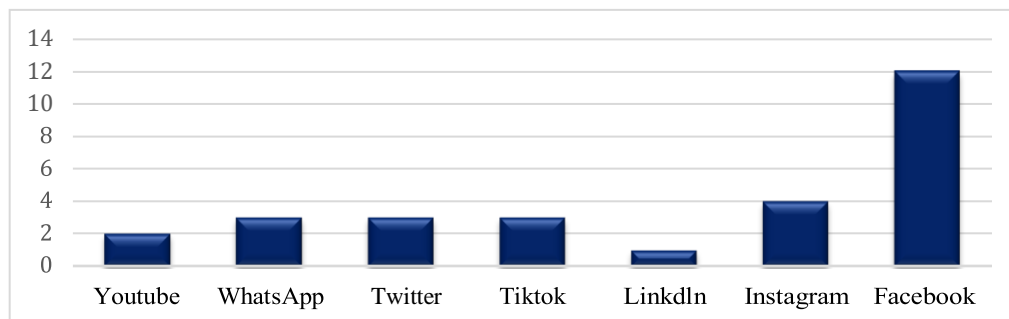
Source: Authors

Faced with the political mistrust of young people and Covid-19, communication via social networks was imposed on Moroccan political actors during the elections of September 8, 2021. The impact of this communication on youth attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioral control, and consequently on the political participation of Moroccan youth, needs

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tobe studied.

4.2. Marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on the political attitudes of young Moroccans

It is important to note that political participation is assimilated by the majority of political actors in Morocco to a commitment within political parties, on the ground through participation in electoral campaigns and especially "voting". Moreover, political participation is linked to the exercise of political activities in the field, as emphasized by the politician and the digital communication manager (E6 and E8): "Only 1% of young people exercise politics through party memberships, participating in decision-making and becoming party politicians"; or as expressed by the head of an institutional communication agency (E5) "young people with a low level of education either do not show political participation (no voting) or consider voting as an opportunity to sell one's voice" and "Honest people generally do not register to vote, and except for a few poor young people who register, the rest do not register" (E1).

From this perspective, Moroccan political actors are more oriented towards marketing communication to inform and mobilize youth via Facebook for more political participation (**Figure 3**). However, the participants in the study consider that the "personalization" dimension can negatively impact the attitude of young people in Morocco.
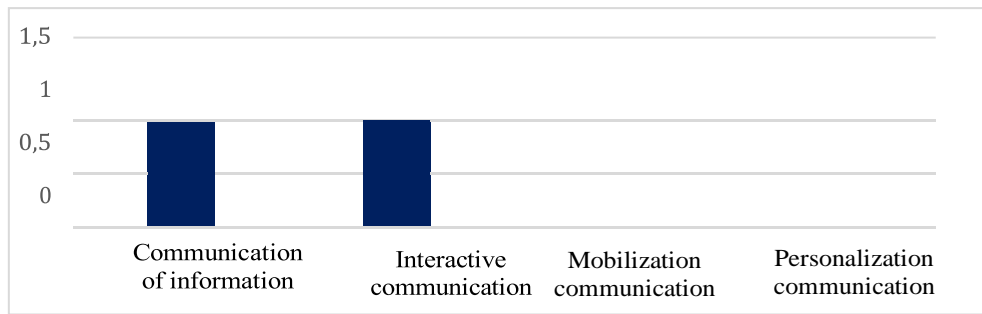
Figure 3: Dimensions of marketing communication, via social networks, invested by Moroccan political actors
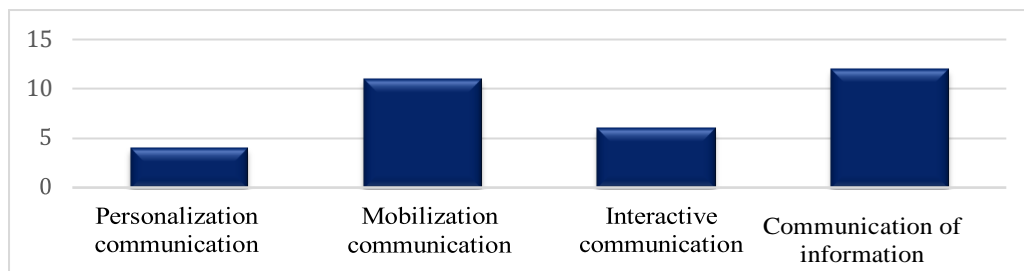
Source: Authors

For the participants in the study, "Interactivity communication via social networks is important for more visibility, to create a good image, to promote new political ideas but it is the direct discussion that leads to the vote" (E1). While all actors recognized the important role of interacting with young people (**Figure 4**), only 50% of participants actively interacted via social networks,especially Facebook (E7 and E8). For (E2), "interactive communication enables the increase offeedback and therefore more political participation of young people but it is difficult to respond to it" or the possibility of "indirect interaction" via a new communication of information" (E4,E10, E11) or "creation of fake accounts to respond indirectly because it is better appreciated than the response of the politician" (E5).

Figure 4: Dimensions of social network communication that have a positive impact on young people's political attitudes

Furthermore, almost all actors agree that communication via social networks, especially Facebook, has a positive impact on the political attitudes of young people. In addition to stimulating and/or revealing political attitudes, this communication can also change young people's attitudes (**Figure 5**). On the one hand, "change from anti-political and anti-voting to different forms of political participation" (E9, E11). According to (E4), "Thanks to social networks, non- politicized people participated in the election campaign". On the other hand, this change in attitudes can lead to voting provided that the communication is interactive as the following excerpts underline: "Interactive discussions on Facebook lead to a change in political opinionsand even to mobilization on the ground" (E2, E7, E8). *Accordingly, this result confirms the first research Hypothesis:*

- *Hypothesis 1.1: The "information" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on young people's political attitudes.*
- *Hypothesis 1.2: The "mobilization" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on young people's political attitudes*

Figure 5: Communication via social networks has a positive impact on young people's political attitudes
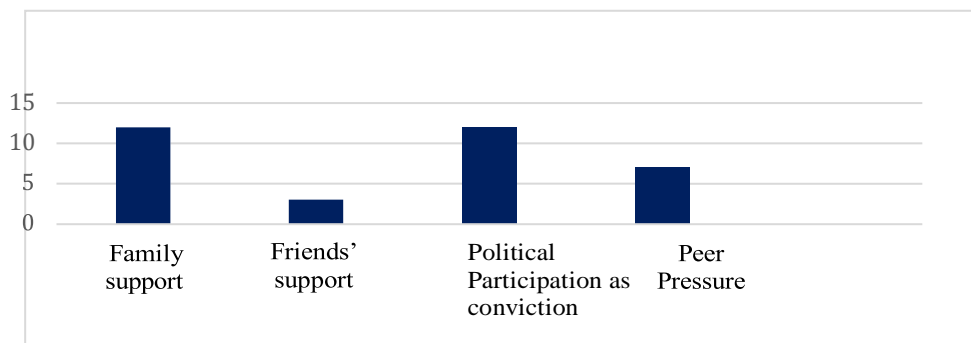
4.3. Marketing communication via Facebook positively impacts the social norm

"Digital communication via social networks has generated political participation from young people who have even applied for party membership and recommended membership to their families and friends" (E12) and (E6) states that "Relatives, friends and neighbors have participated in the conduct of the online and offline communication campaign." Therefore, communication via social networks by Moroccan politicians positively affects social norms (**Figure 6**).

However, the participants in this study agreed that youth political participation was a form of personal conviction. As (E7, E8, E9, E10, E12) stated "Political participation remains a personal conviction". The same was mentioned by (E3) who claimed that "Politics is a personal matter". This was better expressed by (E4) who said that "Young people are leaders in the political game" in reference to their free choice. Even if the people around them (family, friends and colleagues) remain reluctant to the idea of political participation, faced with the

will of young people to participate in politics, they end up supporting the communications and political positions of young people on social networks with "likes", "comments" and "shares" and ask their contacts to support them. Moreover, for (E5, E6), "Parents are afraid for their children but support them"and (E12) adds that "Parents and relatives present their fears but if the young person is convinced, they support and encourage the young people in relation to the decision of politicalparticipation".

Figure 6: Communication via social networks has a positive impact on the social norm

Source: Authors

Therefore, we reject Hypothesis 2 regarding the positive impact of marketing communication via Facebook the social norm. In fact, although the impact may be positive but political participation is considered a personal belief.

4.4. Marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on perceived behavioral control

The participants in the study considered that marketing communication via Facebook by political actors positively impacted their perception of the political act. According to (E7), "social networks facilitate the collection of information about the party, candidate, and political news, which allows for the design of a political position and stimulates the political participation of young people. In addition, "social networks facilitate youth political participation through

possibility of an online application" (E6). Therefore, Facebook facilitates and simplifies the political participation behavior of youth. Therefore, we confirm H 3.1 and H 3.2:
- *Hypothesis 3.1: The "information" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook positively impacts youth's perceived behavioral control.*
- *Hypothesis 3.2: The "mobilization" dimension of marketing communication via Facebook positively impacts youth's perceived behavioral control.*
In conclusion, the results of the study confirm the positive impact of the information and mobilization dimensions of Facebook marketing communication on the perceived political attitude and behavioral control of youth targets.

4.5. Favorable political attitudes and perceptions by youth positively impact their online political participation

First, marketing communication via Facebook encourages political expression among Moroccan youth on current issues: "Social networks have encouraged young people to participate more in politics because it is a medium of expression that overcomes social pressure, fear of speaking out in public, fear of judgment from parents and relatives" (E10) and "Social networks allow for an increase in boldness and an increase in the number of political comments" (E2). However, the participants in this study agreed that voting requires travel to the polls. This requires time, effort, and money to travel, especially for the unemployed youth (E6). This means that social networks mainly facilitate online political participation for the target youth,

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but for "voting and political activities within political parties, communication via social networks is aninsufficient tool" (E4, E6, E12). E6 and E12 added that in order to go as far as voting, "electronic voting must be introduced" (**Figure 7**).

Figure 7: Communication via social networks stimulates online political participation among Moroccan youth
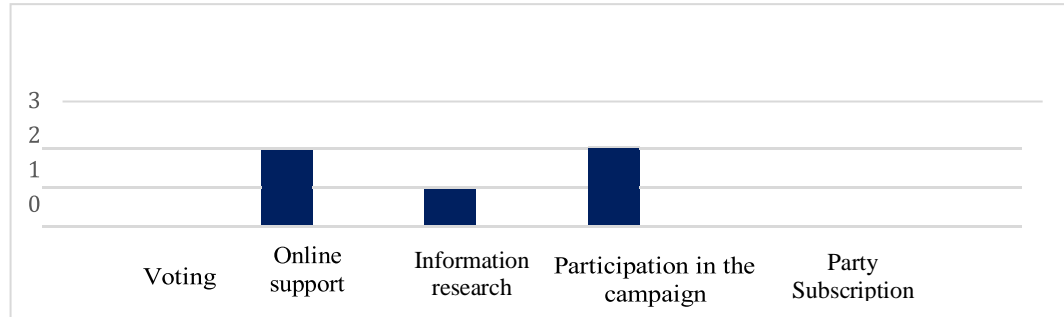
Accordingly, the Hypothesis regarding the positive impact of favorable political attitudes and favorable perceptions of behavioral control on online political participation are confirmed.

5. Discussion

Despite the numerous proofs of the dominance of political marketing communication via Facebook, no previous empirical work has analyzed the respective weight of each dimension of marketing communication (information, mobilization, personalization and interactivity) in the Moroccan context and their respective impacts on the political attitudes of young people, theperception of the act of participation, the entourage of young people, and consequently on their intentions to participate in political activities.

This study finds that Moroccan politicians and parties are more prone to use marketing communication to inform and gain the support of youth. However, the interactive dimension of the communication is seldom deployed contrary to what the theory states about the revival of young people with political participation being mainly due to the interactive features of social networks. For Livingstone and *al.*(2007), Harris (2001), and Östman (2012), the appeal of social networks to young people is explained by the fact that it is a flexible, interactive, and peer-based political engagement. In fact, the participants recognized the importance of interactive communication via social networks in terms of visibility, creating a good image, and promoting new political ideas. However, they believe that it is face-to-face outreach that stimulates the intention to vote. Furthermore, they state that interaction implies the mobilization of important resources.

This study also concludes that communication via social networks, particularly Facebook, has a positive impact on young people's attitudes towards political participation. In addition to stimulating and/or revealing political attitudes, this communication allows for a shift from a negative political attitude to a favorable attitude towards political participation. The study further states that this change in attitude can lead to voting, provided communication is interactive (Koc-Michalska and *al.*, 2021).

In addition, the participants considered marketing communication via social networks by political actors as a "facilitating" factor for young people's political participation (Boyadjian, 2020). First, it facilitates the collection of political information and allows the design of a political position (Pennington and Winfrey, 2021). Second, social networks have encouraged the political expression of young Moroccans on current issues through "likes", "comments" and "shares" (Kim and Yang, 2017). Finally, social networks facilitate the political

participation of young people through the possibility of applying for membership online or participating in the party's e- communication campaigns.

Furthermore, this study states that youth political participation is a personal conviction. In addition, the increased visibility of young people through social networks has a positive impact on the social norms. Indeed, even if the entourage (family, friends and colleagues) remainsreluctant, they end up supporting the communication and political positions of young people on social networks with "likes", "comments" and "shares". From this perspective, the study concludes that social norms have a limited impact on the political participation behavior of Moroccan youth.

Therefore, it turns out that marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact on both the change of attitude in favor of political participation and the evaluation of risks and constraints related to this act in favor of the political participation of Moroccan youth. However, this political participation rarely leads to intentions to vote. It is a new form of political participation that manifests itself primarily through online support in the form of following, "likes," "shares," and "comments" (Azouaoui, Houssaini And Ouhdidou, 2020). However, this political participation is mostly done online (Saud and Margono, 2021). In addition, it is important to note that the variable "political participation intention" as a mediating variable between attitude and behavioral control on the one hand and political participation behavior on the other is only reported for offline political participation activities. Indeed, participants suggested that young people who were exposed to political communication via Facebook, and as a result, developed a positive political attitude, reported their intentions to join the political party in question and their voting intentions.

In this sense, the model of Fishbein and Ajzen (2011), applied to the Moroccan political context and to the target youth, is prepared for two paths, one online and one offline. The online predictive model can be modified by eliminating the mediating variables "social norm" and "political participation intention" (**Figure 8**) while in the offline model, the variable "political participation intention" maintains its importance both theoretically and practically (**Figure 9**).

Figure 8: Conceptual model, the impact of marketing communication via Facebook on online political participation of youth (P.P.Y.)
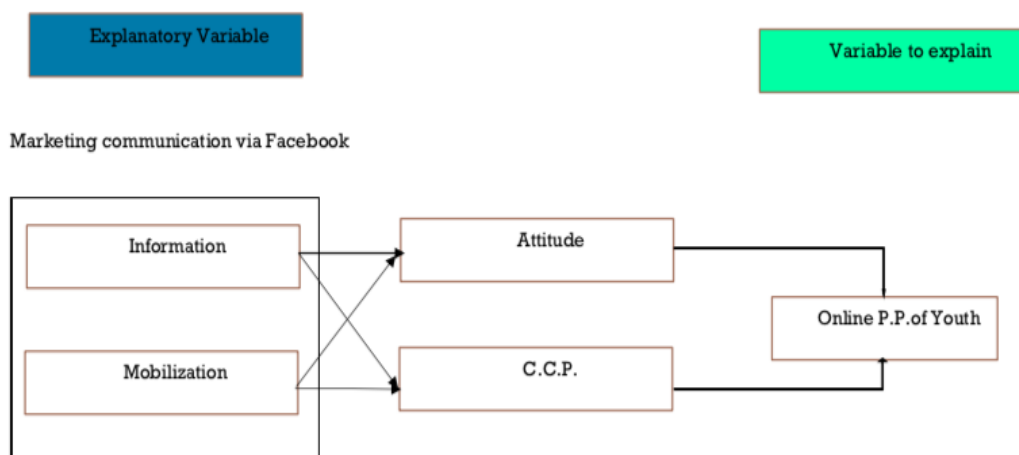
Source: Authors

Figure 9: Conceptual model, the impact of marketing communication via Facebook on offline political participation of youth (P.P.Y.)
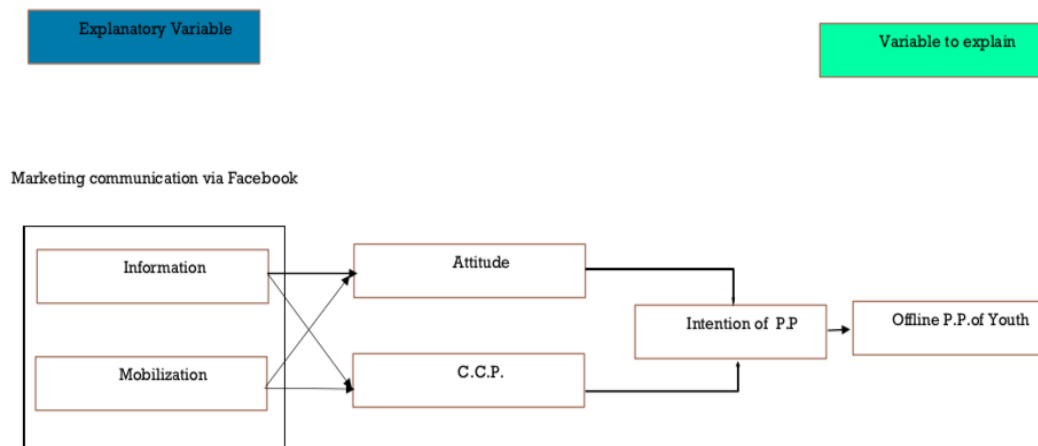
Source: Authors

6. Conclusion

In the political context, communication strategy has the particularity of being at the intersection of two disciplinary fields: "political communication" and "marketing communication". Shama (1976) states that marketing communication and political communication refer to promotion, that is, the apparent and fairly extensive use of media by the vendor and the candidate for the purpose of informing, reminding, influencing attitude, and facilitating sales activities directed at target groups of buyers and voters, respectively. In this sense, political marketing is about communication with party members, media and funding sources, and voters (Lock et Harris, 1996). Thus, political marketing communication is simply an application of marketing communication in the political field (Hind & Azouaoui, 2023).

Furthermore, , Bennett et Iyengar (2008) found that political communication is experiencing a shift from traditional communication to digital communication marked by the use of internet and social media. Rainie et al. (2012) conclude that younger people are more likely than older people to use social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, in promoting political content and sharing their own ideas. However, the lack of compromise regarding the impact of political actors' (Parties and Politicians) use of media and in particular social networks on political participation, invites us to situate this issue in relation to the Moroccan context. Our intention was to answer the following question: "What is the impact of political marketing communication via social networks, in particular Facebook, on the political participation of young Moroccans? Therefore, two main theories were mobilized, namely, the theory of reasoned action and the theory of connective action.

In response to this problem, it turns out that marketing communication via Facebook has a positive impact in terms of attitude change in favor of political participation as well as in terms of the evaluation of risks and constraints related to this act (Perceived Behavioral Control and Social Norm) in favor of political participation among Moroccan youth. This result confirms both the contribution of attitude theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) as well as connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). However, this political participation rarely leads to voting. It is a new form of political participation that manifests itself mostly through online support in the form of following, "likes," "shares," and "comments" (Azouaoui, Houssaini And Ouhdidou, 2020; Boyadjian, 2020). In fact, political participation in Morocco is mainly carried out online. In addition, it is important to note that the variable "intention to participate" as a mediating variable between attitude and behavioral control on the one hand and political participation

behavior on the other, is only reported for offline political participation activities. Indeed, participants suggest that young people who were exposed to political communication via Facebook, and as a result developed a positive political attitude, reported their intentions to join the political party in question and their voting intentions. In this sense, the Fishbein et Ajzen (2011) model, applied to the Moroccan political context and for the target of youth, takes two paths, one online and the other offline. Online, this predictive model can be modified by eliminating the mediating variables "social norm" and "political participation intention" while offline the variable "political participation intention" maintains its importance both theoretically and practically.

Therefore, it turns out that marketing communication via social networks is a necessary but not sufficient condition to encourage and stimulate offline political participation behavior, especially membership and effective engagement in political parties and voting. These activities can be perceived as highly engaging and make it difficult to behave (Ajzen, 1991). Hence the importance of ongoing and interactive marketing communication (Joathan et Lilleker, 2020) to stimulate youth political participation both online and offline.

Given that this qualitative study is one of the first to explore the impact of different dimensions of Facebook marketing communication on Moroccan youth political participation, it is subject to some limitations, which are likely to provide some room for future research. The main limitation of this study is the small sample size (12 semi-structured interviews). In addition, although Politicians and political marketing communication campaign experts are a reliable source, their interpretation of the impact of marketing communication via Facebook may not be the same as that of ordinary youth. To address these limitations, it is recommended that future research validate the preliminary findings of this study by taking a quantitative research approach. Future research could also examine these results by age range, gender of participants, and even taking into consideration degree level or occupation.

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