

The Moderating Role of Knowledge in The Effect of News Access on Students' Political Participation in Makassar

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Abstract. The 2019 student protests prompt the question of whether access to political news affects political participation, with political knowledge serving as a moderating factor. It is suggested that access to political news, as a source of political education for students, may have an impact on political participation. When students who are well-informed have access to political news, they are likely to engage in higher levels of political participation, with political knowledge acting as a moderating variable in this relationship. This study aims to investigate the relationship between access to political news, political knowledge, and political participation (both online and offline) among students. This is the first time that political knowledge is being analyzed as a factor that may amplify the effect of access to political news on participation. This study is a quantitative survey research that was administered to 465 students in Makassar. Of the participants, 64.7% were female ($N = 301$) and 35.3% were male ($N = 164$) with an average age of 20.54 ($SD = 1.80$). The data was analyzed using multiple regression analysis by entering predictor variables and interaction variables, where the predictor variable is multiplied to determine the moderating effect of each predictor on the outcome variable. It found that access to political news is a significant predictor of both types of political participation, and that political knowledge moderates this relationship. This study concluded that political knowledge can act as a counter to potentially misleading information and news, furthermore with sufficient knowledge accumulation will result in real participation, both online and offline.

Keywords: *Online Political Participation; Offline Political Participation; Political Knowledge; News Access*

INTRODUCTION

In September 2019, widespread student protests occurred throughout Indonesia as a result of high levels of social media conversation. These protests, which marked the first time since 2013 that students took to the streets in large numbers, were sparked by the drafting and revision of a series of controversial laws, including those involving students in Makassar. The events of 2019 have been referred to as the "year of student demonstration" (Damarjati, 2019).

Several studies have explored the motivations behind the widespread student

protests that occurred in 2019 in Indonesia.

One study by the KANOPI FEB UI Research Team and the KSM Eka Prasetya UI Research Team found that students who participated in the protests were motivated by friendship and interest, with those who had low political knowledge being more likely to follow their friends, while those with high political knowledge were more interested in politics. The study also found that students who were active users of social media, particularly Twitter, had a higher interest in politics (Tim Peneliti KANOPI FEB UI; Tim Peneliti KSM Eka Prasetya UI, 2019). Another study

highlighted the role of the "echo chamber" effect in the protests, where media users continued to receive messages about the protests through social media, leading to a sense of solidarity and motivation to participate (Winarno, 2019). Another study noted that some students displayed narcissistic behavior by uploading photos of their involvement in the protests, a characteristic of the "visual generation" of the Z generation, who have been shaped by technological advances (Jiwandono, 2020)

One aspect that may be missing from the discussion is the diversity of issues raised by the student protesters. The widespread posting of photos on social media of the student protests in Indonesia in 2019 revealed a diverse range of issues being raised. These included calls for the revision of the KPK Law, opposition to the Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence (PKS Bill), support for the PKS Bill, and calls for the rejection or ratification of certain articles in the Criminal Code Bill. This diversity of issues is in contrast to previous major protests, which typically focused on a single major issue. The wide range of issues raised in the protests of 2019 reflects the diverse patterns of news access and levels of knowledge among the participants, leading to differing opinions on the various issues. Previous studies have revealed that students in Indonesia, as a digital society, primarily rely on the internet as a source of news and access political news regularly

through their social media timelines (Tim Peneliti KANOPI FEB UI; Tim Peneliti KSM Eka Prasetya UI, 2019; Lindawati, 2015; Rosemarwati & Lindawati, 2019). It has also been observed that the use of algorithms by social media platforms leads to personalized timelines for each user (Holt, Shehata, Stromback, & Ljungberg, 2013; Pandey, Gupta, & Chattopadhyay, 2020)

According to the "Digital 2019" study from Hootsuite and wearesocial, the average length of internet usage per day in Indonesia is 8 hours and 36 minutes (we are social & Hootsuite, 2020). This lengthy internet usage may be related to the increased prevalence of political expression online. As society becomes increasingly flooded with information, online political expression is becoming an increasingly essential form of political participation.

Political participation in general can be interpreted as the participation of citizens in order to influence a political policy. So that online political participation can be interpreted as community efforts to get involved in government decision making through the use of online media. Online political online participation boils down to how the community participates in influencing decision making or policy by the government, just as Verba and Nie argued in 1972 (Van Deth, 2016) when many people participated in determining a decision and / or policy, then there was democracy.

Online political participation is an ad-hoc way that internet users discovered given so many possibilities in the cyberspace. Some of the ways taken to participate online including amplification of an issue on social media, this is often seen with the hash tags rising on Twitter; vertical communication with public officials who have social media accounts, both privately managed, and by administrators; and through the making of petitions to support or reject government policies, where the online petition is distributed and then signed. Some level of online political participation could encourage direct political participation, as confirmed in an experimental study (Lee & Hsieh, 2013) as well as research that proves that the use of social media for news and political expression on social media can produce direct participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014).

This research builds on previous studies showing that students in Indonesia rely on the internet as their main source of news (Lindawati, 2015). We suggest that the diversity of issues raised in the 2019 student protests was a result of different patterns of news access, leading to diverse forms of political participation. We are interested in exploring whether the depth of students' understanding of political issues can influence the effect of access to political news on political participation (both online and offline). To test this, we are using contextual political questions to measure the level of

political knowledge among respondents. This is the first time that political knowledge is being analyzed as a factor that may amplify the effect of access to political news on participation.

Access to political news as Political Socialization Agency

Political socialization is an important element that can determine ones' level of political participation in the future. Hyman in 1959 defines political socialization as learning of social patterns related to social positions mediated by various agencies. Political socialization that occurs to people is often informal and unintentional, and it shapes awareness of their position as members of the community and how they can participate to maintain or enhance his or her function as a society. Agencies or things that play a role in the process of political socialization can include family, educational institutions, mass media, peers, and political contexts, such as when elections are taking place, people indirectly can learn about their position in a government (Neundorf & Smets, 2017; Yusuf, 2022).

In an era of increasingly rapid internet penetration, everyone can access information more easily through the new media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others. In this new media definitive boundaries regarding political socialization agencies are blurred, because on social media, one can get

information horizontally (mass media accounts), as well as vertically (individual accounts) (Yusuf, 2013). One can also make friends with family members on social media, as well as with peers. The political context can also be amplified through social media, the presidential and legislative elections which took place in 2019 have summarized the lively discussion on the social media. So instead of comparing what political socialization agencies affect one's political participation, researchers are interested in studying the types of activities that can become political socialization agencies.

Expert revealed that rather than the duration, the type of use in the media, especially online media can produce different political participation, so both of them suggest making more detailed measurements of media use in order to know how the role media for participatory behavior. This is seen in previous studies that tested the use of social media specifically to the democratic process in the population in the United States (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012), the results of the study prove the hypothesis, otherwise there is no significant statistical evidence that the frequency of media use social in general had supported the democratic process.

In line with the Zuniga et al research results, previous research (Holt, Shehata, Stromback, & Ljungberg, 2013) showed the specific use of social media such as for political purposes and political interest, can

increase a person's involvement in politics over time, where interest in politics and political direct participation increases with increasing age of the respondent, except signing petitions, demonstrations, and political arguments, which were significant for those who are younger than those who are older.

Political Knowledge

In general, political knowledge is defined as the ownership of correct information, and this is a very important concept in political communication research. One way to measure political knowledge is by a series of contextual political questions (Bakker & deVreese, 2011), although this method is still a debate among political communication experts (Hoffman, 2019).

The position of political knowledge in political participation can be a determinant of a person's level of political participation either in direct, indirect relationship, or by becoming a mediator or moderator variable. Previous research (Nugraheni, 2017) examined the direct effects of political knowledge in political participation and found that political knowledge significantly predicted political participation, even though the magnitude of the predictions was quite small, at 17.7 percent. Indirectly, political knowledge can increase the efficacy of internal politics, where one feels confident about its role in politics, so that self-efficacy can encourage someone to participate politically (Reichert, 2016) When

occupying the role of mediator, the use of the media for news increases political knowledge and self-efficacy so that it can positively impact participation (Jung, Kim, & De Zúniga, 2011) furthermore the use of social media can explain 54.5 percent of political knowledge, where political knowledge has an effect on political attitudes (Alami & Kotamjani, 2019).

This study put political knowledge as a moderating variable, precisely on how political knowledge has a role in the effect of access to political news on participatory behavior. Encouraged by the phenomenon of demonstration in which students participate in protests but there is a diversity of issues raised trigger researchers to suspect that access to political news has an impact on participatory behavior, but it can be moderated by the level of student knowledge. Therefore, researchers predict that there is a significant moderating effect of political knowledge in the effect of access to political news on offline political participation (H1a) and online political participation (H1b).

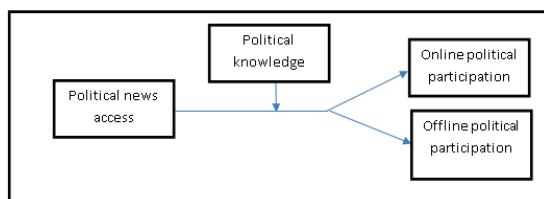


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

The objective of this study is to investigate the diversity of issues raised by student protesters in Indonesia in the 2019 protests, as revealed by social media posts. This aspect has been largely missing from the

current discourse surrounding the protests, yet it is of particular interest as it reflects the diverse patterns of news access and levels of knowledge among the participants, leading to differing opinions and participation.

We intend to explore whether access to political news has a meaningful impact on political participation when moderated by political knowledge.

Access to political news is expected to predict political participation, given its role as a means of political socialization for students. Political knowledge is being examined as a moderating variable because students who have correct information and access political news are expected to demonstrate some level of political participation.

The formulation of the research question is as follows: is there a moderating effect of political knowledge in the effect of access to political news on offline and online political participation among students in Makassar?

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a quantitative approach through multiple regression analysis tests by including several independent variables and interactions of these independent variables to determine the effects of moderation. An online questionnaire was used to answer the problem formulation in this study. The questionnaire consisted of four sections; (1) political knowledge, (2) online

and offline political participation (3) access to political news, and (4) demographics.

Time and Location of Research

The research took place during January-February 2020. Online questionnaires using Google Form were distributed by students of the Communication Studies program at the Makassar Islamic University to active students in Makassar starting on the eighth of January 2020 until January 20, 2020.

Population and Sample

The population in this study was students in Makassar City, both from public and private tertiary institutions. Makassar students were chosen because they became one of the centers of action at the end of 2019, and had a history of high political participation (Hasse, 2012; Fitri, 2012; Marijan & Fitrianto, 2013; Primadi, 2013; Muhajir & Susanti, 2018)

Based on PDDIKTI data per 2018/2019 student population forecast is <500,000 people. Researchers used justification for sampling based on Krejcie & Morgan's sample table where the population was approximately 500,000 with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error (ME) of 5% was 385 people.

A total of 465 respondents met the criteria (university students domiciled in Makassar), 64.7 percent were women ($N = 301$), and 35.3 percent were men ($N = 164$) with an average age of 20.54 ($SD = 1.80$) with

the youngest respondent being 17 years old, and the oldest being 31 years old.

Analysis Techniques

Data analysis will use multiple regression tests through SPSS by entering predictor variables and interaction variables, where the predictor variable is multiplied to determine the moderating effect of each predictor on the outcome variable. This analysis is commonly used in analysis with mediation or moderation variables (Field, 2009).

Research variable

The variables in this study are

- a. Access to political news as independent variable containing three items of statement answered with a five-point ordinal scale. The three items are encoded into a continuous-ratio scale "Access to political news" after being tested for reliability ($\alpha = .73$).
- b. Political Knowledge as a moderating variable in this study. This variable contains a series of political facts, the nominal answer options provided are (1) true, (2) false, and (3) don't know. The minimum value obtained is zero (0) while the maximum value is five (5) ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.06$).
- c. Interaction variable access to political news and political knowledge: This variable is prepared by multiplying the political access to political news variable (X^1) and political

knowledge (X^2), so that the moderation effect coefficient (Z) can be observed on the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, in this case offline political participation (Y^1) and online political participation (Y^2).

- d. Offline Political Participation and Online Political Participation as dependent variables that include six statement and four items respectively that are answered using a five-point ordinal scale, starting from (1) never, until (5) always. The six items on offline political participation ($\alpha = .72$), as well as the four items on online political participation ($\alpha = .82$) are encoded into a continuous-ratio scale after being tested for reliability.

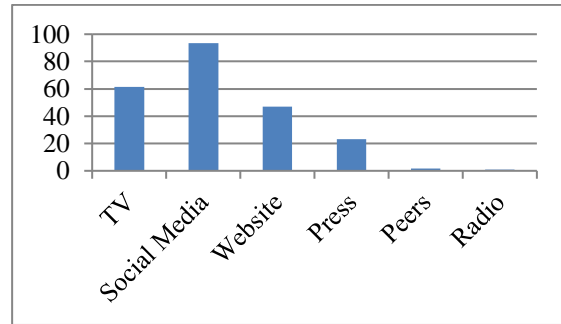


Figure 2. Students news sources

From Figure 2 it can be observed that 93.3 percent of students rely on social media as a news source ($N= 434$), followed by conventional media namely television by 61.3 percent ($N= 285$), the website occupies the third position with 46.9 percent of students ($N= 218$), 23 percent claimed to still rely on print media ($N= 187$), 1.7 percent relied on news through chat with colleagues ($N= 8$), and 0.8 percent of students listened to the radio to get news ($N= 2$).

RESULTS

News Media Source

Knowing the shift in the media of student news sources to be crucial in the discussion of the results of this study, therefore in one section of the questionnaire, students were asked questions about what media were their sources of news. From the results of data processing, researchers found interesting things where social media was the source of news for the majority of students.

Offline political participation

The first sub-hypothesis in this study is "There is a moderating role of political knowledge in the effect of access to political news on offline political participation among students in Makassar."

Before testing the hypothesis, researchers first prepare the data for the regression test. In the regression test there are several assumptions that must be fulfilled such as the assumption of multicollinearity, homocedasticity, normality, and independent errors. Based on the data, we tested multicollinearity and found a VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) smaller than 10 (Myers, 1990

in Field, 2009) and a tolerance level greater than 0.2 (Menard, 1995 in Field, 2009), homocedasticity also did not show anything need to worry, the variable found in the condition does not deviate from normality based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov p-value, as well as the Durbin-Watson figures.

Through multiple regression tests it was found that access to political news, political knowledge, and interaction between access to political news and political knowledge explained 23.6 percent of political participation outside the student network significantly ($R^2 = .236$, $F(3, 459) = 48.55$, $p < .001$). More specifically it was found that access to political news showed a positive prediction of political direct participation significantly ($\beta = .464$, $t = 11,297$, $p < .001$), whereas political knowledge showed a positive prediction of political direct participation, but this prediction was not significant ($\beta = .073$, $t = 1,776$, $p = .076$), then there is a significant positive prediction of interaction of access to political news and political knowledge ($\beta = .097$, $t = 2.381$, $p < .05$) which indicates a significant role of moderating variables in the regression test, so that the second hypothesis in this study is proven.

Table 1. Summary of linear regressions (N= 465)

Outcome Variable	Predictor	BB	SSE	B	B B
Offline political participation	Constant	.022	.035		
	Political access to political news	.418	.037	.464	
	Interaction between political access to political news and political knowledge	.084	.035	.097	
Online political participation	Constant	2.261	.047		
	Political access to political news	.470	.049	9.571	
	Interaction between political access to political news and political knowledge	.113	.047	.407	

Note $p < .05$

To be able to explain the role of moderation of political knowledge in the effect of access to political news on political direct participation, the researcher made a scatterplot. Scatterplot is useful to trace where moderation occurs in the correlation between variables X and Y. To do that, researchers create dichotomous variables from political knowledge variables with three categories; (1) low political knowledge, (2) medium political knowledge, and (3) high political knowledge. This categorization is based on the total answers according to the series of political facts given to respondents. Respondents with zero to one suitable answer are categorized in low political knowledge, respondents with two to three appropriate answers fall into the category of moderate political knowledge, respondents with four to five appropriate

answers are categorized as respondents with high political knowledge.

Through scatterplot in Figure 3 it can be observed that there is a moderating role of political knowledge in the effect of access to political news on political participation, especially for categories of respondents with high and moderate political knowledge, whereas for respondents with low political participation, there is a weak moderation effect. In other words, for a student who has good political knowledge, if he frequently accesses political news it will impact on the high political participation outside the student network. Offline political participations in question are (1) Distributing voting rights in elections, (2) Inviting others to use their voting rights, (3) Participating in protests / demonstrations, (4) Attending political party campaigns, (5) Engaging in discussions or a seminar on politics, and (6) Joining a community that can make a difference to the problems facing Indonesia.

Online Political Participation

The next sub-hypothesis in this study is "There is a significant moderating effect of political knowledge in the effect of access to political news on online political participation among student in Makassar". To test this hypothesis, researcher utilizes multiple linear regression analysis. Political online participation can also be called an online political expression because participation

takes the form of indirect, but using the media. These variables include items such as (1) Signing an online campaign (ie Change.org) on government policy, (2) Expressing about the condition of Indonesia on social media (3) Mentioning public officials on social media about a policy, and (4) Commenting on the status of public officials on social media regarding their political policies.

Data preparation is done to test hypothesis 1b, and check the fulfillment of assumptions such as multicollinearity, homocedasticity, normality and independent errors. After all assumptions are fulfilled, the researchers conducted a regression test.

Regression test results showed that access to political news, political knowledge, and interaction between access to political news and political knowledge explained 17.6 percent of significant political participation in student networks ($R^2 = .176$, $F(3, 459) = 33,288$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of each predictor variable on political online participation namely; access to political news shows a significant positive prediction ($\beta = .470$, $t = 9,571$, $p < .001$), whereas political knowledge shows a negative prediction but this prediction is not significant ($\beta = -.003$, $t = -.064$, $p = .949$), then there is a positive prediction of the interaction of access to political news with political knowledge significantly ($\beta = .113$, $t = 2.407$, $p < .05$), so that the third hypothesis in this study is proven, or in other words, there are the significant role of

moderation in the effect of access to political news on online political participation.

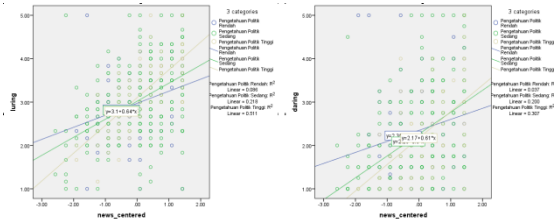


Figure 3. Scatterplot of political news access and offline political participation (left) and online political participation (right) in the category of political knowledge

The researcher made a scatterplot (Figure 3) to translate the interaction of access to political news and political knowledge in these significant predictions, and found that in students with low political knowledge, the effect of access to political news on participation was not strong enough, so it could be interpreted that access to political news did not guarantee political participation in networks in this category. On the other hand, for students in the category of high and medium political knowledge, there is a positive linear effect of access to political news on political online participation, which means that the more often they access political news, the higher their online political participation. Thus the moderating effect of political knowledge in the relationship of access to political news on online political participation can be observed in students who have high political knowledge and moderate political knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Political socialization, or learning of social patterns related to social positions, determines future political participation. It occurs informally and unintentionally, shaped by agencies such as family, education, mass media, peers and political contexts such as elections (Neundorf & Smets, 2017; Yusuf, 2022). In the era of social media, it has become an important agency for political socialization as youth access news from their social media timelines (Lindawati, 2015; Reichert, 2016; Alami & Kotamjani, 2019).

This study posits that utilizing social media as a source of news can account for the varying needs of students due to the unique algorithms employed by each platform (Pandey, Gupta, & Chattopadhyay, 2020). Specifically, it suggests that accessing political news through social media can increase political engagement and that students with higher political awareness may have a greater impact on political participation as a result of their access to news (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012).

Based on descriptive data in this study (Figure 2), students in Makassar have made social media their main source for accessing news (Lindawati, 2015), this data can certainly be a starting point to understanding the different demands in the demonstrations that took place in 2019. In the social media timeline, one can access two forms of journalism, i.e. vertical journalism through

mainstream media accounts that present conventional news, and horizontal journalism through personal accounts that present first-hand, raw, and original information. In crisis situations, horizontal journalism can collaborate and provide more information than vertical journalism given the limited number of mainstream media crews and resource (Yusuf, *Citizen Journalism on the Twittersphere: The Shift From Alternative Journalism to Citizen Journalism*, 2013). In addition to its collaborative nature, horizontal journalism could generate an echo chamber effect (Winarno, 2019), which can encourage both direct and indirect participation. This proves that the new media or social media has become one of the agents of political socialization that is quite effective, given the swift information from various directions that can be found on the media, from peers, family, to the mainstream media (Reichert, 2016; Alami & Kotamjani, 2019).

With more and more students using social media to search for news, students expose themselves to information and political news which in turn will lead to political participation starting from political expression on social media, to field mobilization (Bakker & deVreese, 2011; Alami & Kotamjani, 2019). The strong or weak effect of access to political news to political participation is motivated by student political knowledge. Students' exposure to correct information certainly has an impact on increasing their political

knowledge, considering that in this study political knowledge data was tested with ownership of correct information (Holt, Shehata, Stromback, & Ljungberg, 2013; Reichert, 2016). This study innovates in the field of political communication research by utilizing political knowledge as a moderator variable, which can either strengthen or weaken the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Previously, political knowledge was only measured on a scale and used as an independent variable (Nugraheni, 2017; Tim Peneliti KANOPI FEB UI; Tim Peneliti KSM Eka Prasetya UI, 2019), as dependent variable (Alami & Kotamjani, 2019), and as mediator variable (Reichert, 2016; Jung, Kim, & De Zúniga, 2011).

Political participation in this study is divided into two categories, i.e. offline political participation (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). For Makassar students, it can be observed (Figure 3) that offline political participation is slightly higher than online political participation which includes online petition participation (ie Change.org) regarding government policies, as well as political expressions on social media such as status composing, mentioning and commenting. This could be due to the specific Makassar students being more involved in direct participation (Hasse, 2012; Fitri, 2012; Muhajir & Susanti, 2018; Marijan & Fitrianto,

2013; Primadi, 2013). It would be intriguing to investigate if similar findings occur among students in other regions of Indonesia. Additionally, it is worth noting that this research does not delve into whether direct participation is a more effective method of participation compared to online participation.

One main summary from this research is that political knowledge in the form of ownership of correct information can be an important determinant in the effect of access to political news on participatory behavior. In other words, students with better political literacy tend to be more actively participating in politics. It can be concluded that increasing student political knowledge is important in order to make students well-participated in politics and democracy (Van Deth, 2016). Previous research (Lindawati, 2015) discussed that if information was obtained incomplete it would have a negative impact on student participation.

In terms of how to make students well-informed so that they can be well-participated, is a challenge that must be answered, bearing in mind that the flow of information in new media in particular is no longer linear or through curacy of mass media organizations, and make it harder to confirm the truth of an information (Yusuf, *Citizen Journalism on the Twittersphere: The Shift From Alternative Journalism to Citizen Journalism*, 2013).

How new media users get information, then push an issue on social media to become

the main concern, then mass media organizations or often called mainstream media will utilize this new media to become a story (Rosemarwati & Lindawati, 2019) as evidence that information flow is no longer one-way. This is where one's political knowledge can act as a counter to potentially misleading information and news. This political knowledge also with sufficient accumulation will result in real participation, both online and offline.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that social media has become a prevalent agency of political socialization among youth, resulting in varied levels of political knowledge based on personalized algorithms. Political knowledge plays a significant role in the effect of access to political news on political participation. This research highlights the importance of access to accurate information in shaping political knowledge, and how it can impact student participation in political activities. The study finds that students with higher levels of political literacy tend to be more active in politics. Therefore, it is important to promote students' political knowledge to encourage engagement in politics and democracy. In addition, we suggest to future studies to broaden population coverage to get a comprehensive picture of the participatory behavior of young people in Indonesia.

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