

Political Illiteracy Among Literate Mozambicans

Digitalization and Erosion of Political Participation

Ilídio S. Nhantumbo*

... education serves to inculcate civic virtue and various skills that can make electoral participation easier (Lipset 1960, in Franklin 14:2004).

ABSTRACT

A number of scholarly works have cited education, age, and exposure to media as determinant factors for political participation, regardless of which country or region is being discussed. Some scholars go as far as claiming causation between education and participation. However, after reviewing previous works, especially related to “modernization theory”, I found the need for re-conceptualization. Due to the misapplication and erroneous impact of the three factors on political participation in the digital era, instead of education, age, and exposure to media, my analysis suggests *literacy, experience, and choice of media content* as the more determining variables in the research on political participation. Based on an experimental research survey in the twin Mozambican municipalities of Maputo City and Matola City, I found that in societies simultaneously on democratization and digitalization, the highly literate people tend to be *deeply illiterate* in politics. These findings support my argument that citizens in countries simultaneously on undergoing democratization and digitalization tend to lose *interest in politics* and display a strong interest in entertainment. With the privilege of owning a range of digital devices, with access to almost unlimited media content, professors, undergraduates, public and private officials spend a lot of time on the Internet and television entertaining instead of engaging in local and/or national politics.

Key terms: *democratization, digitalization, literacy, participation, interest in politics, social media, entertainment*

Introduction

In the political behavior scholarship some variables, such as education, age, and exposure to media, are considered unavoidable factors in determining levels of political participation. Indeed, these have been and remain important, but are they the most significant today? Times change. Some established

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variables gain or lose relevance. In this work, I intend to look back and argue for the relevance of revising concepts that have often been taken for granted. Therefore, in this work, I evaluate the meaning and applicability of some of those concepts and their impact on political behavior in the digital era. Digitalization became a directly needed factor, not simply from technological advancement, but sometimes indirectly as policy to deal with environmental issues. This advancement helps us in predicting political behavior. I specifically address the modernization theory, expanding the approach to other related schools. The evaluation impacts may change in measurement, new events, and relevant circumstances initiated with the digitalization – defined as a process of advancement in the use of electronic digital materials or devices.

The fundamental topic in this work is political participation in democratizing countries that are also undergoing digitalization. The skyrocketing sources and abundance of information available, including social media and entertainment, impact established factors that invalidate some theoretical discussions. Environmentalists view the reduction of printed media as positive, resulting in less deforestation and a reduction in the energy used in the manufacturing and distribution of printed materials. While these reductions are beneficial for the environment,¹ it is also important to address the topic in a broader viewpoint. In previous literature, it has been argued that people absorb more information from what they read in printed media than from what they listen to or watch.

Electronic and digital devices are abundantly available to eligible voters in Western countries; the same is becoming true for eligible voters in developing countries. In democratizing African countries, access to and use of electronic and digital devices and the Internet is rapidly increasing. Concentrating on Mozambique, a country experiencing an economic boom, I study the impact of digitalization on political participation. Selecting the most developed twin cities of Maputo and Matola, I examine the impact of access to electronics and the Internet among eligible voters who use smartphones, desktop computers, laptops, tablets, television and other devices. Comparing the behavior in pre-digitalized and digitalized periods, what differences are there in political participation? In the recent flux of unconventional and conventional forms of political participation, scholars are motivated to continuously sharpen arguments related to political behavior. How is digitalization influencing participation in democratizing African countries such as Mozambique?

The modernization theory has been generously applied in the analysis of political participation in both advanced and experimental democracies. Since its appearance, several observers of democratic expansion and voters' behavior have been discussing the puzzle of democracy, political participation, and

¹ The paper does not intend to discuss environment, but to mention the policy as the discourse remains in development studies.

citizenship from a causation viewpoint. Findings have been contradictory, whether they've resulted from quantitative or qualitative methods. In the modernization theory for democratization and political participation, scholars have been focusing on Lipset since the late 1950s and early 1960s. Since then, the discussion has been restricted to essentially the same variables: education, age, and exposure to media. The puzzle, though, is in the contradictory findings related to these three factors as causes of political participation. Where is the flaw?

While these three variables appeared significant for Lipset, societies were not as digitalized as they are currently. Modernists after Lipset did not expect the pick of digitalization we observe currently and the resulting effects. Even in its basic conventional forms, political participation has been shrinking. In some experimental democracies, both conventional and unconventional forms, such as voting, lead to extreme forms of unconventional political participation, either legal or illegal. My point is that digital technology was not at the level it is today. Hence, it is problematic to take for granted the causation between *education* and increasing political participation. Looking at the United Nations Development Programme data, various countries, including Mozambique, are at the bottom in human development, but "education" levels have reportedly been increasing since the end of the cold war. Why wouldn't access to education, media, and the change in life expectancy increase political participation in this country?

In this work, I question the claim that education, age, and exposure to media stimulate participation and democratic critical citizenship. Instead, in the digital era, the concepts of *education*, *access to media*, and *age* may be much less relevant or even invalid. *Interest in politics* better explains the levels of political participation and democratic citizenship in poor but digitally oriented countries. *Literacy*, *experience*, and *media content preferences* are today's key variables. In this work, I first evaluate previous established theories, examining them through a Mozambican lens. I then present my survey study and methodology, followed by findings. Lastly, I offer suggestions for specific academic and policy interventions.

Established Theories and Limitations

Preceding research on the determinants of political participation and critical citizenship in democracies attributes a unique role to education, age, and exposure to media (Boix 2003; Teorel 2010; Mattes and Shenga 2014). This trend arises with the modernization theory for the advent and establishment of democracy (Lipset 1959; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Gueddes 1999; Kuenzi and Lambright 2007, Huntington 1971). However, explanations are blurry when some defendants of the modernization of democracy, democratization, and political participation

concurrently ignore conceptual specifics. Others agree with the components and concepts. For example, though Franklin follows the same concepts of education, age, and exposure to media, he tries to put them in way that one leads to another in a row. That is where he conflicts with Lipset, misapplying the way the three operate. The way these three concepts tend to fail in explaining new phenomena such as participation during digitalization. The results of the established “modernization theory” with contradictory application of the concepts has led academics themselves (Galston 2001, Nie et al 1996) to confuse others with misleading explanations.

The role of education, for example, has been emphasized in both conventional and unconventional forms of political participation.

“[...] *education* serves to inculcate civic virtue and various skills that can make electoral participation easier” (Lipset 1960, in Franklin 14:2004 emphasis added). And [*E*]ducation instills skills such as civic virtue, thus making electoral participation easier, in addition, *age* governs the opportunities that people have had to receive an *education* and to become embedded in social structures” (Franklin 14:2004, emphasis added).

Nonetheless, both Lipset and Franklin do not clearly define the meaning of education, hence leading their supporters to use it as synonymous with going to school. While the association of democracy with education is deep and far-reaching, the problem is in the conventional wisdom attributed to it. In the literature on transitions to democracy since the late 1980s – as has been true in previous debates as well – it is assumed that education means going to school, learning official languages, getting a diploma, and being able to become economically stable based on that process. Related to this delusion is viewing education as solely the ability to repeat what has been transmitted or said. Scholars look at this “going to school problem” and attach it to political participation, thus confounding causation with correlation.

Following a similar approach, Samuel Huntington lists components of modernization theory, but in a blurry combination of the three variables. Accordingly, in modern polities, there is “mass participation” (emphasis added).

“...media expansion, increasing literacy and education, expansion of political participation [...] Changes in one factor are related to and affect changes in the other factors... (1971:288)

Huntington (1971) comes with a significant contribution by making it clear that there is a difference between literacy and education. However, it is not clear how one relates to the other. From this lack of

clarity, we can infer that literacy is not a component of education, but a factor that leads to it. In my understanding, the approach is misleading because literacy in itself takes place during the accumulation of knowledge. In this sense, it is better to treat literacy as a separate variable that can be easily measured for individuals. Also, it is not to be assumed that an increase in literacy will necessarily result in “mass political participation”; the opposite could also be expected. This was the case in the voter turnout depression in the early 1960s in the West. Media expansion is a clear component result of technological advances, including the current process of digitalization. But exposure to media is less important, as exposure is more and more common and as the expansion of media has also resulted in an abundance of choices in media content and media availability: There are innumerable content choices, and they’re available 24 hours a day. If there is no interest in politics as a topic or activity within this range of media content, we will most likely register a decline in participation where democratization and digitalization are simultaneously taking place.

Seemingly, the events of Tse Neman in 1989 and the Arab Spring in 2011 support the role of the “educated” youth with the capacity to initiate uprisings. But are these events enough to support causation between “education” and political participation? Protests are not the only form of participation, therefore, an analysis simply based on protests would not be narrow and misleading. Is the impact similar in digitally advanced societies, and in societies undergoing both democratization and digitalization? The assumed role of so-called education in promoting participation is vague. The uprisings in China and Northern Africa were pro-democracy, but they did not happen in polities that were democratizing or that supported some relatively open space for political participation.

It has been a common view that in poor countries, especially in Africa, “education” is necessary to expand political participation and thus advance democratization (Schumpeter 1942, McClurg 2003; Mattes and Shenga 2014). I am skeptical of this viewpoint. The poor in Africa have been going to school in increasing numbers, and yet democracy in the region is not rising in a corresponding fashion. Also, literacy increases continuously, but political participation has been low. Rather, we observe routine economic crises; de-democratization; and periodic electoral violence. Are Africans all inspired to participate only in violent forms? Political scientists, so far, have not explained the extent to which literacy promotes different forms of political participation in this region.

Another misplaced concept in the modernization theory is age. The cause-effect association is misleading. The same way that education fails, age does not necessarily mean an increase in civic virtue. Scholars conflate age with experience. Age does not literally lead to high levels of participation; the process

of socialization influences the way people make decisions. With greater age, people can also decide not to participate, or to reduce their level of involvement in political activity. Experience, though, will likely determine the decision to participate to one degree or another or to be apathetic to politics. What citizens have experienced in their lives – including armed conflict, independence, political revolution – is likely to influence political behavior. It is a mistake to take for granted that older people, for instance, will vote more often than younger citizens. Therefore, the argument that literacy leads to “easy instillation,” followed by civic virtue, culminating in a high level of participation is inaccurate.

Literacy in itself is a component of socialization, a process with no bridge to a particular age. Scholars, so far, give us examples of unconventional political participation. More specific research would help us to reach more detailed explanations. Age does not necessarily lead to high levels of participation, but most likely to supported decision-making for involvement in politics. Furthermore, age most likely will help in decision-making, even with younger citizens. If young citizens are closely socialized in an environment of interest in politics, that experience might lead them to be involved in a certain form of political activity: voting, membership in a party, participation in political events, etc. This is most likely going to happen in families of activists, governors, members of parliament and local leaders, including students of political participation themselves. This is experience acquired in that environment. What we could expect is an emotional participation; with weak roots. For instance, voting because parents or friends are voting.

Socialization and experience do not come solely from going to school; they proceed as individuals grow up. Experience increases every day, and going to school does not bridge with socialization. They take place simultaneously. Modernization conflates co-linearity with causation; going to school does not literally stimulate political participation. In the specific case of this work, recent studies and electoral observation reports indicate voter turnout to be higher in poor rural areas than in urban areas; where the literate are concentrated (AWEPA 2003). For this reason, instead of age, *experience* explains more than age. Most of all, though, *interest in politics* will most likely determine the political component of experience. Is the use of Twitter and television in the U.S. the same in both urban and rural areas? Who is using advanced digital technology in developed nations? In poor nations, electricity, mobile and Internet coverage is higher in urban than in rural areas (Pierskalla and Hollenbach 2013). We can thus infer that literacy has a higher level of coverage in urban areas.

Besides education and age, the modernization theory attributes a key role to *exposure to media* for political participation. As previously mentioned, digitalization has already invaded the market or is rapidly invading markets, making exposure almost irrelevant in most locations. Access is no longer a privilege. Not

only has the choice of media content exploded, but its availability is constant. The most important variable for participation, in this case, is the interest and relevance of the content for the consumer.

Explaining contemporary or dynamic phenomena in this field, therefore, requires re-evaluation of some concepts. Looking at the modernization theory, I revised education, age, and exposure to media. Here, I refute the idea of exposure to or access to media as a key determinant in participation, focusing on choice of media content instead. Education is such a multidimensional misapplied concept, especially for measurement; therefore, I adopt literacy. Age became a misapplied concept for the intended explanation in political participation; hence, I suggest experience. This revision, though, is not neo-modernization theory. Analyzing political behavior requires using my suggested concepts. Education, age, and exposure to media have lost their primacy in the study of political participation, especially in countries undergoing both democratization and digitalization.

Toward Political Illiteracy

With the limitations previously presented, precursors and supporters of the modernization theory (Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Boix 2003; Teorell 2010) assigned a significant role to the vague transversal concept of education. Literacy suits better than using a complex content that affects political participation. With digitalization, only those who can read and write can use the Internet, a rich source of media. Digitalization creates opportunities for various forms of participation, but skyrocketing digitalization can also have adverse side effects for participation. Reading and writing are not everything; preference in content matters, especially when content has grown and diversified and is always available. Therefore, it is dubious looking at literacy – highly predominant in the youth – as a necessarily positive factor for political participation. Interest in politics is essential.

Instead of age, experience better explains political participation in the digital era. Either old in age or young, if the process of socialization permits the citizens to be involved in certain activities or interests. In political activity, which usually requires at least 18 years for several forms of participation, experience matters. Socialization is a process that regularly induces a person to be involved in certain activities, either within the family or in open public spaces. Certain people are involved in politics based political activities that take or took place during in the unstoppable socialization. Based on this process, interest in politics can be affected, trending toward involvement or apathy.

However, it should not be assumed that living in an ambiance of open political participation will lead citizens to participate. Even if this was the case, some citizens are more interested in some forms of

participation than others. Holding a political party membership card can be the simple-minded participation. What is the effect of digital devices in established democracies? What is the effect in countries in transition to democracy? How are these devices used and in what environment? In some societies, voting does not necessarily require physically going to a polling station (i.e., the U.S.), but simply access to the Internet. Looking at three simplified cases, previous literature gives us examples of unconventional political participation, except in the U.S. We could presume that this is the case in populations of old demographics and old democracies such as Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, except Switzerland (see *IDEA*).

However, compared to the U.S. and some other established democracies, turnout is higher in some new democracies. How can we explain high levels of turnout in Rwanda, Namibia, Botswana, Angola, Seychelles, Burundi, and Guinea Conakry, to name a few African countries in the process of democratization (see *IDEA*). Furthermore, people with access to digital media are located mostly in cities. These discrepancies create a puzzle. Why are there low levels of political participation in urban areas, where the literates with easy access to a wealth of digital content are concentrated?

Literacy has been rising, life expectancy has been increasing, media is readily available. Why would political participation decrease in the modernization theory assumptions? Literacy in African countries is concentrated in urban areas. If literacy were the key variable in political participation, then one could assume that voter turnout, as the primary example of participation in democratic or countries in the process of democratization, would be higher in the cities, where the literates are concentrated. But in Mozambique, the opposite is predominant: that is, low voter turnout in urban areas but high levels in rural areas (see *AWEPA report*). My surveys attempt to examine the relationship between greater access to media content, including through TV and the Internet, among urban populations in two large Mozambican cities and the significantly low levels of both conventional and unconventional forms of participation among their urban youth – the predominant population in the country's demographic pyramid.

Since the late 1990s, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and scholars have been referring to Mozambique as an example of high economic growth. Literacy has been continuously increasing since the Rome Peace Accord in 1992. The political and economic crisis preceding and following the 2014 election, however, changed expectations with a downturn from the 7.00 percent economic growth to 5 percent. From a relatively stable exchange rate of 28 MZM to US\$1, in 2016 it took 93 MZM to equal US\$1. The depression emerged from corruption, the 2014 election and decentralization, and political instability. While the Freedom House has placed Mozambique in the “partly free” political zone,

other sources see the country differently, especially regarding the level of freedom of expression.² The Economist also reports a high decrease in freedom of expression in the last five years.³

Though its progress was interrupted in some areas of Central Mozambique, literacy increased overall nationally from 1994 to 2016. Similarly, while in the 1990s owning landline phones was for the middle class, that is not the case nowadays. In general, as the survey shows, cell phones have extinguished landline phones. The so-called education as a way of promoting political participation and *democratic critical citizenship* is overstated. Also, the role of rapid digitalization is overlooked; both in terms of electronic newspapers and electronic media through cable TV and internet play a role, a ubiquitous role. The number of electronic communication devices in use continues to increase, turning Mozambique into what I refer to as a *digitally oriented society*. Exposure to media, in what I call choice of media content, does not necessarily lead to extreme forms of participation. Through digital sources, the national opposition leader was able to communicate with his political party members, supporters, the president of the country, and diplomats.

To examine voter turnout and digitalization among eligible voters, I chose twin cities; Maputo and Matola, urban areas with high concentrations of literate eligible voters. Maputo City is a Province in itself, and Matola is the capital city of the Maputo Province (in 2015, Maputo City had a poverty index of 0.043 and Maputo Province 0.133 – both the lowest in the country)⁴. Literacy levels, political participation in general and specifically voter turnout in these cities runs counter to what modernization theory would lead us to expect. Previous studies show that rural Mozambicans vote in greater numbers than the country's urban citizens; the literate tend generally to stay at home and abstain (Sambira 2010, World Bank and African Development Bank 2013 c.f. Nhantumbo 2014⁵). In other words, eligible voters living in poor rural areas, with poor infrastructure and long distances to polling stations, register more electoral participation than the literate urban, who live closer to polling stations and have access to electricity, water, sanitation, international languages and other assumed incentives and advantages.

² This discussion can be supported with the deadly gunshot to Professor Gilles Cistac, and the harms caused to Dr. José Macuane – in a failed attempt for killing – most likely due to their views on the 2014 election results and the following uprisings and armed violence. These events gained more attention in Central Mozambique and some parts in which the Renamo party had won the election (See *mediafax* Nr. 6065, May 25, 2014). Nhantumbo, Ilidio S. Wampula Fax, p. 3 March 6, 2015.

³ The Economist – accessed on August 2, 2017: <https://infographics.economist.com/2017/DemocracyIndex/>

⁴ Chattan House Report 2015

⁵ World Bank and African Development Bank. 2013. *The Transformational Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Africa*. Accessed on July 23, 2014 from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTINFORMATIONANDCOMMUNICATIONANDTECHNOLOGIES/Resources/282822-1346223280837/MainReport.pdf>

Clearly, in this instance, exposure to media alone – especially independent media – has not led to greater democratic citizenship, as it has been argued. It is unclear what political participation means. Scholars conflate political participation with voter turnout, which is in fact incongruent. Voting is one component of conventional forms of political participation, which includes but is not restricted to political activism, service in public office, volunteering for political campaigns, and donations to political parties. Violence, insurgencies and riots related to elections, not uncommon in African countries, are often ignored by scholars as forms of political participation. However, unconventional forms, whether legal or illegal (Stolle, Hooghe and Lacheletti 2005; Ekman and Amnâ 2012), are still forms of political participation. Though narrow by looking at the impact of cell phones only, Fierskalla and Hollenbach (2013) claim that these devices are being used to promote extreme forms of political participation; in Africa, “the availability of cell phone coverage significantly and substantially increases the probability of violent conflict.” Clearly, cell phones⁶ increase political participation, but in its extreme form.

Based on the so-called education argument, illegal pro-democracy uprisings may be considered political participation. However, the literature does not reach this form of political participation. The Arab Spring occurred in the digitalization period, but the literature concentrates on conventional forms of political participation in democracies, overlooking the extreme unconventional forms at this events in the context of citizens’ political behavior. Another example are the Tiananmen Square protests that occurred long before the digital era. It is questionable looking at participation in democratic countries and exclude participation leading to democratic participation. The legal and conventional role of digital media in the U.S., including the “Trump Twitter effect,” is part of the new Western political landscape; but the United States are not a country in the early stages of digitalization. How do we place the Arab Spring and what I refer to as the Tweeter effect in the United States?

From a narrow easy measurement of participation in Maputo City and Matola City – with developed public infrastructure and literacy – I found a depression in the levels of voter turnout (*see Table 1*). A broader concept of political participation correlated to literacy disproves causation of education (literacy) to political participation. Some factors involved in political participation have been overlooked in previous literature. Studies have usually focused on voter turnout, individual and popular concerns related to electoral promises, mobilization or protests against a policy or policies, electoral campaigns, and other phenomena. But equating electoral events with political participation hides some of what is going on.

⁶ In their study, the term cell phone does not clarify the type, that is “simple or non-smartphones” or smartphones.

Participation in politics is a wide spectrum that ranges from countries engaging in war to citizens going to polling stations and voting, in the purpose of this work.

In this work, political participation refers to both conventional and unconventional forms. Conventional forms include signing petitions, voting, participating in electoral campaigns, memberships in political parties, donating money or space for political events and contacting public officials. Unconventional forms include participation in strikes, protests, blank voting, riots or uprisings. This participation can either be individual or collective (Teorel et al. 2007, Erkman and Amna 2012). Additionally, I use the concept of latent participation as it is helpful in discussing responses to illegal or legal political circumstances. Likewise, it applies to test possible inconsistency between what is expected from the so-called educated in political participation. *Latent participation* is defined as “the willingness to take action should the circumstances warrant” Erkman and Amna (2012:297).

Year	HDI % Maputo City	HDI % Matola City	Illiteracy % Maputo City	Illiteracy % Matola City	VT % National Election	VT % Municipal Election Maputo City	VT % Local Election Matola City
1994	NA	NA			87.89		
1995	NA	NA					
1996	NA	NA					
1997	0.568	0.480					
1998	0.576	0.491				26.00	25.00
1999	0.589	0.504			68.09		
2000	0.590	0.506					
2001	0.598	0.519					
2002	0.598	0.526					
2003	0.601	0.537				21.55	20.80
2004	0.640	0.551			36.34		
2005	0.626	0.579					
2006	0.622	0.589					
2007	0.624	0.578					
2008	0.640	0.581	2008/09 10.9 %	2008/09 26 %		26.00	25.00
2009	0.651	0.575			44.44		
2010	0.661	0.581					
2011	0.669	0.589					
2012							
2013						50.39	37.97
2014					48.84		
2015							
2016 Official data unavailable and Census IV taking place in early August 2017 – this data count by the beginning of this work.							

Table 1: Voter turnout 1994 – 2014 elections

Sources: AWEPA, IDEA, WLSA Moçambique 2013, União Europeia 2014

The Impact of Digitalization

Besides reviewing and suggesting alternatives for the main modernization theory concepts, I focus on digitalization as a new key variable in the field. Digitalization means the process of advancement in the use of electronic digital materials or devices. As previously stated, contemporary industrialization is especially inclined to digitalization. Is there any particular impact from digitalization on political participation? Some scholars claim that digitalization, especially the component of the Internet, has a positive effect on political participation; others argue the opposite way; still others find an insignificant impact. As the title of this work suggests, “digitalization” is the core variable attached to both literacy and illiteracy in political participation. Previous explanations are problematic, but this work helps to sharpen them, to some extent, through the concepts I renovate. In fact, Sambira defends that “cell phones today are nearly ubiquitous in African society” (2013:19 c.f. Nhantumbo 2014).⁷

In the first school, digitalization reduces people’s involvement in political participation. In this paper, I define digitalization as the phenomenon of technological advancement for access to information using electronic physical and touch keyboards. This phenomenon reduces people’s participation (Davis 1999, Neveck 2000, Anduiza et al 2008, Albrecht 2006). In the digital era, the Internet lessens people’s free time and weakens social cohesion; an obstacle to political participation and tending to maintain the current structure (Davis 1999, Albrecht 2006). Fredin (1999), though, argues that the Internet maintains previous social structures and, most likely, reinforces it with the separation of the elites and the general public. Albrecht strengthens that electronic democracy extends to the cultural common practices of technology.

In the second school of thought, digitalization does not significantly impact change in participation (Bimber 1999, Nisbet 2002, cf. Anduiza 2008, Everland Jr and Scheufele). Davis (1999), though, points out that although the Internet does not have any significant effect on participation, governments will likely move society toward being large and participatory democracy. In this sense, the Internet is a space for politicians’ advertisement of empty messages as a way of providing opponents with their weaknesses.

Lastly, some researchers support the idea that digitalization has a positive impact on participation (Negroponte 1995; Noveck 2000 (cf. Anduiza et al 2010); Bode et al 2015; Delli Carpini 1997; Fredin 1999). Hence, the Internet “brings a noteworthy impact towards a more participative society and perhaps ameliorate people’s participation” (Negroponte 1995).

These three schools fall short in looking at the Internet in a narrow sense, instead of a mandatory

⁷ Africa Renewal, article by Jocelyne Sambira, accessed on July 14, 2014 from <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/africa's-mobile-youth-drive-change>

policy; without distinguishing between the different types of online platforms, e.g., .com, .edu, .gov, .org. This way, scholars exclude the specific use of books, academic literature, mandatory tools for registration in the literacy component, as well as mandatory institutional tool for activities (i.e., webs for students to register, intra-institutional connectivity for common activities; online banking and other forms of online transactions or activities). The type of media content is overlooked. And the nature of the content is relevant – as well as preferences for types of available content – mainly among those with high levels of literacy. Another mistake is to equate the Internet with digitalization. While the first is simply a component, digital devices include different types of computers, smartphones, tablets, and television. Content and circumstances matter. If diverse types of content are available, and if, through various electronics and smart devices, content is available at home, at work, when traveling, etc., then content preferences are expected to be based on users' interest.

Methodology on the Road to Digitalization

The survey targeted respondents with a relatively high level of literacy – a condition of being able to write and read in at least the national official language. But as I criticized above, speaking Portuguese does not mean being literate; the person is literate if he or she knows how to write and read at last in Portuguese. The digitalization of a society undergoing democratization will most likely lead to political illiteracy among the literate. My assertion is that in a society experiencing digitalization, citizens, especially the literate, will pay attention to the phenomenon with special interests not in the way to manage, but the content. To develop support for my theory, I designed a survey in two parts. In the first section, I simply used multiple choice questions and/or choices to confirm participation and its form. In the second section, I used three *land mining questions* – this term refers to the questions that test the congruence between the responses from the first section and the expected answers from the literate. The survey was completed in my presence to help avoid different forms of cheating, including the use of digital devices to look up answers. This is the strategy I used for the experiment, allowing me to reduce the level of dishonesty in the survey answers.

Because the survey topics included voting, I restricted respondents to at least persons aged at least 21 years and randomization. Although 18 years of age is the minimum for eligibility to vote in Mozambique, in this study I adopted 21 years as the minimum. The last local election took place in 2013, meaning that by 2016, survey respondents would have reached the age for the right to vote in both national and local elections. Besides age, representativeness included gender, and the highly literate citizens –

especially undergraduates. I intentionally targeted colleges faculty and students; high-level public and private officials; and journalists from both public and private radio stations and TV stations as individuals who know how to read and write. I also targeted the staff of nonprofits and randomly chose participants on streets and shopping malls. In universities, I used randomization and, to ensure the inclusion of different subjects, I visited several classrooms within different areas of study.

A high level of participants' literacy, was the key variable for the experiment. With all the digital devices the literates possess, to what extent they use them to engage in politics? Residence to make sure that respondents were from Matola City or Maputo City. With the high literacy target level, I intended to demonstrate the role literacy in substitution for education, exposure to media for choice of media content. Experience implies accumulation of knowledge since their individuals' birth, including literacy, as long as they should know how to read and write, for the purpose of this paper. The type and source of content is highlighted for supporting the establishment of the digitally oriented society. Because Mozambique was and remains in the middle of political and economic crises, and undergraduates are usually unemployed, I did not concentrate on income levels, though the survey included related questions.

Since I adopt literacy, experience, and choice of media content, my definition of participation comprises actions such as voting; formally complaining about politicians' performance; meeting political representatives to discuss concerns; registering with a political party membership; registering with a political or apolitical association; promotion of political figures or political parties; and community meetings. For the mandatory location variable, I include residence, the mayor – directly elected at the local level, and the provincial executives – governors – who are legally appointed by the President of Mozambique. Legal terms for the President of the Republic serve to test respondents' knowledge about national politics. The land mining questions bellow serve to test the consistency with section one.

- i) Who is the governor of your province?
- ii) Who is the mayor of your municipality?
- iii) How many constitutional (legal) terms apply to the President of the country?

Surveys were the main method for data collection with an n of 115 per municipality -- Maputo City and Matola City. I also collected some available data from the INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística*), Relatórios da União Europeia), AWEPA (*Parlamentares Europeus para a África*), WLSA Moçambique, and IDEA (International Institute for Democracy Electoral Assistance). This approach allowed me to obtain data from 1994 to 2016, the period that covers both national and municipal (local) elections. These data mainly

show the trend in turnout to vote for both national and local elections during that period. To include the main participants, I visited students and professors from large universities (*Universidade Eduardo Mondlane; Universidade Pedagógica; Universidade São Tomás de Moçambique; Apolitécnica; Instituto Superior de Ciência e Tecnologia de Moçambique*); random participants in government ministries, radio and TV journalists, and shoppers in shopping malls.

Hypothesis 1: When the levels of literacy increase in countries undergoing digitalization, political illiteracy is highly expected.

Hypothesis 2: When a society is simultaneously undergoing digitalization and democratization, citizens tend to lose *interest in politics*.

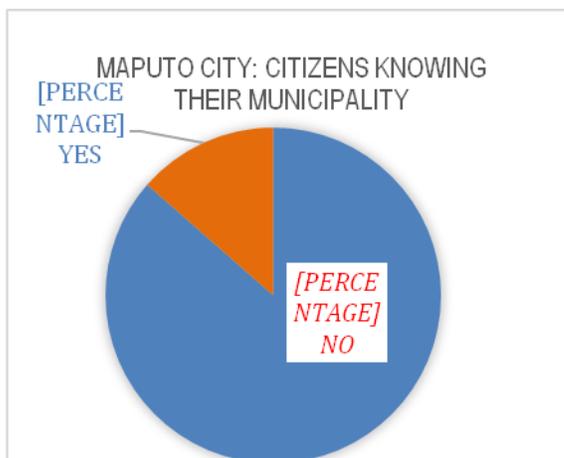
Findings and Scrutiny

The survey respondents were an average of 32 and 30 years of age in Maputo City and Matola City, respectively. The youngest were 21 years and the oldest, 60 years of age. The level of literacy reflected the goal of my selection: citizens with high level of literacy -- undergraduates, *Licenciados*,⁸ graduate students and above; and a highly insignificant number of respondents at the high school level. Respondents all owned cellular phones, with a highly significant number of smartphones. A very insignificant number also owned tablets, but other respondents owned more than one device. In addition, approximately all respondents had at least one television at home, and a minority could also watch TV outside their homes. Only five respondents had no access to the Internet, one in Maputo City and four in Matola City. They all had access through at least one digital device; others had more than three sources of access to the Internet, and could choose the online content that was of greatest interest to them. All of the above was true across different academic levels and professional occupations.

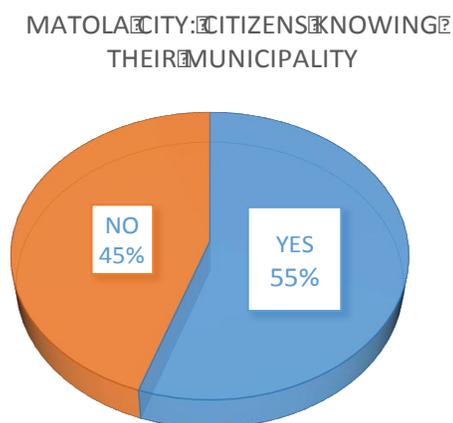
My strategic methodology helped in revealing inconsistencies in respondents' answers. Therefore, many responses from the last section are inconsistent with the first two sections. The following graphs related to the land mining questions intended to show some dishonesty that could have affected a number of results such as national and local turnout to vote, type of participation (especially latent participation), and watching the news. In addition, they reveal the overlap between "practically official activity" and entertainment. Land mining (test) questions call attention for scholars to remark that respondents might affect results and raise questions related to predictions. However, as expected, respondents have access

⁸ Equivalent to a bachelor's degree, but with a relatively higher level.

to several electronic and digital devices with which to view content: basic cell phones⁹, smartphones, tablets, laptops, desktops, and television. Public officials are the ones who mostly use office desktop computers (the only sources with landline phones; other officials owned, work cellphones, smartphones or tablets¹⁰. A significant number of respondents did not explore radio as a device and source of content. These findings support the claim of a strong digitalization trend in urban Mozambique. In addition, the results imply that choice of media content is more important than simple access or exposure to media.¹¹



Graph 1: Maputo City: Citizens Knowing their Municipality

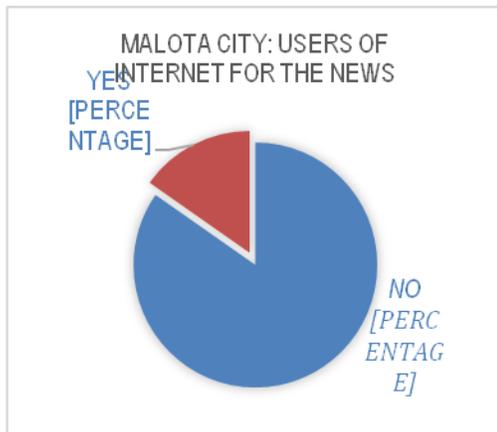


Graph 2: Matola City: Citizens Knowing their Municipality

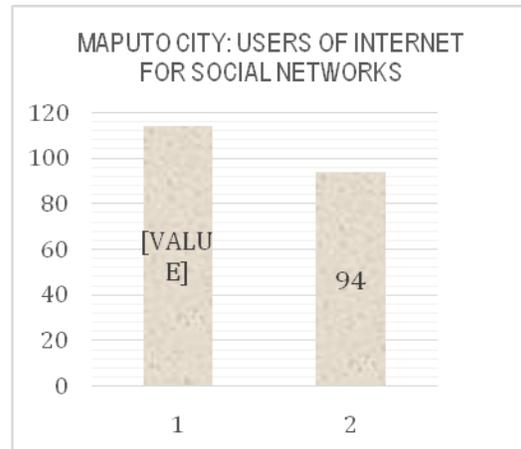
The argument that the Internet reduces people’s resting time does not match with the results. Public, private, and nonprofit officials use some office hours to view entertainment content, and, could be decreasing their productivity. The level of inconsistency shows a significant overlap between of official work and entertainment. Circa 86 percent of respondents from Maputo City did not know the municipality of their residence. The same trend is significantly different in Matola City, with 45 percent. As digitalization is expected to negatively affect participation, respondents with basic cell phones showed more interest in politics and made use of printed newspapers, TV and radio, thus supporting the idea that people getting their news from printed media tend to retain more information than those using other sources of

⁹ The term cell phone is used to mean a basic mobile phone through which the user cannot connect to the Internet.
¹⁰ For simplification, as respondents using tablets are few, I include them in the smartphone group, though in the database I separate them. Some respondents possess both tablets and smartphones.
¹¹ More detailed graphs for analysis are in Appendix 1 for Maputo City and Appendix 2 for Matola City. Perhaps due to the current political crisis, respondents were reluctant to express their reasons for preferences in media content, thus leaving the space blank or checking “Other.”

information. Literacy in digitally oriented societies creates an opportunity for *addiction to social media*. The literate with access to digital media tend to ignore political and other serious news on both the Internet and television and radio.



Graph 3: Access to Internet and use for the news



Graph 4: Access to Internet and use for social media

The methodological strategy helped me to reveal inconsistency of answers. In fact, check marked responses to being involved in politics, voting regularly, having voted once in local or national elections, or regularly reading and or watching the news, was not consistent with respondents' answers in which he or she:

- i) knew in which municipality he or she lives (two municipalities in the study);
- ii) knew the difference between municipality and municipal districts;
- iii) knew the name of the mayor he or she voted for or against;
- iv) knew the name of the governor (governors are appointed by the President of the Republic voted for or against);
- v) knew how many legal terms apply for the President of the Republic.¹²

I found a high level of confusion in respondents' understanding of Maputo City versus Maputo Province. While Maputo City overlaps geographically as a municipality and province, Maputo is a province, thus it applies only for respondents living in Matola City. More than 85 percent of respondents living in

¹² The fourth and sixth questions apply especially for those who voted only in the last national but not municipal elections. They also serve to test latent political participation (i.e., what citizens would do in the case of a violation of constitutional terms).

Maputo City could not distinguish Maputo Province from the Province of Maputo City. Respondents from Maputo City also confused municipality with municipal districts (i.e., *Ka Mpfumo*, *Ka Maxaquene*, *Ka Mavota*). This reveals a lack of awareness that “Maputo City” was declared a province in 2000. Geographically, this confuses people who have been accustomed to not distinguishing one from the other, as it was in the past. The difference between Maputo City and Maputo Province is not trivial: it is vital for people to know their official residence in the context of decentralization as well as public accountability.

From the results above and in table 2, we can infer the trend of voter turnout in previous local elections. In the first municipal election, the turnout in Maputo City was 20 percent, 28 percent in 2003, and 50 percent in 2013. In Matola City, turnout was 28 percent in 1998, 26 percent in 2003, and 48 percent in 2013. With abundant available sources of information, respondents did not use or search media for political content or engagement. Respondents expressed a lack of interest in politics and of awareness of the media from which they could access relevant information. The argument that “access to media” is fundamental for the development of democratic critical citizenship is not supported by these findings, which instead support the importance of availability of many types of media content based on interest.

Municipality	Mayor	Governor	Legal President Terms
Maputo City	68	33	74
Matola City	51	22	63

Table 2: Post-Test Results on local high leadership

Literate citizens tend to lose interest in politics, leading to *political illiteracy*. This suggests that political illiteracy tends to increase when people have access to digital media. political participation of the poor, who are “shielded” from this phenomenon, supports this theory. In addition, digitalization reduces people’s interest in politics by providing an abundance of media content to choose from – and people display a strong attraction to *entertainment* content. Respondents showed a preference to engage with social media, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, movies or TV series, including Brazilian *novelas* or soap operas, during both work and leisure hours. Students, public and private officials, and nonprofit staff engaged with this type of content even when technically they were being paid to perform official duties. These findings support my first hypothesis; when a society is simultaneously undergoing digitalization and democratization, citizens tend to lose *interest in politics*.

Sources for easy access to public topics, and information for duties are “misused”. As I argue, interest and choice matter. Actors use digital material, however, those who have choices in hardware and software materials do not perceive that they are *digital addicted*. Respondents with easy access to the Internet claimed not to have access to newspapers, without realizing that the papers were available online. Others claimed not to have access to the radio, whereas radio is also available via the Internet. These responses support my second hypothesis.

Preference in media content helps to explain why choices related to political participation are intentionally or unintentionally misperceived in digitally oriented society. With digitalization happening at a rapid pace in urban Mozambique, individual use of digital devices and media is much easier than the development of institutional systems. For a person to access digital material, individual finances are required; while institutions require bureaucracy.

Conclusions and Implication for Policy

This work, though narrow in scope, reveals a need to update some established concepts regarding what determines political participation. This work also considers the impact of such a revision on previous arguments we might still take for granted. As time and circumstances change, theories can become invalid, not simply as satisfying explanations of political behavior, but also as effective language and terms to be used in the discussion. Though restricted to two municipalities, these are twin and more advanced cities in the country with the lowest index of illiteracy. It also helps us to question the public infrastructural access as a motivation to engage in politics.

My discussion regarding the role of interest in politics in predicting political participation should inspire further questioning of the primacy and/or exclusivity of the modernization theory and its three main variables, especially in the current era of simultaneous digitalization and democratization in some countries. Although based on responses from a relatively small number of participants, my survey’s data make the modernization theory look ineffective for studying political participation in Mozambique, and mostly expected in other polities on transition. Digitalization has a significantly negative effect on political participation, especially in countries in the process of democratization as a political reform. The survey results do not explain participation in established democracies, but rather reveal a trend in Mozambique and, possibly, in other sub-Saharan African countries facing parallel processes of democratization and digitalization.

In the results, digitalization itself was related to a decline in the relevance of education, exposure to media, and age on political participation. Education, a term already questioned in development studies, tends to simply mean literacy. It is more useful to use the term “literacy”; it is easier to measure and it allows testers to separate data for illiterate persons. Everyone who has access to the Internet is now “exposed to media,” in addition to those who can access newspapers, books, radio, and/or TV. The volume and many types of content on the Internet makes “exposure to media” too broad and too vague a term for contemporary discussions. Both public and private sources of information are available on the Web. In addition, with countless choices of content on the Web, survey respondents showed a consistent tendency to focus on entertainment and social media, rather than the news and politics. Furthermore, respondents not only preferred entertainment and social media, but they also engaged with this type of content during the hours they were technically in school or studying or at work – across public, private, and nonprofit organizations. Choice of and preference for types of media content and preferences for types of media content should replace exposure to media in today’s context of digitalization.

The number of literate people who participated in my survey did not match with Lipset’s and Franklin’s assumption of education as a “source of civic virtue that could make electoral participation easier.” On the contrary, the literates were not interested in political participation. Instead of engaging in politics, they spent time sharing photos and “private conversations” on *Facebook* and/or *Whatstapp*; watching music videos and other nonpolitical content on *YouTube*; playing or/or watching games; and other forms of entertainment (people accessed more .com than .edu, .gov., or .org sites). These activities support my argument of level of interest in politics being related to level of political participation in the digital era.

Literacy did not correspond to higher political participation in the survey’s results. The number of literate people who participated in politics reveals a different trend. With an average of 30 years in Matola City and 32 years in Maputo City, literates had been, in some way, participating as public officials in the one party-system; membership attached to certain historic events or, among the younger respondents, because of their parents’ involvement. Because experience includes both literacy and socialization or habit of engaging with several sources of knowledge based on their interests, experience seemed more relevant than age. However, the results related to this variable might reflect false reason. Several respondents, especially those close to the average age, preferred not to answer the question. Findings showed a certain limitation in expressing the real reason, which may be related to the current political crisis. Hence, the graphs for these data are not developed.

Electronic media in this study, adjusted for media in Mozambique, means two components: electronic as electronically acquired newspapers (i.e. *Canalmoz*, *Correio da Manhã*, *Ikweli*, *Mediafax*, *Diário da Manhã*) and online accessible news which does not require any type of payment, but access to Internet only, even in cases of summarized news (i.e. *Notícias*, *O PaísOnline*, *Savana*). The usage of electronic digital devices – different types of computers, smartphones, advanced television (including packages such as DSTV, and Zap), tablets, and other connected devices – decrease political participation due to the aforementioned preference for social and entertainment content. Either in personal or grouped interests on politics were predominantly based on the content.

Though the concept of political participation itself differs among scholars, their contributions are helpful. The inclusion of conventional and unconventional, legal and illegal forms, as well as the latent participation (Stolle, Hooge and Lacheletti 2005, Teorel et al. 2007 Anduiza et al 2008, Erkmen and Amna 2012) was helpful to the discussion, avoiding the too narrow focus on turnout to vote. My contribution to a more nuanced understanding of the concept involves including violent and extreme illegal forms of participation, including war, riots, and “pro-democracy uprisings” (e.g., the protest in Tienamen Square in 1989 and the Arab Spring uprisings in 2010).

Erkman and Amna (2012:297) state that latent participation is “*the willingness to take action should the circumstances warrant*” (emphasis added). From the findings, the concept was beneficial. as more than 70 percent of respondents did not know about the term limitations for the President of the Republic, the names of their governors and mayors, and not knowing this basic information greatly undermines democratization. From citizens who don’t know the term limits for the president, we cannot expect criticism or activism in cases of violation of the constitution. Low levels of latent participation help us in presuming apathy to politics. A possible participation would be by influence rather than a conscious decision to participate. The interest in politics variable helps explain the illiteracy of the literate. In the context of decentralization in Mozambique, public leadership runs the risk of being punished or rewarded for both local and central government’s responsibilities.

Interest in politics better explains levels of political participation in societies undergoing digitalization. As shown in the findings from the targeted literates, choice of and preference for media content (especially content available through the Internet and TV) and experience are key variables in explaining contemporary participation. Education, exposure to media, and age are not as relevant as they were in the mid-1900 concepts in predicting political participation. The selection of Maputo City and Matola

City, twin cities with the highest literacy rates in this poor country, helped to explain the levels of political participation among the most literate Mozambicans.

The poor in Mozambique, without access to infrastructure and with a high level of literacy, demonstrate the highest level of political participation since 1994. Investing in so-called education (Mattes and Shenga 2014), while beneficial in numerous ways, should not be seen as a foolproof way to build critical democratic citizenship and political participation. Because the literate are politically illiterate, political participation and promotion of democratic citizenship as instruments for advancement of democracy requires knowledge of politics; educating the politically illiterate through mandatory courses on Mozambican politics, especially in universities, where eligible voters are concentrated all around the country.

Looking at my strategic type of survey, scholars have the challenge of collecting reasonably reliable data. It is common to observe some trends in the pools that predict certain results, but the prediction fails in a way that disappoints the public. How will this challenge the way we defend our arguments? My expectation of dishonest responses and applying land mining questions in the end, questioned the results from the first section. I found significant inconsistency between the first and second sections. Would the results have been the same without the second question? From the survey results, it is clear that the trend would have been different. How are we going to deal with this problem? With or without relevance for some theories, there is a need to rethink the primary determinants of political participation.

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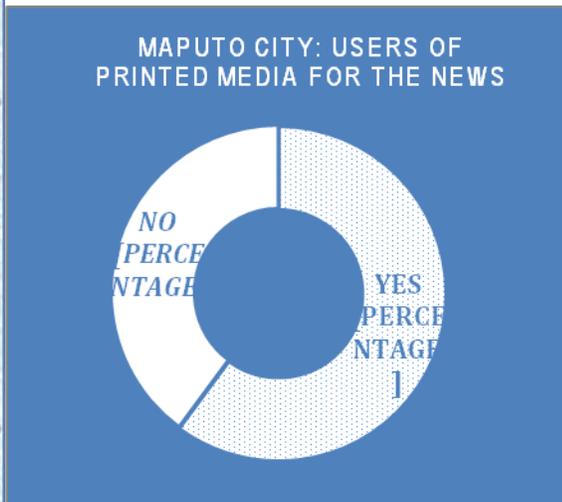
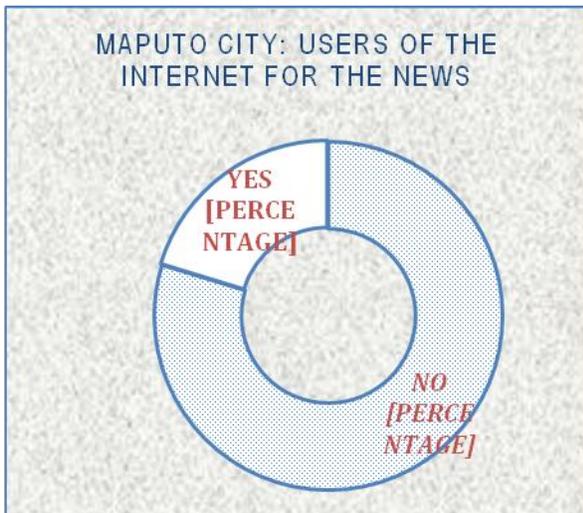
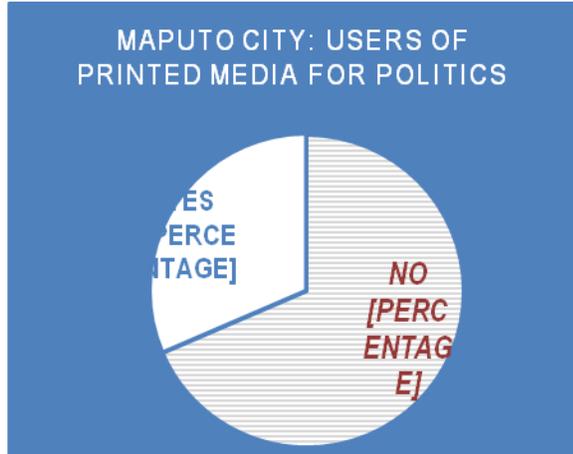
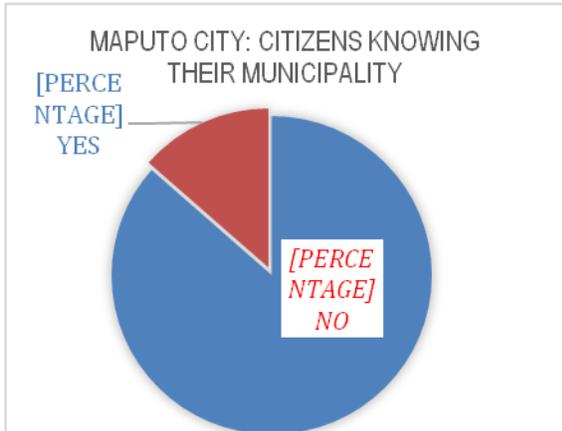
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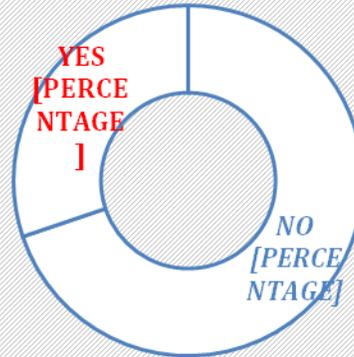
Appendix 1:
Maputo City Graphs



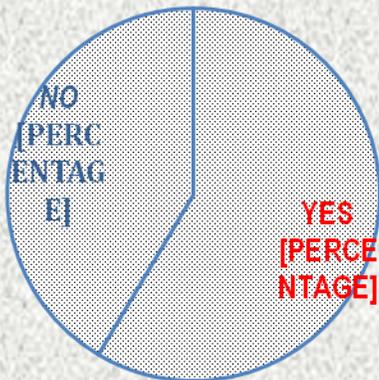
MAPUTO CITY: USERS OF TV FOR THE NEWS



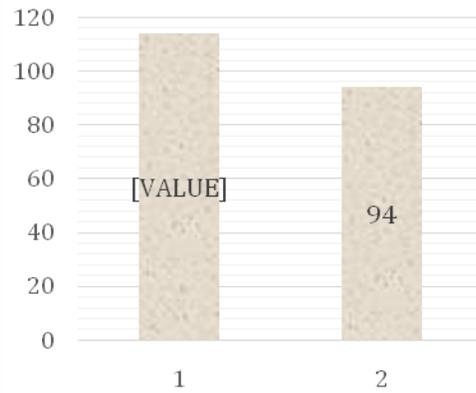
MAPUTO CITY: USERS OF TV ON POLITICS



MAPUTO CITY: USERS OF RADIO FOR THE NEWS

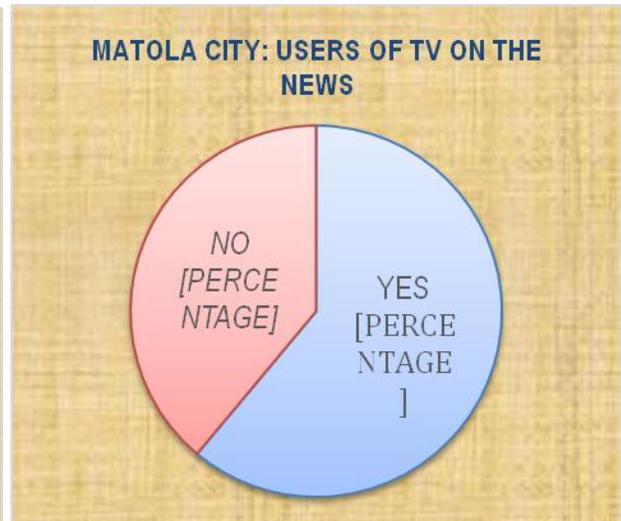
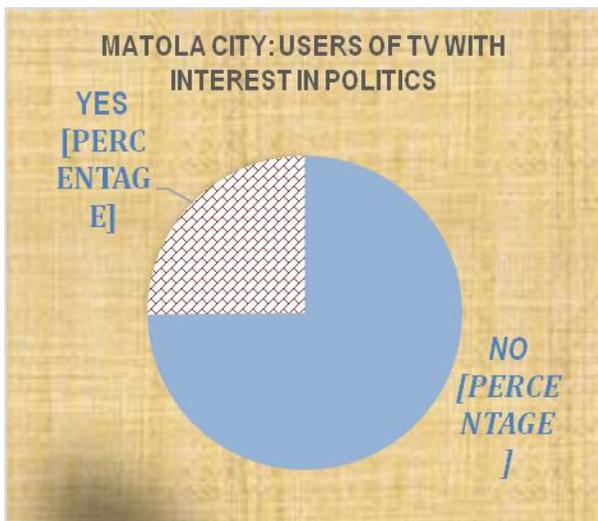
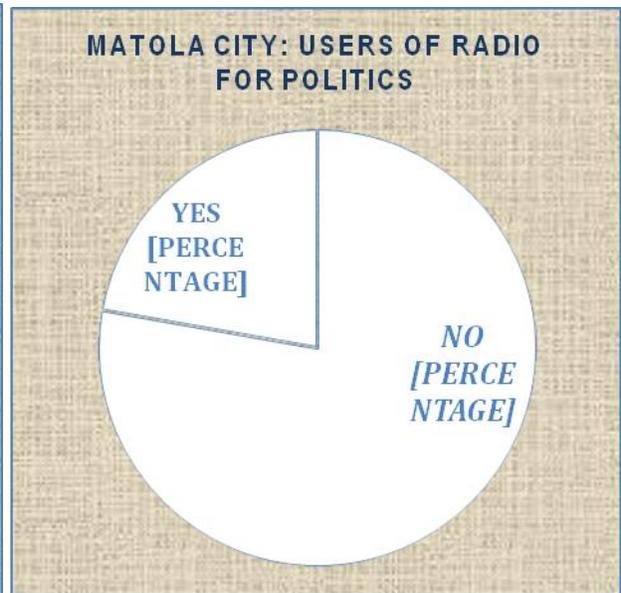
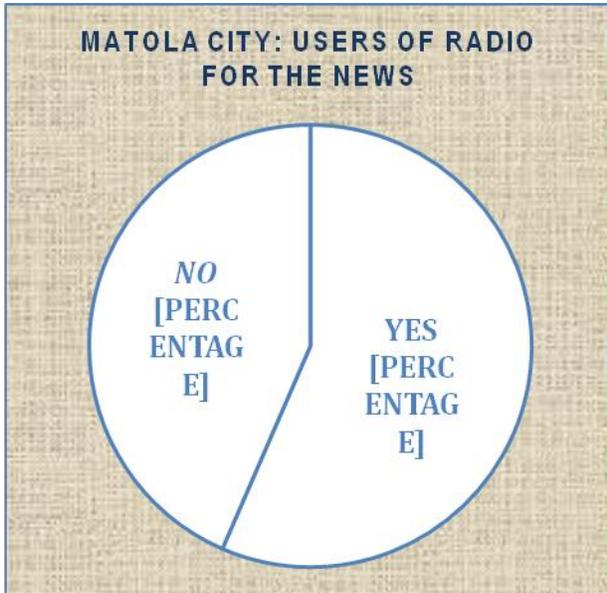


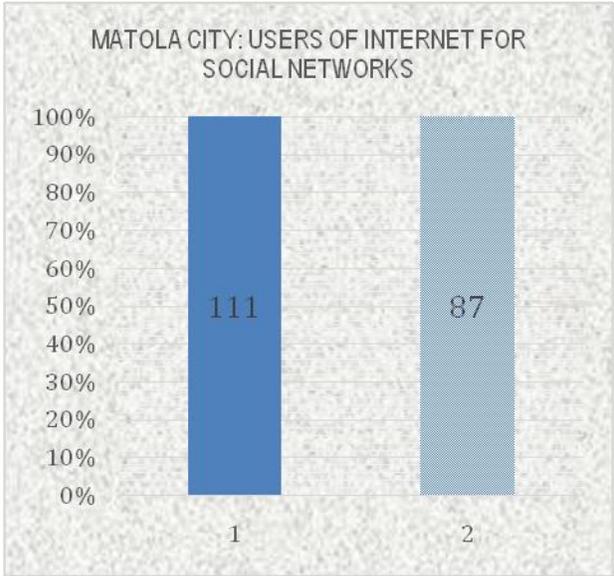
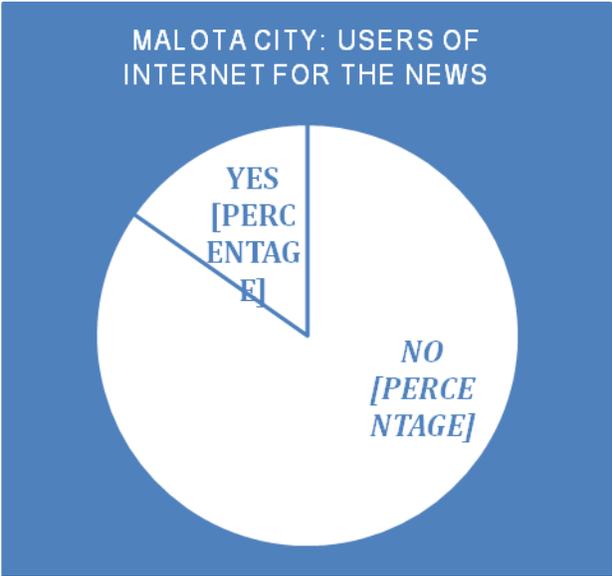
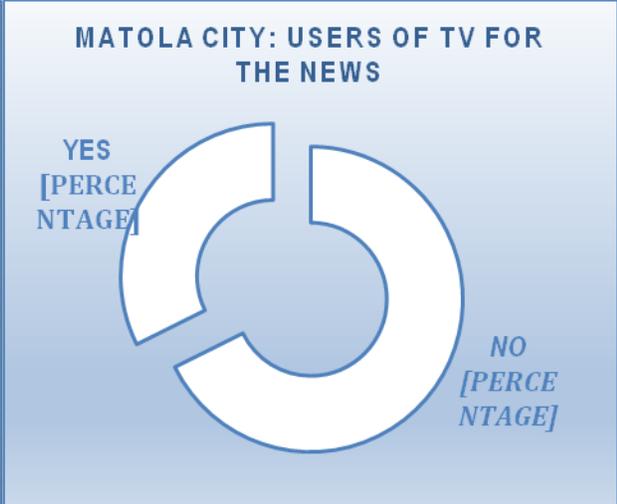
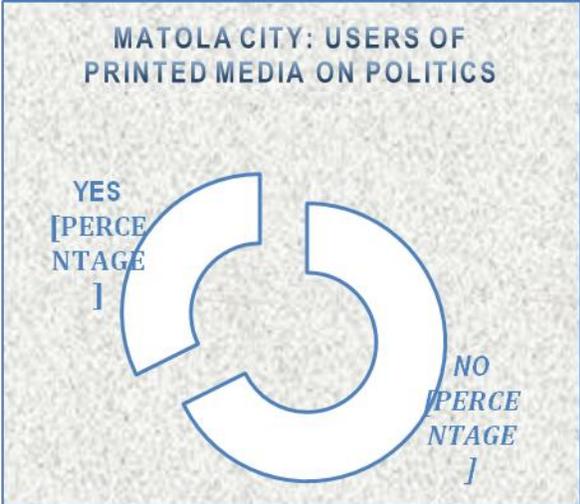
MAPUTO CITY: USERS OF INTERNET FOR SOCIAL NETWORKS



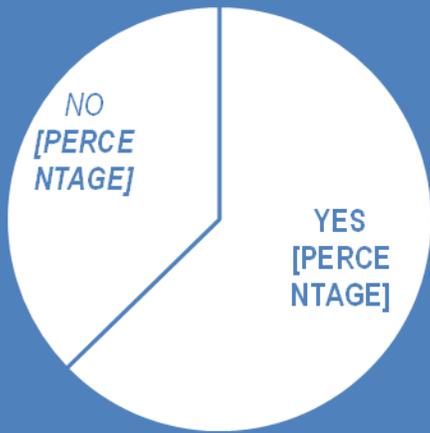
Appendix 2:

Matola City Graphs





MATOLA CITY: USERS OF THE INTERNET ON REGULAR ACTIVITIES



MATOLA CITY: CITIZENS WHO VOTED IN LOCAL ELECTIONS ONLY

