

OF MEDIA, SOCIAL NETWORK AND OPENNESS IN POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS

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Abstract

Democratic citizenship is an integral part of democracy. Citizens in a democracy need to have certain types of political knowledge which guide their behaviour and influence their attitudes and values towards issues and happenings on politics. Agents for political socialisation include family, educational institutions, peers and media. The study examines the influence of media, political knowledge, efficacy and social network on openness in political conversations. In this study, the word “politics” is defined narrowly to encompass election issues. A questionnaire survey is conducted among an educated population with varying levels of political knowledge and engagement. The questionnaire, adapted from Moy and Gastil (2006), measured the respondents’ willingness or reluctance to engage in political disagreements. The antecedent variables examined are network size and heterogeneity, media use, political knowledge and efficacy. The results which reveal openness to political views with respect to election issues will provide an indication of the perceived acceptance towards democracy of political views in the Malaysian society.

Keywords: media, social network, political conversation, political knowledge, political socialisation

Introduction

Democratic citizenship is an integral part of democracy. Citizens in a democracy need to have certain types of political knowledge which guide their behaviour and influence their attitudes and values towards issues and happenings on politics. Attitudes and values towards political issues develop from childhood to adulthood. The agents for political socialisation include family, educational institutions, peers and media. The family is an important agent in political socialisation of children but the influence of peers on political views and attitudes begin in adolescence and goes on throughout adult life.

Political socialisation takes place through everyday conversations. “Through everyday political talk, citizens construct their identities, achieve mutual understanding, produce public reason, form considered opinions, and produce rules and resources for deliberate democracy” (Kim & Kim, 2008, p. 51). Moy and Gastil (2006) argue that political discussions among fellow citizens enlarge perspectives about political matters and result in sound political judgements. They refer to political discussions characterised by “openness to conflict, no-dominance, the use of clear and logical argument, and mutual comprehension” as deliberative conversation (p. 445).

The extent to which conflict is embraced in political conversations may vary with the network characteristics. The size of a social network does not influence deliberative conversation but the openness of political conversations depends on the network composition of peers (Moy & Gastil, 2006). Eveland and Hively (2009) view network heterogeneity as

