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► **To cite this version:**

Décio Tsandzana. Urban youth and social networks in Mozambique: the political participation of the helpless connected. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 2018, 34, pp.251. 10.17231/comsoc.34(2018).2948 . hal-02052820

HAL Id: hal-02052820

<https://hal.science/hal-02052820>

Submitted on 28 Feb 2019

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URBAN YOUTH AND SOCIAL NETWORKS IN MOZAMBIQUE: THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE *HELPLESS CONNECTED*

Décio Tsandzana

ABSTRACT

In the last 10 years, studies on political participation through social networks have marked the debate in the field of media studies. In Mozambique, particularly, and in the world, in general, youth represent the galvanizing centre that finds in the use of social networks an almost ideal tool of expression about their frustrations due to their situation of blatant social misery – unemployment and constant life uncertainty to which youth are exposed. With this article, we intend to analyse the role of social networks, specifically Facebook, in the political and social engagement of urban youth in Mozambique, considering a timeline that covers the last four years, 2014 to 2017. As a result, it is concluded that, despite the expansion of social networks in recent years, they cannot yet be considered as spaces for effective political participation by youth, due to the fact that the internet is less comprehensive, on the one hand, and the weak youth interest in political issues in Mozambique, on the other.

KEYWORDS

Youth; social networks; political participation

JUVENTUDE URBANA E REDES SOCIAIS EM MOÇAMBIQUE: A PARTICIPAÇÃO POLÍTICA DOS *CONECTADOS DESAMPARADOS*

RESUMO

Nos últimos 10 anos, os estudos sobre a participação política por intermédio das redes sociais marcam o debate na área dos estudos dos média. Em Moçambique, de forma particular, e no mundo, de forma geral, a juventude representa o centro galvanizador que encontra no uso das redes sociais uma ferramenta quase ideal de expressão sobre as suas frustrações decorrentes da sua situação de gritante miséria social – desemprego e incerteza de vida constante a que os jovens se encontram expostos. Com o presente artigo, pretendemos analisar o papel das redes sociais, concretamente o Facebook, no engajamento político e social da juventude urbana em Moçambique, considerando um horizonte que abarca os últimos quatro anos, 2014-2017. Como resultado, concluímos que embora a sua expansão nos últimos anos, as redes sociais ainda não podem ser consideradas, no seu todo, como espaços que permitam uma efectiva participação política da juventude, decorrente do facto de a internet ser menos abrangente, por um lado, e do fraco interesse da juventude em questões políticas em Moçambique, por outro.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Juventude; redes sociais; participação política

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, with the growing distrust on traditional methods of political participation based on voting, levels of voter abstention and weak engagement with the usual policy are rising almost throughout the world. However, on the other hand, the emergence of social networks represents the opening of a dynamic space with new forms of civic-political participation.

In this article, one of the first elements to be taken into account is the understanding of what is considered political participation, a discussion that does not reach consensus within the social sciences, according to Norris (2003). However, we believe it is necessary to define the word “participation” which, besides being polysemic, authors like Bordenave (1983, p. 23) consider that it means “to be part of, to take part or to have part”. The author goes on saying that it is useless to “be take part” without “taking part”, as, for example, someone who is part of a group, but does not take part in the decisions of the group. In political terms, we can say that participation is seen as “the set of individual or collective activities that can influence the governed on the functioning of the political system”, as Braud (2014, p. 353) points out. On the other hand, Nay (2014, p. 419) states that political participation is

the set of practices (voting, protest, activism and participation in public meetings), as well as expressions of interest (to learn about politics or talk of politics) of the rulers and citizens in relation to public affairs that affect the community, the region, the state or even the whole of humanity.

For us, Nay’s definition seems more interesting (2014), as it highlights, in addition to voting, political activism as one of the integrated forms of political participation. In the field of political science, voting is still recognized as the essential modality of political participation, which we can call “good participation”. However, in recent years new forms of participation have emerged which are materialized in social movements and organizations, through other practices such as strikes, boycotts, petitions and demonstrations to influence governments, which we can call “bad participation”. This tendency derives from the political exhaustion from the citizens and consequent disappointment with the vote as the only mechanism to participate politically, as Dahlgren (2003) points out. Thus, social networks and other forms of virtual communication are essential because they allow the exchange of information with counterparts and with an uninformed population. According to Castells (2001, p. 9), “a network is a set of interconnected links – modes of organization with extraordinary benefits, because they are naturally flexible and adaptable, essential qualities for surviving and thriving in a changing environment”. More broadly, a social network can be a social structure of the internet, where elements are constituted by organizations or individuals, and whose links represent the established interactions (political, corporate, service, family, friendly, according to the interest and so on). The main function of each network is, above all, mass communication and the transmission of knowledge that will be examined with more detail in our research.

On the one hand, authors such as Matos (2009) show that social networks can be a set of physical and immaterial spaces, where social agents can effectively participate

in the process of public communication, a demonstration that is interesting to study in this article. Pereira (2011, p. 16) explains that the potential of the internet is focused on

reaching individuals who, at first, without any political ties to the classical institutions of civil society, are willing, as long as they are ‘properly’ convinced, to participate in specific protest actions, cybernetic or not, that have some identity with their interests and perceptions of the world.

It is highlighted as an example that since the *Arab spring*¹, it has become more and more common to observe that youth in various parts of the world have used technology to mobilize themselves regarding the issues that affect them. On the one hand, as Luvizotto (2016, p. 301) affirms, with the internet and social networks, the forms of communication and consumption of information have changed, no longer being unilateral – a mark of the mass media – and become more participatory and democratic. In other words, information circulates more fluidly and its range is broad compared to other *media* tools. In addition to reducing distance and cost, the internet (especially social networks such as Facebook) has revolutionized the way communication is carried out, with political actors trying to capitalize on this phenomenon, even considering the latest scandals – as is the case of *Cambridge Analytica (CA)*².

On the other hand, social networks bring about new transformations in our daily lives, in a dynamic and constantly changing way. Here, we refer concretely to the phenomenon known as *uberisation*, which is widely acclaimed by youth who find in it an ideal space and a discourse of rebellion against the *old world* that does not give them enough space, according to Larrouy (2017, p. 56). In the same dimension, the emergence of so-called “citizen-journalism”³ is seen as a fundamental practice for the growing development of citizens’ political and civic participation through blogs and discussion forums on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms (sound, writing, image).

Throughout the article, we will focus on the analysis of the outlines of civic and political participation of urban youth in two cities of Mozambique through social networks, specifically Facebook, over a period of four years (2014-2017), the cities of Maputo and Beira, two urban centres that mark the Mozambican political scene, with Maputo City under the governance of the ruling party, Mozambique Liberation Front – Frelimo, and the city of Beira under the management of opposition party, Democratic Movement of Mozambique – MDM. Beyond this, historically, the City of Beira represents a fervent space of the national political debate – the *bastion of the opposition*.

The choice of 2014 as a starting point is due to the fact that it was in that year that there was a particular interest from the politicians in using social networks as a space

¹ It was a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that took place in the Middle East and North Africa from 18 December 2010. In concrete terms, there were revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

² In 2016 CA worked for the presidential campaign of Donald Trump, and also for the the Brexit, aiming at the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

³ See the Olho do Cidadão-Txeka movement in Mozambique, made up of young bloggers who use social networks to monitor governance.

for citizens to engage, specifically during the electoral campaign for the fifth general elections in Mozambique, held on October 15 of that year. For its effectiveness of the present study qualitative research was carried out, supported by semi structured interviews – through focus groups with youngsters from six civic organizations in Maputo and Beira, as well as the bibliographic review based on the studies on youth associativism in Mozambique and in the theoretical debate on political participation and social networks. Among the organizations involved in the study, we highlight the Mozambican Youth Parliament – Division of Maputo City and Beira, and *Activista Moçambique* and *Olho do Cidadão-Txeka*, both from Maputo City. In Beira, members from *Coalizão*, *É Possível* and *AJURIS – Youth United Towards Social Reintegration* were interviewed.

Formally, the article will be divided in four parts, in the first, a brief summary will be presented on the youth situation and internet governance in the Portuguese-speaking space; in the second, there will be a theoretical basis that will guide the problematisation of the topic; in the third part, an attempt will be made to contextualize the dynamics of political participation in the African reality and in the Mozambican case; in the fourth and last part, the main conclusions of this research will be advanced in the form of clues of analysis and hypotheses.

BRIEF FRAMEWORK ON YOUTH AND INTERNET GOVERNANCE IN THE PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING SPACE

One of the great methodological difficulties when discussing the internet is the existence of a marked divergence in the standardization of data on access to it. However, as far as the CPLP countries are concerned, it can be said that Brazil and Portugal appear as those that are well positioned, given the economic and infrastructural conditions when compared to the other countries of the community. As Mozambique is our particular interest, it should be noted that internet access covers only 18%⁴ of the total population (29 million inhabitants⁵).

In the space of the CPLP, the Electronic Governance Conferences constitute a privileged space in which the discussion of issues related to the internet is taken into account, the last one having taken place in October 2017 in Brazil. The CPLP Forum on Cyber security, which aims to develop a joint reflection on information security in this digital era, promoting multilateral cooperation between Member States in the area of telecommunications. The last meeting was held in Dili, Timor-Leste.

On the other hand, we can highlight the appearance of the first Portuguese-speaking initiative of the internet Governance Forum⁶, which will be held in the second quarter of 2018. However, we need to move back to 2014 when we see the approval of the NET-mundial Declaration in Brazil, an instrument that resulted from the discussion on the

⁴ Retrieved from <https://hootsuite.com/pt/pages/digital-in-2018>

⁵ According to information from the INE – Instituto Nacional de Estatísticas de Moçambique [National Institute of Statistics of Mozambique], 2017, available at <http://www.ine.gov.mz/>

⁶ This is the IGF – Lusofonia, Fórum de Governação da Internet [Lusofonia, Internet Governance Forum], available at <http://igf-lusofonia.pt/>

role of various actors in internet governance. The above examples are a demonstration that the Portuguese-speaking space gains a particular interest not only in discussing the future of the internet, but also the role of each actor in the process of its governance. With these initiatives, it is noticed that the debate on the internet gains greater prominence within the community, although, in general, Portuguese-speaking countries are not ranked as the best in internet access worldwide.

With regard to youth, it is necessary to recognize that their study is not a consensual exercise in the field of social sciences, especially when there is a great conceptual divergence on the subject. In the vast literature consulted, we observed that being young did not always mean the same at all times, as emphasized by Muxel (1995), Abbnik (2005) and Galland (2009). As Honwana (2012) emphasizes, youth is above all an historical construction related mainly to the transformations that affect their socialization and education.

However, it should be emphasized that it is not only an historical production, it is also a cultural and institutional production, the outlines of which vary according to national boundaries and cultural areas. For our study, we will consider all youth from the age of eighteen – the legal age to exercise the right to vote in Mozambique, although access to SNS (Social Networking Sites) governed by the American federal law establishes 13 years as the minimum age to access Facebook, for example. With regard to the CPLP, there are different initiatives and platforms for interaction, especially the CPLP Youth Forum, where CPLP's youth week emerges from, the last edition of which was held in Cascais (2017) under the motto "Investing in Youth", an initiative that is part of the Carta da Juventude da CPLP [CPLP Youth Charter] (approved in December 2013 in Salvador, Brazil)⁷, which states in its preamble:

the Member States of the CPLP recognize youth as holders of rights and political actors, they assume as their obligation the promotion of rights, policies of inclusion, autonomy and emancipation, integral development and intergenerational dialogue as instruments for the affirmation of youth and their life projects. (...) The CPLP considers that youth constitute a social nucleus with their own characteristics, requiring their own intervention by the public authorities, guaranteeing the participation of youth in public decision.

The above quote clearly shows that there is a political awareness at the highest level about the role that Youth represent within the community, although it is often relegated to the background by the rulers, a theme that we will discuss in the third part of the article.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (ONLINE) AND ITS LIMITATIONS

In a study on activism, political participation and the internet, Luvizotto (2016, p. 302) explains that the internet and social networks enable a new understanding and

⁷ Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/uzE99B>

meaning for participation, for democracy, for activism and for identities collective agreements. This idea is corroborated by Vedel (2011, p. 73), who states that “in the last two decades, the internet has changed many aspects of our daily lives, and politics has not escaped these transformations. Whether it is to inform, discuss news, participate in certain collective actions (such as signing a petition), we often use digital tools”. These approaches invite us to think of the internet as a tool for change marked by a permanent evolution. We cannot imagine the future without it, because its change is volatile and it transforms human relations in a substantial way.

Meanwhile, Mabi and Theviot (2014, p. 5) states that “the multiplication of participatory devices mobilizing digital tools has rapidly attracted the interest of researchers, producing an important literature on the relationship between the internet and politics, particularly in terms of civic participation”. This statement may suggest that the new media reduce the distance between political leaders and their constituencies, and that is why in Mozambique there is a tendency to adopt new technologies to communicate with citizens. At the highest level of Mozambican politics, a notable example was the July 2017 decision of the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Filipe Nyusi, to open a space on his Facebook page to interact with users in a way of questions and answers, an exercise seen as a way of capturing the sensibilities of youth in that space.

In an article about the mobilization of young Brazilians in São Paulo for public transport, De Melo (2013) pointed out that in countries where plurality of media is not guaranteed, the expansion of the internet is an advantage, especially for young democracies such as is the case of Brazil, where the internet can become an instrument that promotes the exercise of citizenship. In Mozambique, a country that historically has a past of political reprimand due to the existence of a single party or a state party, internet use has been increasing every year in cities, but also in rural areas, and there is a wide use to express opinions on various topics and especially to influence political decisions, and in Maputo City there are the largest number of users.

However, it should be emphasized that social networks do not replace daily political practice, such as voting. Thus, we consider that “doing politics” in the sphere of virtual communication has its limits, because social networks are not an end in itself, but an instrument. For example, Monnoyer-Smith (2011) points out that each new communication technology brings a novelty to users and can be used for different purposes, according to each person. This statement cannot be understood as an isolated element of reality because all new technology is implanted in a specific society and with a different social, political and economic configuration, i.e, we must understand this evolution in the context in which we are going to study it, and Mozambique is no exception.

In what Morozov (2011) calls “net disillusion”, he shows that social networks are far from constituting spaces of participation and political mobilization, since their access is not enough, it becomes important to master the use, because the more access they have, the more several countries and political leaders are prepared to control or limit the use of these social networks as instruments of political participation. In a study on British youth and the use of the internet, Gerodimos (2008) has shown that there is a

model in the *top-down* interaction of youth through civic websites, discouraging online participation and creating feelings of helplessness.

Still in the field of limitations, Loader (2011, p. 759) stresses that “with social media, citizens no longer have to be passive consumers of political propaganda, government information or mass information, but can share alternative perspectives and publish their stories, their own opinions”. However, the same author argues that today, the most obvious impact of social networks on democracy may have been its ability to ‘disrupt traditional political practices and institutions’, for which it is clearly necessary to avoid utopian optimism about the existence of a ‘digital democracy’.

These observations lead us to think about two major issues: (1) the real mobilizing capacity of social networks, because if we talk about online political participation of urban youth, it is necessary to gauge the extent to which these social networks are an act of inclusion, especially in two cities marked by unequal access to resources, such as Maputo and Beira; and (2) the extent to which social networks can be considered as an instrument of political liberation or intimidation by governments, as there are reprehensible tendencies against voices rising against the current governance in the country.

PARTICIPATIVE YOUTH, YET FORGOTTEN BY THE POLITICAL POWER: THE AFRICAN STORY AND THE CASE OF MOZAMBIQUE

According to Mbembe (1985, p. 19), for most African states, youth are “the spearhead of the nation”, “the safest guarantee for the future”, “the future in the present”. This is a widely used discourse in several countries and reveals a homogenization of the state that refuses to recognize the plurality of conditions in which youth live. That is, several states sometimes point out to blame, threaten or delay, or sometimes to flatter youth, using future words to put youth as the hopes of tomorrow. Previously, these youth were perceived as a group sensitive to anything that could lead to destabilization of the state.

The tendency to politicize Mozambican youth was almost always present in the declarations of the first president of independent Mozambique, Samora Machel, in the same period of the creation of the Mozambican Youth Organization (OJM), on 29 November 1977, that the youth was the “lifeblood of the nation”, a sample that reveals the historical importance that has long been given to youth as a crucial player in building the country, Biza (2009) stresses. Speaking recently at a meeting of the Frelimo party (25 March 2018), Filipe Nyusi, the president of this party who is at the same time the President of the Republic, said that youth should be aware:

to accelerate the creation of youth welfare, we have identified as essential and immediate needs: education and training, access to health, decent housing, employment. (...) We affirm that the young Mozambican cannot continue in fear or be fed by imaginary promises from forces that have never done anything for them. These forces are meant to impress or manipulate them⁸.

⁸ Excerpt from a STV report, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MbQW2yKSo8>

However, in Mozambique, reality shows us that youth are in a situation of “permanent marginalization” (Parlamento Juvenil de Moçambique [Mozambique Youth Parliament], 2014), and their political representation remains low in the country’s decision-making bodies, although it constitutes the majority of the country’s total population. For example, at the level of the Assembly of the Republic, we note that of the 250 deputies, only 40 (16%) were elected for the quality of Deputies aged under 35 years, according to the Gabinete da Juventude Parlamentar de Moçambique [Mozambican Parliamentary Youth Office]⁹.

Faced with this situation of apparent political abandonment, as a refuge, youth find in social networks a fertile space for the exercise of their citizenship, since the model through voting and political representation is in crisis. Added to this is the raising of abstention that is not necessarily synonymous of indifference, but rather a transmission of mistrust, protest and discontent – a political message. For example, in Mozambique, voter participation during the first elections of 1994 (88%) has been replaced in recent years by indifference and apathy. In other words, more than half of registered voters ignored the 2009 (56%) and 2014 (52%) elections, of which the cities of Maputo and Beira are no exception¹⁰.

Authors such as Tournier (2009, p. 17) emphasize that this abstention among youth stems primarily from their social situation. In turn, Galland (2009, p. 45) argues that there is a mistrust of youth to politics based essentially on the feeling that politicians are totally disconnected from the everyday realities of citizens. In addition, Coleman (2005) argue that it is not the youth who are disconnected from politics but the political institutions that are far from these youth. These youth, through practices such as social networks, build their own online participation culture. That is, the traditional modalities of youth political participation tend to be rejuvenated with the use of social networks.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN MOZAMBIQUE: THE CASES OF MAPUTO AND BEIRA

Over the last ten years, we have seen that Mozambique is experiencing a political dynamic marked by the renewal of the political landscape in the urban environment with the rise of power by the opposition in the so-called “most influential cities of the country”, namely Beira and Quelimane (centre) and Nampula (North), which today are under the leadership of the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM) and the Renamo party, respectively. The urban environment in Mozambique has been the focus of several popular demonstrations, with emphasis being placed in the year of 2010 in the city of Maputo, with the “revolt against the cost of living”, a remarkable moment that opened a new page in the history of mobilizations in Mozambique (Chaimite, 2014).

⁹ Information collected in conversation with the Gabinete da Juventude Parlamentar de Moçambique [Mozambican Parliamentary Youth Office], in 2018.

¹⁰ The abstention data were obtained through the information produced by the electoral administration and management bodies in Mozambique.

Since then, we have noticed an evolution of the use of various spaces of participation to express an opinion on different concrete issues in the daily life of Mozambique, a trend that has contributed to the use of information and communication technologies, especially social networks. In a concrete way, we see images of youth coming together to protest through the use of hashtags by Twitter, Facebook and other social networking platforms. Facebook, in Mozambique, is a recurring arena of youth engagement, a network of two million active users per month¹¹ (Figure 1). According to Alexa (2018), the first most visited site by Mozambicans is Google, followed by YouTube and Facebook.

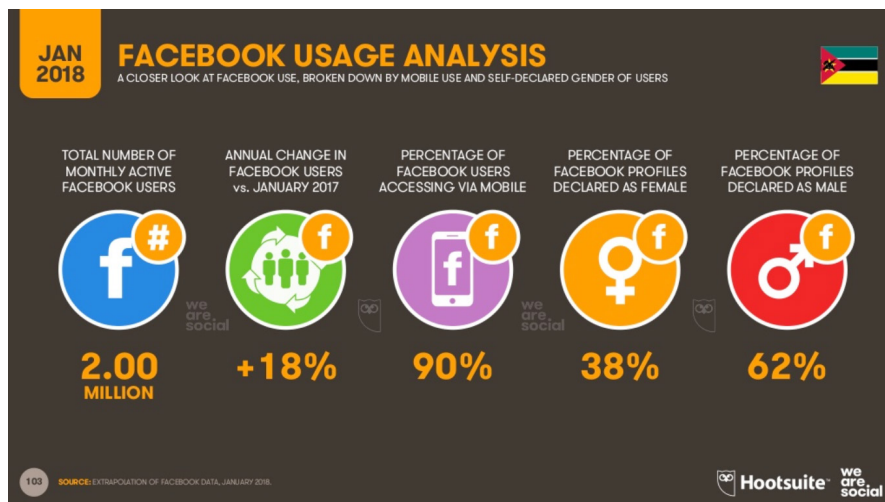


Figure 1: Number of Facebook active users (monthly) in Mozambique

Source: <https://hootsuite.com/pt/pages/digital-in-2018>

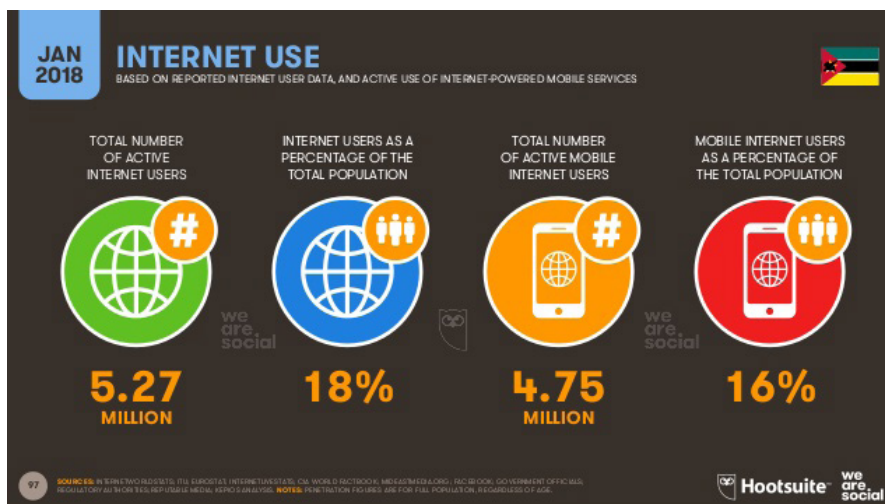


Figure 2: Number of active (monthly) internet users in Mozambique

Source: <https://hootsuite.com/pt/pages/digital-in-2018>

¹¹ Information retrieved from <https://hootsuite.com/pt/pages/digital-in-2018>

Considering that only 18% of the population has access to the internet¹² (Figure 2) in Mozambique, it should be noted that television is still the most reliable mean for access to information, since users seek information on the internet but give credibility after its confirmation by traditional mean – television channel or radio, according to Raposo (2012). This reality allows us to understand in which dimension we should analyze the contribution of social networks as spaces of practices of political participation in a society marked by an inequality in terms of access and use of new information and communication technologies, as well as alert us to the need to have a critical eye on the same networks.

On the one hand, the exponential expansion in the use of social networks with services like Free Facebook¹³ is fundamental to understand how this growth has brought real changes to the form of participation in the political sphere of Mozambique. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that there is a great geographical divergence between cities in terms of the development of infrastructures for the provision of internet services, which substantially influences its quality. One of the cases of social protests that had its epicentre with the use of social networks as tools of mobilization was the manifestation held in the city of Maputo, on 31 October 2013, against public insecurity, an act that had a participation of more than 10 thousand people.

Another outstanding example was the demonstration on March 16 2014, convened by a Facebook group entitled Representantes de luxo (Luxury Representatives), whose purpose was to claim against the *blessings* of the Assembly of the Republic Deputies. Also in 2014, during the doctors' strike (May 20), the Medical Association of Mozambique used Facebook to publish its press releases, and the arrest of Jorge Arroz, president of the Medical Association, was first announced on Jornal@Verdade's page on Facebook¹⁴ and later popularized by other media. As a result, more than six hundred people were mobilized to the police station to demand the release of the doctor.

Already in 2015, social networks have once again become the epicentre of mobilization for a demonstration against the murder of a university professor in the centre of Maputo City, as well as for the “popular march for peace” held in 2016. These examples reveal that social networks began to be a field of pressure, although politicians did not have the real size of that importance in those years, judging by their reactions – with astonishment and calling social networks “unreachable dream factories” as affirmed by then the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Armando Guebuza.

A notable example in the Mozambican political arena was the decision in July 2017 of the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Filipe Nyusi, to open a space on his Facebook¹⁵ page to interact with users of his page in a question and answer format. On the other hand, Alcinda de Abreu, a member of the political bureau of the Frelimo party, speaking at a conference held on 29 November 2017, on the occasion of the 40th

¹² Information retrieved from <https://hootsuite.com/pt/pages/digital-in-2018>

¹³ A Service implemented by mCel mobile network with the support of Facebook.

¹⁴ Available at <https://www.facebook.com/JornalVerdade/>

¹⁵ Available at <https://www.facebook.com/NyusiConfioemti/>

anniversary of the Mozambican Youth Organization, said that the greatest challenge for today's Youth is to know how to use social networks to get access to information and knowledge, with the goal of developing the country. Also in 2017, the Mozambican president invited some young internet users to the presidential palace for a *tête-à-tête* interaction, an act he repeated as early as 2018 during a work visit held in Inhambane Province, southern Mozambique.

In general, during the research, it was observed that there are substantial differences between the understanding of youth participation in social networks in the two cities. While in Maputo the youth present themselves with some relative freedom to express themselves, in the city of Beira we find that apathy reigns in the bosom of the youth, an element that is aggravated by the strong inequalities that are registered between the districts of the same city.

For example, Jackson Timoteo, one of our interviewees in Beira, a member of the *É Possível* Association, mentioned that the culture of political participation varies according to the neighbourhood of residence and level of education of each young person, referring to Munhava and Macute, two residential neighbourhoods where the skills and quality of schooling of youth are different, which according to him influences on how they face and react to social and political problems:

today, if we want to claim something, it is easier to go to Munhava than to go to Macute. Those who have the most needs live in Munhava and need to be heard by proper authority according to their needs – several manifestations are made in Munhava and some are called by social networks.¹⁶

Still in the city of Beira, Benedito Pequenino, coordinator of AJURIS, noted that the entry of a new political party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), into the municipal government of that city motivated youth's political participation in local issues, as they became aware that there is room for a political alternative, which has also opened the way for the acceptance of new ideas.

Concerning the City of Maputo, Cídia Chissungu, from *Activista Moçambique*, stated that the youth of Maputo do not participate through social networks due to the historical and political path of the country itself, since it is believed that those who question the leaders the most are exposed to lose various opportunities, for that reason "they are used to question less and to be well-educated"¹⁷. However, just like in Beira, Alexandre Nhamossa, from *Olho do Cidadão-Txeka*, revealed that in Maputo City there is also a differentiation of participation depending on the area of residence:

in the urban area, there is a different way of thinking and acting. For example, youth can make a difference through social movements and even organize demonstrations using Facebook, but if we enter the suburban area, we will see that youth are indifferent to these situations.¹⁸

¹⁶ Excerpt from the interview with Jackson Timóteo, held on January 9 2017, in the City of Beira.

¹⁷ Excerpt from the interview with Cídia Chissungu, held on January 9 2017, in the City of Maputo.

¹⁸ Excerpt from the interview with Alexandre Nhamossa, held on January 4 2017, in the City of Maputo.

Going back to 2014, the year in which the last elections were held in Mozambique, both Maputo youth and Beira Youth were unanimous in stating that social networks represented a “turning point” for the follow-up of the actions of the political actors (parties and candidates), but this action did not have a substantial impact on their final voting decision. That is, although they have accompanied some achievements through social networks (electoral campaign), social networks have not been able to be mobilizing tools to vote or to build the opinion of vote, since the decision to vote (or not) was already previously taken. In addition, from our study it was possible to note that having an account in a social network does not mean increased political participation, but it may be the other way around, as several critical authors on online political participation claim. These authors affirm that there is a utopian according to which more internet equals to more democracy – what we would call a *democratic illusion*.

Another highlight is the quality of the debate that has taken place within social networks, as it has been affirmed that the event of 2014 was the accentuation of the polarization of opinion and acts of verbal attacks between supporters, members and militants of competing political parties, as well as the lack of feedback from political actors in the spaces that were created for such interaction during that electoral event, a fact that can be verified with the total abandonment of some pages in the social networks after the elections.

The youth of both cities note with some satisfaction that from 2014 to 2017 there has been some evolution in the use of social networks as spaces of political participation, although the general apathy that is characterized by “complaining in the box” prevails, that is to say, youth protest only on social networks, but there is no forceful action to express their will since the last demonstration in 2016 against the armed conflict in Mozambique. The year 2017 saw no significant protest action.

As a result of our interaction in the cities of Maputo and Beira, it was possible to perceive that those who engage in social networks are those who were already somehow active in offline space or who had some connection with a civic organization or an also active network of friends. This trend is due to the high level of mistrust that has developed in youth regarding the national political actors who are seen as responsible for the degrading social situation in which urban youth finds themselves.

Ultimately, the drafting of this article emerges at a time when Mozambique will be the scene of local elections, and Maputo and Beira will again be the most prominent urban centres with the political actors preparing all kinds of strategies to positively maximize use of social networks as real spaces of political engagement, since, in a recurrent way, youth find in digital media a fertile space to express their opinion and the political actors (political parties) do not want to exclude themselves from these spaces.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

To talk about the use of social networks in the urban space by Mozambican youth is, in the first place, to consider that we are analysing a population that represents the

majority of the approximately 29 million inhabitants¹⁹, with about 60% being youth – aged between 18 and 25 years. Secondly, we note that Mozambican youth are present in cities as well as in rural areas. In all, a youth often regarded as the “lifeblood of the nation” by Mozambican political discourse (Samora Machel, 1977). Between apathy and the lack of a common vision, these youth are today at the centre of the change of the political landscape, using the social networks as spaces of participation and political mobilization, concretely in the “big cities”, as in the cases of Maputo, Beira, Quelimane and Nampula.

However, the marked inequality between these cities in terms of access to the infrastructures of internet use is an element that deserves special attention when analyzing this topic. In connection with this question, the dissemination and circulation of fake news on various subjects, as well as the emergence of a repressive and authoritarian system against the so-called Protestant voices against the regime of the ruling party are recurring.

One of the points to be considered in this conclusion is the debate around the understanding of the expression “being young”, an element that we discussed throughout the article and demonstrated that there is no consensus in the field of social sciences. From our exchange with the target audience and the existing literature, we can say that being young is not essentially a matter of age determined simply by specific legislation of a country, but it is above all a social and spiritual condition. On the other hand, we observe that the determination to be young is conditioned by the life status of each individual in their social, political or economic environment, a reality that will also determine how this young person will engage in the use of social networks as spaces of political participation.

It should be emphasized that, despite the enthusiasm created by social networks in Mozambique, youth remain as *helpless connected*. These youth represent in their entirety the face of urban unemployment and social and economic precariousness in Mozambique. These same youth are in the cities, but also in the rural areas and use the networks to “complain without showing the face” and “without leaving the network”. To this situation is added the individualisation of actions that concern Mozambican youth, there is no shared mission on the problems and needs of this social stratum, and lastly, the social, economic and political inequalities among youth of the same city is another factor that weakens its mobilization. ✍

Translation: Januário Alexandre Mavie

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¹⁹ Information from the INE – Instituto Nacional de Estatísticas de Moçambique [National Institute of Statistics of Mozambique], 2017, available at <http://www.ine.gov.mz/>

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Submitted: 19.05.2018

Accepted: 20.07.2018