Understanding Personality, Networking, Leadership and Political Participation: Towards Building Capacity in NGO Setting

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Abstract: Generally, political participation encompasses the many activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue.Individuals can also become involved in certain aspects of the electoral process through independent action particularly at the local level by joining civil society organizations. In Malaysia, for a voluntary organization such as the Federation of Malay Students Union (GPMS), its reputation was built on its nationalist outlook and pioneering role in Malay education and language issues in the post independent years. With the current dramatic changes surrounding GPMS, may provide more challenges and difficulties in assisting the government to achieve the national goals more effectively as members portray more differences with respect to expectations, priorities and values. This study looked into the issue of political participation and its predictors among the GPMS members. Based on correlation and regression analysis, the results showed significant relationship between networking and personality with political participation. However, leadership was not found as strong predictor in this study. Further discussion pertaining to the findings, implications and recommendations are provided.

Key words: Political participation, networking, leadership, personality

I.   INTRODUCTION

Generally, political participation can be loosely defined as citizens' activities affecting politics (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, 2016). It derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government. Individuals can also voluntary become involved in various aspects of the electoral process through independent actions by joining civil society organizations. In this context, professional networks, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, and the media can all provide avenues for political participation.The possibility of exploring political participation in a different context becomes significant due to categorization and classification of countries around the world. In this regard, the context and dynamics of participation in politics in advanced democracies or societies may be quite distinct from developing democracies and societies.Although political participation has similar connotation, the determinant factors may vary from one society to another and such leads to disparity in terms of level of participation between developed and developing countries. Political participation is something that cannot be forced upon as there must be the willingness of an individual to be aware of matters relating to politics, because the values and awareness attitude of an individual has to be present, especially when it comes to being aware about issues relating to the rights of their relationship with others and the rights to themselves as someone staying in a democratic country (Almond & Verba, 1963, Muhammad Ibrahim & Razia Mussarat, 2014). The lack of self-awareness in individuals, particularly in registering as a voter proved to be the primary reason as to why a large number of youths in Malaysia are not involved in politics and this is amplified further by studies in fourteen states, where a number of them in the age group of 22 to 40 years old have not registered to vote and the main factor being that the reason they do not vote is due to the lack of interests in politics while at the same time they are busy with their jobs, (Ibrahim Saad, 2008). In the developing country like Malaysia, Nongovernment Organization (NGO) such as GPMS has played a very important role to help government to achieve the national goals. The organization's attachment to the government goes back to the 1950s. Its reputation was built on its nationalist outlook and pioneering role in Malay education and languageissues in the post Merdeka years. GPMS is a non-governmental organization that helps Bumiputera Malay students, particularly in education and entrepreneurship.

GPMS assists schools to always maintain the sustainable development of education at a good level. It assists schools not only in academic development, but it also serves to help students, especially in the rural areas

of growing entrepreneurial leadership characteristics that students can explore (Khamis, Abdullah, Razak and Omar, 2016).It later became a platform for the ruling party (thegovernment) to air certain Malay views as well as a vehicle to tap into the potential pool of future members among students, especially in colleges and universities. The organisation has produced a number of prominent national figures, including the present Prime Minister who was president during the 1960s when he was a young civil servant. As one of the officials of MYC said that GPMS has always been seen as pro- government but there's nothing wrong with having political content in youth groups. In addition to the challenges in education, GPMS also faced with the challenge of modernization, economic and social challenges dramatically.

Hence, being a voluntary association in nature, GPMS may face more difficulties in playing their roles more effectively as members may have difference with respect to expectations and priorities, values, personality and etc. Hence, this study intends to explore few variables s namely leadership, personality and networking and to what extend are their relationships influence members' political participation.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Political participation

Normally, political participation has always been associated with democratization in a modern society, although there are contentions on attributing participation in politics to non-democratic environments (Urmila and Sharma, 2007). The main focus in this segment is to consider the attributes and methods that are generally related to political participation. Firstly, political participation enables one to express own view in a political arena. This is the greatest goal of participatory democracy (Zittel, 2007). Political participation provides citizens with high sense of dignity, value and responsibility. The implication of this is that both government and citizens are alerted and facilitation of broader understanding in socio-economic and political issues becomes imperative. By participating in politics, individual can acquire political orientation (Gibril, 2015). The political orientations in the modern society are derived through the use of Social Network Sites (SNS) most especially among the youth. As rightly observed by Graham and Avery (2013), SNS has become effective and efficient tools for political participation due to its provision for fast sharing of information between the ruled and the rulers. The method of SNS in the modern political participation has facilitated a stronger civil society and improve political institutions in a more responsive and effective way (Gibril, 2015). Another important attribute of political participation is its promotion of stability and orderliness in the system. The contributions from citizens serve as mechanism of stabilizing the political atmosphere and creates a conducive environment for political learning. In as much as citizens influence counts in decision making, the tendency for political stability is high and most unstable political environment has always been denied of peoples' involvement in the socio-economic and political matters. Such is attributed to governmental attitude in relating to the people (Urmila and Sharma, 2000).

More importantly, it must be noted that elections are not the only event in political participation. There are some other processes ranging from demonstration, protest, rally, strikes, speech writing, canvassing and joining political party with the intention of achieving a goal that can enhance influencing and persuading government in decision making. All these to mention but few characterize participation of the people in political undertone. Although some of these methods might belong to what Patrick (1988) tags aggressive approach, its relevance cannot be overlooked. In the final analysis, Zuniga et al (2012) affirm that "political participation, both offline and online, refers to behavior seeking to influence government action and policy making". From the above quotation, it seems the target of participation in politics among citizens of either developed or developing countries is to persuade and influence government in public policy formulation and implementation. Despite the variants in the gravity of citizens' role towards influencing government decisions in different countries of the world, no one can denounce the significant of peoples' involvement as the basis for political participation.

Personality

Personality is about individual difference affected by certain values, social relationship, habit and skills (McAdams and Olson (2010). According to Saul, (2014), personality connote difference among individuals' characters and patterns of thinking and behaving. This shows that human behavioral tendency is unique on individual basis. This shows that human behavioral tendency is unique on individual basis. In this context, individual has specific characteristics and values which makes him or her to stand out from others. Such reflects personal traits that could be natural or developed in a due course. Also, personality psychology studies emotion and pattern of human behavior. Doing this, similarities and differences of peoples' behavior can be ascertained. In the study of McAdams and Olson (2010), personality is about individual differences affected by certain values, social relationship, habits and skills. This is what Engler (2009) tags enduring characteristics in human that are revealed through behavioral display in a variety of situation and circumstances. However, personality traits are categorized into five which the Psychologists refer to as Five Factor Model (FFM). The model has become a tool in describing human personality and psych. The five factors are openness to experience,

consciousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism and can be represented with 'OCEAN' as acronym (Mathew, Deary and Martha, 2003). Openness to experience as one of the models reflects the degree of intellectual curiosity that makes human to make personal preference for a variety of activity. In fact, individual with high openness is believed to pursue self-actualization.

Conscientiousness is a tendency of being organized and dependable with self- discipline aimed towards achievement. Extraversion involves energetic and assertive behavior that goes with positive emotions. If it is high, it can be perceived to be domineering and if is low, it is seen as being reserved. By agreeableness, it means such personality has the tendency to be compassionate and friendly rather than being suspicious. But someone with high agreeableness is seen to be naïve and submissive while low agreeableness can warrant a person to be argumentative and challenging. Neuroticism goes with depression and unpleasant attitudes which usually leads to anxiety and anger. On the other hand, it refers to the degree of emotional stability (Tugade, Shiota, & Kirby, 2014). Nevertheless, there is every tendency for some individuals not to exhibit a clear tendency towards the aforementioned factors, those people can be perceived as moderate and reasonable personalities, though they belong to unprincipled and calculating set of persons. Considering the nexus between personality and political participation, it can be stated that social and political status exercised by some individuals coupled with their values and contributions to the society enhance level of participation of the people in politics. This submission is justified in the work of Galego and Oberski (2010) when they consider the mediation hypothesis of personality and political participation. According to them, personality showcases the way individuals interact in their environment which affects several outcomes among which political behavior belongs. Thus it is postulated that: Personality significantly influence political participation.

Networking

Networking has been perceived as the formation of individuals with the intention of collaborating towards achieving a particular goal. According to Engel (1993), networking in the context of civil society can be categorized into four activities namely; provision of services, learning together, advocacy and management. B provision of service, it revolves around sharing of information and training. Advocacy indicates collective effort to influence government decision while learning together gives opportunity to jointly identify problems that needed to be addressed. Management remains a unit for facilitating networking process. Form this view, networking is not just a mere collaborating of individuals and institutions toward common interest, but his to do with achieving 'social synergy'. Networking has also been perceived as the formation of individuals with the intention of collaborating towards achieving a particular goal. In this case, networking is shaped by motivation that warranted its formation (Liebler and Ferri, 2004). With this, formation of a network is tailored for a purpose. While many networks are formed to be sustained for a longer period, some networks are in response to specific stimuli designed for a particular time span. Nevertheless, most networks involve collaboration and joint activities for mutual partnership among the members (Todova and Knoke, 2005).According to Diana (2002), political activity is rooted in social structure which allows people's commitment to various networks that enhance individuals' political participation. In similar vein, mobilization of people for active participation in politics has also been strengthen via networking which is believed to be one of the underlying factors of turnout in electoral contest. Networking is also links to social and political activities ranging from voting in elections and other forms of civic rights exercised by the citizens. (Berger, 2009). Hence, the hypothesis formulated: networking significantly influence political participation.

Leadership

Leadership can be seen as a process in which a person influences others in achieving an organizational goal through a coherent and cohesive way. According to Ngambi, Cant and Heerdeen (2010), leadership is a process of influencing others' commitment towards realizing their full potential in achieving a value-added, shared vision with passion and integrity. The nature of this influence is such that the members of the team cooperate voluntarily with each other in order to achieve the objectives which the leader has set for each member, as well as for the group. Leadership is extremely important, both as a social phenomenon and a subject for scholarly investigation. Leadership is viewed as a set of behaviors by individuals in the context of the group or organization to which they belong (Humphries, 2003). The behavior that leaders use to interact with and lead their followers is developed over a period of time, depending on the experiences, education and training to which leaders have been exposed. According to Nelson and Campbell (2006), the behavioral perspective arose from the leadership research programmed conducted at the Ohio State University. The Ohio State University studies identified two main types of leadership behavior: task oriented and relationship-oriented.The leadership styles associated with these leadership behaviors are initiating structure and consideration (Bass and Bass, 2008). Researcher such as Yukl (2008) regard initiating structure (task oriented leadership) and consideration (human-oriented leadership) as the best classification of a leader's behavior and the most stable form of leadership styles. Both these styles have been found to have a positive impact on employee satisfaction,

performance, productivity and commitment. In this regard, Judge and Piccolo (2004) suggested that researchers should include these two styles of leadership in contemporary research.Studies have been conducted with regard to initiating structure and consideration leadership styles, as well as work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction and performance. In addition, studies have been done on employee participation and work-related attitudes such as commitment, satisfaction, productivity and effectiveness. Nevertheless, there is a lack of empirical studies that investigate the relationship between leadership styles and political participation of members from non-governmental organization in the Malaysian context. Thus, the hypothesis formulated is: leadership significantly influence political participation.

III.   METHODOLOGY

This research employed was a quantitative method which used survey based design using questionnaire. The unit of analysis is individual GPMS member. In essence, random sampling is adopted to enhance generalization of findings in order to reduce the potential of bias in selection of respondents. From the GPMS website, a total of 380 questionnaires were distributed and from the total, only 202 questionnaires were retrieved from respondents which represent 53.2%. However, due to incomplete information, only 181 questionnaires were usable for further analysis. With respect to measurement of variables, all of the measures used have been adopted form various sources. The information could be seen from Table 1. In some cases, modifications have been made to render them appropriate to the context of the study. The constructs were measured by Likert term scales which have appeared in the literature and acceptable reliability values. The scales for each of the items were arranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Findings

Based on the 181 questionnaires, the factor analysis was consulted and later followed with the reliability analysis. Table 1 showed the number of items for each measurement while Table 2 showed that the values of Cronbach Alpha were high and within acceptable range. To answer to the hypotheses developed in this study, the Pearson product moment correlation was utilized. This followed with multiple regression which assessed the strength of the relationship among the variables. The detailed information could be referred from Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 1: Measurements

Variables	No of items
1. Political Participation (PP) Van Deth (1986)	17
2. Leadership (L) Schriesscheim and stogdill (1975)	14
3. Networking (N) Forret and Dougherty (2004)	14
4. Personality (PER) Gary Yukl (1989)	25

Table 2: Reliability results

Construct	Reliability
Political Participation (PP)	0.958
Leadership (L)	0.865
Networking (N)	0.897
Personality (PER)	0.895

Table 3: Correlation among the variables

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	P	L	N	PER
PP	3.211	0.517	1			
L	3.905	0.357	0.252**	1		

N	3.768	0.444	0.338**	0.469**	1
PER	4.010	0.265	0.325**	0.335**	0.271**	1

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** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4: Multiple Regression on PP

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Variables	Beta	Sig
L	0.089	.292
PER	0.278**	.001
N	0.227**	.030
F-Value	15.545	
R^2	0.221	
Adjusted R^2	0.217	

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N= 181; ** p<0.01

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The results showed politics participation among the GPMS members are at the moderate level. This is seen from the value of mean 3.2. It should be noted that three predicting variables (Personality, Networking and Leadership style) were able to explain 22.1% of the model (R^2 = 0.221). From the findings, result indicates that among the three predicting variables, personality was found to predict the political participation. Based on the available results, this study substantiates the work of Mondak (2010) that sees personality as a strong factor in political efficacy. In this study, networking, was also found to predict the political participation. The result shows that networking style GPMS was a good predictor that significantly influences political participation among the Malay men and women. The result concurs with the study of Church (2003) that sees networking as a dynamic tool used in strengthening democratic setting. Similarly, the viability of networking to political participation has been justified by Diana (2002) who states that political activity is rooted in social structure which allows people's commitment to various networks that enhance individuals' political participation. However, the result shows that leadership style was not found to predict the political participation. The result shows that leadership style was not a good predictor of political participation for members (Malay men and women). The finding concurs with the argument of Bien, Riggio, Lowe and Carsten, (2013) who indicates that vision of a leader mush be shared and efforts to achieve it requires support from the followers. The results showcases that there is a kind of disconnection on the GPMS leaders and the followers which invariably has effect on the members' political participation.

V.   RECOMMENDATIONS
The findings of this study may provide some important insights to the present GPMS leaders in formulating more effective strategies to increase member's political participation. The current leaders should take more creative efforts and solutions in educating and communicating current GPMS members especially from who are young members either female and male members. More serious efforts need to be done either in formal or informal socialization activities in order to ensure good relationship and understanding between the leader and members. There is also a need to organize more programs to reach out to the different generational groups of members in GPMS. This study suggests that GPMS leaders should widen their scope and ensure a dynamic method of liaising with the youths. The organization should design a more robust way of recruiting members and the level of publicity needs to be strengthened to attract the younger ones to join GPMS. The association may also need to review its objectives and visions to incorporate modern technological know-how in reaching out to the people. The leaders can ensure high level of political participation among the Malay men and women if proper political orientation programs are introduced.

VI.   CONCLUSION
Being voluntary in nature, GPMS may encounter more challenges and difficulties in playing its role effectively. This study showed that personality and networking are more important than leadership in influencing political participation of the members. However, in order to achieve the goals and vision of the GPMS, leaders of this voluntary association need to take more dynamic roles and proactive measures in enhancing, maintaining and securing active participation from members of all levels. The GPMS needs to project itself as a dynamic organization that can compete with other international NGOs that are set up for youth empowerment.

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