



UNIVERSITY of LUSAKA
Passion for Quality Education: Our Driving Force

SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

RESEARCH REPORT

BY

THEREASA MWANGO CHAIMA

BPIR211482653

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STUDENTS AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA, PIONEER CAMPUS.**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DEGREE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
LUSAKA, 2025.**

Declaration

I, Thereasa Mwango Chaima, hereby declare that this research report titled “The Influence of Social Media on Political Engagement among Political Science and International Relations Students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus” is my original work. It has not been submitted, either in part or in full, for the award of any degree or diploma at any other institution of higher learning. All sources of information used in this report have been duly acknowledged.

Student’s Name: THEREASA MWANGO CHAIMA

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'T. Mwango Chaima', written over a horizontal line.

Supervisor Name: DR. WILSON SILUNGWE

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Dr. Wilson Silungwe', written over a horizontal line.

Date: 20th December, 2025

Dedication

This research is dedicated to the students who are passionate about shaping the future of our society through political engagement and activism.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the students who participated in this research and shared their valuable insights, which greatly contributed to the success of this study. My deepest appreciation also goes to my supervisor, Dr Wilson Silungwe, for his invaluable guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback throughout the course of this project. I am equally thankful to my colleagues for their continuous support and insightful contributions during the research process.

List of tables

Table 1: How often do you use social media to access political content..... 27

Table 2: To what extent do you agree that social media has influenced your political opinions 28

Table 3: How has social media changed the way you form political opinions..... 30

Table 4: Social media encourages me to participate in political activities..... 32

Table 5: Situations Where Social Media Motivated Political Action..... 34

Table 6: Increased Awareness of Political Issues..... 36

Table 7: Staying Updated and Interested in Politics 36

Table 8: Ways Social Media Enhanced Political Knowledge and Interest..... 37

List of figures

Figure 1: Conceptual framework	19
Figure 2: Gender distribution	25
Figure 3: Age distribution	26
Figure 4: Which social media platform most influences your political opinion	29
Figure 5: How frequently do you engage in political discussions or debates on social media	31
Figure 6: How likely are you to share political information or campaigns online	33
Figure 7: Daily Time Spent on Social Media for Political Information	35

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgement.....	iii
List of tables.....	iv
List of figures.....	v
Abstract	viii
CHAPTER ONE	2
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....	2
1.0 Introduction.....	2
1.1 Background of the study.....	2
1.2 Statement of the problem	5
1.3 Research objectives.....	5
1.4 General objectives	5
1.5 Specific objectives.....	6
1.6 Research Questions.....	6
1.7 Scope of the Study	6
1.8 Significance of the Study	6
1.9 Operational definitions	7
1.10 Chapter synthesis.....	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.0 Introduction.....	10
2.1 Empirical review	10
2.2 Theoretical Framework	14
2.3 Conceptual framework	16
2.4 Gaps in the literature	17
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	18
3.0 Introduction	18
3.1 Research Approach	18
3.2 Research Design.....	18
3.3 Study Population	18

3.4 Sample size.....	19
3.5 Sampling Technique.....	19
3.6 Data collection.....	19
3.7 Data Analysis.....	20
3.8 Reliability and Validity of Methodology	20
3.9 Ethical considerations	20
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION.....	21
4.0 Introduction.....	21
4.1 Respondents’ characteristics and classifications	21
Figure 3: Age distribution.....	22
4.2 Presentation and analysis of data	23
Table 2: To what extent do you agree that social media has influenced your political opinions.....	25
Figure 4: Which social media platform most influences your political opinion.....	26
Table 3: How has social media changed the way you form political opinions	27
Table 4: Social media encourages me to participate in political activities.....	30
Figure 6: How likely are you to share political information or campaigns online	31
Table 5: Situations Where Social Media Motivated Political Action	32
Table 6: Increased Awareness of Political Issues	34
Source: Author (2025).....	35
Table 8: Ways Social Media Enhanced Political Knowledge and Interest	36
4.3 Discussion of findings.....	37
5.0 Introduction.....	41
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	41
5.2 Conclusions.....	42
5.3 Recommendations to the Study.....	42
5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies.....	43
References	44

Abstract

This paper examined the role of social media in political participation among Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. It aimed to learn the role of social media platforms in influencing the political opinion of students, political participation and activism, and political awareness and interest. The study was designed in a descriptive case study design, but a mixed-method approach, that is, qualitative and quantitative data, was used. The respondents were 75 fourth-year students who were purposely chosen. The data were gathered by means of the structured questionnaires, both open and closed-ended, and analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

The results indicated that social media was a significant source of political opinion formation, as 64 per cent of the respondents reported that social media affected their political opinions. Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as the most influential platforms. The researchers also established that social media encouraged 67 per cent of students to engage in political activities, and 64 per cent of students were likely to share political content on the Internet, implying that digital interaction was closely connected with political activism. In addition, 70 per cent of the respondents stated that social media made them more politically aware, while 72 per cent indicated that social media kept them interested in and updated about political matters. Nevertheless, several challenges were also identified, including misinformation, political polarisation, and the presence of echo chambers, which necessitated a critical assessment of online political information.

The paper found that social media could be highly effective in political learning, mobilisation, and civic engagement when used responsibly. It recommended the incorporation of digital and media literacy courses into university curricula to enable students to develop the ability to critically analyse political information online. Furthermore, it suggested that policymakers, educators, and social media platforms should have worked collaboratively to encourage young people to become truthful and critical digital citizens.

Keywords: Social media, Political Engagement, Political participation, political awareness, misinformation, digital literacy, university students, Zambia.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Social media influenced how students from the Political Science and International Relations discipline at the University of Lusaka Pioneer Campus engaged politically, as Chapter One established. The chapter began by exploring how social media transformed political participation both globally and within Zambia, while demonstrating its dual effects on civic discourse and social fragmentation. The problem statement highlighted unclear understandings of how social media affected students' political engagement due to their exposure to misinformation and insufficient assessment of content authenticity.

The research objectives indicated that the study examined how social media shaped public opinion through various interaction patterns, assessed its influence on political activism, and developed approaches for fostering responsible online discourse. The research questions explored the mechanisms of influence and potential solutions in line with these objectives. The study focused on fourth-year Political Science and International Relations students, and its significance contributed to curriculum development, the shaping of political policies, and the advancement of contemporary academic practices. The chapter concluded by presenting operational definitions, which clarified key terms before proceeding to the analysis of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Social media are Internet-based applications which allow users to generate, share and exchange user-generated content as well as create online communities (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). They incorporate Facebook, X (then Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube and more recent applications, that is, these applications enable people to publish text, pictures, audio and video, to follow and communicate with other users, and to engage in community and personal discussions (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). As functions, social media are applied in personal communication, distribution of news and information, entertainment, organisation and mobilisation, brand-building and marketing, as well as in political communication and campaigning (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Liberini et al., 2025).

The use of social media has now become enormous: according to the analysis of the digital

industry, there are over five billion active social-media user identities in 2025 (or about two-thirds of the world population), and a very large portion of daily communication and political information flows are now passing through these sources (Kepios, 2025). On a national level, Zambia has experienced rapid development of the digital sector, too: towards the end of 2025 there have been approximately 7.29 million Internet users in Zambia and approximately 4.1 million social-media user identities (approximately 18-19% of the population), with online penetration remaining severely low compared to global averages but increasing at inordinate pace annually (DataReportal, 2025).

Political engagement (or political participation) is the spectrum of actions in which citizens seek to shape the decisions of the people and the leaders of the government, both by voting and joining political parties as well as by protesting, petitioning, communicating with authorities, civic discourse and cyber activism (Verba, Scholzman and Brady, 1995). The centrality of political science is that it connects the citizens to the institutions, influences the form of representation, influences the outcome of policies and is a major indicator of democratic health and political equality (Verba et al., 1995). Online scholars differentiate between the traditional, offline modes of participation and the more recent, networked forms of engagement (commenting, sharing political content, online petitions and digital organising) and investigate the interaction between them (Boulianne, 2015).

Empirical evidence is thriving on how social media is able to foster as well as misrepresent political participation. The meta-analytic research shows that there is a positive tendency related to the relationship between social-media regarding civic/political participation in general, with numerous studies revealing that the active use of social platforms correlates with an increase in information level, the discussions, and engagement in civic activities (Boulianne, 2015). Simultaneously, platforms can become the instrument of multiplying misinformation, polarising users and be employed as the tool of targeted persuasion or computational propaganda - the processes that change the nature of the political engagement and its direction instead of turning it up (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Kollanyi et al., 2017). According to the Afrobarometer 2021 Zambia findings, most Zambians who understand social media believe it assists them to be more informed and engaged citizens, despite the fact that most of them also state that they worry about misinformation and social conflicts related to online information (Afrobarometer, 2021).

Historically, social media have been given significant attention in some of the key political issues and election cycles. Facebook and Twitter were significant to the coordination of activities during

the Arab Spring (2010-11) and the quick spread of eyewitness information and global attention to demonstrations (Howard et al.; Smidi, 2017). Considered one of the landmark campaigns in the field of electoral politics, the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign is frequently mentioned as the point where micro-targeted political advertisements, the amplification of messages at a rapid pace, and the dissemination of misinformation on social media became the hallmarks of the campaigning process (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Williams, 2017). These situations demonstrate the two interconnected dynamics: political mobilisation can become cheaper and increased access to political information can be provided by social media, but it also allows manipulating information, asymmetric persuasion and viral propagation of polarising content (Fujiwara et al., 2021; Kollanyi et al., 2017).

Social media is becoming the common communication and campaign tool of moderators among politicians and other political actors. The platform tools are used by parties, candidates and interest groups to stream messages, make demographic segmentations, rally supporters, raise and manage reputations, and in many instances bypassing conventional media gatekeepers (Savvidis, 2024; Liberini et al., 2025). This tendency is observable in Zambia, where Facebook, WhatsApp groups and other applications are being used by political actors, the parties and youth movements to distribute campaign messages, organise rallies and frame events; the expectations raised by the Internet and social media are recorded by the surveys of the population (Afrobarometer, 2021).

The notion of influence in this paper refers to the ability of social media content, actors (such as opinion leaders and political elites), and platform dynamics to influence political knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. The two-step flow of classic theory of communication reminds us that media effects are usually indirect by way of opinion leaders who receive and re-distribute messages to their networks (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). Online influence can be both direct (through a post by a politician with its followers) and indirect (through sharing, commenting and peer endorsement), and it can have an impact on whether students attend political events, whether they change their voting intentions or engage in online/offline activism (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Boulianne, 2015).

The existence of these global and regional trends notwithstanding, the research literature has some significant gaps concerning how social media influences political engagement among students of the University of Lusaka, specifically political science and international relations students, in the Pioneer Campus. Here, such students are a very vital group since most of them will be the policy makers, analysts and public thinkers in future, and therefore it is important to know how social

platforms are shaping their political orientations, information habits and participation levels not only as a theory but in practice as well. Thus, this paper places the student body of the University of Lusaka in the context of global trends (massive social media reach, reported effects on participation) and acknowledges national limitations (lower internet penetration in Zambia and reported misinformation and political tensions issues) as outlined by the Afrobarometer and data reports on the digital industry (Afrobarometer, 2021; DataReportal, 2025).

1.2 Statement of the problem

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly influenced how people receive political content, particularly among young people and university students. Political science and international relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus, are exposed to political information, views, and debates on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok. While social media can enhance political participation and awareness, it also poses problems like the spread of misinformation, polarization, and superficial handling of politically sophisticated issues.

According to a 2023 Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism report, 74% of young adults aged 18-24 get news and information about politics through social media as their primary source. However, the same report cites that 52% of users end up with misinformation on such platforms, a cause for worry for the quality and reliability of political debate. In Zambia, as per a ZIPAR (2022) study, 68% of university students participate in discussions on political topics through social media, but only 34% scrutinize the authenticity of information being consumed. This gap emphasizes the need to investigate the impact of social media on political participation among Political science and international relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. It is for the justification above that this study seeks to address this gap by investigating the role of social media in shaping political opinions, its impact on political participation and activism, and proposing measures to ensure responsible political participation among Political science and international relations students.

1.3 Research objectives

1.4 General objectives

To investigate the influence of social media on political engagement among Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus.

1.5 Specific objectives

1. To examine the influence of social media platforms on the formation and shaping of political opinions among Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus.
2. To assess the influence of social media usage on students' political participation and activism at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus.
3. To analyse the influence of social media usage on students' levels of political awareness and political interest at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What influence do social media platforms have on the political opinions of Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus?
2. How does social media usage influence political participation and activism among students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus?
3. What is the influence of social media usage on students' political awareness and political interest at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus?

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focused on examining the influence of social media on political engagement among students pursuing Political Science and International Relations at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. The research was limited to undergraduate students enrolled in this academic programme during the 2025 academic year.

The study explored the extent of social media usage, the platforms commonly used, and how these platforms shaped political opinions, awareness, participation, and activism. Specifically, it investigated the relationship between social media exposure and students' levels of political interest and involvement.

The scope of the study did not extend to students in other faculties or campuses of the University of Lusaka, nor did it cover the broader population of young people or students in Zambia. In addition, the study did not examine the influence of traditional media or other offline forms of political engagement.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study were significant to several key stakeholders.

Firstly, academic institutions and curriculum developers benefited from the study, as the findings provided insights that could inform curriculum development and the integration of digital literacy and political communication content within academic programmes. Understanding how social media influenced students' political engagement assisted educators in designing learning approaches that aligned with contemporary digital realities.

Secondly, policymakers, political parties, and civic organizations benefited from the findings, as the results provided evidence-based insights that could be used to design more effective programmes and strategies aimed at promoting meaningful political discourse, awareness, and participation among young people through social media platforms.

Lastly, the study contributed to academic knowledge, particularly in the areas of political communication and youth engagement in the digital age. It also laid a foundation for future research on social media and political participation in similar institutional and national contexts.

1.9 Operational definitions

Social Media

In this study, social media referred to web-based digital platforms that enabled users to create, share, access, and interact with content and with one another in real time within online communities and networks (Hyder, 2024). Specifically, the study focused on Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube, as these were the platforms most commonly used by students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus, for accessing and engaging with political content (Hyder, 2024).

Political Engagement

Political engagement referred to the level and manner in which individuals became involved in political processes and activities. This study, it included students' political awareness, interest, opinion formation, participation, and activism, such as following political content online, engaging in political discussions on social media, expressing political views, and taking part in political actions both online and offline (Hyder, 2024).

Political Participation and Activism

Political participation and activism refer to actions undertaken by individuals with the intention of influencing political decisions, policies, or public opinion (Hyder, 2024). In the context of this study, this included both traditional and digital forms of participation such as voting, attending political meetings, signing online petitions, participating in online campaigns, sharing or creating political content, engaging in hashtag activism, and mobilizing others through social media

platforms.

Influence

Influence referred to the extent to which exposure to social media content affected students' political attitudes, beliefs, awareness, interests, and behaviours (Hyder, 2024). In this study, influence was examined in terms of how social media shaped political opinions, increased political awareness, stimulated political interest, and encouraged political participation and activism among students.

Political Opinions

Political opinions referred to students' personal views, attitudes, and judgments regarding political issues, leaders, policies, and governance matters, which were formed or shaped through exposure to political information, discussions, and debates on social media platforms (Hyder, 2024).

Political Awareness

Political awareness referred to the level of knowledge and understanding students possessed about political issues, events, institutions, and processes, particularly as acquired through political content accessed via social media platforms (Hyder, 2024).

Political Interest

Political interest referred to the degree of attention, curiosity, and concern students showed toward political matters, including their willingness to follow political news, engage with political content on social media, and participate in political discussions and activities (Hyder, 2024).

Misinformation

Misinformation is information that is false or inaccurate and is spread without regard for intent to deceive. It may breed misunderstanding and misinformed choices among the public (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018).

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the capability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively in a variety of digital formats or modes, including technology that may be wired, wireless, or functionally other. These skills often encompass the understanding of digital tools and platforms required to participate in online settings (Hargittai, 2010).

1.10 Chapter synthesis

The research is divided into five chapters to explore completely how social media shapes political engagement among University of Lusaka Pioneer Campus Political Science and International Relations students.

Chapter 1: The first chapter of this work presents an introduction that includes background material with a problem statement, while defining research objectives and developing research questions along with the significance of the study and operational definitions, and outlining the study's scope. The introduction serves as the original foundation for the entire research by demonstrating the background and reason behind the investigation.

Chapter 2: The chapter comprises an evaluation of existing studies conducted across worldwide, regional, and local areas. The study utilizes two essential theoretical bases, which are the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Agenda-Setting Theory. This study addresses the areas where previous research remains deficient, according to the findings presented in the conclusion.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and procedures that were used in the study receive a detailed description in Chapter Three. The section provides details about the research methodology, along with an explanation of the design and population selection and their corresponding sampling techniques, as well as methods for data collection and data analysis procedures. The research describes its ethical framework together with the methods which enhance both the validity and reliability of its results.

Chapter 4: The findings derived from data collection appear in Chapter Four through various presentation formats, which consist of tables, graphs and charts. The chapter applies comprehensive analysis techniques to interpret results that support the objectives along with the research questions of this investigation.

Chapter 5: Chapter Five delivers an outline of fundamental research outcomes along with research-based conclusions, professional practice recommendations and future investigation opportunities. The research addresses its significant contributions to knowledge and outlines potential investigation directions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

A review of the related literature on the influence of social media on political participation is offered in Chapter Two. The review covers empirical ones: worldwide, regionally, and locally. Past studies and their findings are examined. The chapter goes on to the theoretical framework, identifying and explaining key theories informing the study. Next comes the conceptual framework, which graphically articulates the relationship between critical variables in the study. The chapter will end by identifying the gaps in the existing literature, thus justifying the current research.

2.1 Empirical review

The section includes a proven analysis of existing academic work which discusses social media influence on political engagement among students at tertiary institutions. The study employed a research design to explore the phenomenon across worldwide, regional and local levels.

2.1.1 Influence of Social Media on Students' Political Opinions

Global Perspective

Globally, a lot of research has shown that social media plays an important role in forming and shaping the political views of university students. The research by Alarqan (2020) is a quantitative study, in which the researcher surveyed students at the Al-Alaluyah University, located in Jordan, in their degree major of Political Science and International Relations, to understand the effect of social media and politics on political efficacy and opinion formation. The study measured variables, including frequency of use of social media, exposure to content of political nature, intensity and perceived political competence through the use of structured questionnaires that were administered on a sample population of 495 students. The results found that the more students were exposed to a lot of political content, such as Facebook and Twitter, the stronger their political opinions and the more they believed in their ability to express their political opinions. The research also found that the interactive nature of social media, such as commenting and sharing, increased critical participation on political matters. Alarqan (2020) has come up with the conclusion that social media serves as an informal political learning space and is largely influential in forming the political views of students.

On the same note, Theocharis and Quintelier (2016) investigated how social media affected the political opinion of the youth in various European democracies. The study evaluated the basis of exposure to political discussions on social networking sites on political attitudes using cross-national survey data and regression. The findings indicated that students with active participation in online political debates had greater chances of becoming firm in their political views and ideological preferences. Notably, the researchers discovered that among the youth who are yet to become politically oriented, social media played a more significant role in opinion shaping, implying that online communication is a trigger to the process of political socialisation. These results can be applied to the current research since they emphasize the influence of social media in shaping the opinions of higher education students.

Regional Perspective

In Africa, social media is becoming a more dominant platform in the formation of political opinions among students in the university. Dasno et al. (2023) examined the social media effect on civic and political perceptions among communication students in Ghana. The research used a quantitative survey with purposive sampling, where 200 students studying in three institutions of higher learning were used. Some of the variables studied were the political information exposure, belief in online sources and perceived credibility of the content in the social media. The results showed that those students who regularly read political news on Facebook formed better political views on how the government should run, corruption and how politicians should account for their elections. The researchers came to the conclusion that social media sites are powerful opinion-forming spaces where political discourses are built and strengthened among the young generation.

Mukhongo (2022) carried out mixed-methods research in Kenya based on the political behaviour of university students during elections. The results showed that social media had a huge impact on the political opinions of the students by setting the political agenda and exposing certain players in politics. Students said that their political preferences and views of candidates were affected by recurring exposure to political messages on social media. This research concluded that social media has a vital agenda-setting role in influencing the political opinion of the youth.

Local Perspective

Banda (2021) also studied political information use by University of Zambia students in the 2021 General Elections in Zambia. Basing his research on a mixed-method design that incorporated surveys and in-depth interviews, the researcher concluded that Facebook and Twitter were the most used social media sites among the students in getting information about politics. The results indicated

that political content found on social media had a great impact on the political views of the students in terms of their alignment with a party, as well as perceptions on political leadership. The author found that social media is the focal point of forming political opinions among students of Zambian universities, especially in election years (Banda, 2021).

Another study by Chibwe (2019) explored the issue of youth political participation in Zambia through qualitative methods of interviewing and focus group discussions with students of different universities. The research observed that students depended on social media immensely to make sense of the political events that, as a result, were applied to their political views and ideological standpoints. The paper has pointed out the increasing prominence of social media as a political opinion-making platform among the youth in Zambia.

2.1.2 Influence of Social Media on Students' Political Participation and Activism

Global Perspective

On the international scene, various studies indicate that social media plays an important role in political participation and activism among students. In their investigation of the role of social media in political participation among students in universities, Sesli and Guven (2024) used a mixed-methods case study design. The qualitative interviews were used to supplement quantitative survey data in order to measure both behavioural and attitudinal aspects of participation. The results revealed that the more students actively had political conversations on social media, the more they were likely to attend protests, online campaigns and political advocacy. The research process found that social media reduces the cost of participation and enables political mobilisation of students through social media.

Barati (2023) investigated the causal effect of social media on the political participation of the youth in the United States through the use of sophisticated econometric models. The research revealed that the use of social media influenced the online political participation (digital campaigning and petition signing) positively. The offline political activity effects, like voting, were, however, minimal. This research was able to conclude that social media increases digital activism, but not necessarily the translation to traditional political participation.

Regional Perspective

Abraham (2023) carried out a descriptive survey study at Delta State University in Nigeria to determine the effect of social media on political involvement on campus. The research based on structured questionnaires available to 340 undergraduate students concluded that WhatsApp and Facebook were popular tools used to mobilise students in relation to political meetings, debates and

elections. The results showed that social media enhanced participation in politics a great deal by allowing quick communication and coordination. The research came to the conclusion that social media is an effective mobilisation tool in the political life of the university.

Adegbola and Gearhart (2019) discovered in South Africa that social media also played a key role in youth activism, as it allowed organising protests and political coordination of university students. The research has emphasized the influence of social media in perpetuating political activism when there is political discontentment.

Local Perspective

Chibwe (2019) in Zambia discovered social media platforms used in mobilising the university students in the political arena, including protests, online advocacy and electoral campaigns. Students claimed that social media helped them to mobilise and act in a united way through efficient sharing of information.

Mwanza (2022) also studied the political participation of university students in Lusaka and discovered that more frequent users of social media had a high possibility of engaging in political campaigns and civic life compared to the less active users. The paper has concluded that social media has been at the forefront of encouraging political participation among the young Zambians.

2.1.3 Influence of Social Media on Students' Political Awareness and Interest

Global Perspective

Studies across the world have consistently indicated that social media has a bearing on the field of political awareness and interest in students. In a detailed meta-analysis of 36 empirical studies, Boulianne (2015) has discovered that there is a strong positive correlation between the use of social media and political awareness. It was concluded that social media brings more interest to politics by exposing users to a variety of political content and discussing politics.

Similar results were reported by Gil de Zuniga et al. (2017), who found that there was a great increase in the levels of political awareness and interest among university students, especially when interactivity with political information was demonstrated by users of social media.

Regional Perspective

In Africa, Dasno et al. (2023) found that exposure to social media increased the awareness of the students regarding civic rights and political processes. Students who got into the political materials on social media frequently showed greater interest and political knowledge.

Ssewakiryanga (2021) discovered that in Uganda, social media played a vital role in enhancing political awareness among university students, especially when there was an election.

Local Perspective

In the local context, Banda (2021) developed a fact that students of Zambian universities, who used social media as a source of political information, had a higher level of political awareness and interest as compared to students who used traditional media. The research was critical that social media has a significant educational value in political education among the students.

Mbewe (2020) also discovered that exposure to social media kept the political interest among university students alive, as students were in constant contact with the political argumentations and discussions.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch (1973). Based on this theory, individuals actively seek media to satisfy specific needs, for example, information, entertainment, or social contact. Contrary to earlier media theories emphasizing the powerful influence of media over passive audiences, UGT emphasizes the agency of audiences, arguing that individuals utilize media based on their own needs and motivations.

Key Assumptions

1. Audiences are not merely passive receivers of the media message.
2. Individuals select the content of media on needs and gratification grounds.
3. The same media is for different purposes by different people.
4. The same media is not equally powerful to all audiences; the use is what matters.

Importance to the Study

In this research, UGT explains the use of social media for politics by students of political science and international relations at the University of Lusaka. Students will use social media websites to gather political information, while others will utilize them for political activism or debate. This aligns with the study's first objective, which investigates the role of social media in shaping the political opinions of students. With an understanding of why students are motivated to access political content on social media websites, researchers can ascertain how much social media websites aid political participation and discussion.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory was developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The theory posits that the media does not determine what people think, but rather what they think about,

by giving greater emphasis and visibility to certain issues over others. Through repeated coverage and prominence, the media elevate selected issues to public importance.

In the context of social media, agenda-setting is no longer controlled solely by traditional media institutions. Instead, the agenda is shaped by multiple actors, including mainstream media organizations, political actors, social media influencers, opinion leaders, and ordinary users. These actors set the agenda through activities such as posting content, using hashtags, sharing news, commenting, liking, and amplifying specific political topics, which then become visible through trending lists, algorithmic recommendations, and viral circulation.

Key Assumptions of Agenda-Setting Theory

1. Media platforms play a significant role in shaping public agendas by selecting, emphasizing, and repeatedly presenting certain issues.
2. Issues that receive greater visibility and frequency in the media are perceived by audiences as more important.
3. On social media, agenda-setting is a participatory process where agendas are jointly shaped by media organizations, political elites, influencers, and users through interactive features such as sharing, liking, commenting, and hashtag use.

Importance of the Theory to the Study

Agenda-setting theory was relevant to this study because it explained how social media influenced political opinions, awareness, interest, participation, and activism among Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp exposed students to politically salient issues that were prioritized through trending topics, repeated sharing, and algorithmic amplification.

By identifying who set the political agenda on social media--including political leaders, media houses, activists, influencers, and peers the theory helped explain how students' political attention was directed toward specific issues. This directly supported the study's objective of examining the impact of social media on students' political engagement and activism, as it enabled the assessment of how online agendas shaped students' political discussions, interests, and levels of participation in both online and offline political activities.

2.3 Conceptual framework

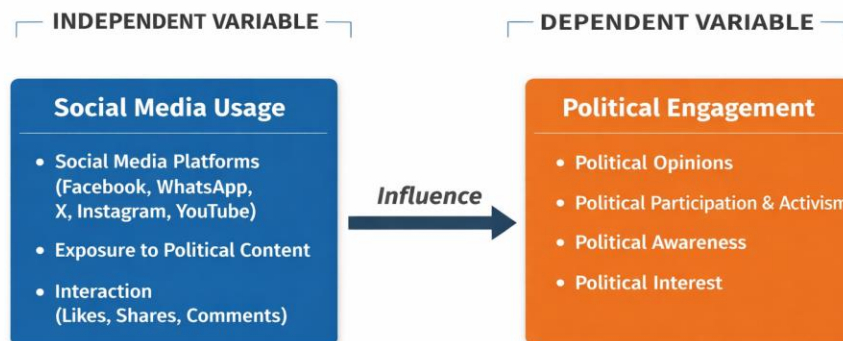


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Author (2025)

Narration of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between social media usage, which is the independent variable, and political engagement, which is the dependent variable, among Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus.

Social media usage was conceptualized in terms of the platforms used by students, namely Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube, as well as students' exposure to political content and their level of interaction through activities such as liking, sharing, and commenting on political information. These aspects represent the key ways through which students engage with political content on social media platforms.

Political engagement, as the dependent variable, was examined through four core dimensions that formed the focus of the study: political opinions, political participation and activism, political awareness, and political interest. The framework assumes that increased exposure to and interaction with political content on social media influences how students form and shape their political opinions, enhances their awareness and interest in political issues, and affects their levels of participation and activism.

Overall, the framework demonstrates that social media serves as a critical channel through which political information is disseminated and discussed, thereby influencing students' political

engagement in line with the study's general and specific objectives.

2.4 Gaps in the literature

Although the literature has significantly discussed the effect of social media on the political activity of university students (worldwide, regionally and locally), many gaps still exist. For example, most of the research has been conducted on the measurement of online participation, yet they do not prepare a way in which such digital activities should be reflected in physical political participation and enduring civic participation. In Zambia, research regarding the University of Lusaka's Pioneer Campus, but more particularly for the Political science and international relations students, is lacking owing to the general terminologies of regional and global studies. Also, the relationship between the critical thinking abilities of the students and the consequences of misinformation has not been widely examined. Moreover, research in the area of understanding how specific social media platforms (WhatsApp, TikTok) impact the political academic discourse among Political science and international relations students is weakly studied. For instance, as was reported by a study by Banda (2021), the role of social media was borrowed heavily by citizenship students of the University of Zambia in forming political views, but the critical thinking factor was not identified or reflected on offline political participation. Similarly, Chibwe (2019) relied on the significance of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp in political discussions among the Zambian university students, but did not develop the dimensions of misinformation or the shift from online to offline political action. According to a report by Reuters Institute to the Study of Journalism (2023), which states that 74% of respondents aged between 18-24 years use social media as their main source of information on political affairs and that 52% of respondent's users of social media experienced misinformation, which is also one of the findings that is cause of concern in the context of quality and authenticity of the political debate. Equally, a ZIPAR (2022) study in Zambia discovered that 68 percent of students in universities argue politically on social media, but only 34 percent of them check the information obtained. This finding shows a gap between social media use and its impact on political engagement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter described the research methodology that was employed to examine the influence of social media on the political engagement of Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. The chapter was organised into sections covering the research approach, research design, study population, sample size, sampling technique, data collection instruments, data analysis procedures, reliability and validity, and ethical considerations. Each methodological choice was justified using relevant literature in political communication and social science research.

3.1 Research Approach

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative component enabled the measurement of patterns, relationships, and levels of influence using structured Likert-scale items, while the qualitative component allowed for deeper exploration of students' perceptions and experiences regarding social media and political engagement. Mixed-methods research was considered appropriate because it provided a comprehensive understanding of both the extent and nature of social media influence on political opinions, participation, and awareness among students (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive case study design, focusing on fourth-year Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. The case study design was suitable because it allowed for an in-depth examination of a specific group within its real-life context, particularly how social media influenced political engagement within an academic environment (Yin, 2018). The descriptive nature of the design enabled the researcher to systematically describe trends, perceptions, and relationships without manipulating variables.

3.3 Study Population

The target population of the study consisted of all fourth-year students enrolled in the Bachelor of Political Science and International Relations programme at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus, during the period of data collection. According to faculty records, the actual population size was 300 fourth-year students, comprising both Political Science and International Relations students.

Fourth-year students were selected because they had advanced exposure to political theory, governance studies, and international relations, which enhanced their ability to critically engage with political content on social media. Their academic maturity and prolonged interaction with political discourse made them a suitable population for examining the influence of social media on political engagement (Banda, 2021).

3.4 Sample size

The sample size was determined from the known population of 300 fourth-year Political Science and International Relations students using Slovin's formula, which is appropriate when the population size is known, and the researcher seeks a representative sample (Yamane, 1967).

$$N = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{300}{1 + 300 \cdot (0.10)^2} = 75 \text{ Students}$$

Therefore, a sample of 75 fourth-year Political Science and International Relations students was drawn from the total population of 300 students.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling to select respondents from the fourth-year cohort. This technique was used to ensure that participants had sufficient academic background and exposure to political discourse and social media use. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study sought information-rich cases capable of providing relevant and informed responses regarding political engagement and social media influence (Patton, 2015).

3.6 Data collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three sections aligned with the study objectives:

- influence of social media on political opinions,
- influence on political participation and activism, and
- influence on political awareness and interest.

The closed-ended items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), to quantify levels of influence. Likert scales were suitable because they allowed respondents to express degrees of agreement and enabled statistical analysis of attitudes and perceptions (Likert, 1932).

The questionnaire also included a limited number of open-ended questions to allow respondents to elaborate on their experiences and views. This combination strengthened the depth and reliability of the data collected (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data through data coding and repeated pattern discovery. The thematic process is implemented in three stages: first, perform open coding, then move on to axial coding for grouping concepts and finally, apply selective coding to develop primary research-oriented themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis stands out as a widely adopted method for qualitative research since it offers structured flexibility to handle data effectively in social and political explorations (Flick, 2014). Descriptive analysis was utilized for closed-ended questions, carrying out frequencies and percentages for the data collected.

3.8 Reliability and Validity of Methodology

To ensure reliability and validity, a pilot study involving 10 fourth-year Political Science and International Relations students was conducted before the main data collection. The pilot study helped to assess the clarity, consistency, and relevance of the questionnaire items. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the instrument.

Content validity was further enhanced through expert review by lecturers in Political Science and International Relations, who assessed whether the items adequately captured the concept of social media influence. Reliability was ensured through consistency checks of Likert-scale responses (Creswell, 2014).

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001).

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by excluding names and personal identifiers from the questionnaire. Data were used strictly for academic purposes. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Lusaka Ethical Review Board, in line with institutional and international research ethics standards (Creswell, 2013).

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.0 Introduction

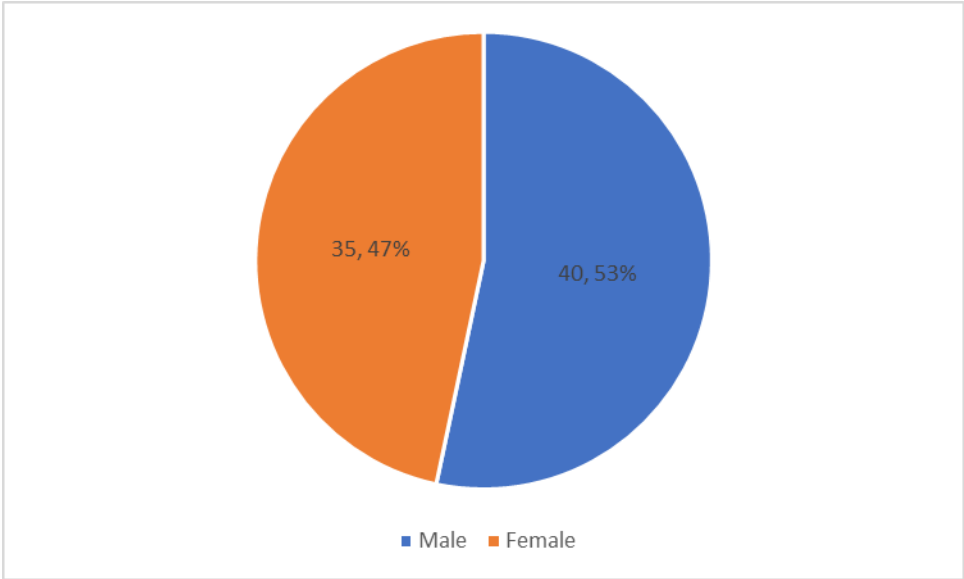
This chapter introduces, discusses, and explains the research findings gathered on the topic of the role of social media in political participation among the students of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. This chapter aims to give a comprehensive record of the empirical data which was produced after the questionnaires were administered and how they answered the research questions and objectives of the study. Tables, figures, and narrative interpretations are used to present the data, both in quantitative frequencies and percentages, and qualitative themes based on open-ended answers.

The discussion of this chapter is organized by the three definite aims of the research: first, the influence of social media platforms on the political opinion of students; second, the influence of social media on the political participation and activism of students; and third, the influence of social media on the political awareness and interest of students. The objectives are analyzed and discussed individually, and the evidence of the respondents is used to determine the emerging patterns and trends.

4.1 Respondents' characteristics and classifications

This section presents the demographic characteristics and classifications of the respondents who participated in the study. The information includes respondents' academic programme and year of study, which provides contextual background for interpreting the findings of the research. Understanding the characteristics of the respondents is important as it helps to situate the analysis of social media influence within the academic and disciplinary context of Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus.

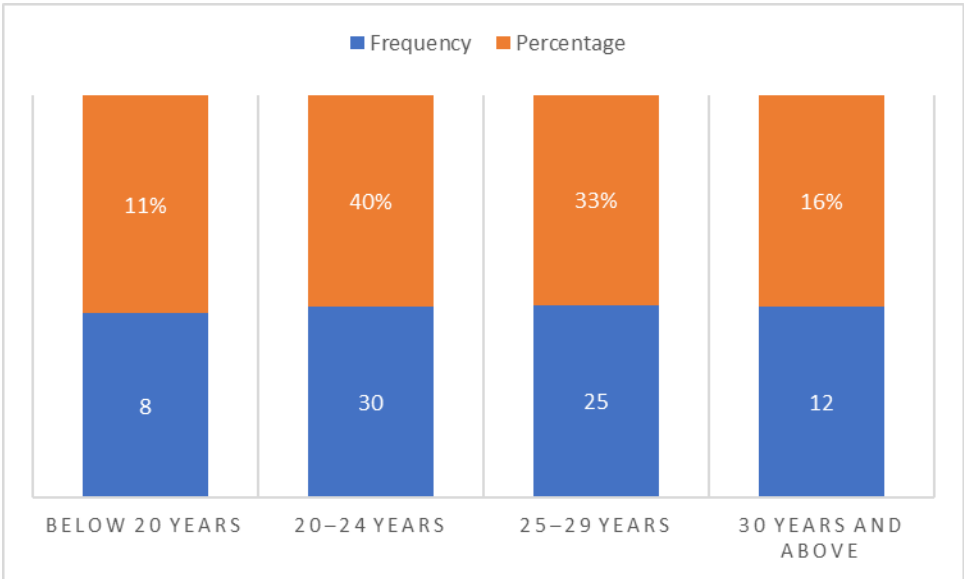
Figure 2: Gender distribution



Source: Author (2025)

The research sample size was 75 participants, of whom 40 (53%) were male and 35 (47%) were female. The close Correlation of male and female respondents reduces gender bias and gives both groups a fair representation towards a fair perspective of how social media affects political opinion between genders.

Figure 3: Age distribution



Source: Author (2025)

Figure 2 above shows the age distribution of respondents, of which 30 or 40% were between 20-24 years, 25-29 years (25 respondents, 33%), was the largest. The categories of those under 20 years were 8 (11%), and those aged 30 and above were 12 (16%). The findings indicate that younger adults (20-29 years) are the primary users of social media and, hence, most likely exposed to political information on the internet.

4.2 Presentation and analysis of data

This section presents and analyses the data collected from fourth-year Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. The presentation of data is organised according to the three specific objectives of the study, ensuring direct alignment between the research objectives, the data collected, and the analysis. Data are presented using tables and figures, supported by narrative explanations to facilitate interpretation and discussion of the findings.

Objective 1: To investigate the influence of social media platforms in shaping students' political opinions.

This objective sought to examine the extent to which social media platforms influence the formation and shaping of political opinions among Political Science and International Relations students. To achieve this objective, a number of statements relating to exposure to political content, opinion formation, and expression of political views on social media were presented to the respondents using a Likert scale. The responses obtained from the participants are presented in tables and figures, followed by descriptive analysis and narrative interpretation to explain emerging patterns and trends.

Frequency of social media use for political content

Respondents were asked how often they use social media platforms to access political content. Their responses are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: How often do you use social media to access political content

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Never	5	7%
Rarely	10	13%
Sometimes	20	27%
Often	26	35%
Very often	14	19%
Total	75	100%

Source: Author (2025)

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents visit social media to receive political content rather frequently. A total of 54% (26 respondents often and 14 respondents very often) use social media to access political information, as opposed to 20% (5 respondents never and 10 respondents rarely) who have low use. The other 27 per cent (20 respondents) occasionally read political content online with moderate but regular exposure. This trend demonstrates that a large percentage of students rely on social media to obtain political news, which indicates the increased centrality of such platforms as Facebook, X (Twitter) and WhatsApp to political communication. Because of the high frequency of use, it can be stated that social media has become the main source of information through which the students can keep updated, debate the policies and monitor the political events in the country or globally.

Influence of social media on political opinions

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that social media has influenced their political opinions. Their responses are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: To what extent do you agree that social media has influenced your political opinions

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	6	8%
Disagree	9	12%
Neutral	12	16%
Agree	30	40%
Strongly agree	18	24%
Total	75	100%

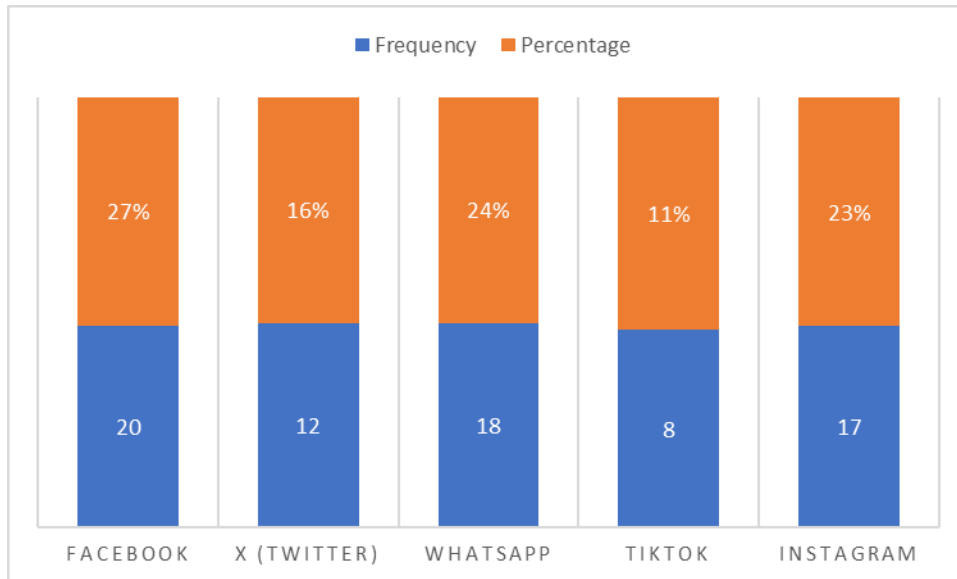
Source: Author (2025)

Table 2 shows to what extent does social media influences the political opinion of respondents, and it is seen that 64% (48 respondents) agreed with the opinion or strongly agreed that social media has affected their political opinions. Only a fifth (15 respondents) of the respondents said that they disagreed or strongly disagreed, with a further 16 per cent (12 respondents) being neutral. Such findings indicate that social media is the dominant force in the development of political beliefs among students in universities. This degree of agreement indicates that the sustained exposure to online debates, news and discussions affects the way students deliberate upon governance, policies and politics among the political leaders. The 16 per cent neutrality can be the people who consume political information without necessarily having to alter their views. All in all, the information shows that social media can be used as a learning platform and a form of influence in shaping political views among educated young people.

Most influential social media platform

Respondents were asked which social media platform most influenced their political opinions. Their responses are presented in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Which social media platform most influences your political opinion



Source: Author (2025)

Figure 4 shows the results of which social media platforms have the strongest impact on the political opinion of students. The most dominant platform is Facebook, as it was chosen by 27 per cent of the respondents (20 students). This is closely followed by WhatsApp, which was used by 24 per cent of the sample (18 students). X (previously Twitter) is the third platform that has the highest impact, as 16% of the students (12 people) have selected it. Last in the line are Instagram and TikTok, whose 11% (8 students) and 23% (17 students) of the respondents reported them as the most influential, respectively. This distribution highlights that the sites, which are mostly aimed at thorough text-based communication, news dissemination, and closed-group discussions, are Facebook and WhatsApp, and have the most significant influence on the formation of political views among Political Science and International Relations students.

Ways social media has changed political opinion formation

Respondents were asked to explain how social media has changed the way they form political opinions. The thematic responses obtained are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: How has social media changed the way you form political opinions

Theme	Frequency
Increased exposure to diverse views	28
Fast updates and real-time news	18
Echo chambers/confirmation bias	10
Misinformation / fake news	9
Engagement through discussion and debate	6
Polarisation of opinions	3
Simplified or short-form political information	1

Source: Author (2025)

The findings indicate that social media has influenced political opinion formation in several ways among the respondents. The most dominant theme was increased exposure to diverse views, reported by 28 respondents (37%). These respondents indicated that social media broadened their political perspectives beyond traditional media and immediate social environments. One respondent explained that *“I now see different sides of political issues from people all over the country, not just what’s on TV.”*

Fast updates and real-time news emerged as the second most common theme, mentioned by 18 respondents (24%). Respondents noted that the speed at which political information circulates online affects how quickly they form opinions. As one participant stated, *“Social media gives instant political news, so I form opinions faster based on what’s trending.”*

Concerns about echo chambers and confirmation bias were raised by 10 respondents (13%), who acknowledged that their online interactions often reinforce existing beliefs. One respondent observed that *“I tend to follow pages that support my views, so I mostly see opinions I already agree with.”*

Misinformation was cited by 9 respondents (12%), who expressed concern that false or misleading content could distort political perceptions. One respondent remarked that *“sometimes false information shared online affects how I view certain politicians.”*

Engagement through discussion and debate was highlighted by 6 respondents (8%), who felt that interacting with others online helped refine their political views. As one participant explained, *“discussing politics in comment sections helps me shape my views through debate.”*

A smaller proportion of respondents, 3 respondents (4%), pointed to political polarisation, suggesting that online debates often intensify extreme positions. One respondent stated that *“people argue a lot online, and it makes opinions more extreme.”*

Finally, 1 respondent (1%) mentioned simplified or short-form political content as influential, noting that *“short videos and memes make it easier to understand issues, even if they oversimplify.”*

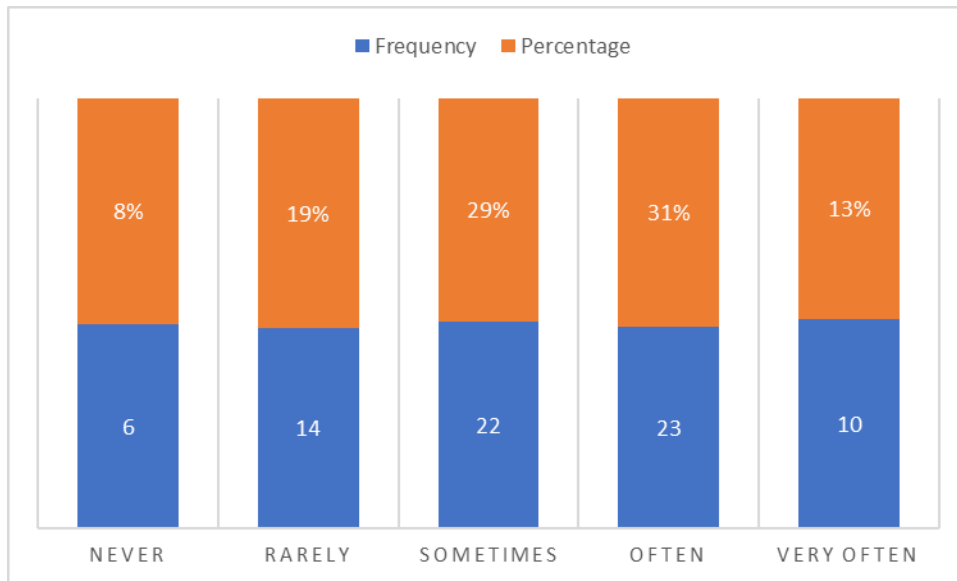
Objective 2: To explore the effects of social media on students’ political participation and activism.

This objective aimed to assess how social media influences students’ involvement in political activities and activism, both online and offline. To address this objective, respondents were presented with statements relating to political discussions, mobilisation, participation in campaigns, and engagement in political actions facilitated through social media platforms. The responses are presented in tabular and graphical form and are analysed using descriptive statistics, supported by narrative explanations.

Engagement in political discussions on social media

Respondents were asked how frequently they engage in political discussions or debates on social media platforms. Their responses are presented in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: How frequently do you engage in political discussions or debates on social media



Source: Author (2025)

Figure 5 demonstrates the existence of moderately, although not excessively, active students in political discussion. The majority of respondents, 31 per cent of them, or 23 students, stated that they do it "Sometimes." This is then followed by those who do so "Often", which stands at 29 per cent (22 students). Taken together, these two groups show that a rock-solid majority of 60% of the students are having political debates regularly. At the lower end of the scale, 19% of the respondents (14 students) said that they participate "Rarely", and a very small minority (8 students) indicated that they never participate. The distribution of this kind of picture creates a view of an active academic community in which a large number are comfortable with the idea of political debate via the internet occasionally, and a large group of individuals are regular participants. Nonetheless, it also reveals that a significant portion of people are still placed on the periphery of these online political debates, which indicates that they are more or less comfortable, interested, or time-consuming in this type of interaction.

Social media encouragement of political participation

Respondents were asked to indicate whether social media encourages them to participate in political activities such as voting, attending rallies, or signing petitions. Their responses are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Social media encourages me to participate in political activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	7	9%
Disagree	8	11%
Neutral	10	13%
Agree	32	43%
Strongly agree	18	24%
Total	75	100%

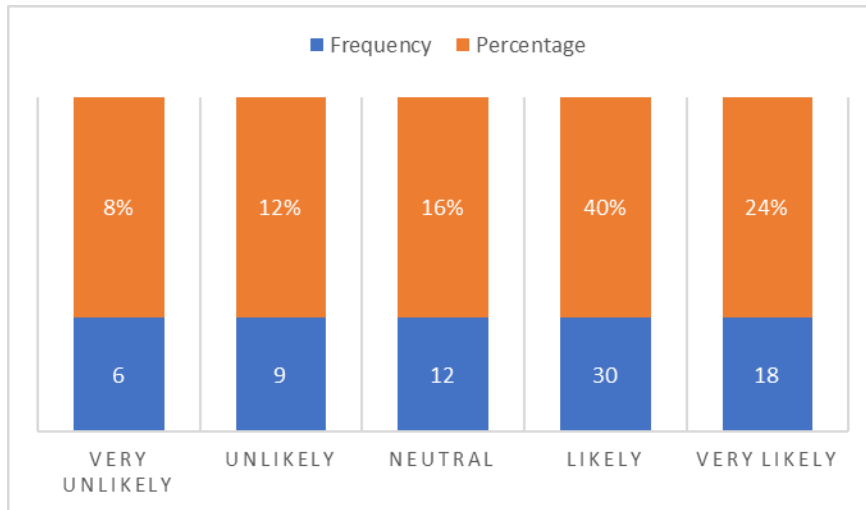
Source: Author (2025)

The findings show that 67% (50 respondents) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that social media stimulates them to participate in political processes, like voting, campaigning, or political discussions. Only 20% (15 respondents) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 13 percent (10 respondents) did not give an answer. The thorough pronouncement shows that social media is a mobilizing platform that makes it inspiring to take part in digital and physical political activities. Social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and X make this engagement easy because the user can easily interact with the platform and be linked to the causes, petitions, or other advocacy groups. Thus, social media plays the role of a source of information as well as a driver in the political arena in terms of participation.

Likelihood of sharing political information or campaigns online

Respondents were asked how likely they are to share political information or campaigns on social media platforms. Their responses are presented in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: How likely are you to share political information or campaigns online



Source: Author (2025)

The results above show that the majority of respondents 64% are disposed to share, with 40 per cent (30 students) responding that they are Likely to do so and 24 per cent (18 students) of those answering that they are Very Likely. This means that more than half of the population of students is not only an active spectator but is also willing to share political content actively in their online circles. Conversely, 20 per cent (15) of the total students said that they were not willing to share as they were either Unlikely (12 per cent) or Very Unlikely (8 per cent). 16 per cent of the sample (12 students) adopted a neutral position. This distribution implies that social media is an effective medium of spreading political information among these students since the behaviour of the activist 64% would greatly enhance the extent of the spread of political messages. Nevertheless, this large number of students who are neither supportive nor opposing (36%) points to a section that favours consuming over sharing political material, perhaps owing to fear of controversy, false information or confidentiality.

Situations where social media-motivated political action

Respondents were asked to describe situations in which social media motivated them or someone they know to take political action. The thematic responses are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Situations Where Social Media Motivated Political Action

Theme	Frequency
Participation in rallies, petitions, or voting	30
Real-time mobilisation and updates	20
Exposure to political issues leading to action	17
Misinformation-driven political action	8

Source: Author (2025)

The findings demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in motivating political action among students. The most prominent theme was participation in political activities such as rallies, petitions, and voting, reported by 30 respondents (40%). These respondents explained that exposure to political campaigns and calls to action online directly encouraged their involvement. One respondent stated, *“I joined a youth rally after seeing the campaign shared on Facebook.”* Real-time mobilisation and updates were cited by 20 respondents (27%), who emphasised the importance of timely information in facilitating immediate action. As one participant explained, *“When updates about voter registration deadlines were posted online, I quickly registered.”* Exposure to political issues leading to mobilisation was reported by 17 respondents (23%). These respondents indicated that seeing political problems discussed online increased their motivation to act. One respondent noted that *“seeing videos about corruption online made me more determined to vote for change.”* However, 8 respondents (11%) highlighted misinformation-driven political action as a concern. These respondents cautioned that inaccurate information circulating on social media sometimes led to misguided activism. One participant stated that *“some people attended a protest based on wrong information circulating on WhatsApp.”*

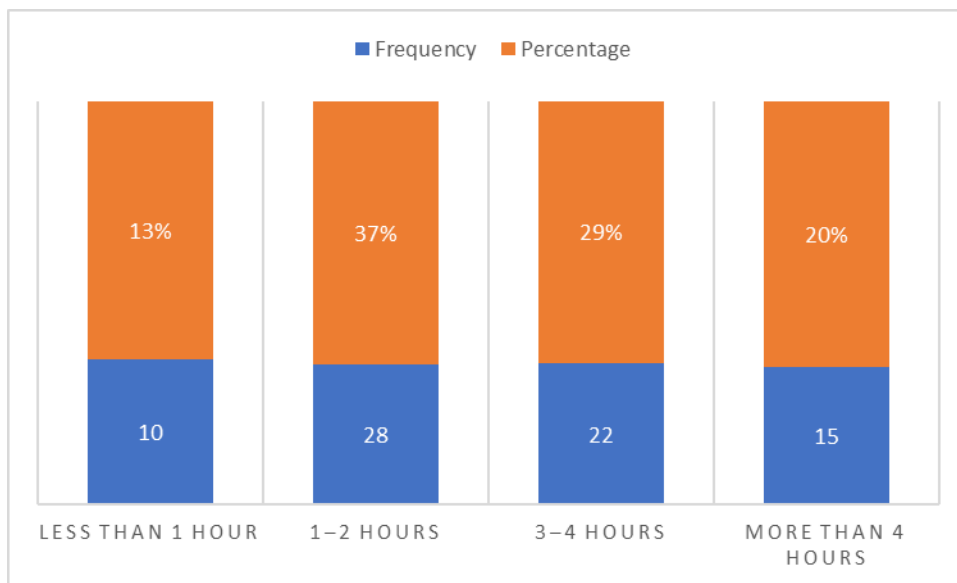
Objective 3: To investigate the relationship between social media usage and students' political awareness and interest.

This objective sought to analyse the influence of social media usage on students' levels of political awareness and political interest. To achieve this objective, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements relating to political knowledge acquisition, awareness of national and international political issues, and sustained interest in political affairs through social media. The findings are presented using tables and figures and are accompanied by descriptive and interpretive analysis.

Daily time spent on social media for political information

Respondents were asked to indicate the amount of time they spend daily on social media accessing political information. Their responses are presented in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Daily Time Spent on Social Media for Political Information



Source: Author (2025)

Figure 7 shows that the student population has a powerful and considerable amount of time spent on political knowledge on digital platforms. The greatest population of respondents of 37% of the sample (28 students), is represented by those who are spending 1-2 hours a day on this activity. It is then accompanied by a very active group of 29% (22 students) who average between 3-4 hours daily. Together, these two statistics represent the fact that an authoritative 66% of the entire student spends between one and four hours per day specifically on the consumption of political content

over social media. Another 21 (15 students) are even more engaged, showing a higher period of more than 4 hours per day. On the other extreme, only 13 per cent (10 students) spend less than 1 hour. Such distribution highlights the fact that in the vast majority of these Political Science and International Relations students, searching and reading political news and analysis on social media is not something that is done on the spur of the moment, but rather a highly internalized and time-intensive daily routine. This huge time commitment brings into the limelight the core aspect of the influence these platforms have in terms of being the most important sources of political information and indicates the existence of a very politically conscious student body, at least in regard to being exposed to online political discourse.

Social media and increased political awareness

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree that using social media has increased their awareness of political issues. Their responses are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Increased Awareness of Political Issues

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	5	7%
Disagree	8	11%
Neutral	9	12%
Agree	34	45%
Strongly agree	19	25%
Total	75	100%

Source: Author (2025)

The results of Table 6 show that most of the respondents (70% or 53 people) agreed or strongly agreed that social media made them more aware of political issues. The number who disagreed was only 18% (13 respondents), and 12% (9 respondents) were neutral. This proves that social media platforms are important learning institutions of political awareness, as students get to know about elections, policy discussions, and what happens in their country. This continuous stream of

information keeps the user informed, but it also requires one to exercise discretion in determining the accuracy of information.

Social media and sustained political interest

Respondents were asked to indicate whether social media helps them stay updated and interested in political matters. Their responses are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Staying Updated and Interested in Politics

Response	Freq uenc y	Perce ntage
Strongly disagree	6	8%
Disagree	7	9%
Neutral	8	11%
Agree	35	47%
Strongly agree	19	25%
Total	75	100%

Source: Author (2025)

Table 7 indicates that 72 per cent (54 respondents) said that they were convinced or strongly convinced that social media made them interested and updated in politics. It was found that only 17% (13 respondents) disagreed, and 11% (8 respondents) were neutral. These findings imply that social media is an informing and maintaining agent of political engagement. Students are more

vigilant of political trends, and they are making contributions in the discourse and campaigns of awareness, which means that social media always has a consistent and steady effect of raising socially aware citizens.

Ways social media enhances political knowledge and interest

Respondents were asked to explain how social media has enhanced their political knowledge and interest. The thematic responses are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Ways Social Media Enhanced Political Knowledge and Interest

Theme	Frequency
Exposure to diverse political opinions	32
Fast access to political news and updates	22
Simplified political information	8
Engagement through discussion and interaction	7
Reduced trust due to misinformation	6

Source: Author (2025)

The findings reveal that social media enhanced students’ political knowledge and interest in several ways. The most frequently cited theme was exposure to diverse political opinions, mentioned by 32 respondents (43%). Respondents indicated that encountering different viewpoints improved their understanding of political issues. One respondent stated that *“I get to hear opinions from different political groups, which helps me see issues from many sides.”*

Fast access to political news and updates was reported by 22 respondents (29%), who appreciated the immediacy of information shared online. As one participant noted, *“social media keeps me updated on political events as they happen, faster than TV or newspapers.”*

Simplified political information, such as infographics and short posts, was identified by 8 respondents (11%) as enhancing understanding. One respondent explained that *“posts and infographics make political topics easier to understand and follow.”*

Engagement through discussion and interaction was highlighted by 7 respondents (9%), who felt that online debates deepened their political understanding. As one participant stated, “*commenting and debating online helps me understand political arguments better.*”

Despite these benefits, 6 respondents (8%) expressed concerns that misinformation reduced trust in online political content. One respondent cautioned that “*sometimes fake news makes it hard to know what’s true, so I don’t always trust what I read.*”

4.3 Discussion of findings

The Influence of Social Media on Students’ Political Opinions

The results indicate that social media sites are predominant in determining the Political views of students in the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus, Political Science and International Studies Relations. Table 1 and Table 2 reveal that most of the respondents, 54 per cent of them, regularly utilize social media to get political information, and 64 per cent of the participants also agreed or strongly agreed that their political views have been affected by these sites. This trend proves that political communication in the online world has emerged as one of the defining factors of how students envision and see political realities. The interactive character of the spaces is emphasised by the high dependency on such platforms as Facebook (27 per cent), WhatsApp (24 per cent), and X (16 per cent), where opinion is shaped by information sharing and peer discussions.

These results correlate with the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1973), which states that people tend to pursue a certain informational and social need and use media actively in order to meet it. The attention of the students to the political content of social media is indicative of their efforts to acquire knowledge, get engaged and belong to society. It confirms the results of other researchers all over the world, who state that the use of social media by students boosts their political self-confidence, as well as their desire to discuss politics and engage (Alarqan, 2020; Sesli and Guven, 2024). The given study supports these trends occurring in the whole world, yet it also demonstrates the existence of local complexities, including the usage of misinformation and echo chambers mentioned by 9 and 10 respondents, respectively. This shade reminds me of Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018), who have warned that fake news on social networks usually becomes viral more quickly than the truth and shapes feelings and opinions.

The fact that 28 respondents were exposed to the views of different people suggests that social media is a pluralistic space, which encourages a democratic deliberation process. Nevertheless, the

presence of the echo chambers proves that the platforms may expand the horizons, but they may also support biases. Such observation is in line with a meta-analysis by Boulianne (2015), who reported that even though 82 per cent of studies indicate that social media use is associated with increased civic engagement, the quality of engagement varies based on the credibility of the content being read. Thus, the research confirms the thesis that social media is a source of power and polarization in forming political views among students at universities. The results indicate that social media is not just a news outlet but a powerful mental instrument that shapes the perception of students with regard to governance, political process, and leadership.

The Influence of Social Media on Students' Political Participation and Activism

The results prove that there is a close connection between political participation and activism of students and social media usage. Figure 5 shows that 60 per cent of the respondents engage in political debates or discussions on social media regularly. Moreover, 67 per cent of people said that social media made them consider or strongly consider engaging in political activities, and 64 per cent said that they are probably or definitely going to post political details on the internet. Such statistics highlight the mobilizing power of social media, where online communication is converted to online and offline activism. The findings of the qualitative research also indicated that 30 respondents were motivated by social media to participate in rallies, sign petitions or vote, and 20 respondents mentioned real-time mobilization as one of the factors that persuaded them to participate.

These findings support the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), which argues that the media does not dictate what people should think but what they should think about. Social media platforms influence the political priorities of students and motivate them to act through the escalation of trending topics and viral material. Facebook and WhatsApp are the most notable platforms that mobilized students, a factor that echoes Abraham (2023), who discovered that these platforms played an important role in mobilizing students in the politics of Nigerian universities. Likewise, Dasno et al. (2023) have witnessed that social media was used in Ghana as a focal point of civic engagement, especially among communication scholars. The uniformity of this research proves the fact that social media is a participatory infrastructure of the political dialogue and mobilization regarding the African academic realities.

Nevertheless, the research also revealed warning lessons. Misinformation-based activism, according to eight respondents, occasionally resulted in misplaced political behaviour, and the dual

nature of digital mobilization was exposed. This observation is reminiscent of a report by Barati (2023) that even though social media boosts online political action, it does not necessarily translate into offline action. Therefore, platforms offer visibility and immediacy, but they might not be a reliable way of creating long-term civic engagement. However, the elevated rate of participation and desire to communicate the political material in this research is indicative that social media has transformed the channels through which students can express themselves politically. It serves as The source of information and a resource of mass action, which strengthens the interdependence of virtual communication and democratic action.

The Influence of Social Media on Students' Political Awareness and Interest

The correlation indicates that social media use has a strong positive correlation with the political awareness and interest of the students. This is shown in Figure 7, which shows that 66 per cent of the students spend one to four hours a day on political content, which means they are deeply engaged in digital political discourse. Moreover, 70 per cent of the respondents said they were more aware of the political matters with social media (Table 6), and 72 per cent said they were kept informed and engaged in the political matters (Table 7). All these statistics indicate that social media is one of the main educational arenas of civic consciousness and policy literacy among university students.

These results are in line with the Uses and Gratifications Theory because they indicate that the students are active in pursuing social media as a source of informational gratification in politics. Their desire to be aware of the latest events is manifested in the exposure to different political views (32 respondents) and the availability of real-time information (22 respondents). This correlates with the findings of Gil de Zuniga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012), who came to the conclusion that people who consume social media news have increased levels of civic engagement and awareness. Banda (2021) also took into consideration the local results, which led to the conclusion that Zambian university students primarily used Facebook and Twitter to obtain information about politics during elections, which in turn talks about the importance of social media as a learning and engagement tool.

However, 6 of the respondents were of the opinion that misleading information reduced confidence in the political content they encountered. This is consistent with the increasing digital literacy requirement, as only 34% of Zambian university students check the accuracy of political information prior to sharing or commenting on it, as per a report by ZIPAR, 2022. Theoretically,

it can be stated that even though the use of social media opens up more political topics for students, its ultimate impact is still dependent on the individual's ability to tell good sources from the bad ones. Hence, it is true to say that social media keeps on informing and at the same time testing the political knowledge of the students, and making them responsible for being critical.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter shows the summary findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study conducted on the topic of The Influence of social media on Political Engagement among International Relations and Political Science students of the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. The chapter synthesizes the key findings made during the analysis of the data, connecting them with the purpose of the study, theoretical framework, and literature sources discussed in the chapters mentioned above. This chapter aims to assess the attainment of the research objectives and how they can be applied in practical use to the academic institutions, policymakers, and future researchers. The three specific aims of the study were to examine how social media platforms shaped the political opinion of students, to examine how social media affects the political participation and political activism of students, and the connection between social media and the political awareness and interest of the students. Those outcomes and discussions in Chapter Four prove that those goals were indeed met, and the findings have helped the field of comprehending the ways digital platforms influence political participation among students.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study found that social media significantly influences political engagement among Political Science and International Relations students at the University of Lusaka, Pioneer Campus. In response to the first research question, the findings show that social media shapes students' political opinions through frequent exposure to political content and interaction with peers, with 64% of respondents agreeing that their political opinions were influenced and 54% reporting frequent access to political content online. Platforms such as Facebook (27%) and WhatsApp (24%) were identified as the most influential. Concerning the second research question, the study established that social media encourages political participation and activism, as 67% of respondents indicated that it motivated them to engage in political activities, 60% participated in political discussions online, and 64% were likely to share political information or campaigns. Regarding the third research question, the findings revealed a strong positive relationship between social media use and political awareness and interest, with 70% of respondents reporting increased political awareness and 72% indicating that social media helped them remain informed and interested in political matters.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings of this study are important because they highlight social media as a powerful driver of contemporary political engagement among educated youth, a group that is critical to the future of democratic governance and policy leadership. The evidence shows that social media is no longer merely a communication tool but a central arena where political opinions are formed, awareness is built, and participation is mobilised. The high levels of influence observed, such as over two-thirds of students reporting increased political awareness and participation, suggest that social media has the capacity to strengthen democratic engagement by expanding access to information and lowering participation costs. However, the findings also underscore the risks associated with misinformation, echo chambers, and uncritical engagement, which can undermine informed political decision-making. This dual reality makes the findings particularly significant, as they demonstrate that the democratic value of social media depends not only on access but also on users' critical literacy and institutional support. Consequently, the study underscores the need for universities, policymakers, and civic institutions to actively engage with social media as a political space, promoting responsible use and digital literacy to ensure that increased engagement translates into informed, constructive, and meaningful political participation.

5.3 Recommendations to the Study

1. Politicians and political parties should prioritise the use of social media platforms as key channels for political communication and opinion formation among university students, as the study found that 64% of respondents reported that social media influences their political opinions and that Facebook (27%) and WhatsApp (24%) were the most influential platforms.
2. Political actors should adopt more interactive and issue-based engagement strategies on social media, including responding to comments, hosting live discussions, and sharing policy-focused content, since the study established that frequent exposure to and interaction with political content on social media shapes students' political opinions.
3. Electoral bodies and civic organisations should increase the use of social media to promote political participation and engagement among students, given that 67% of respondents indicated that social media encourages participation in political activities and 64% reported

a likelihood of sharing political information or campaigns online.

4. Universities and academic institutions should acknowledge social media as an influential space for political learning and engagement and integrate structured academic discussions that analyse political content from social media, in response to the finding that 70% of respondents reported increased political awareness and 72% indicated sustained political interest through social media use.
5. Policymakers should recognise the growing influence of social media on youth political engagement and develop policies that encourage constructive political communication on digital platforms, reflecting the study's finding that social media significantly shapes political opinions, awareness, and participation among university students.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies

1. The next research should be directed towards the investigation of the long-term impact of misinformation on youths' decision-making abilities. This aim would facilitate the understanding of the effects on the civil outlook and the faith in government and political action of being categorized as the "newly misinformed and liberal."
2. The potential influence of the likes of TikTok and Instagram Reels, which are social media platforms, on political education and participation should be researched. These platforms have become more popular among the youth and might have an even smaller but important impact on raising political awareness through visual and short messages.
3. Future studies can carry out a mixed-method study design that will incorporate both qualitative interviews and a longitudinal survey. The reason for this is that such a design will be able to look into the extent to which online political participation leads to non-participation and, thus, be able to probe deeper into the digitalization of students' civic participation.

References

- Afrobarometer (2021) Majority of Zambians want to protect unrestricted access to social media and internet. Available at: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/majority-zambians-want-protect-unrestricted-access-social-media-and-internet-afrobarometer/> (Accessed: Day Month Year).
- Asante, E. (2023) 'Social media usage and civic engagement among communication students', *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 17(1), pp. 10–20. Available at: [<https://wjarr.com/sites/default/files/WJARR-2023-1494.pdf>] (<https://wjarr.com/sites/default/files/WJARR-2023-1494.pdf>) (Accessed: Day Month Year).
- Banda, F. (2021) 'Information consumption among university students in Zambia', *Journal of Political Communication*, 12(3), pp. 45–63.
- Boulianne, S. (2015) 'Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research', *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), pp. 524–538.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Flick, U. (2014) *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N. and Valenzuela, S. (2012) 'Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement, and political participation', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), pp. 319–336.
- Hargittai, E. (2010) 'Digital Na(t)ives? Variation in internet skills and uses among members of the "Net Generation"', *Sociological Inquiry*, 80(1), pp. 92–113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2009.00317.x>
- Harvard Style Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2023) *Digital News Report 2023*.

- Hyder, Q. (2024) 'Social media and its impact on political participation', *Review Journal of Social Psychology & Social Works*, 1(2), pp. 102–108. <https://doi.org/10.71145/rjsp.v1i2.21>
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G. and Gurevitch, M. (1973) 'Uses and gratifications research', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), pp. 509–523.
- McCombs, M. E. and Shaw, D. L. (1972) 'The agenda-setting function of mass media', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), pp. 176–187.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L. and Wynaden, D. (2001) 'Ethics in qualitative research', *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), pp. 93–96.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tufekci, Z. (2014) 'Big questions for social media big data: Representativeness, validity and other methodological pitfalls', *Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*.
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D. and Aral, S. (2018) 'The spread of true and false news online', *Science*, 359(6380), pp. 1146–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>
- Yin, R. K. (2018) *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (ZIPAR) (2022) *Youth engagement in politics: The role of social media in Zambia*.