

**INVESTIGATING THE RELATION BETWEEN FACEBOOK USE AND
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MALAWIAN YOUTHS**

MASTER OF ARTS (POLITICAL SCIENCE) THESIS

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UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

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MASTER OF ARTS (POLITICAL SCIENCE) THESIS

By

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Submitted to the Department of Political and Administrative Studies in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the Master of Arts (Political Science)

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December, 2022

DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work, which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

*To late Bright Petros Nkowani, my dad, and Rosemary Masozi Phangula, my mum,
the two people I have always drawn my strength and inspiration from.*

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the link between Facebook use and political participation among Malawian youths. The youths are taking advantage of Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, which are enabled by the second generation of the web (web 2.0), which allows Internet users to collaborate and share information online. SNSs are dialogical, akin to online “word of mouth”, which has proved an attractive site for socialisation among the youths. These youths are also using Facebook as means for political participation, discussion and information seeking. Thus, it is not surprising that during the 2019/ 2020 electioneering in Malawi all the major political parties and candidates had a presence on popular social media platforms, as they sought to reach out to the youthful voters. The study deployed the theory of political socialisation, which describes the process by which citizens form political identities, values, and behaviour. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, this paper conducted quantitative research among 384 Malawian youths and a qualitative interview with 20 University of Malawi (Chancellor College) students to investigate the relationship between Facebook use and political participation. The findings show a direct and positive relationship between Facebook usage and political participation among the youths. The study also established that Facebook usage increases political knowledge and has significant and positive effect on the youths’ overall political attitude and knowledge.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FB	Facebook
SNSs	Social Networking Sites
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
UN	United Nations
AU	African Union
USA	United States of America
UK	United Kingdom
SM	Social Media
SPSS	Statistical Packages for Social Sciences
UNIMA	University of Malawi

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The advent of Web 2.0 has paved the way for the rapid growth of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in the last ten years or also. The ability of Web 2.0 to allow one-on-one and one-to-many communication on Social Networking Sites means that people are exposed to an abundance of political, economic, and social information every day. Social Networking Sites—also known as social media, have become an important part of people's everyday socialisation and people regularly access a variety of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook, using a variety of means such as mobile phones and handheld computers with internet enabled capabilities. Individuals use social media for a range of social purposes and spread messages through social influence and information sharing online. The online environment relates positively to group membership, involvement, and political activity (Kwak et al., 2006; Taveesin & Brown, 2006).

Some scholars such as (Valenzuela et al., 2009; Anduiza et al., 2010 & Beam et al., 2016), who have done studies in the field of online political participation and its impact on offline political activities and the intensity of internet use, conclude that the effect of online participation depends on the features of the political system and that sharing news online contributes to voters' political knowledge.

Social Networking Sites such as Facebook are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

As noticed by Jacklin, (2012), globally, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have been the most popular SNSs for the last decade or so, but the current trend is now that these SNSs are not more popular with a certain age group, especially the politically active age groups. The younger generations are more interested in new social media platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat. According to We are Social, Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in Malawi; the platform has seen rapid growth in popularity and usage since its inception in 2006.

According to International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the UN agency mandated to regulate international telecommunications, Malawi's internet penetration rate is 13.9 percent, out of a population of about 17.5 million Malawians, according to the 2018 Housing and Population Census. The country has 540,000 social media users. Out of this, about 530,000 people are active on Facebook with a penetration rate of 4.6 percent as of January 2019.

As evidenced by the 2019 Tripartite Elections, all top politicians and political parties in Malawi have a presence on Social Networking Sites, primarily Facebook and Twitter for political communication and engagement. Politics on these platforms is discussed either publicly through individual personal accounts or either open or closed groups

also known as online communities. For instance, in Malawi, there are groups such as Malawi Congress Party, UTM Official Page, Democratic Progressive Party, and many others which connect people with similar political interests and orientations.

The 2008 elections in the United States of America (USA) are widely regarded as the first social media elections but the 2016 USA elections are noted as elections in which Facebook specifically became one of the key channels for political information—from campaign messaging to the political organization leading to offline political participation. This trend was also evident during Malawi's tripartite elections in May 2019.

Extensive literature has been published regarding the effect of social media on real-life political participation (Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq, 2019; Mthembu & Lungu, 2020; Casteltrione, & Piezcka, 2018; Zaheer, 2016). Scholars interested in Social Networking Sites (Vromen, 2016; Bincof, 2018; Ahmad, et al., 2019; Tsukayama, 2015; Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Anderson, 2018) recognise the power of Social Networking Sites such as Facebook in stimulating both online and offline political participation. Ahmad et al., (2019) investigated how online political activities impact political efficacy and real-life political participation among university students in rural Pakistan and found that the majority of the students use social media for political awareness and information. They also established that political efficacy is significantly based on online political participation and that social media is a vital platform for 'netizens' (citizens who engage online) to participate in real-life political activities.

Globally, it is said that on average youths spend about nine hours a day using social media (Strasburger et al., 2009; Tsukayama, 2015; Anderson & Jiang, 2018 and Anderson, 2018). In Malawi, the largest user group for Facebook as of December 2019, are people aged between 18-24 years old (Herhold, 2019), this is the young generation but crucially an active political group falling within voting age. This exposure to Social Networking Sites allows the youth to learn about current events, become acquainted with the actors of national and international politics, get exposed to new and divergent political viewpoints, and also introduce them to expert evaluations and opinions (Graber, 1997). Moeller and Vreese (2013) contend that these are important ingredients of the socialization process toward becoming a political citizen.

Studies done elsewhere in Africa on youth political participation (Bosch, 2016; Mthembu & Lunga, 2020; Bosch & Mutsvairo, 2017) have shown that Social Media accords the youths an invaluable opportunity to participate in politics and set mainstream news agendas. Whereas these studies found a positive correlation between online political activities and real-life political participation, what remains unexplored is the extent to which SNSs shape youths' political knowledge, attitude, and behaviour and whether there is a link between Facebook use and political participation. Furthermore, it remains to be explored whether there are differences in political knowledge, attitude, and behaviour between Facebook users as compared to non-users. Using the case of Facebook, this current study aims to investigate the relationship between the use of Facebook and the political participation of Malawian youths. In so doing the study will make an invaluable contribution to the scholarly literature, which is currently lacking in this area. It is important to find out if there is a link between

Facebook use and political participation because this would help shaping of political messages or political communication in order to achieve maximum response.

1.2 Problem Statement

Social networking websites are the most popular means of communication among youths at the global level (Masiha, et al., 2018). Based on this, one can then infer that the increased dispersion and popularity of social media networking sites such as Facebook, lead to widespread use by youths as a vehicle for political participation and engagement.

However, in the case of Malawi, this would just be mere conjecture as there has been no research on whether exposure and increased use of Facebook by the youths leads to political participation. There could be a possibility that youth political participation is a result of other socialising agents and not necessarily Facebook, or in addition to Facebook. If such a possibility exists, there is a need to confirm this proposition. Therefore, there is a need to explain the linkage between Facebook use and political participation. This study primarily aims to find out whether there is a relationship between Facebook use and political participation as well as explore whether Facebook shapes the political knowledge and attitude of Malawian youths. It is important to investigate this because there have been almost no studies on Facebook use and political participation in Malawi. Again, this study would help in political communication and messaging. If not investigated, both the politicians, government and citizenry would be missing out and under-utilizing social networking sites such as Facebook.

Past studies on political socialisation and Social Networking Sites (Mthembu & Lunga, 2020; Casteltrione & Piezcka, 2018; Zaheer, 2016; Ahmad, 2019; Baquero, 2017; Kizgina et al., 2018; Kizgn, et al., 2019 & Bode, 2012) mainly focused on effects of Social Networking Sites and how online political activities stimulate offline political participation and communication. These studies generally found a correlation and relationship between online political activities and political awareness. However, few studies (Schmeiemann, 2015; Baquero, 2017; Kizgina et al., 2018; Kizgn, et al., 2019 & Bode, 2012), have been done on the political socialization effects of Social Networking Sites on the youth. These studies, however, have not established if there is any link between political socialisation online and offline. This is the main research gap that this study will address.

1.3 Aim of the study

The main aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between Facebook use and political participation among Malawian youths. The study seeks to, among others, answer the following research questions;

- I. Does the duration of a Facebook account have an impact on one's online political participation?
- II. Does the number of Facebook accounts lead to more or less participation?
- III. Is there a link between network size and participation?
- IV. Should the government regulate Facebook use? (Attitudinal question)
- V. Which SNS do you use to access political news and information?
- VI. Did you vote in the recent election? How did you know about the political party and the political leaders?

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- I. Is there a relationship between Facebook use and political participation?
- II. To find out if Facebook use shapes political knowledge
- III. Does Facebook use result in change in attitude towards politics?

1.4 Study Rationale

Studies done elsewhere in Africa on youth political participation (Bosch, 2016; Mthembu & Lunga, 2020; Bosch & Mutsvairo, 2017) have shown that Social Media accords the youth an opportunity to participate in politics and set mainstream news agendas. Whereas these studies could be true for Africa in general, in Malawi specifically, there have not been systematic studies on youth's use of Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, as tools for political participation.

Studies done in UK, USA, and Australia on Facebook as a site for youth political engagement found that the majority of youths in these countries use Facebook as the first point of call in finding out what is happening in the political world (Vromen, 2016). However, this too cannot be generalised to all young people. There are significant barriers to online political engagement for the youths in Africa and Malawi to be specific. Young people's participation in politics must be situated within the context of political systems, economic conditions, education levels of an individual and cultural dynamics, social dynamics of religion and ethnicity, and internet access (Van Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019).

1.5 Conclusion

While studies conducted on Social Networking Sites have found a positive correlation between online political activities and offline political participation, such studies have not elaborated on the extent to which SNSs such as Facebook shape the political knowledge and behaviour of the youth. This study attempts to not only establish whether Facebook use shapes the political knowledge and attitude of youths in Malawi but also attempts to find out the relationship between Facebook use and political participation. Finding out whether or not Facebook is an agent of political socialisation is crucial to understanding whether Facebook does matter in shaping the youth's political knowledge and attitude of youths in Malawi.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature that is related to the various concepts that assist in understanding the concept of political socialisation. In particular, this section reviews literature that aids in the understanding of political socialisation agents with a focus on Facebook as a tool for political participation. The section defines the key concepts that inform this study such as; political socialisation as a general theme and narrows down to Social Networking Sites, specifically Facebook as a tool for political participation among the youths in Malawi, and also conceptualises the youths.

Considering that individuals and groups use Facebook for various purposes such as a communication tool and online social interaction, it is, however, not the intention of this study to analyse literature on other roles of Facebook. For purposes of this study, the social networking sites to be studied is Facebook and the youth will be those between the ages of 18 and 35 years old.

2.2 Conceptual Analysis

This section provides definitions of key concepts used in this study. This is important for purposes of providing adopted meanings of the terms to avoid diverse interpretations as is often the case when they are in use.

2.2.1 Political Socialization

Political Socialization is an important concept in politics because it is through this process that politically active and responsive citizens are made. Typically, the process of political socialization starts at the adolescent age (Moeller & Vreese, 2013). Early life experiences are generally considered to form the basis for political attitudes (e.g., political values and identity), political engagement (e.g., political interest and political efficacy), and ultimately political behaviours (e.g., conventional and unconventional forms of political participation) (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). Young citizens, it is believed, are not yet set in their political ways and are subsequently more easily influenced by external factors. However, there is no agreement on how enduring these early socialization experiences are.

The concept of political socialization was widely studied and discussed in the 1960s and 1970s by scholars such as Almond and Verba (1963) and Sigel and Hoskin (1981). Various conceptualisation of political socialization exists. For instance, German (2014) defines political socialization as the process by which orientations towards the political system are developed from one generation to another. Gimpel et al. (2013) in their definition integrated define political socialization as the process by which new generations are inducted into political culture, learning the knowledge, values, and attitudes that contribute to supporting the political system.

Early influential socializing agents include family, school, peers, and community. In the later stage, the influential socializing agents include education, income, religion, gender, race and ethnicity, and mass media (Wasburn, & Covert, 2017). In terms of convergence, the definitions above agree that political socialization is a continuous

process in which cognitions and behavioural patterns are actively learned through socialising agents such as family, school, and mass media, just to mention a few political socialising agents. Much of the earlier studies on political socialisation focused on the political orientations and behaviours of young children, as it was believed that political attitudes were acquired very early in life (Easton & Dennis 1969). Family is mostly highlighted as one of the enduring agents of political socialisation. However, recent studies argue that the mass media play an important role in the formation of political knowledge (Vasile, 2014). Mass media such as Television, Radio, Newspapers Magazines, and the internet give out a lot of information through news articles and programmes that feature political actors and political institutions. In this way, both the young and adults are exposed to political information and also learn about current affairs.

Even though there is little literature discussing social media as an agent of political socialization, the rapid growth of social media in recent years means people are exposed to an abundance of information every day with the potential of changing one's political knowledge, attitude, and behaviour. Globally, the two most popular social media platforms are Facebook and Twitter and this is the trend in Malawi (Chaputuka & Majawa, 2012). More recently, WhatsApp has also become the most popular social media platform in Malawi. These social media platforms provide vast amounts of political information, from news on politics to political campaigns, and young people, as heavy social media users, are the most exposed to this information (Valise, 2014).

In a study that investigated the effect of social media on youth political interest, Valise (2104) found out that social media is a major source of political knowledge and that it

indirectly affects the political interest of youth and has the potential to increase it. Valise (2014), concluded that social media is suitable to spread knowledge among the youth and implicitly increase their political interest.

The youths today frequently get their political information from social media rather than traditional media. The information given via social media is more interactive, user-centered, brief, easier to process, and visually attractive (e.g. animation, videos, and infographics). People are increasingly posting online their views concerning politics and social issues, sharing news articles, ‘following’ political figures, and watching videos connected to politics. The use of social media can mean more exposure to information and also a higher interest in politics, but first, the audience’s attention must be won. Therefore, it can be concluded that social media is suitable to spread knowledge among the youth and implicitly increase their political interest.

Baquero (2017) did a study on the political socialization and political culture of the Brazilian youths focusing on the effect of the use of the Internet in the political socialization process (13 to 24 years old) in the South of Brazil. The result of the survey research conducted from March 2015 to April 2016 with 1964 adolescents in public and private high schools selected through multi-stage probabilistic sampling, showed among the young citizens a conformism which results from a feeling of impotence, of not being capable of doing something to change things and hostility with the political institutions that do not provide equal opportunities for participation for the youth. Furthermore, Baquero (2017) argued that the use of the Internet has not had a significant impact on the construction of another type of youth’s political culture. Just like other studies aforementioned, this study revealed the consistency and the linkage

between how political culture is constituted and its effect on how the youth express their political attitudes and behaviour. The research also found that the political interest of the youths in South Brazil has not experienced significant changes in the last years. They continue to be passive, indifferent, and hostile towards politics and politicians (Baquero, 2017, p.18).

The strength of this study to the present one is in the emphasis on Internet as a socialisation agent for the youths. However, the gap in Baquero's (2017) study is that the Internet is too broad and the findings cannot be generalised because like Chan (2016), there are different affordances on Internet as well as Social Networking Sites.

In general, media helps bridge the gap and establish linkages between leaders, institutions, and citizens. In contrast to typing and mailing a letter, with social media platforms, it is easier than ever for people to contact leaders directly using e-mail and Facebook. Nowadays young citizens spend an increasingly larger portion of their time online, especially on social media. However, the question of whether social media platforms foster interaction with people with different views or rather tend to be echo chambers in which citizens interact with like-minded people only remains an area for further research.

2.2.2 Social Network Sites (SNSs)

Social network sites (SNSs) such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become entrenched in many people's everyday life. From individuals using SNSs such as Facebook to connect, interact, and share images, and videos with family and friends, business entities using SNSs to promote their business and build potential clientele, and politicians using SNSs to mobilise masses to rally behind their political

party's ideology, social network sites have changed the way individuals, organisations and political organisations communicate their messages, interact with their clientele as well as relate with each other. The terms social network sites and social media are often used interchangeably.

Over the last decade, an increasing number of academic studies have examined how digital technologies can contribute to political participation, with numerous publications focusing on social networking sites which Ellison et al., (2007) define as web-based services that allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks and establish or maintain connections with others. The popularity of SNSs is said to have been necessitated by the role played in political protests and campaigns such as the Arab Spring and the 2008 Obama presidential campaign (Dahlgren, 2009). Despite the richness of existing research on SNSs and political participation, a review of scholarship reveals that there still exist gaps for further development in this field. Studies on social network sites effects on real-life political participation (Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq, 2019; Mthembu & Lungu, 2020; Casteltrione, & Piezcka, 2018; Zaheer, 2016). Social Network Sites (SNSs) fall under mass media which is considered a powerful agent for political socialization affecting political attitudes and behaviours of voters and non-voters (Kononova & Alhabash, 2011). SNSs have reshaped, in part, the methods of interpersonal and political communication, influencing the ways politicians and citizens interact with each other (Casteltrione & Pieczka 2018).

Nguyen (2013) found that mass media reinforces values that are instilled by other socialising agents such as family, education, peers, and community, and that youth exposure to mass media such as the internet leads to political discussions and increased

mass media consumption leads to political knowledge (Nguyen, 2013). This finding is important to this study because it partly answers one of the questions that this study wants to explore. However, Nguyen (2013) does not further explore what the youth do with the knowledge they acquire through exposure to the internet. It is this gap that this study wants to fill. Apart from finding out whether SNSs, in this case, Facebook, shape political knowledge and attitude, the present study further will go to find out if the knowledge is used to participate in politics online.

Some researchers in the field of SNSs and their role in political participation, have found a positive relationship between the use of social network sites and civic and political participation (e.g., Gil de Zuniga, Jung, &Valenzuela, 2012; Gil de Zuniga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). However, there are also studies coming up with mixed or null findings (e.g., Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Vitak et al., 2010; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). One of the reasons for the differences in research findings on the relationship between social media use and political participation is the lack of a commonly accepted conceptualization and operationalization of SNSs usage.

2.2.3 Facebook background and popularity in Malawi

In February 2004 Mark Zuckerberg launched “The Facebook”, as it was originally known; the name was taken from the sheets of paper distributed to freshmen, profiling students and staff. It became Facebook.com in August 2005 (Phillips, 2007). In September 2006, Facebook extended beyond educational institutions to anyone with a registered email address. The site remains free to join and makes a profit through advertising revenue.

One has the liberty of creating a public account or semi-public account on Facebook. Individuals, firms, and political parties also have a choice of creating an open, closed or secret Facebook group.

Gebhart (2017), explains that with public groups anyone can see the group’s name, location, member list, and posts, and the group can show up in anyone’s searches or News Feed. Anyone can add themselves as a member without any invite or approval. A Closed group’s name, description, and member list are not at all “closed,” but are publicly visible. Closed groups may even show up in a search publicly. Overall, they are just as open as Public groups, except for three main differences: new members must ask to join or be invited by a member rather than just adding themselves; only current members can see the content of group posts; only current members can see the group in their News Feed. Secret groups are the most private of the three types. No aspect of a Secret group is publicly visible, new members must be added or invited by current members to join, and only members can see the content of group posts.

The Internet World Stats and International Telecommunications Union (ITU) estimates that there are about 509 600 Facebook users in Malawi as of January 2020 which accounts for a 2.6 percent penetration rate of the entire Malawi population. The ITU estimates that the majority of the users are male 66.5 percent and females 35 percent. In terms of other demographics, people aged between 18 to 25 years are said to be the largest Facebook user group in Malawi accounting for about 166,000. The highest difference between men and women is said to occur among people aged between 25 to 34 years, where men lead by 56 000. Overall, the Internet World Stats, estimates that there are about 2.7 million internet users in Malawi as of December 2019.

The 2019 and 2020 Digital Reports done by the commercial research companies, We are Social, Hootsuite, and Socialbakers, Facebook is the most popular Social Networking Site in Malawi seconded by WhatsApp while Twitter comes third. In terms of usage, Facebook is mostly used for connecting family and friends, however, this trend has changed in the past years as the platform is now used for political organisation and communication as well as commercial purposes. Politicians have also turned to Facebook to mobilise support, communicate and sell their political parties' ideologies. Almost every politician worthy of the salt at least has a Facebook account or Facebook page. In Malawi some notable politicians with Facebook accounts include former president Arthur Peter Mutharika, Vice President Saulos Klaus Chilima, president Lazarus Chakwera, and former President Joyce Banda, just to mention a few.

Since its founding in 2006, Facebook (FB) has grown tremendously from being a high school and college network to be one of the most globally popular and widely used

social networking sites (SNSs). In the process, it has also become a platform for a wide range of political activities (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Ward, 2012).

A study on Facebook Use and Political Participation among Hong Kong youths focused on how time spent on Facebook, exposure to shared political information, network size, network structural heterogeneity and direct connection with public political actors relate to young people's online and offline political participation, Tang and Lee (2013) found that participation is explained most prominently by direct connection with public political actors, followed by exposure to shared political information.

Apart from connecting individuals with each other, Facebook provides a common space for its users to discuss a specific topic and exchange political information. Individuals in Facebook groups share their different social and political opinions (Masiha, et al, 2018). From political engagement and contentious politics in democracies (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012) to social movements and protests in authoritarian regimes (Howard & Parks, 2012), Facebook is said to have played an influential role in facilitating information exchange, expression, and collective action mobilization for different political causes and purposes.

Masiha, et al, (2018) argue that Facebook facilitates youth engagement in political activities, which were previously not possible. They further argue that Facebook gives the citizens the possibility to draw the attention of the government to specific issues and seek broader online support among other citizens. Facebook also allows its members to engage in less demanding activities, such as 'liking' or 'joining' a social

and political online group, 'liking' a political party, and its candidate and sharing one's opinion on a political topic on their personal and others' Facebook wall.

Political activities on FB are new ways to engage in political matters because they are also low-cost compared to offline political activism. Facebook provides a platform for individuals to get political information and participate in public issues. For example, research on the political rally organizing site *Meetup.com* found high involvement during the 2008 campaign in the USA and previous research linked the same social networking site to increases in campaign donations, volunteering, political candidate support, and advocacy.

Nonetheless, Internet access alone does not generally increase political participation but exposure to political material does increase participation. A study done by (Masiha, et al, 2018) has found that the more politically active people are online, the more they participate in political discussions online and vice versa and that exposure to online political information has both a main and moderating effect on political engagement. Valenzuela et al. (2009) found that the use of Facebook is closely related to political engagement because of the exposure to online political Facebook groups. For instance, studies indicate that political chat serves both political and information-seeking needs (Atkin, et al. 2005) and that political chat on Facebook influences political behaviours and attitudes (Johnson, et al. 2003).

Tang and Lee (2013) their multidimensional study aimed at examining the impact of Facebook use on political participation among university students contend that, unlike conventional mass media, using Facebook or other SNSs does not refer merely to

exposure to content, it also refers to the active cultivation of networks, the construction of personal profiles, consumption and/or production of shared materials, and commenting on or simply “liking” other people’s postings. They argue that paying attention to the various aspects of social media use is crucial to understanding the impact of social media.

Tang and Lee's (2013) study is important to this study as it helps shape the argument advanced in this study that joining political communities/groups is also part of online political participation. This study aims to assess whether Facebook can shape the political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of Malawian Youths. Literature and studies on this are rare. Much of the available literature focuses mostly on the goal of participation without necessarily explaining the process that one goes through to finally participate in politics. This is the gap that this study fills.

2.2.4 Youth and political participation

Historically, citizens’ participation in the political processes has been considered a fundamental element of an ideal democracy. Thus, participation represents a significant component in political communication and democratic institutions. The youth have long represented an important constituency for electoral mobilization in Malawi. According to the 2018 Malawi Population and Housing Census, out of the estimated 17.8 million Malawi population, 51 percent of the population is below the age of 18 years old.

However, despite the youth bulge across Africa, a 2016 study by Afrobarometer found that despite their numerical importance and the historical relevance of generational

identities within the region, very little is known about the political participation of Africa's youth and that the youths do not connect with political processes. Afrobarometer found out that in comparison with older citizens, Africa's youth tend to vote less and express a lower level of partisanship. Further to this, Afrobarometer found that Africa's youth are more likely to participate in protests than older citizens. In conceptualizing the youth this study adopts the Malawi National Youth Policy (2013) definition which defines youth as those between the ages of 10 and 35 years. The Malawi National Youth policy allows for flexibility in defining the youth bearing in mind the variety of parameters that could be used in categorizing the youths. Hence, for this study, youths are those persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. When young people are disenfranchised or disengaged from political processes, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice or influence in decisions that affect group members' lives. A key consequence is the undermining of political systems' representativeness. Forbrig (2005) argues that to make a difference in the longer term, it is essential that young people are engaged in formal political processes and have a say in formulating today's and tomorrow's politics.

Literature on the importance of youth's participation in politics puts emphasis on the argument that meaningful democracy requires the meaningful participation of youth, hence, young people have much to offer societies. Their participation in democracy promotes active citizenship, strengthens social responsibility, and can enhance democratic processes and institutions because today's young citizens are tomorrow's leaders and decision-makers (Bincof, 2018).

While some studies have found that there is decreasing youth participation in political activities such as low turnout at elections (Kitonova, 2019; Tshuma & Zvaita, 2019; Ferreira, Lorenzini & Torcal, 2020; Henn & Foard 2012 & Afrobarometer, 2016), other scholars have raised an observation on whether all forms of political participation are declining or are youth now shifting the paradigm of participation from an institutionalized form to social media sites such as Facebook to affect political and social change in the society (Baker & Vreese, 2011).

Empirical evidence has shown that the trends which describe an apathetic youth in their contemporary politics can be interpreted by the shift from traditional to expressive online participation (Theocharis & Quintelier, 2014). Thus, a study of youth and their online political participation is timely and imperative because political behaviours are often articulated and nurtured at a younger age (Howard & Parka, 2012).

Different scholars have advanced divergent definitions of political participation. Milbrath and Goel (1977) define political participation as those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics. Verba and Nie (1972), define political participation as activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take. A more revised definition by the same scholar, (Verba, 1995) states that political participation are those actions that afford citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond.

As divergent as the definitions are, they seem to converge on four common understandings of political participation that is; first, political participation refers to people in their role as citizens and not, say, as politicians or civil servants. Second, political participation is understood as an activity (action)—simply watching television or claiming to be curious about politics does not constitute participation. Third, the activities of citizens defined as political participation should be voluntary and not ordered by the ruling class or obliged under some law or rule. Finally, political participation concerns government and politics in a broad sense of these words and is neither restricted to specific phases (such as parliamentary decision-making), nor specific levels or areas such as national elections or contacts with officials (Norris, 2001).

In his study on politics and young people's political participation, Bennet and Segerberg (2012:748) posit that young people's perceptions of politics and groups of engagement have changed. They argue further that increasingly, political participation is viewed through the lens of individual action frameworks, but formal organizations are losing their grip on individuals and group ties are being replaced by large-scale fluid social networks. These networks form the basis of alternative modes of political engagement that seem to better fit younger citizens' preferences for horizontal forms of engagement.

Sloam and Henn (2019), concur with the argument advanced by Bennet and Segerberg (2012) and add that young person find it much easier and more attractive for instance, to sign an online petition, forwarded by a friend, on online spying by the state, than to actively promote the broad programme of a top-down organisation like a political

party. These studies parry away the perception that the youth are apathetic and disengaged in politics. The major argument in these studies is that the youth have alternative avenues for political participation other than the traditional avenues such as holding a position in a political party.

Several studies on the role of Facebook and youth political participation have found a positive correlation between Facebook use and political participation and that the number of frequent use of Facebook does have a significant increase in political participation (Dagona, Karick & Abubakar, 2013; Abdu1, Mohamad, & Muda, 2017 & Bincof, 2018).

In their study, focussing on the role of Facebook use, interactivity with politicians, quality of information, and political interest as the predictors of online political participation among youth, Ugwuanyi, Olijo & Celestine (2019) argue that Facebook use, interactivity, quality of information and political interests have the potential to engender online political participation among the youth. Also, by offering them an avenue for acquiring political information necessary for making an informed political decision through deliberations on Facebook; to bring new political changes and group mobilization.

The results of the aforementioned studies are significant in that they demonstrate the capability of social networks to afford persons of different perspectives the ability to unite and engage in political debates or discussions. Furthermore, the studies demonstrate that the youth are seeking beyond recreational use of these social media

and are harnessing the capabilities of these technologies to engage in political discussion and express their views about issues they care about.

Due to the popularity and growing everyday use of Facebook within the young Malawian population (Digital Report, 2019), we must begin to understand how the youths are using Facebook and what effect these uses have on the rest of their lives, particularly their political lives. It is also important to understand the effects Facebook use may have on young people's offline political participation

2.3 Theoretical Framework

There are several competing theories that would suit this study. Theories about mass media and technology adoption and use, such as Roger's theory of Diffusion of Innovation and van Dijk's theory of Digital Technology Access and Societal impacts. For Rogers (2003), adoption is a decision of "full use of an innovation as the best course of action available" and rejection is a decision "not to adopt an innovation" (Rogers, 2003; p. 177). Rogers defines diffusion as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers, 2003; p. 5). As expressed in this definition, innovation, communication channels, time, and social system are the four key components of the diffusion of innovations. However, this theory would not do justice to this study because while adoption of innovation is important in terms of an individual's ability to use the same to participate in societal activities, it does not ably show whether there is a link between adopting innovation and participation, be it in politics, economy or other social activities. Its core focus is on who adopts what innovation, through what

communication channels, and over what time. While this study's focus is on socializing agents, the individual being socialized, and the outcome of socialization.

The other theory is van Dijk's theory of Digital Technology Access and Societal Impacts which mainly, focuses on the digital divide. The core of the theory posits that inequalities of personal position and background result in inequalities in resources for the individual, which lead in turn to inequalities of access and finally to disparities in participation by the individual in society (Pick, James, Sarkar & Avijit, 2016; p.2-3). Van Dijk's theory further advances that participation in turn feeds back to positional characteristics which form a full feedback loop. The fundamental assumption in this theory is that inequalities are perpetuated throughout the entire process of accessing and using technologies in society.

Personal characteristics are posited also to influence resources. A person's age, gender, intelligence, and health can impact the extent of resources. For instance, mental (knowledge) resources available would be different for a young, intelligent, healthy female versus an elderly, ill, and less intelligent male. The personal characteristics similarly can contribute to the amount of time available for digital activities, for instance, certain illnesses might limit the time available.

This theory essentially is about the digital divide and the inequalities that the digital divide perpetuates in society, and the consequences of that which is, failure by individuals of social systems to fully participate in societal activities because of a lack of enabling resources such as the internet.

However, this theory too partially answers the research questions, especially where it talks about an individual's characteristics such as age, gender, income, and intelligence (education level). The limitation of this theory is that it almost entirely focuses on the digital divide and not on whether technology such as the internet helps in the process of socialization. It is more concerned with bridging the gap between those who have access and those who do not have access to technology so that they can participate in societal activities. It is not concerned with the process that leads to an individual's ability to embrace technology and use it to participate in activities such as politics, culture, or economy.

2.3.1 Interactive theory of political socialization

To impose some kind of order on the results of the research carried this study uses the Interactive theory of political socialization as advanced by Pawelka (1977).

Pawelka (1977) names four interlocking conditional factors comprising political socialization: the individual being socialized, the agents of socialization and the socializers contained in them, the dominant sub-systems of the society, and the peripheral sub-systems of the society.

The strength of this theory lies in its central component which is the individual being socialized. According to Pawelka (1977), objects of investigation concerning this individual being socialized are:

- I. The political knowledge, insights, opinions, skills, attitudes, behavioural intentions, and behavioural patterns of this individual, and the relationship between that knowledge and personal characteristics such as gender, age, health, level of education, and cognitive and moral development.

- II. The agencies of socialization are; structures and processes within the society which are of importance to socialization. Falling under these different agents of socialization are various socializers that are, persons, groups, categories, institutions, organizations, objects, and events that contribute to the individual's socialization.
- III. The dominant sub-system of the society is divided into a dominant sub-system that is in power, and a dominant sub-system that is in opposition.
- IV. The peripheral sub-systems of the society, have some significance for the individual being socialized.

The relationships among these four components influence relationships (Dekker, 1991). Dekker (1991) posits that the first influence relationship which is examined is the one between the individual being socialized and the agent of socialization and the active socializers contained within it. The other influence relationship is the one among the different agents of socialization themselves, as well as among their respective socializers. The third influence relationship is the one between the dominant sub-systems and the socialization agents. The anticipated influence exerted by the part of the dominant sub-system which is in power is a stabilizing one, the anticipated influence of the oppositional part of the dominant sub-system is one of the breaking down of existing structures.

The goal of political socialization study in its broadest sense is to find an answer to the following question: when, how and by means of what do people with which personal and social characteristics acquire what political knowledge, opinions, skills, attitudes,

behavioural intentions and behavioural patterns, and how are these cognitions, skills, attitudes, and behaviours related to which given political systems (Watkins, 2009).

In the context under discussion, the object of investigation is the youth while the socializing agent is the Mass media, specifically Facebook which falls under Social media. This theory is relevant to the study because it will help answer the question of whether Facebook shapes the youths' political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour that would lead them to political participation as an intended behaviour.

One of the limitations of this theory is the lack of variety in terms of the use of other methods in addition to the traditional method, the written (mailed) questionnaire. Some of the suggestions have included the need to use in-depth interviews, systematic observation, experimental research, and autobiographical storytelling (Watkins, 2009). However, despite this limitation, the theory's central components still hold the intended purpose of this study. As for the improvement in the methods used for investigations, this study instead of a mailed questionnaire, used the interactive web link which respondents can answer in almost real-time.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on youth and the use of social network sites for political participation by defining key concepts; political socialization, social network sites, youth and political participation, Facebook, and its popularity in Malawi. The chapter has provided a theoretical framework that guided the study which is the interactive theory of political socialization.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Based on the literature reviewed and research gaps identified in Chapter two, this study's overall goal is to investigate whether there is a relationship between Facebook usage and political participation among Malawian youths and whether as a socializing agent, Facebook shapes the political knowledge and attitude of these youths. This study adopted the Malawi National Youth Policy (2013) definition of youth which defines youth "as those between ages 10-35 years, the definition is flexible bearing in mind the variety of parameters that could be used in categorizing the youth such as gender.

This chapter highlights and defines the population under study and also highlights the sample and sampling method employed in identifying the respondents. The chapter also explains the data collection and analysis method and also presents the ethical considerations as well as the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a plan of how a researcher answers the study's research questions and consists of methodological choice, research strategy, and time horizon (Saunders et al., 2016). Others (Creswell & Clark 2007; Grey, 2014; Kinnear & Taylor, 1996; Churchill & Iacobucci 2005) define research design as the procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies and further explain that

it is the overall plan for connecting the conceptual research problems with the pertinent empirical research.

There are three possible methodological choices used in studies of Facebook use and political participation.

Firstly, a qualitative method aims at collecting non-numerical data and seeks to interpret meaning from the data that helps one to understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Crossman, 2019). There are several advantages of using qualitative research methods in a study like this one. Some of the advantages include the use of open-ended and probing questions which allow participants to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses (Crossman, 2019). Another advantage is that it produces a detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences and interprets the meanings of their actions (Denzin, 1989). Again, the qualitative research method admits the researchers to discover the participants' inner experiences, and to figure out how meanings are shaped through culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

However, beyond the above advantages, some of the limitations of the qualitative method have to do with the smaller sample size which raises issues of generalizability to the whole population of the research (Harry & Lipsky, 2014; Thompson, 2011). It is also time-consuming. The analyses of the cases take a considerable amount of time, and one can generalize the results to the larger population in only a very limited way (Flick, 2011).

Secondly, the quantitative research method is utilized in studies of Facebook use and political participation. The quantitative method aims at collecting and analysing numerical data. Bryman (2012) defines quantitative research as, “A research strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data...” This research method attempts to investigate the answers to the questions starting with how many, how much, and to what extent (Rasinger, 2013). In other words, the method lays heavy stress on measuring something or variables that existed in the social world.

The major advantage of using the quantitative research method is that findings can be generalized to a whole population or a sub-population because it involves a larger sample size that is randomly selected (Carr, 1994). Besides sampling, data analysis is less time-consuming as it uses statistical software such as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Connolly, 2007).

Given the strengths above, quantitative research has limitations too. It tends to leave out the common meanings of social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It also fails to ascertain deeper underlying meanings and explanations. Another limitation of quantitative research is that it fails to account for how the social reality is shaped and maintained, or how people interpret their actions and others (Blaikie, 2007). Lastly, the quantitative research overlooks the respondents’ experiences and perspectives in highly controlled settings because there is a lack of a direct connection between researchers and the participants when collecting data (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2013).

Lastly, the mixed research method which aims at collecting both numerical and in-depth data about what is being studied (Saunders et al., 2016, Dominick, 2013 & Crossman, 2019).

This approach is used to provide a better understanding of the research problem than either of each method alone. The method also helps the researcher to gain breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration while offsetting the weaknesses inherent in using each approach by itself (Apuke and Oberiri, 2017).

Just like qualitative and quantitative methods, this mixed method too has a few shortcomings despite its overwhelming advantages. Owing to its duplicity of content, the application of the mixed methodology in one study can prove difficult to handle by any single researcher. This is the case especially when the researcher has to apply two or more approaches concurrently (Aramo-Immonen, 2013). The mixed method of research is more expensive and time-consuming than any other method of research due to its duplicity content. Despite its shortcomings, which are not unsurmountable, this study adopted the mixed method.

3.2.1 Mixed Research Method and its rationale

This study adopted the concurrent mixed research design but was predominantly quantitative. The mixed method involves the collection and analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data is collected concurrently or sequentially, is given a priority, and involves the integration of the data at one or more stages in the research process (Gutmann & Hanson, 2002). Though regarded as time-consuming and expensive due to its duplicity (Aramo-Immonen, 2013; Apuke & Oberiri, 2017). The mixed method helps the researcher answer questions that cannot be answered using only quantitative or qualitative methods alone. Mixed methods provide a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives (Boru, 2018).

Mixed methods research was considered for this study to gain breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration while offsetting the weaknesses inherent in using each approach by itself (Apuke and Oberiri, 2017).

As a research design, mixed methods research was considered for its ability to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques (Wisdom, 2013). Thus, a structured survey questionnaire for numerical data collection and analysis was used with a larger sample. Additionally, interview schedules were used for data collection and analysis with smaller samples. The first objective of this study which is to find out the relationship between Facebook use and political participation was answered using the quantitative method by way of a questionnaire. While the second objective which is to explore under what circumstance these relationship works was answered through semi-structured interviews.

3.3 Study population

In this study, the target population to which the results were extrapolated was all Malawian youths aged between 18 to 35 years old. The eligibility criteria for the sample population included youths aged between 18-35 years old, both males and females, who have had a Facebook account at least since 2019. This means that youths between the ages of 18-35 but without a Facebook account were not eligible to be included in the study. These were considered common traits for the population of interest. The objective of this study is to generalize the study findings from the sample to the population of interest.

3.4 Sample and sampling methods

The objective of this study was to come up with a statistically representative sample that could be generalised to the population. Since this study is predominantly quantitative, it is the quantitative component of the study that will be generalized to the population while the objective of the qualitative component of the study is to garner an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, especially the lived experiences of the participants and not necessarily generalise the findings to the population. The sampling method used in identifying the sample size is the random probability while the sampling scheme is Snowball. The snowball sampling scheme is applied when it is difficult to access subjects with the target characteristics. In this method, the existing study subjects recruit future subjects among their acquaintances (Naderifar, et. al 2017; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

This method, which is also called the “chain method,” is efficient and cost-effective to access people who would otherwise be very difficult to find. The first few samples will be asked if they know anyone with similar views or situations to take part in the research. The snowball method not only takes little time but also provides the researcher with the opportunity to communicate better with the samples, as they are acquaintances of the first sample, and the first sample is linked to the researcher. This type of networking is particularly useful for finding people who are not willing to reveal their identities.

In this study, the sample size for answering the quantitative question is 384. According to NapoleonCat, a social media research institution, there are 1,015,100 Facebook users in Malawi as of July 2020. Out of 1,015,100 Facebook users, 400,000 are people aged

between 18 to 25 years old and they are the largest number of Facebook users in Malawi. Since the population of interest for this study is the Malawian youths aged between 18 to 35 years, the sample size was drawn from 400,000 youths who are active on Facebook. Using Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, the sample size was calculated at a margin of error of ± 5 (5%) and a confidence level of 95%. For the qualitative part of the study, the sample size is 20. The sample size used in the qualitative component is often smaller than that used in quantitative research methods. This is because qualitative research methods are often concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on meanings that are often centered on the how and why of a particular issue (Charmaz, 2006).

3.6 Data collection method

This study employed the concurrent method of data collection specifically, the concurrent nested method. In concurrent nested studies, one of the methods, either qualitative or quantitative, dominates whilst the other one is embedded or nested in it. In this study, priority was given to the quantitative method. Kroll et al. (2005) define priority as the relative weight assigned to the qualitative and quantitative research components.

For the quantitative component, data was collected using a structured questionnaire which was generated through Google Forms and sent electronically to respondents. The questionnaire contained the independent variable; the use of Facebook; and the dependent variable; political participation. For the qualitative component, data was collected using an interview schedule with open-ended questions.

3.7 Data Analysis

In analysing qualitative data, this study used a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is defined as a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004) argue that thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights.

The quantitative component of this study was analysed using inferential statistics (Statistical testing). Samuels (2020), posits that quantitative data is factual information involving numbers and categories. Shwarz (2014) also argues that statistical testing involves reasoning about statistical quantities derived from a sample from a population where it is assumed that the events are independent and making decisions with a certain level of confidence. The goal of inferential statistics is to make generalizations from the sample to the population, investigate differences between groups and explore relationships between variables (Samuels, 2020).

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to aid in analysing the data. Crossman (2019), argues that one of the advantages of SPSS is that the software provides a user interface that makes it easy and intuitive for all levels of users. It is also simple and easy to enter and edit data directly into the programme. However, Crossman, (2019) posits that there are a few drawbacks to SPSS such as a limit on the number of cases a researcher can analyze. It is also difficult to account for weights, strata, and group effects with SPSS.

A simple linear regression was done to study the relationship between the use of Facebook (independent variable) and political participation (dependent variable). This study employed a mixed method design; however, integration of data was not done at the data analysis stage rather it was done at the final stage of data interpretation.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Before commencing the research, the University of Malawi (Unima) through the Department of Political Studies and Administrative Studies (PAS) issued me a letter of introduction to show to the participants of the research to seek consent for their participation. This is in line with the research involving human subjects. Social Science investigates complex issues that involve cultural, legal, political, and economic phenomena (Freed-Taylor, 1994). This complexity means that social science research must concern itself with “moral integrity” to ensure that the research process and findings are “trustworthy” and valid (Biber, 2005).

In this research, respondents were notified that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they were free to decline to take part in the research at any point during the research. Prospective research participants were also fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in taking part in the research and were asked to give their consent by signing a consent form that was provided to them. This research will endeavor not to cause any harm to the participants. Harm according to (Trochim, 2006) could be both physical and psychological. Participants were guaranteed protection of their privacy and confidentiality. Above all, participants were informed of the purpose of the study that it is for academic purposes, and that it will be used for nothing else without their prior knowledge and consent.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research design as a concurrent mixed method of research but predominantly quantitative. The population of interest for this study is Malawian youths, both male and female aged between 18 to 35 years old, and only those who have an active Facebook account. The main aim of the study as discussed is to produce statistically representative findings that should be generalized to the population from which the sample was drawn. The sample size is 384 drawn from 400,000 active youths on Facebook. The figure was arrived at using a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of ± 5 . Data was collected using both a structured questionnaire generated and distributed electronically, for quantitative data and interviews with open-ended questions to generate qualitative data.

The chapter also discussed the data collection and data analysis methods. The data method used in this study is a survey and the collection tool is a structured questionnaire. The chapter also discussed ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a presentation of the results of the findings and their interpretation based on the study's objectives. The main focus of this study was to investigate the relationship between Facebook use and political participation among Malawian youths. In conceptualizing the youths, this study targeted those in the age range of between 18 to 35 years old. This study employed Mixed research methods whereby data was collected and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Although this study used the Mixed research method, the study was predominantly quantitative. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and thematic analysis for the qualitative data. The quantitative sampling design intended to get responses from 384 respondents but 103 weblinks (Google survey links), were not returned leaving the final sample size at 281, a response rate of 73%.

The specific objectives of this study were; To investigate the relationship between Facebook use and political participation and to find out if Facebook use shapes the political knowledge and attitude of Malawian youths.

The study targeted Malawian youths aged between 18 and 35 years old from across the country. This chapter presents the results in key themes drawn from the two specific objects. The broken-down themes are as follows; for Facebook use, the themes are; Number of Facebook accounts, duration of Facebook account, number of times one checks Facebook, network size, and purpose of using Facebook.

Results on political participation were analysed by looking at four key elements of Facebook political participation, which are; sharing, commenting, liking, and posting. The chapter starts by giving an overview of Facebook use and political participation then presents results for the key themes and also presents a discussion of the results.

4.2 Facebook use and political participation

The use of Facebook (FB) fosters political engagement by lowering the barriers to the expression of opinions. Facebook facilitates youth engagement in political activities, which were previously not possible. This feature gives the citizens the possibility to draw the attention of the government to specific issues and seek broader online support among other citizens. Facebook also allows its members to engage in less demanding activities, such as ‘liking’ or ‘joining’ a social and political online group, ‘liking’ a political party and its candidate and sharing one’s opinion on a political topic on their personal and others’ wall.

In this study, Facebook use, the independent variable, was measured by the following indicators; the number of Facebook accounts that one has, duration of the Facebook account (in years), number of times in a day that one checks Facebook account

(frequency), amount of time spent on Facebook in a day, number of friends and close friends that one has and lastly, what they use Facebook for.

The scale used to measure political participation contained response variables related to Facebook political participation. The responses were measured by a five-point Likert scale; 'never,' rarely,' 'sometimes,' 'most of the time,' and 'All the time. While responses to four questions on political participation required respondents to simply state "yes" or "no".

On political participation, participants were asked how often they share, comment, like, and post about politics. Participants were also asked if they have ever signed a political petition, voted, and participated in an event after it was announced on Facebook. Respondents had to simply state "yes" or "no" to questions on signing petitions, voting, and participating in political events. Control variables included four demographics; gender, age, socioeconomic status, and location.

4.2.1 Analysis and Discussion

Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The empirical results were computed using the Chi-square Test and also graphs and tables. The key variables for the analysis of Facebook use are operationalized as follows:

4.2.2 Number of Facebook accounts

The statistical analysis of the responses by respondents on the number of Facebook accounts that they have revealed that the majority of them, 83%, had only one account. While 13% of the respondents indicated that they had a minimum of two Facebooks

accounts. A cross-tabulation between the number of accounts and location revealed that the majority, 85%, of those that said they only had one account lived in an urban area while 72% lived in a rural area. Whereas, those that indicated that they had one account, 86%, were male and 80% were females. Of those that indicated that they had more than one Facebook account, 18%, were female while 13% were male.

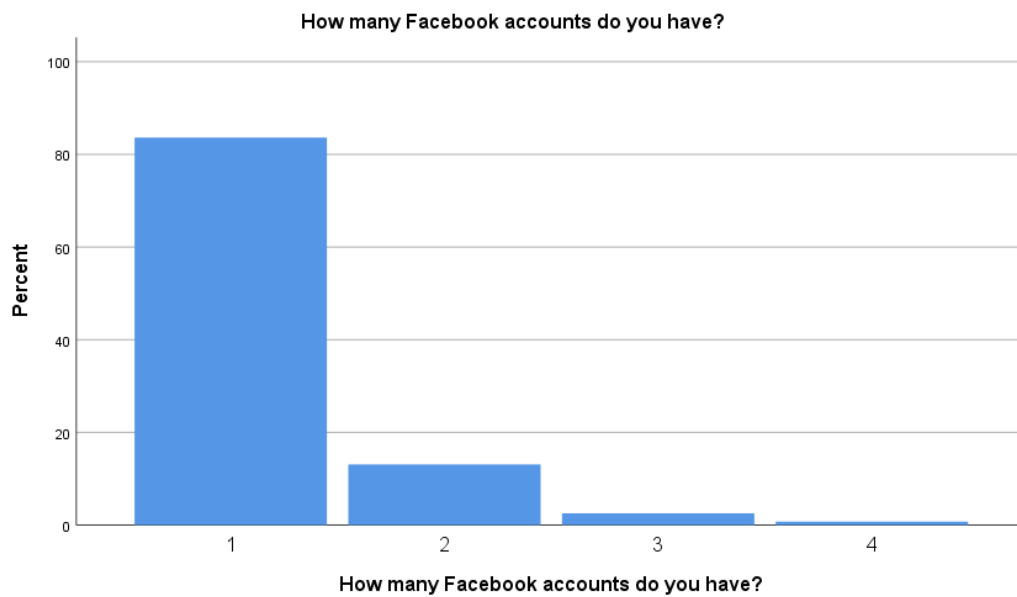


Figure 1: How many Facebook accounts do you have

The statistical analysis reveals that a little less than half of the respondents had more than one FB account. It may be possible that one Facebook account is used for keeping in touch with close friends and family members (private account) and the other account may be for public use. This is consistent with existing literature that has shown that most people on Facebook, particularly females, hide their identities because, in some patriarchal societies, females are not allowed to meet with strangers even on Facebook (Roblyer et al, 2010). There is also another possibility that those with more than one account, do not necessarily use all of them as some often tend to forget passwords and end up opening another account once they fail to remember the password but forget to

deactivate the previous one. Some scholars (Konova & Alhabash, 2011; Vasile, 2014; Kizgin et al, 2019; Gil de Zuniga et al, 2014; Chan, 2016) have argued that the number of Facebook accounts is a precursor to judging the involvement of the youths in Facebook activities. The use of Facebook with more accounts allows one to engage with not just a heterogeneity network structure—those with similar characteristics and interests, but rather expand their network size hence, being exposed to more diverse information including political information (Chan, 2016; German, 2014 & Konova & Alhabash, 2011)

4.2.3 Duration of Facebook account

In analysing the duration of Facebook accounts, respondents were asked to indicate a range in years that best described the number of years they have been using Facebook. The duration of Facebook accounts of more than half of the respondents, 74%, was more than six years. Only 3% of the respondents indicated that they had been using Facebook for less than a year.

Table 1: Range of years on Facebook

Duration	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1	7	2.5
1-2	5	1.8
2-3	5	1.8
3-4	24	8.5
5-6	30	10.7
6+	207	73.7
Total	278	98.9
Missing	3	1.1
Total	281	100

This indicates that youths consistently use Facebook for information sharing and expressing opinions on different issues. It might also be thought that the duration of FB accounts is an indication of youths' dependence on Facebook for seeking information about their interests.

The statistical analysis of the relationship between duration of Facebook account and location revealed that 70% of those who indicated that they have been on Facebook for more than six years, said they lived in a rural area while 74.8% said they lived in an urban area. For those who have been on Facebook for less than a year, 2.7% indicated that they live in a rural area while 2.5% of the respondents indicated that they live in urban. In terms of gender, 66.9% of the respondents whose duration on Facebook was more than six years, were female while 80.5% were male. Those in the less than a year bracket, 4.7% were female while 0.7% were male.

There were more females in the 5-6 years range, 11.8% as compared to males, 10.1%. The duration of the Facebook account of more than half of the respondents was six years which indicates that youths consistently use FB.

4.2.3 Number of times in a day one checks Facebook

Respondents were asked to indicate, by ticking, the number of times in a day that they check their Facebook account. The options available to them were; 2-5 times, 5-10 times, more than 10 times, once a day, and not every day. The results show that the majority (68.3%) check their FB at least two times a day as compared to less than once and not at every day (30.9%).

Table 2: Number of times in a day one checks on Facebook?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2-5 times a day	67	23.8	24.1	24.1
	5-10 times a day	59	21.0	21.2	45.3
	More than 10 times a day	66	23.5	23.7	69.1
	Not everyday	70	24.9	25.2	94.2
	Once a day	16	5.7	5.8	100.0
	Total	278	98.9	100.0	
Missing		3	1.1		
Total		281	100.0		

4.2.4 Time spent on Facebook

Time spent was measured by asking the respondents to report on the amount of time they spend on Facebook in a day. The time spent ranged from less than 10 minutes, 10-60 minutes, 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours, more than 5 hours. The daily time spending on Facebook shows that the maximum time spent on FB was 10-60 minutes (45.6%), while 15.7% indicated that they spend less than ten minutes on FB in a day. Only 9.6 % of respondents indicated that they spend five hours on FB in a day. Only 9.6% of the respondents indicated that the spend more than five hours on FB in a day. A cross-tabulation between time spent and location indicate that those who says they spend an average of 10-60 minutes on FB, live in urban areas (46.6%) while 45.9% of those who said they spend 10-60 minutes on FB live in rural areas. Those that reported that the spend less 10 minutes, 16.2% of them live in rural area while 16.1% live in urban area while 16.2% of those who indicated that they spend more than five hours on Facebook, said they live in rural area while 8.5% of those who spend more than five hours live in urban area. On the other hand, a cross-tabulation of the time spent on FB against gender, revealed that 51.6% of those that spend an average of 10-60 minutes on FB were female

while 42.6% were male. Those that spend less than 10 minutes a day on FB, 19% of them were female while 12.8% were male. However, the results show that males (10.8%) spend more than five hours a day on FB compared to 8.7% of females. Spending more time on FB has the possibility of heightening the chance of people encountering all kinds of information and materials, including political materials on the platform (Masiha, et al, 2018).

Time spent on FB relates significantly to exposure to shared political information, which in turn affects both online and offline participation.

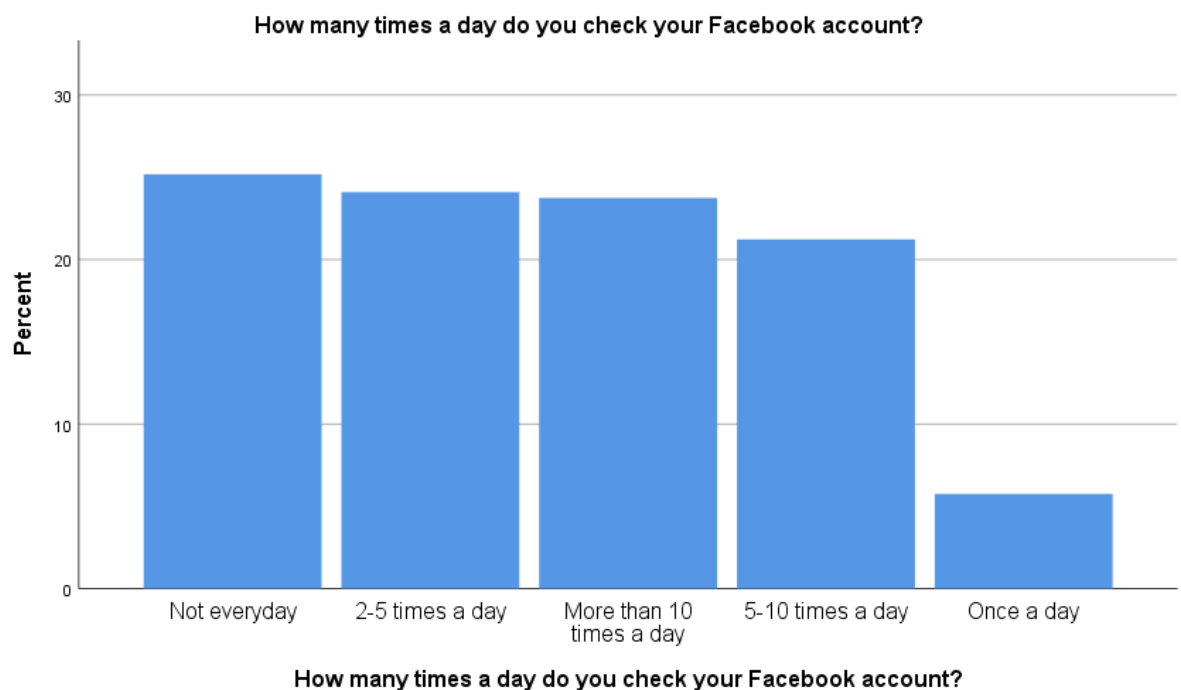


Figure 2: How many times a day do you check on Facebook?

4.2.5 Network size

In this study, network size means the average number of friends and close friends linked to one's account. Network size was measured by asking the respondents to tick the box that best described the number of friends and close friends linked to their Facebook accounts. This variable was capped at 1000 to resolve the problem of having outliers

who have an extraordinarily large number of friends. The statistical results show that out of a total of 278 respondents who responded to this question, 117 (42.6%) had over 1000 friends and close friends on Facebook. While 23 % indicated that they had between 500 to 700 friends and 13% indicated they had about 100-500 friends and only 10% had less than 50 friends. A cross-tabulation of the Statistical analysis of the relationship between number of friends and location found that 43.2% of those who said they had over 1000 friends, lived in a rural area while 41.6% of those with over 1000 friends lived in an urban area. Of those with less than 50 friends, 21.6%, lived in rural areas while 8.4% lived in urban area. On the other hand, a cross-tabulation between the number of friends and close friends with gender revealed that those who said they had over 1000 friends, 45.6% were males while 38.6% of them were females. Of those who indicated that they had between 500-700 friends, 25.2% were females as compared to 22.1% males in this category. For those with less than 50 friends, the statistics reveal that more females (14%) had less than 50 friends compared with 6% of males in this category.

Where main elements of FB usage are concerned, respondents who had larger FB networks—more friends, also participated in political activities such as through signing online political petitions and online voting more frequently, though the impact of network size is necessitated by connection with other politically inclined friends. Network size is an important factor for knowing the use of Facebook and political participation. Having a personal account, may not be enough for online political engagement, hence one needs to network to fully participate in online civic engagement. It is also from this networking that one derives diverse political perspectives Network size necessitates one to be exposed to political information.

Respondents to a question on how they access political news, most respondents revealed that they mostly access both political and other current affairs news through social networks sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Essentially, being exposed to political news on FB is somehow indirectly linked to network size.

4.2.6 Purpose of using Facebook (what they use FB for)

The reason for using Facebook or simply put, why the respondents use Facebook was measured by asking the respondents to tick all options that applied to them. The options were; Keeping up with friends, keeping up to date with political news, keeping in touch with political leaders, online shopping, and events planning. The results show that the majority of respondents use Facebook for keeping up to date with political news and keeping in touch with political leaders (39.1%) as compared to keeping up with friends, 37.5% while 17.8% said they use it for online shopping. Respondents were also asked to tick yes or no if they use Facebook or not. The majority of the respondents, 97.6% said they use FB while only 1.4% said they do not use FB. From the results and follow-up interviews, it was clear that the motivation behind using Facebook was mostly, information seeking, whether to it is seeking information about their friends, or seeking more information about political leaders and political affairs. The majority of the respondents (39.1%), did indicate that Facebook is the platform they mostly use to know more about politics and political leaders.

Previous studies on this subject tend to agree that the youths are now using Facebook to seek political information, mobilize like minds, create user-generated content, and share political views (Towner, 2013; Thun, 2014; Droguer, et al, 2011& Abdu, et al, 2017). Increasingly, Facebook has been used to mobilize individuals to participate in

politics and protests around the world. The other motivation for using Facebook is its global reach, better quality, greater speed, and also interactive medium of online political discussion (Gromping, 2014, p.39-59). Youth today get their political information from Facebook rather than the legacy traditional media.

4.2.7 Political Participation

The four key indicators for political participation in this study included; sharing, commenting, liking, and posting about politics on Facebook. Participants were also asked if they have ever signed a political petition, voted, and participated in an event after it was announced on Facebook. Respondents had to simply tick “yes” or “no” to questions on signing petitions, voting, and participating in political events.

With regards to *sharing* content about politics on their FB accounts, the statistical results revealed that most of the respondents, 37.4%, rarely share political posts while 34.2% said they never share at all as compared to only 3.2% who said they share all the time. Those that said they share most of the time were only 8.5% while 16.7% said they sometimes do share political posts on their FB accounts. An analysis of the relationship between sharing and gender revealed that 39.5% of those who said they never share about politics on their FB accounts, were female while 29.3% were male. Of those who said they post all the time, 3.1% were females while 3.3% were male, while those who said they rarely share about politics, 38.8% were female and 36% were male. Analysis of sharing and location showed that 32.4% of those who said they never share, lived in a rural area while 34.9% of them lived in an urban area. Of those who said they share all the time, 10.8% lived in a rural area while 1.7% lived in an urban area. The results

also revealed that of those who indicated that they rarely share political content, 27% lived in a rural area while 39% lived in an urban area.

A Chi-Square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between sharing political content and signing political petitions via FB. The relationship between these variables was significant, $X^2(4, N=281) = 14.625, p = .006$. Another test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between sharing political posts on FB and participation in political activities. The relationship between these two variables was statistically significant, $X^2(4, N=281) = 14.666, p = .005$. On the other the test of independence performed to examine the relationship between sharing political posts and voting on political issues posted on FB showed that the relationship between these two variables was not statistically significant, $X^2(4, N=281) = 13.107, p = .011$.

On the basis of the above results, those who do not share political content on their FB account are more likely not to sign a political petition that has been posted on FB.

Results of *commenting* on political issues showed that the majority of respondents, 29.9%, never comment on political issues on their FB account while 28.1% said they rarely comment and 27.8% said they sometimes comment on political matters. Only 2.8% of the respondents indicated that they comment all the time while 11% said they comment most of the time.

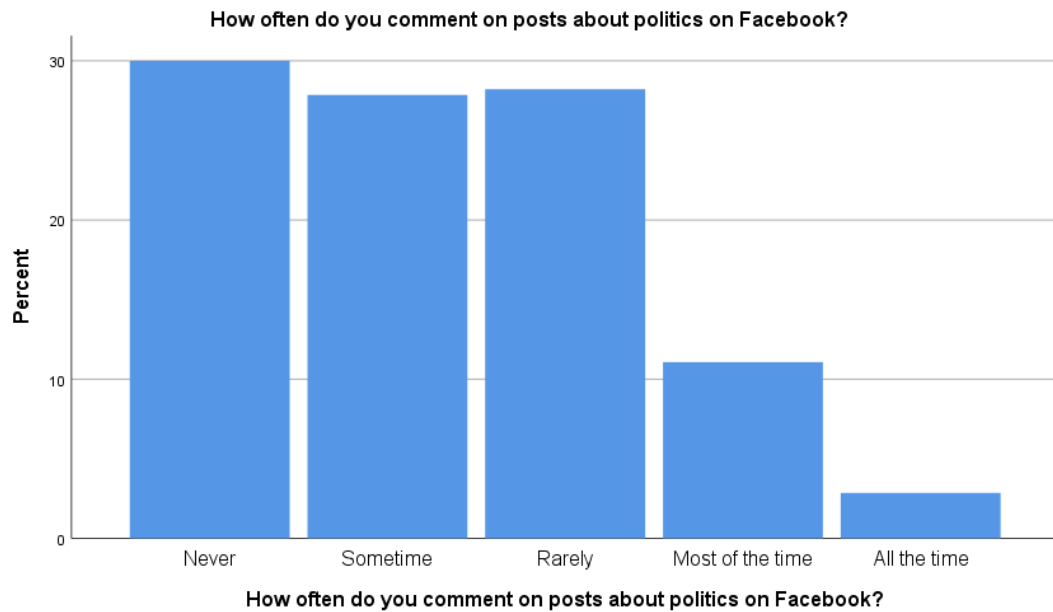


Figure 3: How many times do you comment on posts about politics on Facebook

A cross-tabulation between commenting and gender revealed that the majority, 37.2%, of those who never comment on posts about politics were female compared with 23.5% of males who said they never comment on posts about politics. However, there was a majority of males who comment all the time (4.7%) compared with females who comment all the time (0.8%). The results also showed that more males, 30.2%, were sometimes commenting on posts about politics while 25.6% of females were sometimes commenting. A Chi-Square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between commenting and signing the online political petition. The relationship between these variables was significant, $X^2 (4, N = 281) = 21.918, p = .000$. Again, a chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant relationship between commenting and participating in political events, especially those events that are announced on Facebook, $X^2 (4, N = 281) = 30.65, p = .000$. The same result was observed between commenting and voting online. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (4, N = 281) = 33.054, p = .000$.

Another key indicator of Facebook political participation was “Like”. Clicking “Like” below a post on Facebook is a way to let people know that one has seen the post, that the post interests them and somehow, they endorse the thinking behind such a particular post. The statistical results for “Like” showed that the majority, 29.2%, of the respondents, rarely ‘Like” political posts. The results showed that 27.4% of the respondents sometimes like political posts, while 8.5% of the respondents said they like political posts all the time. On the other hand, 11.7% of respondents said they never like political posts. A Chi-square test of independence performed to examine the relationship between “Like” and signing a political petition showed that the relationship between these two variables was statistically significant, $X^2(4, N=281) = 28.974$, $p = .000$.

The statistical results also showed a significant relationship between “like” and participation in political events in one’s community. The results also revealed that there is statistically a significant relationship between “Like” and online voting.

Results on commenting as an indicator of participation show that majority of the youths do not comment about politics on their FB wall or other people’s posts about politics.

Another key indicator of participation is *posting*. Respondents were asked to indicate “yes” if they post about politics and “no”, if they do not. The results revealed that out of the 281 respondents, 214 (76.2%) do not post about politics on their FB wall while 66 respondents (23.5%) said they do post about politics.

A Chi-square test of independence performed to examine the relationship between “posting” and signing political petition showed that the relationship between these two variables was statistically significant ($p < .000$). The same result was observed between

posting and participating in political activities and also between the variable of “posting’ and voting online. There was a statistically significant relationship between these variables.

A cross-tabulation between posting and gender showed that 82.9% of those who said they do not post about politics were female while 70.5% of those who responded that they do not post about politics were male. On the other hand, 29.5% of those who said they do post about politics were male while 17.1% of those who said they do post about politics were female.

Table 3: Do you ever post about politics on your Facebook account?

**Do you ever post about politics on your Facebook account? * Gender
Crosstabulation**

			Gender			
			Female	Male	Prefer not to answer	Total
Do you ever post about politics on your Facebook account?	No	Count	107	105	1	213
		% within Gender	82.9%	70.5%	100.0%	76.3%
	Yes	Count	22	44	0	66
		% within Gender	17.1%	29.5%	0.0%	23.7%
Total		Count	129	149	1	279
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Again, a cross-tabulation between posting and location revealed that the majority of those who said they do not post about politics, 77.2%, lived in an urban area while 73% of those who said they do not post about politics lived in a rural area. The results also showed that 27% of those who said they do post about politics on their FB wall live in a rural area while 22.8% of those who do post about politics said they lived in an urban area.

Posting and sharing both imply content creation on social media. However, while sharing is a mere reproduction of some already published material, in posting, content is created by the user or what is called user-generated content (Bene, 2017). A Facebook user can post text, pictures, videos, or any infographics which will be viewed by all of the users' friends or what are called connections. While sharing is somehow endorsing someone's opinion, with posting, the user expresses their own viewpoints. In terms of weighting, direct posting carries more weight than simply reproducing other people's opinions or content.

One of the reasons that respondents said they either do not post or share political content on their Facebook wall is that they do not trust social network sites and Facebook in particular. During interviews, respondents indicated that they fear being targets of political party sympathizers who might harass them in cases where they post and comment not in favour of a particular political party.

“No. I haven't, sometimes I just feel scared that I might be traced by political party leaders or supporters and be intimidated.”— (F.M. 19-years-old, female respondent).

Apart from trust issues to do with intimidation, there is also trust issues in terms of whether one is dealing with the real person or an impersonation of a real person.

4.2.8 Facebook use, political attitude and knowledge

One of the objectives of this study was to find out if Facebook shapes political attitude. Through a five-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with the following statement: How much do you agree or disagree

with this statement: Facebook makes it easier for one to participate in political discussions that they would otherwise not express offline (*Refer 1= strongly agree; 2= agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree*). The results showed that the majority of the respondents, 30.2%, strongly agree that Facebook makes it easier for them to participate in political discussions which they would otherwise not express offline, while 11.4% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 4

How much do you agree or disagree with this statement: Facebook makes it easier for one to participate in political discussions that they would otherwise not express offline (Refer; strongly agree; = agree; = neither agree nor disagree; =disagree; =strongly disagree)

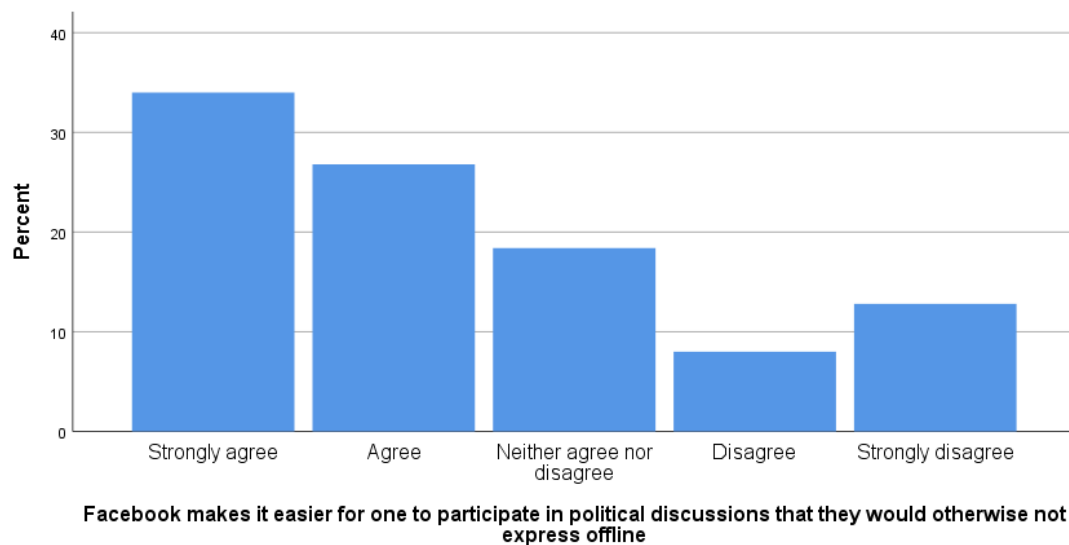


Figure 4: Facebook as a platform for political participation

When a similar question on attitude but focusing on whether Facebook should be regulated was put to respondents during the interviews, respondents expressed reservations about regulating Facebook. One respondent said this:

“No. Let people be free to express their views although some abuse this. I benefitted a lot from Facebook even if it’s not me posting but

just reading other people's posts makes me know what is happening in my country and world"— (T.B. 21-years-old, Male)

Exposure to political information through Facebook, has a potential of influencing users' perception towards politics. Respondents to the interview expressed knowledge of political affairs which they attributed to their use of Facebook and other SNSs such as WhatsApp and Twitter.

"Facebook has helped me know some profiles of political party leaders of which in the past it was hard to know them. I know them by searching their username on Facebook, even though sometimes I get fake accounts but mostly I get the official ones"— (S.P. 19-years-old, Male)

Discussion

With respect to specific objective one, which aimed at finding out the relationship between Facebook use and political participation, the study has found that there is a statistically significant relationship between Facebook use and political participation. Where main elements of FB usage are concerned, respondents who had larger FB networks also participated in politics more frequently than those with small network size. Those with a larger network size participated more in political activities such as signing online political petitions and online voting, though the impact of network size is necessitated by connection with other politically inclined friends. Network size is an important factor for knowing the use of Facebook and political participation. Having a personal account, may not be enough for online political engagement, hence one needs to network to fully participate in online civic engagement. It is also from this networking that one derives diverse political perspectives. Network size necessitates one to be exposed to political information. Besides, time spent on FB also has a significant indirect effect on participation through exposure to political information.

The more time one spends on FB, the more likely that person will be exposed to political information from within their network. The number of FB accounts that one has, relates to network size—number of friends one has on FB. The more the number of accounts, the bigger the network size and the higher the likelihood of one being exposed to more and diverse political information which in turn might lead to change in political knowledge, change in political attitude and lead to political participation. These findings coincide with past research on relationship between Facebook use and political participation. Gil de Zuniga et al., (2012) found out that there was a relationship between Facebook use and political participation among the youths. Gil de Zuniga's study particularly found that network size significantly predicts political participation. In his study on politics and young people's political participation, Bennet and Segerberg (2012:748) posit that young people's perceptions of politics and groups of engagement have changed. They argue further that increasingly, political participation is viewed through the lens of individual action frameworks, but formal organizations are losing their grip on individuals and group ties are being replaced by large-scale fluid social networks. These networks form the basis of alternative modes of political engagement that seem to better fit younger citizens' preferences for horizontal forms of engagement.

Sloam and Henn (2019), concurs with the argument advanced by Bennet and Segerberg (2012) and adds that young people find it much easier and more attractive for instance, to sign an online petition forwarded by a friend on online spying by the state, than to actively promote the broad programme of a top-down organisation like a political party. These findings parry away the perception that the youth are apathetic and disengaged in politics. The major argument in these studies is that the youth have

alternative avenues for political participation other than the traditional avenues such as holding a position in a political party.

Several studies on the role of Facebook and youth political participation have found a positive correlation between Facebook use and political participation and that the number of frequent uses of Facebook does have a significant increase in political participation (Dagona, Karick & Abubakar, 2013; Abdu1, Mohamad, & Muda, 2017 & Bincof, 2018). Previous research by Park, et al (2009) has shown that young FB users who used FB frequently are more actively and purposively inclined to engage in civic and political activities both online and offline because of increasing awareness about political issues.

With regard to specific objective two, which aimed at finding out if Facebook use shapes the youths' political attitude and knowledge, the study found out that Facebook helps shape one's political knowledge and attitude. Respondents expressed that SNSs such as Facebook and WhatsApp, are their go-to platforms for information seeking on current and political affairs and that often debates that ensued on Facebook helped them to change their attitudes towards politics and politicians. One respondent highlighted the following;

Most of the political information I have received is mainly about the campaigns and also, I have read manifestos of different political parties on Facebook. I most of the times share with friends—(F.S. 21-years-old, female)

When a question to gauge the youths' political attitude was posed; should government regulate Facebook? Most of the respondents expressed reservations about any sort of government intervention, positive or negative on Facebook. Reasons for such

reservations ranged from those who expressed that SNSs enable them to express themselves freely and argued that any government intervention means infringing on people's right to freedom of expression to those who felt the government should only intervene in order to stop online bullying and not to stop free speech.

No, because insofar as the government will regulate this platform then people who are shy on the ground won't be able to express themselves fully as they do—(G.J, 19-years-old, Male)

While the results did not show a significant relationship between a number of political pages one follows and participation in political activities such as signing petitions, voting, and attending political rallies, of interest was the fact that 40% of the respondents indicated that they follow between 20 and 30 political pages on FB, said they have participated in activities such as signing online political petitions as compared to those who did indicate that they follow few political pages. One explanation for this would be that those who follow many political pages on FB are highly likely to be exposed to more and more diverse political information leading to either change in political knowledge or political attitude which in turn leads to participation.

Some scholars, (Lupia & Philpot, 2005; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010) have argued that people's tendency to consume certain materials based on existing interests and attitudes does not rule out occasional, sometimes accidental, exposure to other materials. The rise of social media has arguably further contributed to the phenomenon of accidental or unintentional exposure to public affairs content because such content is often pushed to people by their friends. Although people having strong ties with each other are likely to share similar interests and attitudes, individuals' social media networks often contain "weak ties" that play important roles in information dissemination (Gil de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2011). Politically apathetic individuals can

still be connected via social media such as Facebook, to acquaintances who are highly interested in public affairs, and the latter could become sources of occasional political information and messages.

As regards the theory, the results of the study confirm that interactivity is at the center of SNSs such as Facebook. The Interactive theory of political socialization suggests that there is an influence relationship between the individual being socialized, the socializing agents, and the socializers contained therein. It is the social interactions that help individuals gather political information which helps them to live beyond their resource constraints, thereby being able to support political activities (McClurg, 2003). Interactivity happens when individuals comment, post, share, and like political posts. Social Networking Sites such as Facebook exist for interaction, whether social or political interaction.

Even before social media appeared, scholars have been debating the Internet's impact on citizens' civic and political participation since the Internet's popularization in the 1990s. On one hand, the optimists argued that the Internet lowers information costs, enhances people's sense of efficacy through its interactivity (Chadwick, 2006), and facilitates online mobilization (Earl & Kimport, 2011). On the other hand, the skeptics argued that the Internet presents a "high choice environment" that generates higher levels of audience selectivity (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008: p.125-130). It facilitates the political junkies to stay even closer to politics, but it also allows the uninterested to stay further away (Davis, 1999; Prior, 2007).

While some of the results replicate existing findings especially on the relationship between Facebook use and political participation (Abdu, et, al., 2017; Chan, 2016; Gil de Zuniga, et, al., 2014; Kononova & Alhabash, 2011; Schmiemann, 2015; Vissers & Stolle, 2013; Vasile, 2014), this study further found out that most youths, much as they find Facebook to be liberating in terms of offering them a platform where they are able to express their political opinions, there is also a sense of mistrust of social networking sites such as Facebook due to the possibility and ability for one to create a parody or fake account that mimics political personalities. It is this mistrust that most respondents expressed that stops them from actively posting or commenting on some political posts.

The central conclusion to be drawn from the above discussion is that there is a relationship between Facebook use and political participation among the Malawian youths however, this relationship happens under conditions of interactivity with other politically inclined friends within one's network. In other words, network size has a huge bearing on how much political information one is exposed to and how that influences and shapes one's knowledge and attitude.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of the study and the discussion thereof. The central conclusion drawn from the findings and the discussion is that there is a relationship between Facebook use and political participation. It has been discussed that this relationship is more prominent in those with a large network size which necessitates them to be exposed to more and diverse political information. The other main finding discussed in this chapter is that Facebook helps shape one's political attitude and knowledge. Just like in participation, exposure to political information on

Facebook leads to shaping one's political knowledge and attitude which also leads to participation. Network size is at the core of political engagement and influences one's political attitude. The larger the network size, the more information one is exposed to. The relationship between Facebook use and political participation as well as the shaping of political attitude and knowledge, happen under conditions of interactivity with other politically inclined friends within one's network. In other words, network size has a huge bearing on how much political information one is exposed to and how that influences and shapes one's knowledge and attitude.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study, their implications, and recommendations for further study. The broad conclusion of this study is that there is a relationship between Facebook use and political participation. This participation depends largely on one's network size and network structure. The study's main aim was to investigate the link between Facebook use and political participation among Malawian youths. It was further supported by two specific objectives; Finding out if there is a relationship between Facebook use and political participation and finding out if Facebook use shapes youths' political attitudes and knowledge.

This chapter also concludes that Facebook use among Malawian youths helps shape their political attitude and knowledge. Despite some mistrust of Social Networking sites such as Facebook because of what some described as ability to create a fake account, generally, Malawian youths use Facebook to be for political information seeking and be kept abreast of current and political information. This chapter discusses the implication of the study findings as well as provides recommendations. The chapter ends with recommendations for further areas of study.

5.2 Conclusions and Implications

Previous studies on Facebook use and political participation among the youths, converge on one major conclusion; that there is a positive relationship between Facebook use and political participation. Similarly, previous studies that explored whether the use of Facebook leads to change in political attitude and political knowledge, conclude that frequent use and exposure to political information online has a direct effect on one's political attitude and knowledge. However, most of these studies are Eurocentric. Studies on use of SNSs have been few and far apart in Africa and Malawi in particular.

The major motivation for this study was the need to investigate if there is a relationship between Facebook use and political participation among Malawian youths. The study further aimed at finding out if the usage of Facebook shapes the youths' political attitude and knowledge. It was important to conduct this research because for a long time youths have been labelled as apathetic towards politics despite being touted as the future leaders. Those who often advance such argument, point to fact of the youths' lack of taking part in political party positions, low youth turn-out at political activities such political rallies and voting.

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. When young people are disenfranchised or disengaged from political processes, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice or influence in decisions that affect group members' lives—a key consequence is the undermining of political systems' representativeness.

Although not one of the major motivations for this study, this research aimed at finding out if indeed the youths are apathetic towards politics or if the youth of today have found other means of participating in politics apart from the traditional means such as holding political positions or being physically present at a political activity and others. Facebook and indeed other digital communication technologies are offering an alternative to the youths according to a 2018 Pew Research Center on Teens, social media and Technology done in the USA, which found that youths use smartphones to constantly access social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram.

The central conclusion drawn from this study's findings and the discussion is that there is a relationship between Facebook use and political participation. It has been discussed that this relationship is more prominent in those with a large network size which necessitates them to be exposed to more and diverse political information. It is discussed in this study that those who are friends with those who are politically active, were also more likely to participate more in online political discussions and activities. Network size in this case refers to the number of friends and close friends one has on Facebook.

The implication of this finding on policy is that often connection on Facebook suffers from structural homogeneity whereby people get connected to people with similar political views and tend to not befriend those with different views from theirs. This means that there is also a high likelihood that even though one is exposed to more political information, that information is only one-sided such that it may not be quite useful in enabling one to make informed political choices. In terms of implications for

future studies, this finding is critical in contributing to the scholarly discussion on Facebook and political participation and even on political organization and communication.

The other conclusion from this study is that Facebook helps shape youths' political attitudes and knowledge. Just like in participation, exposure to political information on Facebook leads to shaping one's political knowledge and attitude which also leads to participation. The relationship between Facebook use and political participation as well as the shaping of political attitude and knowledge, happen under conditions of interactivity. Interactivity happens one is able to post, share, comment, and like posts on Facebook and or any other SNSs of their choice. Interactivity is key in knowing how actively involved one is, as well as knowing one's political views. However, for interactivity to happen smoothly on Facebook, one has to have access to the Internet.

The implication of this is that with the digital divide—the gap between individuals, households, businesses, and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities leaves those in areas with poor ICT infrastructure disenfranchised. Even for the findings, those who live in urban areas where there is at least good access to ICT infrastructure were more than those who indicated that they lived in rural areas. This was also true for those who indicated to have some form of income generating activities as compared to those who indicated they were not engaged in any income generating activity.

Access to and development of information, communication, and e-commerce resources are increasingly viewed as crucial for economic and social development. It would be important for the government to come up with a policy to examine how best to ensure access for citizens to these technologies that not only ease communication but are also crucial in the democratization process. The youths today frequently get their political information from social media rather than traditional media. The information given via social media is more interactive, user-centered, brief, easier to process, and visually attractive (e.g. animation, videos, and infographics). People are increasingly posting online their views concerning politics and social issues, sharing news articles, ‘following’ political figures, and watching videos connected to politics. Access to the internet hence would enable youths to be exposed to information that is crucial for them to make informed decisions on politics or socio-economic issues that affect them. An informed youth would surely lead to informed future leaders.

Hence, it would be good to reach the youths where they are with such information. To do so efficiently and effectively, it is important that government has information on the nature and extent of the digital divide and on the kinds of measures that can help to overcome it.

5.3 Recommendations for further study

Given the limitations of the study design and scope, there is a need for further studies on Facebook use and political participation. The areas that can be further explored include the following:

- a) Establishing whether there is a difference in political knowledge and attitude between Facebook users and non-Facebook users. It is critical to find out if there

is any difference between users of SNSs and non-users because such studies would contribute to the understanding of the place and influence that SNSs have on one's political participation and politics in general. Again, establishing whether or not there are differences between Facebook users and non-users will help inform a new way of doing political communication and organization by politicians and the general citizenry.

- b) This study focused on online political participation. From the findings, further inquiry can be done to find out if active online political participation leads to offline political participation. Of interest would be to find out if the youths or indeed anyone using SNSs such as Facebook, are able to log off and take part in offline political activities such as holding positions in a political party and others.
- c) Establish whether or not the digital divide has a significant effect on the quantity and quality of both online and offline political participation. From the results of this study, it is clear that socio-demographic variables (age, education, gender, income levels) play a crucial role in political participation, especially online participation which was the main focus of this study. For instance, female respondents indicated less levels of participation and so too were those with low education levels and lower income. Studies on the use internet and political participation have generally found a strong positive relationship and positive link between online and offline political participation. However, in an environment where there is a digital divide, the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communication technologies, there are bound to be inequalities in terms of both online and offline political participation. It would be interesting to find out which age,

gender with what levels of education, income and from which geographical set-up participates more or less and what factors contributes to their more or less participation?

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APPENDENCES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: Demographics

Name of respondent (Optional) _____

1. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other

2. Age

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 25-30
- ☐ 30-35
- ☐ 35-40
- ☐ 40 and above

3. What is your highest level of education attained?

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ College
- ☐ University
- ☐ None

4. Where do you live?

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural

5. Are you involved in any income generating activity?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

SECTION B: Facebook Use

6. Do you use Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. How do you access Facebook?

- ☐ Phone (Smartphone)
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Desktop computer
- ☐ Tablet

8. How many Facebook accounts do you have?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5+

9. How long have you been using Facebook?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 2-3 years
- ☐ 3-4 years
- ☐ 5-6 years
- ☐ More than 6 years

10. How many times a day do you check your Facebook account?

- ☐ Not everyday
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ 2-5 times a day
- ☐ 5-10 times a day
- ☐ More than 10 times a day

11. How much time do you spend on Facebook in a day?

- ☐ Less than 10 minutes
- ☐ 10-60 minutes
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ More than 5 hours

12. How many friends and close friends do you have on Facebook?

- ☐ Less than 50
- ☐ 50-100
- ☐ 100-250
- ☐ 500-700
- ☐ Over 1000

13. What do you use Facebook for?

- ☐ Keeping in touch with friends
- ☐ Keep up to date with political news
- ☐ Keep in touch with political leaders
- ☐ Event planning
- ☐ Online shopping

SECTION C: Facebook and Political Participation

14. How often do you share political posts either by you or by your Facebook friends?

- ☐ All the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Sometime
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

15. How often do you comment on posts about politics on Facebook?

- ☐ All the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Sometime
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

16. How often do you like other people's posts about politics on Facebook?

- ☐ All the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Sometime
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

17. Do you ever post about politics on your Facebook account?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. Have you ever signed an online political petition that was sent to you via Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. How many political pages do you follow on Facebook?

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10-20
- ☐ 20-30
- ☐ Over 30 pages

20. How many of your friends on Facebook are actively involved in politics?

- ☐ 0-10
- ☐ 10-50
- ☐ 50-100
- ☐ More than 100
- ☐

21. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement: Facebook makes it easier for one to participate in political discussions that they would otherwise not express offline. (Refer 1=strongly agree; 2= agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree).

1. Strongly agree

- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree

22. How many of your friends on Facebook are actively involved in politics?

- ☐ 0-10
- ☐ 10-50
- ☐ 50-100
- ☐ More than 100
- ☐

23. Have you ever participated in a political event in your community after it was announced on Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Have you ever voted before?

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.....

2. Are you a member or do you support any political party?

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.....
.....

a) If yes, how did you know about the political party and what made you become a supporter/member?

.....
.....
.....

b) If no, how did you know about the candidates and political parties you voted for?

.....
.....
.....

3. Where do you get most of your political news and information?

.....
.....
.....

4. Do you think Facebook has helped you to gain political knowledge?

.....

a) If yes, how and what political knowledge do you now have?

.....
.....
.....
.....

b) If no, why?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5. Have you ever received or heard any political information through Facebook?

.....

a) If yes, what kind of information was it and what did you do about
the information?

.....
.....
.....

b) If no, would you go to Facebook to seek political information?

.....
.....

6. Have you ever participated in any political activity after it was announced on Facebook?

.....
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a) If yes, what was the activity and how did you participate?

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b) If no, why did you not respond to the Facebook announcement?

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.....

7. Have you ever signed a petition on Facebook?

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a) If yes, what was the petition about?

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.....
b) If no, why did you not sign?

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.....
8. Have you ever participated in voting for a particular political issue that was posted on Facebook? Why did you vote or not vote?

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.....
9. Should government regulate Facebook? In what ways? (Give a reason for your answer).

.....
.....
.....
10. Could you please just tell me, how old you are?

.....
.....
11. What is your highest attained education?