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MASTER'S DISSERTATION (PROJECT)

***« Social Media and political participation in Kazakhstan: are Instagram,
Tik Tok and YouTube democratizing our political system? »***

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Abstract

Social media's influence on political activity and citizen participation in today's information society is significant. This research aims to examine the connection between social media usage and the political engagement of young people in Kazakhstan, contributing to the existing literature in this area.

The study focuses on three research questions as use of social media for political engagement, its impact on the expansion of political participation and democratization among the youth in Kazakhstan, and the perceptions of young individuals regarding social media's capacity to enable their involvement in politics and influence political decision-making and opinion formation.

Preliminary findings reveal that Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have emerged as significant platforms for political participation, particularly among the younger generation in Kazakhstan. These platforms have empowered citizens to express their opinions, share political content, and engage in discussions previously limited to traditional media outlets. The democratization potential of social media lies in their ability to facilitate the free flow of information and amplify diverse voices. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offer platforms for citizens to exchange information, express viewpoints, and engage with political matters, which is crucial in environments with limited traditional media.

However, social media platforms face limitations and challenges when used for political participation. For example, disinformation and manipulation pose significant risks that distort public opinion formation. Additionally, not all citizens have equal access to the Internet and social media, leading to a digital divide that may skew perceptions of political preferences.

In Kazakhstan, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become platforms through which the younger generation actively expresses political opinions and influences public discourse. However, political participation through social media remains constrained and subject to limitations. These platforms can potentially democratize Kazakhstan's political system by providing avenues for free expression and information exchange. However, their influence can be curtailed by restrictions and regulations, hindering their impact on political activity and citizen participation. To achieve broader democratization of Kazakhstan's political system, it is crucial to foster conditions encouraging open discussions on political issues within social media platforms while preserving citizens' rights to express their political beliefs freely.

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III. Introduction

The role of social network interactions is increasing due to the rapid development and deep penetration of information and communication technologies into all spheres of modern society. Public policy implementation cannot be imagined without being affected by social networks as the latter have become a media, where the changes can be communicated to people, awareness of the public policy agenda can be built and meaningful interactions between the policy makers and users of the policies take place. Driss et al. (2019) explain that citizens interact with government's policy by defining the problem for policy development. In other words, political opinion is formed in social media and political decisions need to consider the effects of social networks.

The present dissertation will regard platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok when using term social media or social network, which will be used in the work equally and interchangeably. The current changes in digitalisation of the society have led to higher social and political activity of the population due to availability of the information and means of reacting to it (Wilhelm,2002). Many new ways of participation, such as peaceful rallies, blogging, themed street parties, organising and being a part of like-minded groups have evolved and formed a political leverage of the population (Huyn & Kim, 2015). Moreover, Wilhelm (2002, p.8) states that the following is characteristic of a democratic society, "where "opinion formation and decision making" are thought to be legitimate when they represent the will of the people, typically defined "not as the wishes of a particular interest group or coterie but of all persons who are potentially affected by a policy". In this regard, any action or reaction in the social media can be viewed as a political participation and, thus, it becomes difficult to determine the extent to which democratisation process is taking place along with rising activity of using social media. The research aims to assess the relationship between social networks operation and the political system of Kazakhstan. Namely, the concepts of political

participation and democratisation (PPD) of political system will be studied in the present work.

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

What is the extent of social media usage among young people in Kazakhstan for political engagement and participation?

How does social media usage relate to the expansion of political participation and democratisation among the young population in Kazakhstan?

What are the perceptions of young people in Kazakhstan regarding the ability of social media platform features to enable their participation in politics, formation of political decisions, and influence on current political decision-making and opinion formation?

It is also very important to understand how such changes affect less democratised countries like Kazakhstan. Currently, this topic has not been extensively studied, and therefore the present dissertation will add knowledge to the existing gap in the literature.

This study builds upon the work of Verba et al. (1995), who claimed that rise in availability of information and news resulted in greater political engagement, and, on the works of Baumgartner & Morris (2010) and Rainie et al. (2012) and Sairambay (2021,2022), who explain the role of social networks in different social and other interactions including political involvement and participation.

IV. Literature review

There has been conducted extensive amount of research in the topic of political participation. Moreover, there are number of scholars who examined the dependencies between political participation and democratisation of the society. The part of the dissertation will examine these concepts and the scholarly papers written in the related subjects. Moreover, existing scholarly articles studying social networks and their influence on political participation of youth, and factors facilitating democratisation of the political system of Kazakhstan will be studied and presented.

Citizen Actions as Political Participation

The study of democratisation process and improvement of political participation rate requires to define the political participation term. An earlier definition produced by (Verba and Nie, 1972) explains political participation as involvement in various political activities including election, campaigns, activities of the political parties and interaction with the government bodies and officials. Moreover, the authors explain that the aim of political participation for the individuals and groups of people was to have a direct influence on processes where the politicians are selected and what actions they undertake. Later Verba et al. (1995) revised and defined a role of political activity as one that aims to create an impact on decision of the legislative power of the country in direct or indirect manner. The relevant knowledge that can be applied to present dissertation from Verba et al. (1995) is that they studied the factors that facilitated or hindered the citizen activity in politics. Authors argue that the level of political participation is not equal across the social groups in the USA. In fact, certain demographic groups, such as people with higher education or income, have shown higher involvement in politics.

Moreover, the important contribution of Verba et al. (1995) is that they define the scope and significance of voluntary associations and activities in promoting political

participation. The authors explain that these voluntary actions are the main way of participating in politics as they allow the citizens take part in forming the political decisions without being a part of formal political system and organisations within it. Moreover, the authors use a term "civic voluntarism", which refers to an organisation that is not related to government, which is not commercially oriented or do not produce a public good. These organisations act as a thrust in building political engagement of the population. However, there are many obstacles that interfere with natural development of political participation. For instance, many such organisations have a limited influence due to resource scarcity as the organisations are not commercial and usually funded by their founders. Moreover, political climate in the country may serve as a barrier as well. To sum up, political participation refers to actions performed by individuals and groups of people to have an influence on election of government officials and their further actions. The following question that requires understanding is how political participation and democratisation are connected.

The Relationship between Political Participation and Democratization

As mentioned above, under the concept of political participation people willingly take actions in order to express their opinion and attitude regarding political decisions, and to have an impact on them. Verba and Nie's (1972) and Verba et al.'s (1995) definition of political participation is centred on the idea that people can influence government decisions by actions. Thus, democratic governance arises from political participation. Moreover, civic voluntarism, as described by Verba et al. (1995), is means of executing political participation outside of formal political institutions. A substantial work in explaining the relationship between democratisation of the society and political participation has been conducted by Pateman (1970), who explained that theory of democratisation of the society is reliant on the participatory democracy. In other words,

democratic governance can be promoted if the individuals will be included in political decision-making in the role of participants. The author argues that political participation should not be limited to occasional voting only but allow to interact directly and actively with political process and its formal participants. Pateman (1970) claims that increasing legitimacy and accountability of political institutions will facilitate the development of the democratic society. This can be explained by the fact that the more legitimacy and responsiveness is expressed by political institutions, the more likely and willingly the people will interact with them. This can help to build stability and cohesion of the social interactions as the citizens will be able to share honest opinion and receive an adequate response, thus, the political institutions will satisfy the needs of the society. Following the aforementioned, political participation is a tool that can develop the civil society. Civil societies have sense of responsibility; thus, they will not only express their views, but will engage with the government to create a social justice and defend values of democracy (Pateman, 1970). As political participation and democratisation of the society are strongly interrelated, the following section will examine to what extent the digitalisation and wide usage of social networks affects the latter.

Impact of social network on the political participation level

Political participation has had simple forms in the beginning. The political participation has been executed by going to an election and voting. However, over time, the types of political activity have expanded from voting to acts of protest and agitation to other types of political activity on websites and other digital platforms where some kind of social interaction took place (Van Deth, 2016). It is fair to mention that previous studies show that new media, as well as traditional media, mostly have a positive impact on the political engagement of citizens (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). If the older generation persists in traditional means of acquiring political news, young people are

engaged in political activities on the Internet (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

Therefore, young people prefer to participate in actions which are focused on achieving certain goals (Norris, 2004; Wang, 2007). Thus, social media provides new civic engagement opportunities for younger generation. For instance, Baumgartner & Morris (2010) have interviewed 3500 young adults before presidential election in the USA, based on which authors have concluded that the broadcasting of the news related to the election has increased the interest among the youth. However, authors do not claim that likelihood of the youth to take part in voting has risen as a result of their higher interest in politics.

On the other hand, Baumgartner and Morris (2010) note that young people use social networks to communicate with like-minded people. Thus, there is a tendency that groups with different preferences do not connect to each other. As for political information, it will appear in the person's feed only if at some point the person has searched or viewed information of this kind. Taking into account that not all visitors are interested in politics, they will not be exposed to political content. It can also be noted that the younger generation is progressive in terms of the Internet usage, thus they can willingly ignore the content which is not appealing to them (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010). This means that social media has limitations in influencing a person's beliefs if segmenting the market before launching the campaign has not been performed.

Moreover, there is a phenomenon called echo chambers, which refers to a bias that is present for people when accessing the information in social networks. In fact, according to the echo chambers effect people tend to find and relate to the information that is relevant to them or reinforces their attitudes and opinions. Cinelli et al. (2021) studied the presence of echo chambers effect in social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Gab and Reddit on the basis of 100 million pieces of information. The authors have discovered that even though each of the studied platforms differed in the way the

information was fed to the users, the echo chambers phenomenon persisted in all of them. Furthermore, authors have confirmed that social platforms were used as means of connecting to like-minded people, and thus were served as a media to create more polarisation on sensitive economic, social, and political topics (Cinelli et al., 2021).

The same view has been proved by Huyn & Kim (2015), who explained that the subscription to political news channels had an impact only on those who discuss politics on social networks (Huyn & Kim, 2015). Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are actively used to attract views to various issues including ones with political motives. Such platforms attract a lot of students' attention to the political content (Valenzuela et al., 2012). Taking into account the big number of social network users, one may assume that creating political content in social networks will create more possibilities for politization of the youth, and, thus, development of democratic society. Verba & Nie (1972, p.1) state "There is more democracy where many participants take part in decisions", which implies that the less people are engaged in decision-making or opinion-forming processes, the less democratic society is. Despite the fact, that participation of the majority is one of the features of democratic society, political participation alone does not define or assess the level of democracy in the country. Van Deth (2014, p.351) defines political participation by a wide explanation as people's "activities affecting the politics". Then the author explains what factors affect these activities and how they can be framed into some system. By matching the activities against the rules such as relation to behavior, the extent to which the activity is voluntary, has the activity been done by citizens and is in the scope of the government and state politics, the author comprises a conceptual map of political participation. The map identifies four political participation types and lists the labels and modes relevant to the type of political participation. The first type is conventional participation expressed by voting, party membership etc. The second type is unconventional and considers

demonstrations, petition organisation and other activities. The third type is a civic engagement, where the aim is to tackle the existing problems. This type is expressed by volunteering and social participation. The fourth type is expressive participation, where boycotts and public violence are used as means of expressing the political participation (Van Deth, 2014). Thus, the political participation has multiple dimensions and levels, and studying to what extent it is influenced by the use of social media becomes a significant question. The following section will provide an overview of the research made on democratisation, political participation and effect of social network on these processes.

Democratisation of the Political System in Kazakhstan

Political system of Kazakhstan is officially announced as a "democratic, secular, legal and social" country with presidential government, where constitution guarantees "rights and freedoms" of the population as essential values ("The Republic of Kazakhstan — Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan," n.d.). However, international organisations rank the country differently in terms of the political freedom and levels of political participation and democratisation. For instance, Heritage (2023) has ranked the country the 71st most free country, and assigned a score of 62.1 out of 100. In fact, this indicator has worsened in the last year decreasing by 2.3 points (Heritage, 2023). Freedom House (2021) has rated political participation in Kazakhstan as low as 0 or 1 out of maximal value of four in four dimensions. Despite the rankings of international organisations, there is a need to conduct an analysis to evaluate the level of democratisation and political participation in Kazakhstan in a more comprehensive way. Moreover, there is not sufficient amount of information in existing literature to conclude the level of political participation and its connection to the usage of the social networks. According to Kemp (2022) there are 16.41 million internet users, which

makes the internet penetration equal to 85.9% of the population. As for the amount of social network users, this figure equalled to 13.8 million people (Kemp, 2022). Thus, it can be assumed that the population actively engages in the social network. As for the interrelation between the social media usage and the democratisation process, there are some studies that show positive relationship between the readiness level of young people in Kazakhstan to participate in the political life and implementation of civic initiatives with greater use of the social platforms such as Sairambay (2021, 2022). However, the gaps identified above are not fully covered by these papers, which make it important to research how and to what extent the social network usage facilitates or inhibits the democratisation of the population through increased political participation.

V. Research methodology

The research conducted in the scope of the present dissertation aims to fill the gaps mentioned in the literature review in order to identify the relationship between usage of the social media platforms and increase in political participation, and, as a result development of democratisation in Kazakhstan. The previous chapter examined the existing scholarly works that define the phenomenon of political participation and its ties to democratisation of the society. However, secondary research conducted in the literature review revealed that there were gaps in the current knowledge base, particularly with regard to the social and political phenomena specific to Kazakhstan, which implied the necessity to conduct a study based on primary data. The primary research data will be quantitative with some open questions to gather in-depth data, which will be collected with the means of survey. The present chapter will discuss the approaches employed in collecting and analysing the data along with considerations of ethicality and credibility of the research design.

Research philosophy

A research philosophy focuses on the identification of the approach in which the data in the research is collected, used, analysed and interpreted. Lewis & Thornhill (2009, p. 124) explain that philosophy of the research is the "system of beliefs and assumptions" applied by a researcher in the course of designing the study and executing it. Authors (Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, Saunders et al., 2015) explain that in the preparation of the research methodology a researcher is influenced by three types of assumptions such as epistemological, ontological and axiological. Epistemological assumptions refer to a knowledge that a person can have. Ontological assumptions are made in regard to beliefs of the author of the realities that are experienced in the process of the study. Moreover, axiological assumptions are connected with the

personal values of the author and their impact on the research design Saunders et al., 2007). Bahari (2010) referencing to Bryman (2004) concludes that qualitative research philosophies are the following:

- Concerning the relation of the research to the theory: Qualitative research has inductive nature as it generates new knowledge and adds to the theory.
- Concerning epistemological assumptions: Qualitative research has interpretivist nature.
- Concerning ontological assumptions: Qualitative research has subjectivist or constructivist nature. Subjectivism explains that "social reality is made from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors" (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 130). In other words, subjectivism builds the knowledge of the phenomenon based on subjective realities of each respondent, their opinion, beliefs and assumptions. Constructivist approach is a less extreme approach as explained by Saunders et al. (2007, p. 130), as it builds the knowledge pieces relying on "shared meanings and realities".

Hence, as a result of examination of the aforementioned research philosophy paradigms, the author has decided to employ interpretivism within epistemological approach and subjectivism within ontological approach. Analysis of the collected primary data will be based on interpretivist approach, which is based on an assumption that all knowledge is subjective and differs from person to person. As the survey contains both open and closed questions, the researcher will employ interpretivist approach in combination with pragmatism, Thus, by gathering the pieces of subjective information based on individual understanding of the respondents, the author will then interpret them in order to form a knowledge of the existing phenomena, which will help to understand connection between social media use, political participation in and their connection to the process democratisation of the society. Moreover, following the

pragmatist paradigm, the author will make practical recommendations that can be utilised to change the current situation. To employ the research philosophy, the aims and research questions need to be defined, which will be presented in the following section.

Aim of the research

The purpose of the research design in the present dissertation is to examine the relationship between social media usage and the political participation and democratisation of the young population in Kazakhstan. The overarching aim of this research is to contribute to the current literature on the intersection between social media and political participation, specifically in the context of the young population of Kazakhstan. Research questions of the present study are the following:

1. What is the extent of social media usage among young people in Kazakhstan for political engagement and participation?
2. How does social media usage relate to the expansion of political participation and democratisation among the young population in Kazakhstan?
3. What are the perceptions of young people in Kazakhstan regarding the ability of social media platform features to enable their participation in politics, formation of political decisions, and influence on current political decision-making and opinion formation?

The specific objectives of the research are derived from the research questions and are as follows:

1. To explore the extent to which young people in Kazakhstan use social media platforms for political engagement and participation.

2. To examine the relationship between social media usage and the expansion of political participation and democratisation among the young population in Kazakhstan.
3. To evaluate the influence of the ease of finding and sharing information on social media platforms on the expansion of political participation and democratisation among the young population in Kazakhstan.
4. To assess the perceptions of young people in Kazakhstan regarding the ability of social media platform features to enable their ability to take part in politics, form political decisions, and have influence on current political decision and opinion formation.

By addressing these objectives, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the potential of social media to influence political participation and democratisation among the young population in Kazakhstan. This research is timely and relevant, as social media usage continues to increase in Kazakhstan and around the world (Sairambay, 2022, Raman et al., 2020), and there is a growing need to understand its impact on political engagement and participation. To fulfil the mentioned aims, the research data collection technique needs to be explained in depth, which will be presented in the following section.

Data collection and sampling approach

The present section discusses data collection methods for the present dissertation. As mentioned, the present dissertation employs qualitative analysis design in order to study the effect of the use of social media on the political participation of the Kazakhstani youth and subsequently democratisation of the political system. Namely, the research will be conducted based on primary data collected using survey as a data collection method. The survey has been developed based on the research objectives

and questions. The survey was designed to assess the influence of social media usage on the political participation and democratisation of the young population in Kazakhstan, as well as their perceptions of social media platform features and their ability to participate in politics and form political decisions.

The survey was comprised of topic-specific closed-ended, as well as demographic questions. Questions were used to gather quantitative data that evaluates the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of the respondents.

The research employed a non-probability convenience sampling technique as a data sampling approach. Etikan et al. (2016, p. 2) explain that researchers employ convenience sampling due to the advantages such as "accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study". In other words, the author has recruited the respondent to whom she had access to through social media, friend suggestions and referrals considering their willingness to take part in the research. Participants were recruited through social media platforms and various messengers, targeting young people aged 18-36 in Kazakhstan. The survey was distributed through various social media channels, including Instagram, Tiktok, What's app, Telegram and Vk.com. According to Kemp (2022), 7.7% and 15.4% of the population were aged 18-24 and 25-34 respectively. That approximately makes up 4.4 million people. The sample size for this study was calculated to be 208 respondents, which was determined based on a power analysis calculation to achieve a confidence level of 85% and a margin of error of 5%. Moreover, to ensure that the sample is representative of the population, the efforts were made to recruit participants from different geographic regions of Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, the data collection procedure was undertaken by providing the participants with a link to the online survey, which they could complete at their convenience. The survey has been prepared in two languages (Kazakh and Russian) to

accommodate participants who were more comfortable with one language over the other. Data collection is anticipated to take place over a period of three weeks, during which participants can share the survey link with their social media networks to help increase participation rates.

To conclude, the present section provided descriptions of the primary data collection methods. the used to collect primary data for this study, including the survey instrument used and the sampling strategy employed to select participants. The next section will discuss the ways of ensuring the credibility and validity of the research design along with discussion of the ethical considerations, biases, and limitations of the research.

Credibility and validity of the research

Ensuring validity and credibility of the research is important because they evaluate the practical application and meaningfulness of the findings and conclusions made by the author as explained by Adcock & Collier (2001). In other words, quality of the collected data and the methods using which it was analysed define the quality of the conclusions made. For instance, King et al. (2003) examine qualitative studies conducted in political science that relied on surveys as a data collection technique. Authors explain that if the researcher identifies the biases and limitations of the research, the survey-based data analysis allows "to discover, clarify, and define additional dimensions of complicated concepts, and they may ultimately help develop clearer concepts" (King et al., 2003, p. 204). Thus, in order to ensure the quality of the research it is important to understand the limitations, biases and to adjust the research design to minimise their impact.

The possible biases that can affect the research process are the following:

Participant bias, based on which participants can give answers that they assume to be socially acceptable, but not what they genuinely think and feel. This may end up in distorting the results of the study. However, the author has little or no influence over this issue other than in properly designing the survey questions. Thus, this can be viewed as possible limitation of the research design.

Moreover, McSweeney (2021, p. 1064) discusses confirmation bias being the most significant in qualitative researches. The author explains that confirmation bias is "defining, seeking, perceiving, constructing, remembering, judging, highlighting, responding to, supposing, imagining and/or interpreting "evidence" in ways that give priority, even exclusivity, to confirming a pre-established, or established early in the research, favoured or focal attitude, belief, claim or message".

In other words, confirmation bias can make the findings of the research irrelevant as all of the interpretations will be adjusted to match the preconceptions of the author. To avoid being influenced by confirmation bias the author will avoid making conclusions before carefully revising the findings multiple times. Moreover, the author will conduct reflective analysis of the interpretations made during the study.

Furthermore, Korstjens & Moser (2018, p.120) define "credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability" and "reflexivity" to be criteria defining the quality of the qualitative research. The strategies to ensure credibility are to conduct persistent observation and prolonged engagement. These two strategies allow to enhance the quality of the analysis by making the researcher to spend more time engaging with the collected data, its coding and analysing. Moreover, these strategies will help to avoid distortion of the research findings by confirmation bias.

To continue, credibility of the research is impacted by understanding of the limitations that affect it. Limitations of the present research are the following:

First, the chosen sampling method is a non-probability method, meaning that respondents are not completely random, and thus the generalizability of the research findings is limited (Etikan, 2016). The convenience sampling has been selected due to the other limitations of the research such as resource limits as the respondents have not been paid to participate in the survey. Moreover, the research is limited by the time constraints. These limits affect the applicability of the findings to the broader population.

To conclude, the present section has provided strategies in the analysis process that will ensure validity and credibility of the research along with discussion of biases and limitations of the research. The following section will focus on ethical considerations of the research.

Ethical considerations,

As the qualitative data collection implies interaction with human beings, the ethical norms need to be considered throughout the research process. Before conducting the data collection, the survey questions were reviewed by the ethics committee and obtained approval. The main considerations that were considered during the research are the following:

- to obtain informed consent from the participants and make it clear to them that they can withdraw from the study at any time;
- to ensure anonymity and confidentiality;
- to maintain safe environments for all of the participants;
- to ensure that research is conducted ethically.

In order to comply with the ethical and moral requirements, as discussed in Tracy (2010), the author will anonymise the respondents and will refer to them as Respondent1, Respondent2 and so on. Moreover, the survey form will not ask for identification of the respondents. The surveys will be collected using Google Forms,

where the form can be submitted only the respondent provides an informed consent to participate in the survey. The remote nature of the surveys will create a safe environment for the respondents that can complete the survey at a convenient time. Lastly, the author will ensure that the study is conducted ethically with understanding and avoidance of the potential biases that can distort the findings and conclusions. These strategies will make the research process comply with ethical standards raised by the university and academic community.

In conclusion, the present chapter presented the research design for the present dissertation. The following chapter will present the key points in data analysis and interpretation.

VI. Data analysis

The data analysis chapter presents the results of the data analysis based on primary data collected through surveys with closed and open questions. The research was conducted within an interpretivist and pragmatist paradigm, aiming to explore the experiences and perspectives of participants in relation to the research question and objectives. The chapter begins by presenting the descriptive statistics of demographic information and data regarding social media usage, followed by an analysis of the survey responses. The chapter concludes with an interpretation and discussion of the results in light of the research question and objectives, and their significance for the field.

Descriptive Statistics

The present section of the data analysis chapter will present the descriptive statistics of the collected primary data including frequencies, percentages, and proportions of the responses to the closed-end survey questions. The visualisation has been performed using free Google Looker Studio. To start with, the demographics of the studied population will be presented.

Table 1

Age group of the respondents

Age group	Number of respondents
18-22	106
23-27	67
32-36	19
28-32	16

The information provided in the Table 1 highlights the age distribution of the respondents who chose to participate in the survey. Based on the Table 1, most respondents, 106 to be precise, belonged to the age group of 18-22. The second most

populous age group was of respondents aged between 23-27, with 67 participants. A lower number of respondents, just 16 individuals, belonged to the age group of 28-32, while an even smaller number of 19 individuals belonged to the 32-36 age group. These age categories provide a valuable insight into the demographics of the survey respondents and can be used to identify any trends or preferences among individuals belonging to different age groups.

The following figure shows distribution of the age groups by gender.

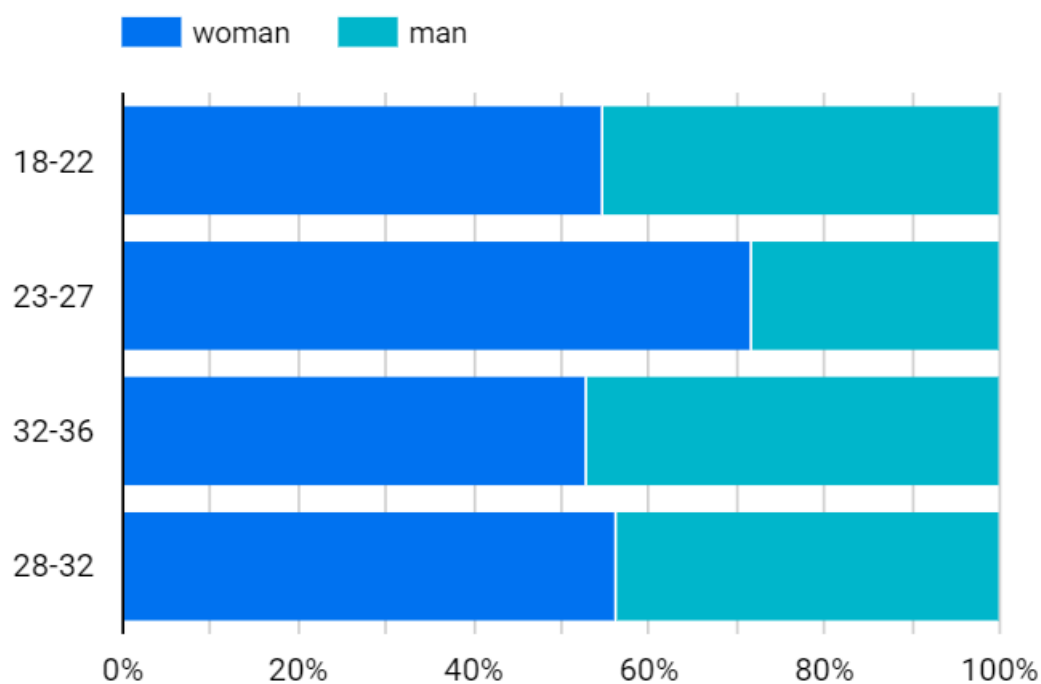


Figure 1. Age and gender distribution of the survey respondents

The data presented in the Figure 1 provides information on the demographics of the survey respondents categorised by age group and gender. Among the age group of 18-22, the data shows that there were 58 women and 48 men who participated in the survey. In the age group of 23-27, there were 48 women and 19 men who participated. For the age group of 32-36, the data indicates that there were 10 women and 9 men who participated in the survey. Finally, in the age group of 28-32, there were 9 women and 7 men who participated.

The significance of discussing the demographic content of the respondents is connected with the fact that it may help identify any potential differences in opinions or preferences across different demographic groups. Analysing both gender and age group can be important as both factors can have a significant influence on the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of the individual respondent.

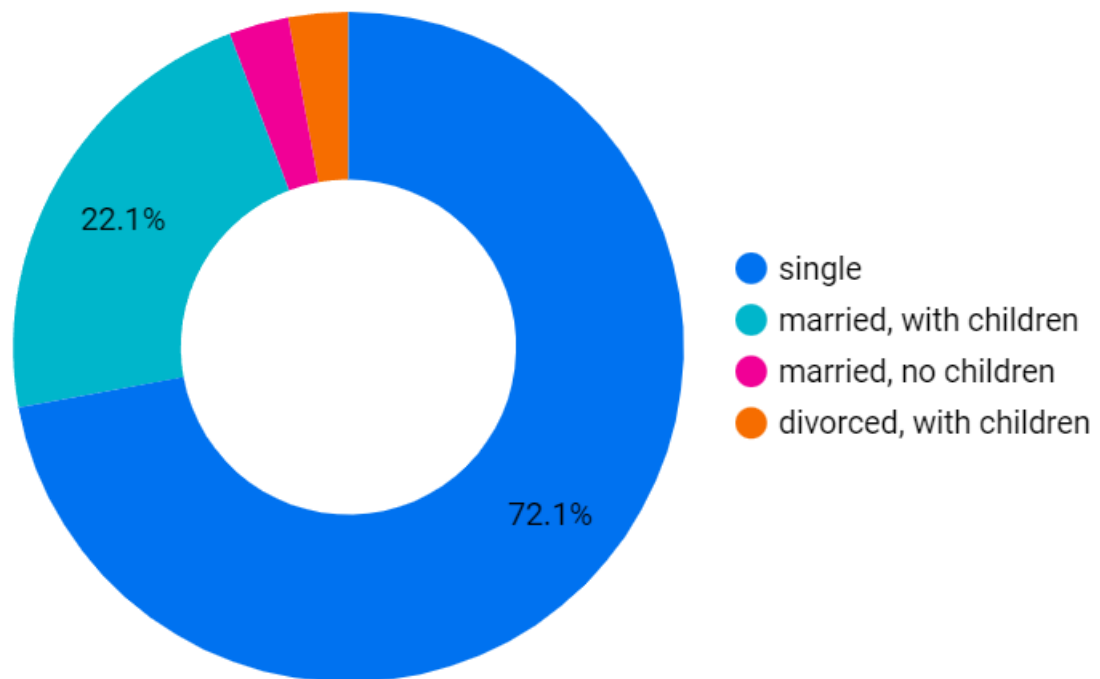


Figure 2. Age and gender distribution of the survey respondents

Figure 2 illustrates the marital and parental status of the respondents. Out of the total number of respondents, 150 individuals or 72.1% identified themselves as single. The following biggest group of respondents were (46 individuals) married and had children. 12 respondents were equally distributed between 2 statuses such as married without children and divorced individuals with children. Thus, the 52 respondents had children.

Education level		Record Count ▾
1.	bachelor degree	150
2.	master's degree	37
3.	college	11
4.	school	7
5.	PhD	3

Figure 3. Education level of respondents

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the respondents based on their highest education level. The striking feature is that majority of the respondents hold or study to obtain a bachelor's degree (150 individuals). 37 individuals hold a master's degree, and 3 respondents hold or study to obtain a PhD degree. 11 respondents have a college level education, while 7 respondents have only completed school. The level of education has been included in the study in order to understand whether the education level is significant defining factor of political participation through social media and of level of democratisation. At the same time, the monthly income is distributed as follows:

Table 2

Monthly income of the respondents, KZT

Monthly income, KZT	Number of respondents
Does not have monthly income or chose not to indicate the information regarding the income	68
Less or equal to 200,000	61
Between 200,001 and 400,000	44
Between 400,001 and 600,000	20
Between 600,001 and 800,000	2
More than1,000,000	5

The survey data has revealed important insights into the monthly income of the respondents. The Among the 200 survey participants who provided information about their monthly income, the majority fell into the category of earning less or equal to

200,000 KZT, with a total of 61 respondents. The next largest group was respondents who earned between 200,001 and 400,000 KZT, with 44 respondents falling into this range.

There were fewer respondents in the higher income brackets, with only 20 respondents earning between 400,001 and 600,000 KZT, and just two respondents earning between 600,001 and 800,000 KZT. Interestingly, five respondents reported earning more than 1,000,000 KZT per month. It is also worth noting that a significant number of respondents, 68 in total, either did not have a monthly income or chose not to indicate this information. This may reflect the fact that some respondents are not currently employed or do not have a steady source of income. The average income of 140 entries is 363,823 and mean is 300,000 KZT.

Income level and level of education play significant roles in shaping the relationship between social media usage and political participation, contributing to disparities in access, engagement, and influence. Socioeconomic factors, such as income and education, influence individuals' access to technology, digital literacy, and diverse sources of information, subsequently impacting their political efficacy and ability to engage in meaningful political participation through social media platforms. Higher-income individuals and those with higher levels of education tend to possess greater resources, skills, and political knowledge, potentially affording them a more active and influential role in shaping political discourse and outcomes online. Conversely, lower-income individuals and those with lower levels of education may face barriers that hinder their participation, perpetuating digital divides and limiting their political efficacy within the digital sphere. Consequently, examining the interplay between income level, educational attainment, and social media usage is crucial for understanding the nuanced dynamics of political participation and informing strategies to promote inclusivity and equal opportunities for engagement in the digital age.

This information is followed by analysis of the city of origin or residence of the respondents.

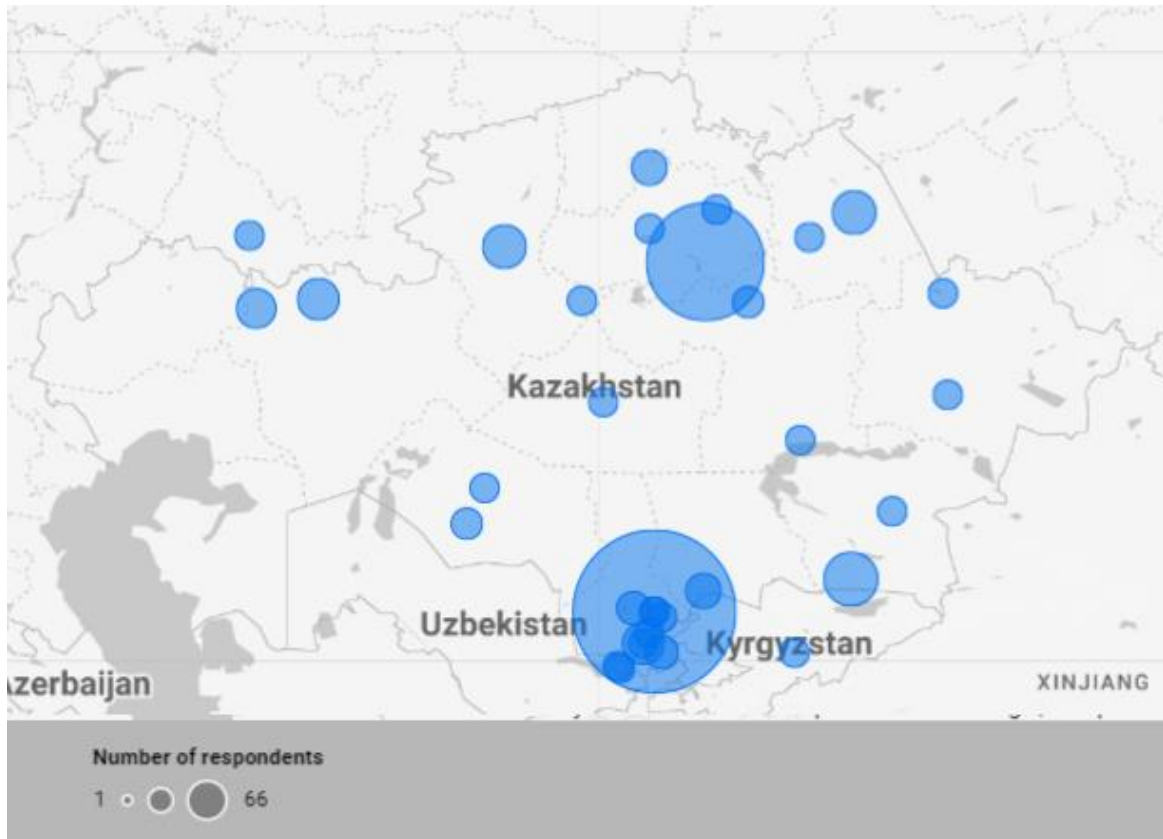


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of the respondents

The data provided in the Figure 4, shows the geographical distribution of the survey respondents. The map graph has been constructed by the author using free Google Looker Studio website. The size of the circles signifies of the frequency with which the location has been chosen. The largest number of respondents were from Shymkent, with a total of 66 individuals. Astana and Almaty were the next most common locations, with 44 and 13 respondents respectively. Other locations had fewer respondents, with some regions and cities having only one respondent. However, from the Figure 4 it is visible that many respondents came from Turkistan region. Moreover, it is worth noting that a small number of respondents either did not indicate their location or were from outside of Kazakhstan, with two respondents from Moscow and one from Kyrgyzstan and Tashkent each. The distribution of respondents across different

locations provides insights into the regional representation of the survey sample and may have implications for the generalizability of findings to other parts of Kazakhstan.

The survey further progresses into the topic such as social media usage. For instance, the Table 3 presents the average values of using Instagram, TikTok or YouTube measured in hours a week along with respondents' subjective evaluation of the frequency with a choice between very often, often, rarely, sometimes.

Table 3

Average frequency of using Instagram, TikTok and Youtube, hours a week

Frequency of social media usage	Average usage in hours a week		
	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube
Very often	24.3	15.5	4.0
Often	13.4	9.0	7.7
Rarely	6.3	4.1	4.3
Sometimes	6.0	5.2	4.5
Average	12.2	8.3	7.0

The average number of hours spent using Instagram per week was highest among respondents who reported using the app "very often" and "often" with an average of 24.3 and 13.42 hours respectively. Respondents who evaluated their Instagram usage as "rarely" or "sometimes" used the application almost equally throughout the week. For TikTok the "very often" and "often" groups had average usage figures of 15.5 and 9 hours per week respectively.

In terms of YouTube usage, the values are comparably lower compared to the other two social media platforms. The average usage was 7 hours a week. To understand how often the respondents used social media, the following scatterplot was designed.

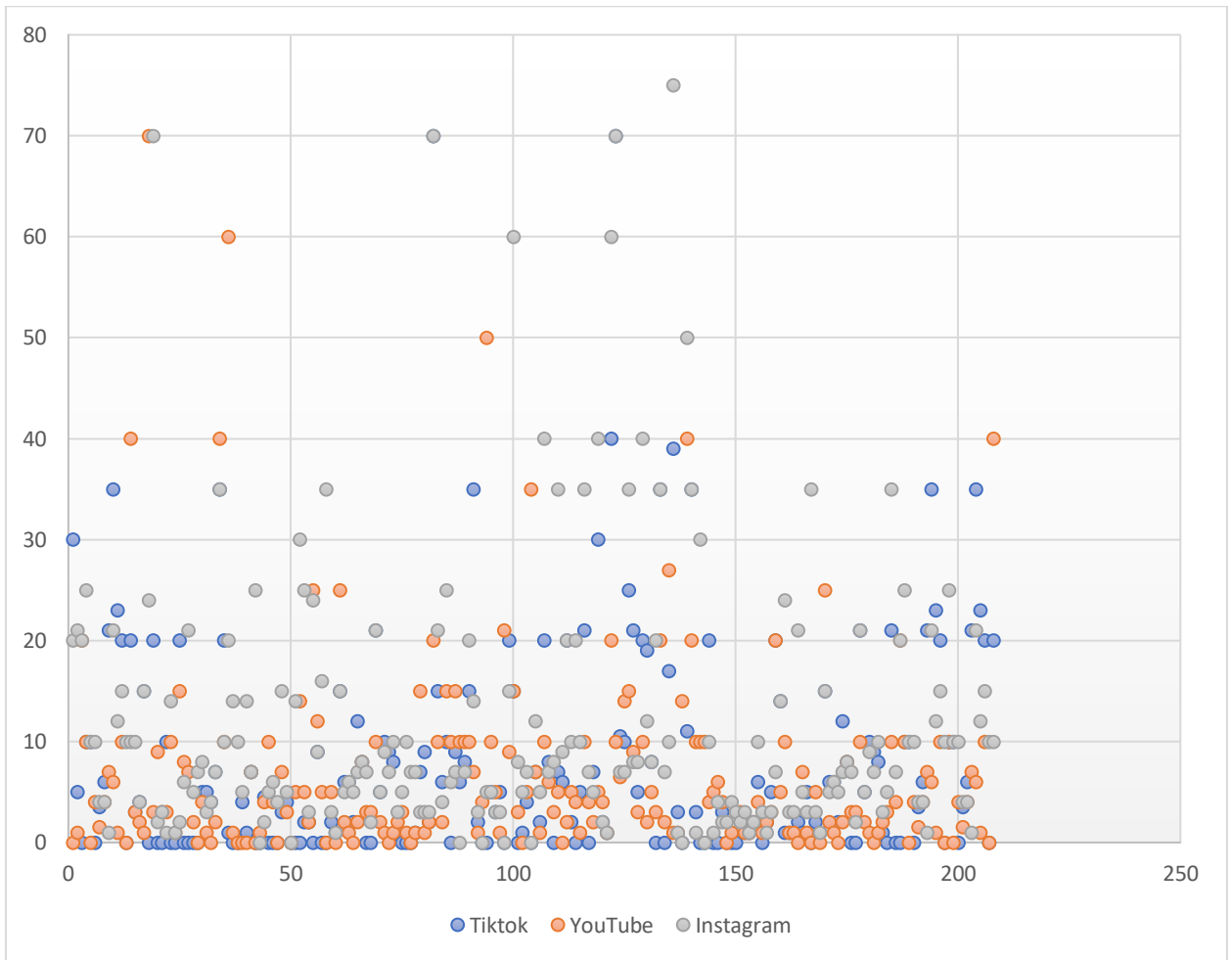


Figure 5. Frequency of the social media usage, hours a week

Scatterplot in Figure 5 provides a visual illustration of the usage of the social media platforms by respondents. Higher weekly usage can be observed for Instagram compared to other two platforms. This matches the information in Table 3. Also, it can be observed that majority of the answers lie in the are from 0 to 10 meaning that the majority of respondents used each platform around 0 to 10 hours a week. To continue, more insights can be gained from analysing the descriptive statistics provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of using Instagram, Tiktok and Youtube, hours a week

	Instagram	Tiktok	YouTube
Minimal value	0	0	0
Maximal value	75	70	70
Median	7	4,25	4

Mode	10	0	1
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It is important to understand the central tendencies and range of the data collected in order to tie frequency of the social media usage to the perceptions of respondents regarding the social media usage and progress in political participation.

The minimum value for all three platforms was 0, indicating that some participants reported not using these platforms at all. However, no respondents have indicated 0 usage for all three or even for two platforms at a time. This means that an average respondent used at least two of the studied platforms with varying preferences. The maximum value for Instagram and TikTok was 75 and 70, respectively, suggesting that some participants use these platforms extensively. The maximum value for YouTube was also 70, indicating that some participants use this platform extensively as well.

The median value for Instagram was 7 hours per week, for TikTok it was 4.25 hours per week, and for YouTube it was 4 hours per week. This means that half of the participants spent more than these values and half spent less.

The mode, or the value that appears most frequently in the data, was 10 hours per week for Instagram, indicating that a considerable number of participants reported spending this amount of time on the platform. The mode for TikTok was 0, indicating that many participants reported not using the platform, while the mode for YouTube was 1 hour per week, indicating that many participants reported using this platform at least a little.

Overall, these statistics provide insight into the range of social media usage among the participants, with some reporting minimal usage and others reporting extensive usage. The central tendencies provide understanding of a "typical" social media user among the sample group. The typical participants spent less than 10 hours per week on Instagram and less than 5 hours per week on TikTok and YouTube.

Analysis of topic-specific survey questions

To continue, the topic-specific survey questions were grouped according to the research objective. From the research objective the theme and subthemes have been developed (Figure 6). For convenience the questions will be labelled Q1 to Q20.

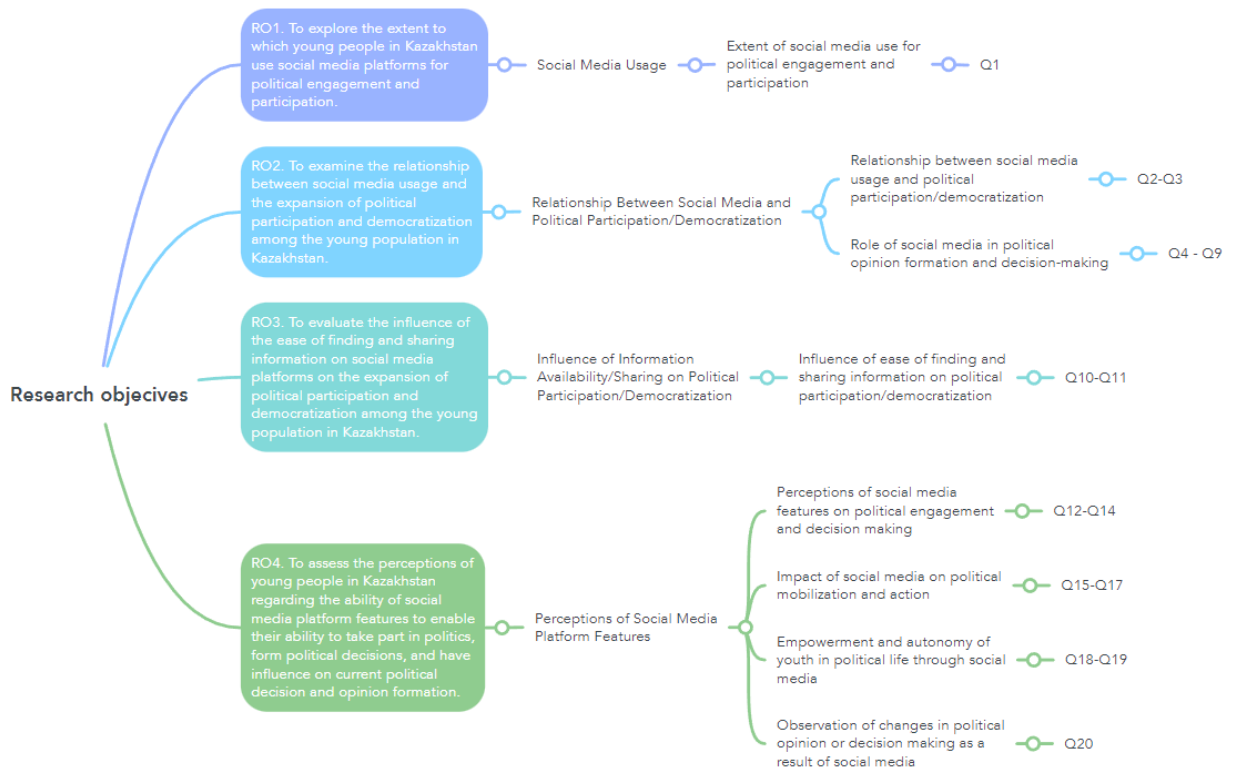


Figure 6. Connection between the research objectives and survey questions

Four research objectives, which were developed from research questions, have been further formulated as themes and subthemes resulting in eight subthemes. The analysis of the survey responses will be grouped by the subthemes in order to find more in-depth insights.

Social media usage for political participation

For instance, 136 respondents have indicated that they have never used social media platforms intending to discuss political events or issues or to participate in political debates. On the other hand, 72 respondents or almost 35%, have indicated that they have engaged in such activity through social media.

Relationship between social media usage and political participation

Q2 and Q3 aim to investigate to what extent the respondents felt that social media has increased their awareness of political issues in Kazakhstan and facilitated political participation. The responses have been combined in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Answers to Q2 and Q3

Q2 answer options	Total answers to Q2		Answers to Q3	
			No	Yes
Absolutely agree	22	8%	15	7
Agree	42	20%	36	6
Neutral	108	53%	96	12
Disagree	28	14%	26	2
Totally disagree	8	4%	8	0
Total	208		181	27

The data shows that just over half of respondents (53%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Of these 108 respondents, 96 or 89% thought that political participation could not be promoted or changed using social media. 28% or 64 respondents held that social media impacted people's knowledge of the political events in Kazakhstan. 80% of this group also did not believe social media could change political participation in Kazakhstan. The third group that disagreed or absolutely disagreed (28 and 8 respondents) also mainly answered negatively about the relationship between social media and the improvement of political participation and democratisation in Kazakhstan (PPD). Thus, out of the whole sample, 181 respondents or 87%, had a negative view of the impact of social media on PPD.

Role of social media in political opinion formation and decision-making

The present section of the dissertation will provide the survey's findings regarding the perceptions of the role of social media in forming opinions and influencing decision-making processes in Kazakhstan. Most respondents (153 or 74%) used social media

platforms to view or search for information on political events. Out of these 153 respondents, 86 had optimistic views regarding the possibility of changing the political situation in Kazakhstan through the promotion of PPD. At the same time, 26 did not agree, and 59 had a neutral view regarding the impact political participation has on improving the political situation in the country. Figure 7 shows the distribution of opinions of political participation's impact on the political state (scale of 5) among the people that used social media as a source of political news.

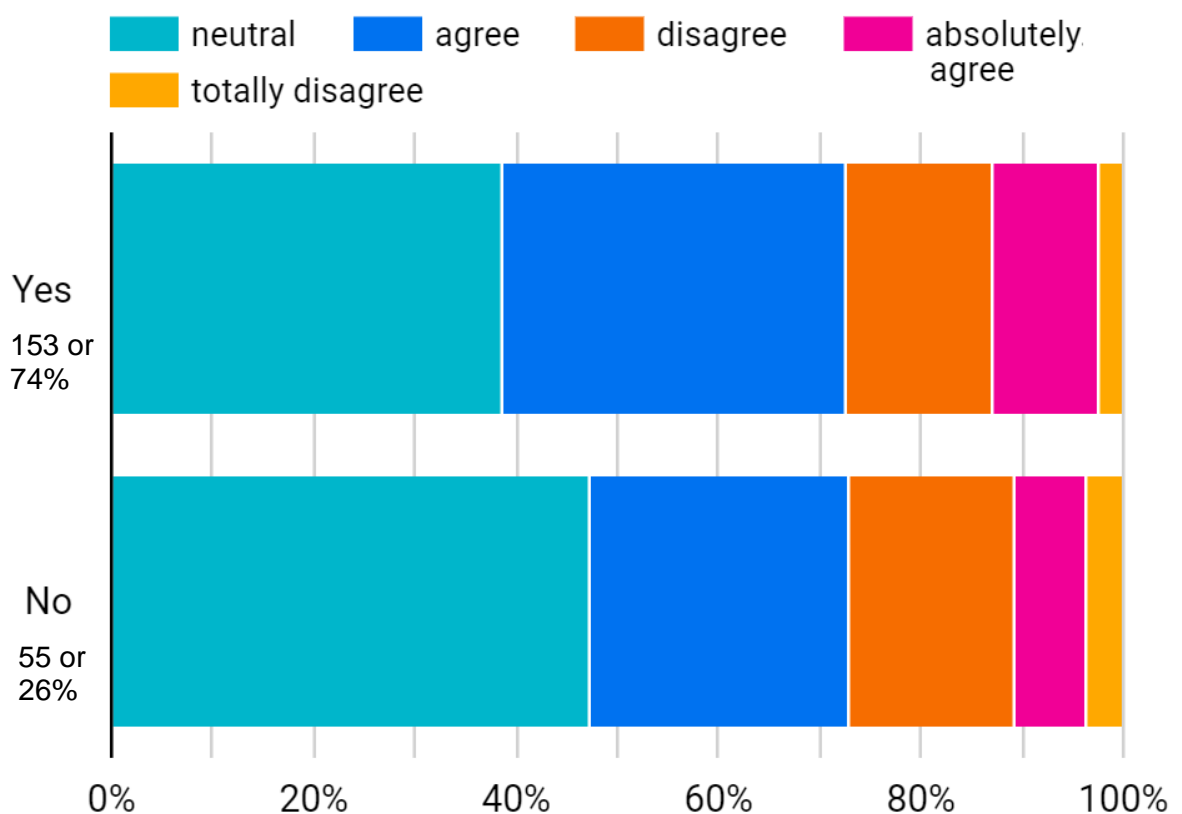


Figure 7. Answers to Q4 and Q5

55 respondents indicated that they did not use social media as a source of information. Almost half of this group had a neutral opinion regarding the role of political participation. 18 agreed and 11 disagreed with the idea that political participation drives political improvement in the country.

The following examined respondents' experiences who posted or reshared political content on social media, where 125 respondents reported not posting or sharing

political content. 83 respondents have reported using social media to distribute political content.

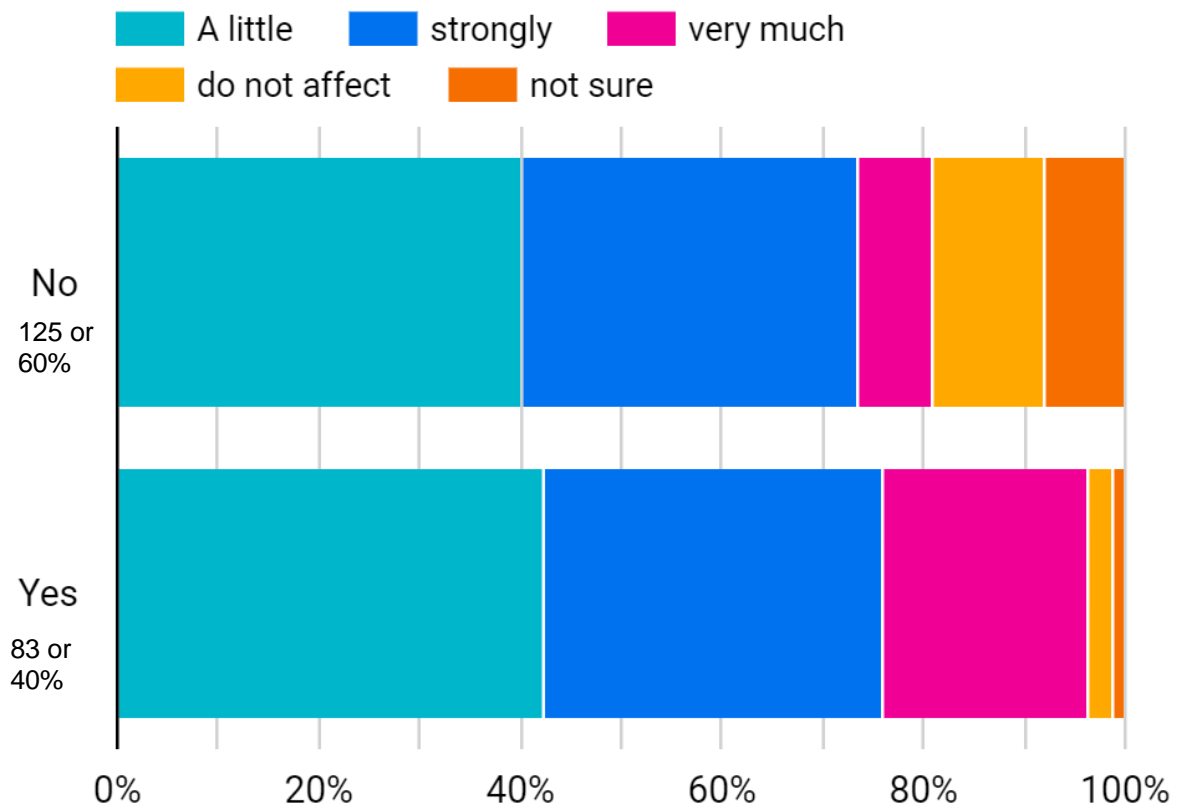


Figure 8. Answers to Q6 and Q8

Of the respondents who did not use social media to share political content, 11% did not believe, and 40% thought social media has a limited impact on public opinion or political decision-making in Kazakhstan. On the other hand, 51 respondents or 41%, had a positive and 10 had a neutral opinion.

The same proportion of respondents who reported using social media to inform their followers of political events answered "a little" and "strongly" as those who reported not using. In other words, the belief of being able to influence political decision-making and public opinion in Kazakhstan was consistent across the groups despite their actual political participation level.

To continue, it can be seen (Figure 9) that a majority of the respondents have not used social media to express their political views to a political leader or government

official (146 out of 208). On the other hand, 62 respondents have used social media for this purpose.

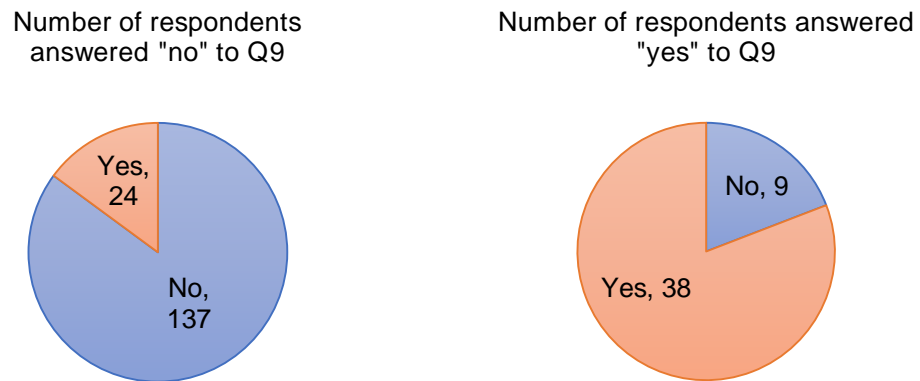


Figure 9. Answers to Q7 and Q9

Similarly, most respondents have not used social media to voice their opinion on a political issue or a proposed policy change (161 out of 208). Only 47 respondents have used social media for this purpose.

These findings suggest that although social media can be a powerful tool for political participation and expression of opinions, a significant portion of the population may still not utilise it for these purposes.

Influence of ease of finding and sharing information on political participation/democratisation

To continue, questions 10 and 11 aim to identify the opinions of the survey participants regarding the relationship between social media and connecting people interested in politics (Q10) and whether social media can be a source of reliable political information (Q11). The results are displayed in Figure 9. The analysis of the survey data explored two critical aspects related to social media and political engagement among young people in Kazakhstan: the perceived effectiveness of social media in providing accurate and reliable information about political issues and its role in connecting individuals with shared political interests.

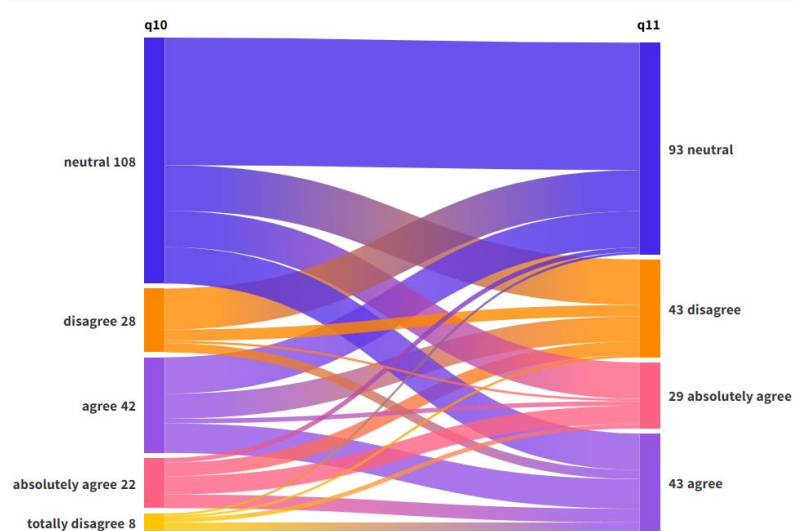


Figure 10. Answers to Q10 and Q11

Regarding the effectiveness of social media in providing accurate and reliable information about political issues in Kazakhstan, the results showed a lack of consensus among the respondents. While a significant proportion of participants agreed or absolutely agreed (29 + 43 = 72) that social media can offer credible information, an equal number disagreed or held a neutral stance (43 + 93 = 136). This indicates a divided opinion among young people, suggesting that some perceive social media as a reliable source of political information while others have reservations or remain undecided.

The findings showcased a similar pattern regarding social media's ability to facilitate connections among young individuals interested in politics. Most respondents (22 + 42 = 64) reported feeling that social media has helped them connect with like-minded peers. However, many participants (28 + 108 + 8 = 144) disagreed or remained neutral. These results indicate that social media platforms have enabled a limited number of individuals to establish connections and engage with others interested in politics.

Cross-tabulating the survey results (Figure 10) further illustrates the relationship between the two aspects under investigation. When examining the responses to both questions simultaneously, it becomes apparent that respondents who agreed or absolutely agreed that social media provides accurate and reliable information (72 respondents) were more likely to report that it also helped them connect with other politically interested individuals (22 respondents). Conversely, those who held a neutral or disagreeing stance on the effectiveness of social media in terms of information provision (136 respondents) were less inclined to perceive it as a means of connecting with like-minded peers. This cross-tabulation highlights the interplay between these two dimensions, suggesting that individuals who trust social media as a reliable source of political information are more likely to utilise it to connect with others interested in politics.

Perceptions of social media features on political engagement and decision making

The survey findings provide valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of young individuals in Kazakhstan regarding their attendance at political events due to social media influence (Q12), perceptions of to what extent the opinions of youth are taken into account (Q13), and the sense of empowerment and autonomy they associate with social media in the context of political life and decision making (Q14). In addition, these results allow conclusions regarding social media's role in political engagement and its psychological effects on individuals' sense of empowerment.

Regarding the attendance at political events prompted by social media, the data reveals that a significant proportion of participants (65) reported attending such events, such as rallies, protests, or gatherings, due to seeing them on social media. However, it is essential to note that a substantial number of respondents (143) indicated that they

had not attended such events in this manner. These findings suggest that while social media serves as a mobilising platform for a considerable segment of young individuals to engage in political events, it is not equally effective in reaching and engaging all participants.

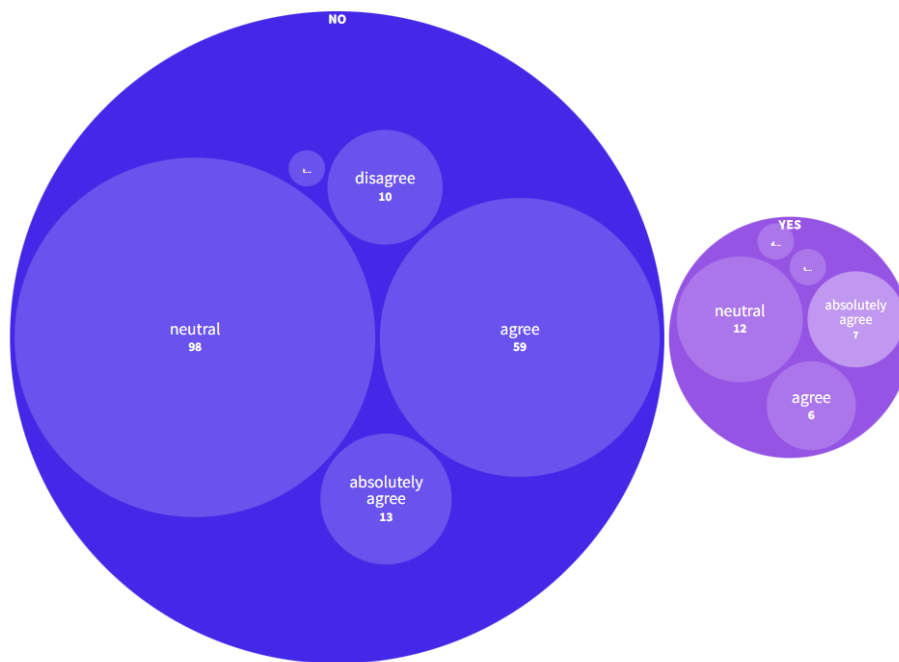
Furthermore, the survey explored the participants' perception of the empowerment and autonomy they experience concerning political life and decision-making through social media. The results indicate a range of responses among the respondents. A significant number of participants (65) agreed that social media gives them a sense of empowerment and autonomy, whereas a smaller proportion (11) disagreed. Additionally, a considerable number of respondents (110) reported a neutral stance on this matter. These findings highlight young individuals' diverse experiences and perceptions regarding the empowering potential of social media in political contexts.



Figure 11. Cross-tabulation of questions 12 and 14

Cross-tabulating the survey results for questions 12 and 14 allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between attending political events due to social media influence and the perceived sense of empowerment and autonomy. Examining the responses together reveals a pattern where participants who reported attending political

events prompted by social media (7) were more likely to agree that social media gives them a sense of empowerment and autonomy (27). Conversely, individuals who did not attend such events (181) were more inclined to express a lack of agreement with the notion of social media providing a sense of empowerment and autonomy (10). This cross-tabulation suggests a potential association between attending political events influenced by social media and the perception of empowerment and autonomy



attributed to social media.

Figure 12. Cross-tabulation of questions 12 and 13

A cross-tabulation of questions 12 and 13 (Figure 12) allows making connections between attending political events influenced by social media and the beliefs regarding the government's consideration of young people's opinions. Analysing the responses in conjunction reveals a pattern where participants who reported attending political events due to social media exposure (9) were more likely to agree that the government considers young people's opinions (6). Conversely, individuals who did not attend such events (181) were more inclined to express disagreement with the government's responsiveness to young people's opinions (54). This cross-tabulation suggests a

potential association between attending political events through social media and the perception of the government's consideration of young people's opinions.

Impact of social media on political mobilisation and action

The findings of the survey provide information on the participation of young individuals in votes (Q15), social media campaigns or petitions related to political issues or policy changes (Q16), as well as their perceptions of social media's facilitation of sharing political views (Q17). Based on the survey, 88 respondents, or 42%, did not attend votes. Moreover, analysing the participation in social media campaigns or petitions, the data reveals that a significant number of respondents (65) reported having participated in such activities. On the other hand, a majority of participants (143) indicated that they have not engaged in social media campaigns or petitions related to political issues or policy changes. These findings suggest that while a considerable portion of young individuals actively participates in social media activism, a more significant proportion remains uninvolved in these forms of political expression.

Table 6

Answers to Q16 and Q17

Responses to Q16	Responses to Q17		Total
	No	Yes	
Absolutely agree	11	24	35
Agree	53	25	78
Disagree	14	0	14
Neutral	64	15	79
Totally disagree	1	1	2
Total	143	65	208

Furthermore, the survey explored the participants' perceptions of whether social media makes it easier to share their political views with others. The results indicate a range of responses among the respondents. A substantial number of participants (78) agreed that social media facilitates the sharing of their political views, including both

those who absolutely agree (35) and those who agree (43). However, a smaller proportion expressed disagreement with this notion, with 14 participants indicating that social media does not make it easier for them to share their political views. Additionally, a significant number of respondents (79) adopted a neutral stance, suggesting mixed opinions or uncertainty regarding the ease of sharing political views on social media.

A comparison of the responses of Q16 and Q17 reveals a pattern where participants who reported engaging in social media campaigns or petitions (65) were more likely to agree with the idea that social media makes it easier for them to share their political views (49). Conversely, individuals who did not participate in these activities (143) were more inclined to disagree with the idea that social media facilitates sharing of political views (14). This cross-tabulation suggests a potential association between participating in social media campaigns or petitions and perceiving social media as a platform that eases the expression of political opinions.

Empowerment and autonomy of youth in political life through social media

The present section explores the opinions of young individuals regarding the importance of easy access to information about political issues for increasing political participation among youth in Kazakhstan. Additionally, the survey explores the extent to which social media platforms allow individuals to engage in political discussions with a wide variety of people.

Regarding the importance of easy access to political information, the results indicate a range of opinions among the respondents. A majority of participants (74) expressed agreement that it is vital to have easy access to political information, with varying degrees of importance. This includes individuals who consider it very important (27) as well as those who perceive it as important (47). On the other hand, a significantly smaller proportion of respondents (16) expressed disagreement with the

notion that easy access to political information is important, with varying levels of disagreement.

Furthermore, the survey investigated the participants' perceptions of social media platforms as a means to engage in political discussions with a wide variety of people. The findings suggest a mixed response among the respondents. A significant number of participants (89) adopted a neutral stance, indicating a lack of strong opinion or uncertainty regarding the capability of social media platforms to facilitate political discussions. Additionally, participants who deemed social media platforms important for engaging in political discussions represented a considerable portion (82) of the respondents. However, a smaller proportion expressed disagreement with this notion, with some participants indicating that it doesn't matter to them.

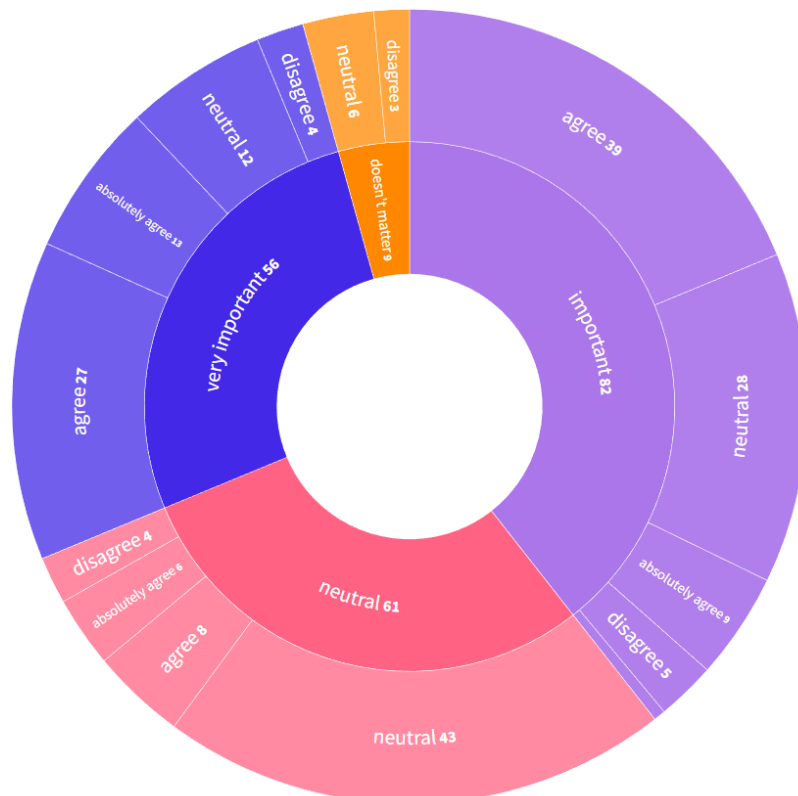


Figure 13. Cross-tabulation of questions 18 and 19

A cross-tabulation analysis allows to conclude that individuals who consider easy access to political information as very important (27) are more likely to view social

media platforms as important for engaging in political discussions (22). Similarly, participants who perceive easy access to political information as important (47) are more inclined to perceive social media platforms as important for political discussions (39). Conversely, individuals who express disagreement with the importance of easy access to political information (16) are more likely to adopt a neutral stance regarding the capability of social media platforms for engaging in political discussions (28).

Observation of changes in political opinion or decision-making

This section sheds light on the extent to which respondents have observed changes in political opinion or decision-making as a result of discussions or debates on social media platforms. The results indicate that a considerable majority of participants (120) responded negatively, stating that they had not observed such changes. Conversely, a smaller proportion of respondents (88) reported having observed political opinion or decision-making changes resulting from discussions or debates on social media.

These findings suggest that, according to the surveyed individuals, social media platforms may not significantly impact shaping political opinion or decision-making. The large number of participants who have not observed any changes implies that social media discussions and debates may not be influential or persuasive in altering political perspectives. However, it is worth noting that a minority of participants did acknowledge witnessing changes, suggesting that social media can have some impact, albeit limited, on shaping political opinions and decision-making.

In conclusion, the data analysis conducted in this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions and behaviours of young people in Kazakhstan regarding their use of social media platforms for political engagement and participation. The findings revealed mixed attitudes towards the effectiveness of social media in promoting political

participation and democratisation, as well as varied opinions regarding access to accurate and reliable information about political issues. However, the survey results also highlighted the potential of social media in facilitating connections among young individuals interested in politics, although some respondents expressed reservations.

Furthermore, the cross-tabulation of survey results demonstrated differing opinions on the influence of social media on attending political events, government responsiveness to young people's opinions, sharing political views, and observing changes in political opinion or decision-making. These findings emphasise the complex and multifaceted nature of social media's role in political engagement, suggesting that its influence varies among individuals.

The relationship between political participation and education level reveals that the answers of bachelor's degree students are distributed between positive and neutral responses. In contrast, bachelor's degree students have a more positive attitude towards the relationship between social media usage and political participation. This tendency can be observed in the example of Figure 14.

Do you think social media can be a powerful tool to promote political participation and democratization in Kazakhstan?

absolutely agree agree disagree neutral totally disagree

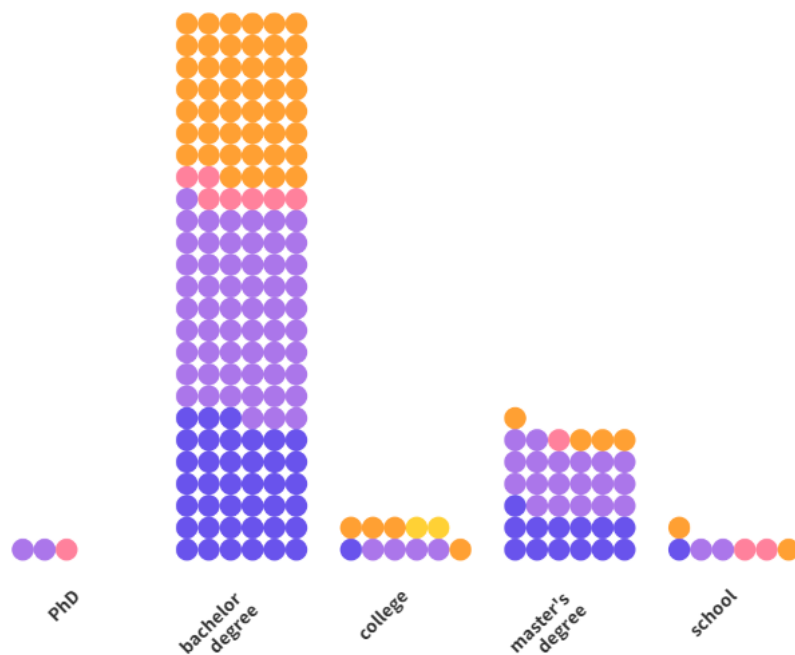


Figure 14. Role of social media in facilitating political participation

A similar tendency can be observed in Figure 15, which illustrates the respondents' opinion regarding the ability of social media usage to strengthen political participation with dividing the respondents into income groups.

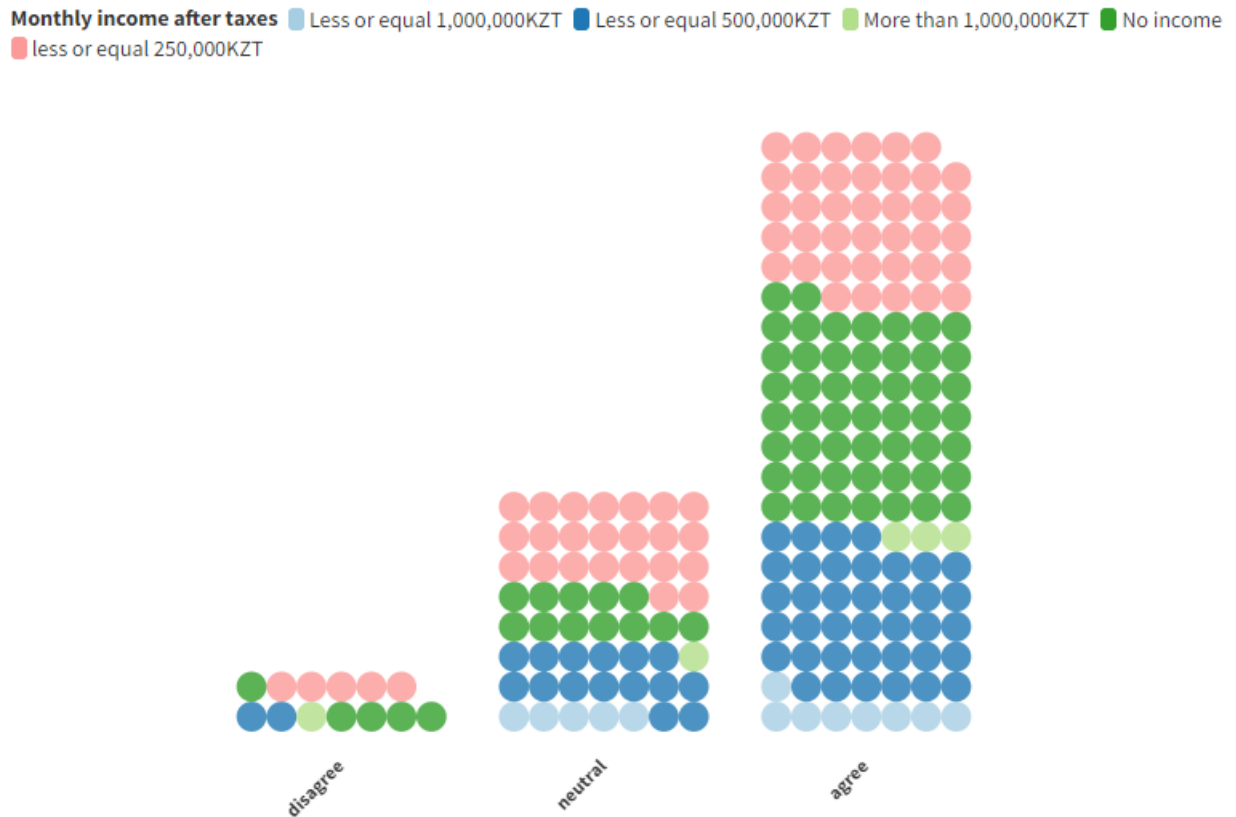


Figure 15. Role of social media in facilitating political participation

It is can be clearly seen that respondents with no income tended to agree with the statement more, compared to other income groups, whose answers were distributed between “neutral” and “agree” in the proportion of 33% to 66%. On the one hand, the sample size is too small to conclude that income level or education level can define the attitudes and behaviour of the population. On the other hand, however, some patterns and commonalities can be observed from the findings, hinting that the higher the education level achieved, the more positive the respondent felt about the relationship between social media and the development of political participation. In order to make meaningful conclusions regarding these interdependencies a, further research with a bigger sample size needs to be performed.

The study findings underscore the need for further research to delve deeper into the underlying factors and mechanisms that shape the relationship between social media and political participation among young people in Kazakhstan. Exploring the nuances of social media usage, the quality of information dissemination, and the dynamics of online political discussions can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social media platforms' potential benefits and limitations in promoting democratic engagement and participation. Moreover, such insights can inform the development of strategies and interventions aimed at harnessing the positive aspects of social media while mitigating any potential drawbacks.

VII. Conclusion

The dissertation findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent of social media usage among young people in Kazakhstan for political engagement and participation. The study results indicate that a considerable proportion of young individuals in Kazakhstan actively utilise social media platforms as tools used to express their political views, participate in social media campaigns or petitions, and attend political events prompted by social media influence. This suggests that social media plays a significant role in facilitating political participation among the youth population in the country. However, it is essential to note that a significant number of respondents do not engage in these activities, highlighting the presence of a diverse range of behaviours and preferences among young individuals in their use of social media for political purposes.

Regarding expanding political participation and democratisation, the findings underscore the complex relationship between social media usage and its impact on political engagement. While social media serves as an effective mobilising platform for a significant segment of young individuals to participate in political events, a considerable portion of respondents remains unaffected by social media in terms of attending such events. This suggests that social media alone may not be sufficient to ensure widespread political participation and democratisation among the youth. Other factors, such as offline mobilisation efforts, civic education, and structural changes in the political system, should also be considered to create a more inclusive and participatory environment.

The perceptions of young people in Kazakhstan regarding the ability of social media platform features to enable their participation in politics, formation of political decisions, and influence on current political decision-making and opinion formation vary significantly. While a notable proportion of respondents perceive social media as a

platform that empowers them and provides a sense of autonomy in political life and decision-making, there are also contrasting opinions and a considerable number of individuals adopting a neutral stance. This highlights the importance of considering individual differences, socio-political contexts, and social media platforms' specific features and affordances in shaping young people's perceptions and experiences.

Acknowledging and discussing the limitations of using convenience sampling instead of probability sampling in research is important. Convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling, involves selecting participants based on their availability and willingness to participate, which may introduce biases and impact the generalizability of the findings. Firstly, convenience sampling may result in a non-representative sample, as individuals who are easily accessible or more inclined to participate may not accurately reflect the broader population. This can potentially lead to a lack of diversity and potential underrepresentation or overrepresentation of particular demographic groups, thereby limiting the external validity of the findings. Secondly, convenience sampling can introduce selection bias, as individuals who self-select to participate may possess distinct characteristics or attitudes that differ from those who decline to participate. This can compromise the representativeness of the sample and potentially skew the results.

Furthermore, convenience sampling may limit the researcher's ability to make statistical inferences and generalise the findings to the broader population. On the other hand, probability sampling methods allow for the calculation of sampling errors and provide a more accurate estimation of population parameters. Additionally, convenience sampling may be prone to response bias, as participants who voluntarily choose to participate may have specific motivations or perspectives that differ from the broader population. This can influence the validity and reliability of the collected data and limit the researcher's ability to draw unbiased conclusions. Thus, the study can be duplicated

and implemented using probability sampling and a bigger sample size to ensure higher validity and reliability. Moreover, the study results can be enhanced by conducting additional longitudinal analysis, which will allow the researchers see the dynamics in behaviours and perceptions of the youth regarding the impact of social media usage on political participation and democratisation.

Based on the findings of the survey and the aim of enhancing political participation and democratisation among the youth of Kazakhstan, several practical recommendations can be proposed for the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), policymakers, and social activists.

The recommendations for the government of Kazakhstan can be the following:

Foster an inclusive and participatory political environment by actively involving young people in decision-making and policy development.

Establish mechanisms to systematically collect and analyse feedback from young people, ensuring their opinions and perspectives are taken into account in formulating and implementing policies.

Collaborate with social media platforms to promote responsible and ethical use of these platforms for political engagement while safeguarding against misinformation and hate speech.

Provide training and capacity-building initiatives to enhance digital literacy skills among young people, enabling them to evaluate and navigate political information online critically.

In addition, the following actions can be taken by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

Organise workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns to educate young people about their rights and the importance of active political engagement.

Facilitate networking and peer-learning platforms where young individuals interested in politics can connect, share ideas, and collaborate on initiatives.

Advocate for creating youth-friendly political spaces and platforms, ensuring young people's voices can be heard and respected in decision-making processes.

Policy Makers and influencers of political opinion of the population should consider the following recommendations:

Develop policies that promote and support youth engagement in political processes, such as creating dedicated youth advisory councils or platforms for direct interaction with policymakers.

Allocate resources to support initiatives enhancing youth political participation, including funding youth-led projects, campaigns, and events.

Implement legislation to ensure transparency, accountability, and accessibility of political information, thereby enabling informed decision-making among young people.

Social Activists can also play a significant role in developing the political participation and democratisation of the youth by:

Organising grassroots movements and campaigns that raise awareness about political issues and encourage young people to participate actively in civic and political activities.

Using social media to mobilise and engage young individuals in constructive political discussions, sharing accurate information, and countering misinformation.

Collaborating with other stakeholders, such as NGOs and youth organisations, to amplify their efforts and create a collective impact on political engagement among the youth.

Implementation of these recommendations requires collaboration among various stakeholders. Establishing partnerships between the government, NGOs, policy makers, and social activists is crucial to collectively design and implement programs and

initiatives that address the specific needs and aspirations of young people in Kazakhstan. In addition, regular monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms should be put in place to assess the effectiveness and impact of these interventions, ensuring continuous development and adaptation to the evolving needs of the youth population.

Overall, the present dissertation contributes to the existing literature and knowledge by providing insights into the role of social media in political engagement and participation among the youth in Kazakhstan. The results demonstrate the significance of social media as a tool for mobilising and expressing political views. However, they also indicate the need for a nuanced understanding of social media usage's limitations and potential drawbacks in political contexts. Future research should explore the underlying factors influencing social media usage patterns, the mechanisms through which social media can effectively enhance political participation and democratisation, and strategies to address the challenges and limitations of social media in promoting meaningful youth engagement in politics.

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IX. Annex 1: Questionnaire

The survey will take 5-7 minutes. We do not assume that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to terminate the survey or withdraw from the study at any time.

- all or part of the content of your survey will be used ONLY for this course assignment;
- any survey responses made for the course assignment will be anonymous, so you cannot be identified.

Thank you for agreeing to take the survey as part of the above research project.

Survey questions

Q1. Age group

Q2. Gender

Q3. Education level

Q4. Family status

Q5. Monthly income after taxes

Q6. Were you born in the same city where you live now?

Q7. If you answered "no" to the previous question, where were you born?

Q8. How often do you use social networks (such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, etc.)?

Q9. How many total hours do you spend using Instagram per week?

Q10. How many total hours do you spend using TikTok per week?

Q11. How many total hours do you spend on YouTube per week?

Q12. What social network do you think influences public opinion the most?

Q13. Have you ever used social media to discuss political issues or participate in political debates?

Topic specific survey questions

Q1. Have you ever used social media to discuss political issues or participate in political debates?

Q2. Do you feel that social media has increased your awareness of political issues in Kazakhstan?

Q3. Do you think social media can be a powerful tool to promote political participation and democratization in Kazakhstan?

Q4. Do you think that your personal participation in political life can change the situation in Kazakhstan?

Q5. Have you ever used social networks to find information about political issues (problems) that you did not know about before?

Q6. Have you ever shared political content on social media to inform others about an issue or event that you learned through social media?

Q7. Have you ever used social media to voice your opinion on a political issue or a proposed policy change?

Q8. In your opinion, how much do social media platforms influence current political decision-making and public opinion in Kazakhstan?

Q9. Have you ever used social media to express your political views or beliefs to a political leader or government official?

Q10. Do you feel that social media has helped you connect with other young people who are interested in politics?

Q11. Do you think that social media is effective in providing accurate and reliable information about political issues in Kazakhstan?

Q12. Have you ever attended a political event (such as a rally, protest, or gathering) as a result of seeing it on social media?

Q13. Do you think that the government of Kazakhstan takes into account the opinion of young people?

Q14. Do you feel that social media gives you a sense of empowerment and autonomy in relation to political life and decision making?

Q15. Have you ever voted in an election in Kazakhstan?

Q16. Do you find that social media makes it easier for you to share your political views with others?

Q17. Have you ever participated in a social media campaign or petition related to a political issue or proposal for a policy change?

Q18. In your opinion, how important is it to have easy access to information about political issues in order to increase political participation among youth in Kazakhstan?

Q19. Do you think that social media platforms allow you to engage in political discussions with a wide variety of people?

Q20. Have you ever observed changes in political opinion or decision making as a result of discussions or debates that have taken place on social media?

X. Annex 2: Questionnaire

(Russian version)

Опрос займет 5-7 минут. Мы не предполагаем, что есть какие-либо риски, связанные с вашим участием, но вы имеете право прекратить опрос или выйти из исследования в любой момент.

- все или часть содержания вашего опроса будет использоваться ТОЛЬКО для этого задания курса;
- любые ответы из опроса, сделанные для задания курса будут анонимными, так что вас нельзя будет идентифицировать.

Спасибо, что согласились пройти опрос в рамках вышеуказанного исследовательского проекта.

Общие вопросы

1. Возрастная группа
2. Пол
3. Уровень образования
4. Семейное положение
5. Ежемесячный доход после уплаты налогов
6. Вы родились в том же городе, где живете сейчас?
7. Если вы ответили "нет" на предыдущий вопрос, то где вы родились?
8. Как часто вы пользуетесь социальными сетями (такими как Tik Tok, Instagram, YouTube и т.д.)?
9. Сколько в общей сложности часов вы проводите в Instagram в неделю?

10. Сколько в общей сложности часов вы проводите за использованием Tik Tok в неделю?
11. Сколько в общей сложности часов вы проводите на YouTube в неделю?
12. Как вы думаете, какая социальная сеть больше всего влияет на общественное мнение?
13. Использовали ли вы когда-нибудь социальные сети для обсуждения политических вопросов или участия в политических дебатах?

Специфические вопросы

1. Вы когда-нибудь использовали социальные сети для обсуждения политических вопросов или участия в политических дебатах?
2. Считаете ли вы, что социальные сети повысили вашу осведомленность о политических проблемах в Казахстане?
3. Считаете ли вы, что социальные сети могут стать мощным инструментом содействия политическому участию и демократизации в Казахстане?
4. Считаете ли вы, что ваше личное участие в политической жизни может изменить ситуацию в Казахстане?
5. Вы когда-нибудь использовали социальные сети для поиска информации о политических вопросах (проблемах), о которых вы раньше не знали?
6. Вы когда-нибудь делились политическим контентом в социальных сетях, чтобы проинформировать других о проблеме или событии, о которых вы узнали через социальные сети?
7. Вы когда-нибудь использовали социальные сети, чтобы высказать свое мнение по какому-либо политическому вопросу или предлагаемому изменению политики?

8. На ваш взгляд, насколько сильно платформы социальных сетей влияют на принятие текущих политических решений и общественное мнение в Казахстане?
9. Вы когда-нибудь использовали социальные сети, чтобы выразить свои политические взгляды или убеждения политическому лидеру или правительственному чиновнику?
10. Чувствуете ли вы, что социальные сети помогли вам наладить контакт с другими молодыми людьми, которые интересуются политикой?
11. Считаете ли вы, что социальные сети эффективны в предоставлении точной и достоверной информации о политических проблемах в Казахстане?
12. Посещали ли вы когда-нибудь политическое мероприятие (например, митинг, акцию протеста или собрание) в результате того, что увидели его в социальных сетях?
13. Считаете ли вы, что правительство Казахстана учитывает мнение молодежи?
14. Чувствуете ли вы, что социальные сети дают вам ощущение расширения прав и автономии по отношению к политической жизни и принятию решений?
15. Вы когда-нибудь голосовали на выборах в Казахстане?
16. Считаете ли вы, что социальные сети позволяют вам легче делиться своими политическими взглядами с другими?
17. Вы когда-нибудь участвовали в кампании в социальных сетях или петиции, связанной с политическим вопросом или предложением об изменении политики?
18. На ваш взгляд, насколько важно иметь легкий доступ к информации по политическим вопросам для расширения участия молодежи в политической жизни Казахстана?

19. Считаете ли вы, что платформы социальных сетей позволяют вам участвовать в политических дискуссиях с самыми разными людьми?
20. Наблюдали ли вы когда-нибудь изменения в политических взглядах или процессе принятия решений в результате обсуждений или дебатов, которые происходили в социальных сетях?

XI. Annex 3: Questionnaire

(Kazakh version)

Сауалнама 5-7 минутты алады. Біз сіздің қатысуыңызға байланысты тәуекелдер бар деп ойламаймыз, бірақ сіз кез келген уақытта зерттеуден шығуды сұрауды тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар.

* сауалнама мазмұнының барлығы немесе бір бөлігі тек осы курстық тапсырма үшін пайдаланылады;

* курс тапсырмасы үшін жасалған кез келген сауалнама жауаптары сізді анықтау мүмкін болмайтындай жасырын болады.

Жоғарыда аталған зерттеу жобасы аясында сауалнама жүргізуге келіскеніңіз үшін рахмет.

Жалпы сұрақтар

1. Жас тобы
2. Еден
3. Білім деңгейі
4. Отбасылық жағдайы
5. Салықтан кейінгі ай сайынғы кіріс
6. Сіз қазір тұратын қалада тудыңыз ба?
7. Егер сіз алдыңғы сұраққа " жоқ " деп жауап берсеңіз, онда сіз қай жерде тудыңыз?
8. Сіз әлеуметтік медианы қаншалықты жиі қолданасыз (мысалы, Tik Tok, Instagram, YouTube және т. б.)?
9. Сіз Instagram-да аптасына қанша сағат өткізесіз?
10. Аптасына Tik Tok қолдануға қанша сағат жұмсайсыз?
11. Сіз YouTube-те аптасына қанша сағат өткізесіз?
12. Қоғамдық пікірге қай әлеуметтік желі көбірек әсер етеді деп ойлайсыз?

13. Сіз әлеуметтік медианы саяси мәселелерді талқылау немесе саяси пікірталастарға қатысу үшін қолдандыңыз ба?

Ерекше сұрақтар

1. Сіз әлеуметтік медианы саяси мәселелерді талқылау немесе саяси пікірталастарға қатысу үшін қолданғансыз ба?
2. Әлеуметтік желілер Қазақстандағы саяси мәселелер туралы сіздің хабардарлығыңызды арттырды деп ойлайсыз ба?
3. Әлеуметтік желілер Қазақстандағы саяси қатысу мен демократияландыруға жәрдемдесудің қуатты құралы бола алады деп ойлайсыз ба?
4. Сіздің саяси өмірге жеке қатысуыңыз Қазақстандағы жағдайды өзгерте алады деп ойлайсыз ба?
5. Сіз бұрын білмеген саяси мәселелер (мәселелер) туралы ақпаратты іздеу үшін әлеуметтік медианы қолдандыңыз ба?
6. Сіз әлеуметтік медиа арқылы білген мәселе немесе оқиға туралы басқаларға хабарлау үшін әлеуметтік желілерде саяси мазмұнды бөлістіңіз бе?
7. Сіз кез-келген саяси мәселе немесе саясаттың өзгеруі туралы өз пікіріңізді білдіру үшін әлеуметтік медианы қолдандыңыз ба?
8. Сіздің ойыңызша, әлеуметтік желілердің платформалары Қазақстанда ағымдағы саяси шешімдер қабылдауға және қоғамдық пікірге қаншалықты әсер етеді?
9. Сіз өзіңіздің саяси көзқарастарыңызды немесе сенімдеріңізді саяси көшбасшыға немесе мемлекеттік қызметкерге білдіру үшін әлеуметтік медианы қолдандыңыз ба?

10. Әлеуметтік медиа сізге саясатқа қызығушылық танытатын басқа жастармен байланыс орнатуға көмектесті деп ойлайсыз ба?
11. Әлеуметтік желілер Қазақстандағы саяси проблемалар туралы нақты және шынайы ақпарат беруде тиімді деп ойлайсыз ба?
12. Сіз әлеуметтік желілерде көрудің нәтижесінде саяси іс-шараға (мысалы, митинг, наразылық акциясы немесе жиналыс) қатыстыңыз ба?
13. Қазақстан Үкіметі жастардың пікірін ескереді деп ойлайсыз ба?
14. Әлеуметтік медиа сізге саяси өмір мен шешім қабылдауға қатысты құқықтар мен автономия сезімін береді деп ойлайсыз ба?
15. Сіз Қазақстандағы сайлауда дауыс бердіңіз бе?
16. Әлеуметтік медиа сіздің саяси көзқарастарыңызды басқалармен оңай бөлісуге мүмкіндік береді деп ойлайсыз ба?
17. Сіз әлеуметтік медиа науқанына немесе саяси мәселеге немесе саясатты өзгерту туралы ұсынысқа қатысты петицияға қатыстыңыз ба?
18. Сіздің ойыңызша, жастардың Қазақстанның саяси өміріне қатысуын кеңейту үшін саяси мәселелер бойынша ақпаратқа оңай қол жеткізу қаншалықты маңызды?
19. Сіз әлеуметтік медиа платформалары әртүрлі адамдармен саяси пікірталастарға қатысуға мүмкіндік береді деп ойлайсыз ба?
20. Сіз әлеуметтік желілерде болған пікірталастар немесе пікірталастар нәтижесінде саяси көзқарастардағы немесе шешім қабылдау процесіндегі өзгерістерді байқадыңыз ба?