Article3

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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paradigm: critical realism.

ABSTRACT

The survival of democracy depends on the active participation of citizens in the political processes. South Africa's nascent democracy is at risk as long as her young citizens continue to show apathy towards participation in politics. This perceived paucity of youth participation in politics can be reversed through the mass media's provision of political education. This study, therefore, investigated the influence of media use on university students' political participation in South Africa. This study adopted a mixed methods design. Questionnaires were administered to 372 students selected, using the stratified random sampling techniques, from one university in the Eastern Cape Province. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among five purposively selected members of the Student Representative Council. Simple descriptive and Pearson correlation statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data while thematic content analysis was performed on the qualitative data. Of the 372 participants, 243 (65.3%), 124 (33.3%), 160 (43.0%), 81 (21.8%) reported the use of the internet, newspaper, television, and radio respectively for political information on a daily basis. A total of 183 (49.2%) and 113 (30.4%) voted in the SRC and national elections respectively. The bivariate analysis reveals that mass media exposure is significantly associated with students' participation in politics (P<0.001). In conclusion, it is established that there is a strong and positive relationship between students' mass media use and their participation in politics. It is, therefore, recommended that political education through the mass media would be significantly required to improve students' interest and participation in politics. The potential advantage of the media especially the social media must be tapped by the university authorities, political organizations and other concerned agencies of government to increase university students' political knowledge, interest and participation in South Africa.

Problem statement

critical realism

Paradigm proof

Keywords: mass media, social media, political education, political participation

INTRODUCTION

The survival of democracy depends on the active participation of citizens in the political

processes. South Africa's nascent democracy is at risk of becoming a government that serves only the few political office holders and their cronies as long as her young citizens continue to show apathy towards participation in politics. There are concerns that South Africans have been exhibiting low participation in the conventional political processes in the first 20 years of their country's democratic experimentation as a republic (Mattes and Richmond 2015, 2). These concerns are further highlighted by Tracey's (2013) worries indicating that South African youth have become apathetic towards the democratic affairs of their state. This perceived paucity of youth participation in politics can be reversed through the mass media's provision of political education.

The mass media are very critical to raising awareness about political issues and encouraging participation of the citizenry in the democratic processes (Anwar and Jan 2010). There is no gainsaying the fact that the mass media and the news media are very influential in shaping the individual's perception of the world in general and politics in particular (Yaseen, Mamdani and Siddiqui 2018). Previous studies have found that there are three main agents of political education exerting a lot of influence on the participation of youth in politics and democratic engagement (Print 2007). First is the family, of which, parents are regarded as political role models to their children; second is the exposure to media and use of political information through the television programmes and news broadcasts, and reading of the newspapers; and the third one is the school which provides the learning experiences about politics and democracy (Print 2007). This is to emphasize the influential contribution of the mass media in mobilizing people for participation in democratic politics (O'Neill 2007).

Frateschi (2016) argues that participation deepens democracy and encourages minorities and less politically powerful actors to become involved in decision-making and formulation of public policies for the good of all in the state. Democracy, itself, is an organizing model for the collective interest and exercise of political power in the public institutions in a society premised on certain principles for decision-making through a free and deliberative participation among the politically equal citizens (Benhabib 1996, cited in Frateschi 2016). Benhabib has argued further that such participation is guided by the principles of equality and equity among individuals given same opportunities to exercise their freedom of expression, rights to take part in political conversations in a way that seeks to promote their collective interest and general welfare (cited in Frateschi 2016). Citizens' participation in politics is imperative for the healthy continuation of the democracy (Gutmann 1987). Gutmann insists that students must be availed ample opportunities to be involved in the making of certain decisions that impact their lives at the school level so as to build in them self-efficacy, and encourage their participation in the nation's political life.

Political participation, as defined by Resnick and Thurlow (2015), involves the citizens' actions which are intended to influence the policies and decisions of government and its officials through voting, party meeting and communicating with the elected representatives, and going on strikes or protests to express dissatisfaction against leaders' actions and inactions. Utter (2011) notes that political participation has three distinguished features which include taking part in voting during elections, party affiliation and membership and protestation against dissatisfaction. Essentially, political participation enables citizens to become involved in decision-making regarding issues that affect their interest and public service delivery; providing them platforms to join debate with a view to proffering solutions to a myriad of problems and attaining developmental strides. In this article, political participation connotes the students' involvement in voting exercise during local, provincial and national elections, campaign rallies, online conversations, Student Representative Council's elections and mass meetings, and campus-based political organizations' activities.

Recently, digitization and globalization have continued to affect the contemporary nature and processes of political participation, more importantly, the ways citizens engage and participate in politics have been shaped by digital media (Bimber, Flanagin and Stohl 2012). Given the ways digitization is shaping globalization processes in relation to politics, Brennen and Kreiss (2014) submit that digital media have facilitated new forms of political participation across the international boundaries, increased the political playing ground and access to more political actors, created political information across the borders and linked national politics to the global stage. Heblich and Gold (2016) contend that globalization and digitization have affected how electorates participate in politics as the internet has afforded them opportunities to have more access to information on political issues on a global scale. For instance, unwilling and non-participating voters can be mobilized and motivated to vote through social media campaigns. Participation in the pre-digital period was characterized by the incentives and opportunities which political parties provided to entice citizens while the digital period of social media and digital technologies has widely expanded the available options for citizen participation in politics.

Social media, undoubtedly, have become an important instrument for increasing participation in all forms of political activities in such a way that civic participation is now witnessing changes in this era of information age defined by digitization processes (Heblich and Gold 2016; Bimber et al. 2012). With digitization, citizens' expectations, desirability and ability have radically changed; such that individuals are more empowered to shape their own participation. Karpf (2012) has added that citizens' new forms of political engagement have shifted due to the availability of political information through digital media. This article argues

that students increasingly utilize digital media for online participation such as posting or discussing their views on national and international issues mostly on Facebook and Twitter and canvassing for support for their preferred political parties and candidates during elections. Mhlomi and Osunkunle (2017) have argued that young people in South Africa may not be actively involved in the mainstream politics, but, they have been found to be actively involved in other forms of political activities such as the 2015 #FeesMustFall and the #RhodesMustFall protests.

Citizen participation in any democratic society would ensure that political powers are checked and prevented from abuse and compromise by the privileged political elite groups. It would also ensure that institutions of governance are prevented from being captured and reformed in manners that would bring about the exclusion of the interests of the poor masses (Parvin 2018). There is evidence in the literature indicating that rates of political participation have declined in most of the liberal democracies like South Africa; as such participation is largely concentrated in the hands of the few wealthy and influential power brokers (Parvin 2018; Bartels 2016). This kind of situation portends a great risk for South Africa's nascent democracy where there is evidence of state capture and corruption by the political actors who have been in power since 1994. The risk of non-participation on the part of young people will leave the country's democratic future to be bleak.

Students' participation in South Africa's democracy will certainly throw up a crop of young, visionary, versatile and progressive leaders for the country. Such young leaders have a grasp of the contemporary political and socio-economic problems confronting the country. They have been prepared by their university education to proffer pragmatic solutions to complex problems plaguing the nation and direct it on the path of genuine development. The university provides opportunities for students to become involved in political activities and organizational leadership programmes (Luescher-Mamashela 2011). They are more passionate to provide responsive leadership in the interest of all and sundry as against the narrow interest of the few, old and professional politicians who have held the country stagnant since its return to democracy. The participation of students in politics will certainly reduce the risk of state capture and the tendency to plunge the nation's democracy into comatose by the older generation of politicians. Democracy works and survives when all eligible citizens participate in the state's democratic affairs. A representative democracy should encourage popular participation not only voting but also incorporate citizens' voices in the decision-making processes in order to compensate for their lack of democratic capacity (Landemore 2017).

Nonetheless, there is the dearth of empirical studies on the media's provision of political education and its influence on university students' political participation in South Africa. This

Problem statement

study was therefore conducted to fill in the gap. The main purpose was to investigate university students' media use and their political participation in South Africa. The study setting was one selected university in the Province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. In the next sections of the article, the discussion focuses on the theoretical framework, literature review, and objectives of the study, research methodology, and results analysis, discussion of findings, conclusion, and recommendations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the majority of opinions of scholars, South Africans generally have had the lowest participation in conventional politics in Africa and the youth, in particular, have appeared to be disinterested in the country's political processes in the past two decades (Mattes and Richmond 2015, 2; Tracey 2013). On the contrary, a quantitative study conducted by Mhlomi and Osunkunle (2017), the authors collected data from 200 students of the University of Fort Hare in South Africa on the social media influence on their participation in South Africa's 2014 national election. The study found that the majority of the students (76%) voted during the national elections in 2014. However, only 19 per cent of the students indicated that they were influenced to cast their votes for their preferred political parties and candidates due to the enormous awareness and exposure to the political campaigns and other political information made available through the social media platforms. The authors concluded that the students were not politically disinterested. To reconcile these findings, this study was poised to investigate university students' media use and their political participation. → Problem statement.

Sample not relevant.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

i. What are the media types used for political information by university students in South Africa?
ii. How often do students get political information from the media types?
iii. To what extent have the students participated in politics?
iv. To what extent is students' mass media use associated with their participation in politics?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Dalton's (1984) cognitive mobilization theory of political education and participation is considered appropriate for this study because it clearly states the benefits of the mass media in terms of the promotion of political education in the citizenry with a view to fostering and

2 Variables:
① Media use
② Political participation. (use pierson's correlation)

Problem Statement:

Mattes & Richmond

↓ ~~Richmond~~

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Mhlomi & Osunkunle.

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University students' media use

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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encouraging their participation in politics. Besides, this theory has not been adequately used in the literature to explain the mass media's potential for increasing political education and participation in the political processes. This theory asserts that political education results in mobilizing an individual's cognitive skills and capacities for their participation in the political processes (Onuigbo, Eme and Asadu 2018). Cognitive mobilization theorists have argued that political education is capable of increasing the citizens' mental capacities and skills with which to engage politically and to undertake certain actions and duties in relation to the political system and democratic governance. The mass media are the agencies of political education empower and mobilize individuals through the news and political information resulting from the analysis and discussion of national and international issues that unravel the complex nature of politics with a view to making informed decisions on voting and other political activities (Onuigbo et al. 2018). We, therefore, believe that the mass media are offering political education through the discussion of political issues by featuring the experts and other opinion leaders to dissect politics relating to national and international interests. In this way, the citizens become well informed about politics and their interest, to participate in politics as active citizens, is further strengthened and enhanced.

MEDIA TYPES USED FOR POLITICAL INFORMATION

The media types used for political information by the university students may include the electronic media types such as the television, radio, internet news media – You Tube channels and the print media especially the newspapers. We have observed that university campuses in South Africa provide students with television sets in their residences and internet facilities are also made available to them in classrooms, residences, and libraries. The university libraries also have provisions for the daily newspapers for students to read. Young people find it easier to access political information through regular use of the internet to access news websites to see the breaking news, live coverage of government's activities and press briefing by government officials and their political leaders. Luescher-Mamashela (2011) in their student governance study in selected African countries reported that an overwhelming majority of students (86%) at the University of Cape Town, South Africa used the internet; 71 per cent of the students also listened to radio, 65 per cent watched the television and 52 per cent read the newspapers for political information. From the above data, the fact is that there seems to be an over-reliance on the internet news media types which has been responsible for the declining interest in the use of the print news media (newspapers) nowadays.

STUDENTS' FREQUENCY OF MEDIA USE FOR POLITICAL INFORMATION

Owen (n.d.) believes that young people these days spend quite a lot of time with the media especially when they are alone. She cited a study which confirmed that young Americans (18 years and below) spend an average of 38 hours per week for media use. There is also the assumption that students of nowadays do stay on the internet for the use of social media for at least 8 hours each day (Strasburger, Wilson and Jordan 2009; Möller and De Vreese 2013). According to the students' governance survey in African universities, participants at the University of Nairobi were reportedly reading newspapers daily or many times in one week. Most of the students from the participating universities (i.e. Universities of Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and Cape Town) declared that they used the internet on a daily basis or many times per week. Furthermore, the South African students at the University of Cape Town were reportedly using the internet more frequently than they used the television and radio as the news media for information on politics and public affairs (Luescher-Mamashela 2011, 86–88).

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Dibetle's opinion piece (2007) stated that university students in South Africa had become politically apathetic. He was worried that the vibrant universities which were known for political consciousness, political articulation and nurturing of political leadership during the apartheid era had suddenly become less politically active in terms of training students for political mindedness. He lamented about the poor participation of students in the Student Representative Council elections at the University of Pretoria where only 2 500 students (11.4%) out of the total of 22 000 on the registered list turned up to vote during the SRC elections in one particular academic year. In the same vein, Luescher-Mamashela (2011) reported in their students' governance survey that 62 per cent of the UCT students who participated in the survey agreed to have participated in South Africa's 2005 national elections. More recently, Mhlomi and Osunkunle's (2017) study at the University of Fort Hare, South indicated that 76 per cent of the students declared they voted and participated in the 2014 national elections.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MASS MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The media, be it electronic or print, are veritable agents of political education. There is a generally held belief in social science disciplines about the important role that media can play in influencing the political education and participation. The media has been described as the sources and transmitters of information to the public platforms where public participation takes

place (O'Neill 2009). Studies have described mass media variables which include watching the news on television and reading of newspapers and magazines as vital and essential outcomes and more importantly as determinants of political education and participation in politics (Shahid 2013; Möller and De Vreese 2013; Mbabvu 2017). It is stated that young people who regularly watch television news, listen to radio news and find newspapers or magazines reading pleasurable would have political knowledge and develop orientation in the political world around them better than others who choose not to have interest in the news provided through the media (Etnel 2010). It is important to understand the fact that political information is not generated by the mass media but only serve as the conveyors of the political information initiated by other agents of political education such as political organizations, politicians and government agencies.

The media platforms are usually patronized by labour unions, political parties and government officials for the purpose of disseminating and communicating political messages and other issues of interest to their members or citizens in the case of government agencies (Mbabvu 2017). Previous studies have emphasized the influential role of television viewing on political behaviour (O'Neill 2009; Möller and De Vreese 2013; Mbabvu 2017). For instance, it has been found that political information through television exposes and stimulates the young people's political participation in Europe (Möller and De Vreese 2013).

Andersson (2012) posits that the use of interactive digital media has increased among youth, and it also created demands on educational institutions in training students to manipulate the complex nature of the digital world as well as the kinds of identity work that encapsulates what educators actually require dealing with the students' experiences outside the school environment. In another study, Pasek, Kenski, Romer and Jamieson (2006) found that the mass media was significantly associated with the youth's political awareness and participation in politics. The media has made it possible for the youth to have access to a lot of political information that positively encouraged them to participate in the democratic processes of their country. Anwar and Jan (2010) also found that there was a slight significant difference between the electronic media such as the television, radio and the print media (newspaper) as the sources of political information. Their study actually reported radio, television, and newspapers as the major media platforms through which political information was disseminated to members of the public.

Some scholars have expressed optimism about the democratic values of social media that hitherto could boost the participative and deliberative skills of young people (Jenkins 2006; Leadbetter 2008); while there are however others who are deeply concerned about the negative influence of social media on the political actions and behaviour of young people. By this

concern, social media platforms are considered as a source of political instability as witnessed in the urban unrest in the UK precisely in August 2011 and it is equally seen as a challenge to ideal participatory political culture through fragmentation and personalization (Papacharissi and Mendelson 2010; Pariser 2011). Apparently, the media especially the television and internet have been said to be highly impactful on the lives and political behaviour of the young individuals. Young people, through the media, learn about political events; thereby become well familiar with the activities of political actors at the national and international levels (Möller and De Vreese 2013).

The Internet has arguably increased the numbers of the politically vibrant, informed and active, particularly in terms of reaching groups of young individuals that are typically inactive or less vibrant in conventional and offline forms of political activities (Gibson, Lusoli and Ward 2005). Dery and Puopiel (2013), in their study on radio and political education of students in the university, found that radio was the major source of information for most of the students followed by television and the internet. The study also revealed that students learned greatly about political issues from the political education programmes aired on radio and had been motivated to actively participate in activities like political campaigns and political debates.

Undoubtedly, the media's political education has deepened democratic participation especially among the young citizens across the world (O'Neill 2009; Boulianne 2009). In South Africa, the youths have been exploring the use of social media platforms to debate political issues. Many of them, as young as 18 years, have become politically aware through the online social media interactive platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In addition, South Africa's political parties equally engage and encourage youth participation in the democratic processes through the use of social media sites (Tracey 2013). As the country is preparing for another round of national elections in 2019, this study is timely and relevant because it has unraveled the important role the mass media could play for effective mobilization of youth towards participating in the democratic processes.

did not specify

Data collection (quantitative)

* Stratified sampling

sample size

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

This study adopted a mixed methods design. Questionnaires were administered to 372 students, selected using the stratified random sampling techniques, from one university in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. (Semi-structured interviews) were conducted among five (5) purposively selected members of the Student Representative Council (SRC). The sample consisted of students of political science, public administration and other students in other faculties as well as members of the SRC. The researcher purposively selected departments across the six faculties of the university, approached the students one-on-one or in a group and

equal selection

qualitative data collection

qualitative sampling method

qualitative sample ~~sta~~

only 5 students

in the class through their lecturers and class representatives. He explained the purpose of the study and gave the questionnaire to those who became interested in and consented to participate in this study. The simple descriptive and Pearson correlation statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data while thematic content analysis was performed on the qualitative data.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Out of the total 372 university students who participated in the quantitative strand of this study, 60.5 per cent were male, while 39.5 per cent were female. In addition, 21.0 per cent fell in the age bracket 16–20 years, 41.0 per cent were in the age bracket of 21–25 years, 34.2 per cent were in the age bracket of 26–30 years and only 3.8 per cent were 31 years and above. A majority of the participants (41.0%) were aged between 21 and 25 years. The largest proportion of participants (36.3%) came from the departments in the Faculty of Sciences, followed by the participants in the Department of Political Science/Public Administration (21.5%), participants from both the Faculties of Social Sciences, and Management and Commerce coincidentally had an equal proportion of participants (12.1%) and Faculty of law had the least percentage (8.3%). Finally, a majority of the participants (40.3%) were in their third year, while 31.7 per cent were in their second year and only 28.0 per cent were in their first year. The SRC members interviewed for the qualitative strand, aged between 24 and 33 years old. Their departments cut across social sciences, humanities, and management.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Experts' opinions were sought to enhance the validity of the data collection instrument. A pilot testing was also done with a smaller sample size of respondents different from the participants that eventually took part in the actual study. The Cronbach alpha coefficient value of 0.78 was obtained from the reliability test of the data collection instrument.

DATA TRUSTWORTHINESS

Data trustworthiness is about considering the research findings to be worthy of receiving attention (Graff 2014). The trustworthiness criteria which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability as articulated in Loh (2013) had been given a through attention with a view to ensuring the trustworthiness of the qualitative data used in this study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The approval for this study was granted to the researchers by the University of Fort Hare's Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Also, the permission to conduct this study was sought

nd secured from the relevant authorities of the university under investigation in the Province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

RESULTS: ANALYSIS OF THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

Attempts were made in this study to investigate the participants' media types used for political information, how often they use the media types, their extent of participation in politics and discussion regarding public affairs.

What are the media types used for political information by university students in South Africa?

The participants were asked to indicate the mass media types they used for political information. 86.8 per cent of the participants indicated that they listened to the radio news and other political talk shows, 94.4 per cent of them stated that they watched the television news and political programmes, 86.5 per cent declared that they read the newspapers for political news updates and 93.5 per cent disclosed that they used the internet to access online breaking news, political talk shows and political discussions via the social media network sites. All the SRC members' narratives corroborated the quantitative findings that the internet, YouTube, Online Television Apps and others were among the media platforms they used to access some political information. The response of one of them was as follows:

> "I read online newspapers like the Daily Dispatch ... I mainly watch news on TVs on internet. I follow news on phone using the internet. I follow news via different media apps like the eNCA app and YouTube on my phone. So, the internet is really helping one's understanding of politics and how much we have known politically in South Africa and outside the country (A male Law student, 24 years old)."

How often do students get political information from the media types?

Table 1: Participants' distribution based on media types of political information

How often do you get news or information about politics and public affairs from the media types?					
	Everyday	A few times per week	A few times per month	Once in a while per month	Never
Radio	81 (21.8)	134 (36.0)	51 (13.7)	57 (15.3)	49 (13.2)
Television	160 (43.0)	84 (22.6)	71 (19.1)	36 (9.7)	21 (5.6)
Newspaper	124 (33.3)	68 (18.3)	67 (18.0)	63 (16.9)	50 (13.5)
Internet/Online news	243 (65.3)	71 (19.1)	16 (4.3)	18 (4.8)	24 (6.5)

Source: Badaru (2019)

Table 1 presents the participants' responses regarding their sources of political information.

The results show that a majority of the participants (65.3%) used the internet every day. For the newspaper, 33.3 per cent of the students read it to update their political knowledge on a daily basis. Television was another news medium which less than half of the students (43.0%) claimed they used for political information every day. Same for radio, a smaller proportion (21.8 %), compared to other media types, of the participants listened to it for political updates on a daily basis. A member of the SRC buttressed as follows:

> "Internet is playing a huge role in raising the level of my political awareness and knowledge. I used YouTube, Online newspapers. I used the internet every day. Media has been very influential in that I know about politics and how I relate with political information. You know you cannot carry television everywhere you go. And when there is press briefing or breaking news, it is easier to access the programme or political information via YouTube on your mobile phone connected to the internet" (An Applied Communication Management male Student, 31 years old).

To what extent have the students participated in politics?

Table 2: Students' level of participation in the 2017 SRC elections

	Yes	No
Did you vote in the 2017 SRC election?	183 (49.2)	189 (50.8)
Were you voted for as a candidate in the election?	38 (10.2)	334 (89.8)
Were you actively involved in the campaigns?	94 (25.3)	278 (74.7)
Did you support candidate financially for the election?	48 (12.9)	324 (87.1)
Did you take part in the election debate?	40 (10.8)	332 (89.2)

Source: Badaru (2019)

Table 2 shows the students' level of political participation in campus politics. Almost half of the participants (49.2%) voted during the 2017 SRC election. The majority of the students (89.8%) were not voted for as candidates in the election. In the same vein, a quarter of the participants (25.3%) disclosed that they were actively involved in the campaigns. Furthermore, the majority of the students (87.1%) had not supported candidates financially for the election. Last but not the least, only 10.8 per cent of the participants affirmed that they took part in the election debate.

Table 3: Students' participation in the last National General Election (2014)

	Yes	No
Did you vote in the 2014 election?	113 (30.4)	259 (69.6)
Did you support a candidate for national assembly?	111 (29.8)	261 (70.2)
Did you support a candidate for the provincial assembly?	99 (26.6)	273 (73.4)
Were you actively involved in the electioneering campaigns?	48 (12.9)	324 (87.1)
Did you support a candidate financially?	26 (7.0)	346 (93.0)

Source: Badaru (2019)

Table 3 presents the responses of the participants to a question regarding their participation in

the 2014 national general election in South Africa. The results clearly indicated that a majority of the participants (69.6%) did not vote during the 2014. In the same vein, most of the students (70.2%) did not support any candidate for national parliament. Moreover, the majority of the participants (73.4%) did not support any candidate for the election into the provincial assembly. The proportion of the participants who were actively involved in the electioneering campaigns was 12.9 per cent. Interestingly, it was found that only 7 per cent of the students had lent a financial support to a candidate during the election.

One of the members of the SRC had this to say about the extent of his participation in politics:

> "I never wanted to serve as anything in politics on campus. Neh ... [sic] I never participated nor voted during the national elections in 2014. I came to the university and I was drafted by friends into joining the EFF Student Command. I was elected as the Secretary of the organization in my absence. When they called to inform me, I wanted to reject the offer but I was advised to accept, neh ... [sic] that it was a good start politically. I got the encouragement and decided to move on. In 2017, my political organization [EFFSC] nominated me to contest the SRC election and we won the seat. I never voted too in the SRC election when I was in year one but I did in year two because I was also contesting on the platform of the EFFSC (A female Accounting Student, 33 years old)."

To what extent is students' mass media use associated with their participation in politics?

(2) did they aim to reconcile

Table 4: Pearson correlation statistics showing relationship between mass media use and political participation

Variable	On-Campus Political Participation	Off-Campus Political Participation
Mass media use	0.122**	0.232**
Age	-0.034	0.093
Year of study	0.303**	0.195**

Note: ** means p-value <0.05, ** means P-value <0.001
Source: Badaru (2019)

Table 4 shows that there is a positive relationship between mass media use and students' political participation on and off the campus. Comparatively, it is also interesting to note that there is a stronger relationship between mass media use and students' political participation outside the campus as indicated by the p-value (0.232).

target population: all students meeting parameters in South Africa. (mention page)

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Our findings that the university students in South Africa used radio, television, newspapers and the internet as the media platforms for accessing information on politics and public affairs are consistent with Luescher-Mamashela's (2011) findings at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

More so, most of the participants in this study would always want to use the internet for political information. The reason being that they have unlimited access to the internet and could frequently use it to access even other types of news media online every day. This is corroborated by Luescher-Mamashela (2011) who also found that students at UCT frequently used internet news media more than they used television, radio, and newspapers for political information.

Our findings further revealed that the students' political participation was below average. For instance, less than half of them voted and participated in the SRC elections while the majority of them never voted in the 2014 national elections. These findings confirmed the assertions made by Mattes and Richmond (2015, 2) and Tracey (2013) who disclosed that South African youth had been disinterested in political activities. Interestingly, our findings are contrary to that of Mhlomi and Osunkunle (2017) who stated that South African youths were not politically apathetic. What can be deduced from these submissions is the fact that the proportion of South African youth who are interested in politics and have been actively participating in the political processes is very small compared to others who have shown no interest at all.

In the literature, it has been found that the mass media is one of the important agents of political education and political socialization with a lot of influence on political participation of the young people in any democratic societies (Mbabvu 2017; Neundorf and Smets 2017; Mhlomi and Osunkunle 2017). In this study, however, it has been established that there is a relationship between mass media use and students' political participation. In addition, we found that the mass media such as the internet, television, radio, and newspapers had an influential impact on the students' political participation. In tandem with the proposition of the cognitive mobilization theory of political education, political education inculcates political competence in people through the political information that empowers them cognitively to be able to make an informed decision on participation in terms of voting (Onuigbo et al. 2018).

There are a lot of political talks' shows through the television and YouTube channels as well as the radio which usually disseminate political information to the citizens. The citizens' understanding of politics, voting decisions and interest in politics are better shaped and influenced by the amount of the political information available and released to the public through the active role of the media. In this way, students can be positively influenced to participate in politics when they are exposed to a lot of political information and knowledge about the government policies, actions, and inactions of the government officials, what they do right or wrong and the impact of governance on the lives of the individuals.

Again, it is undisputable to agree that political information is disseminated through the mass media. Social media in particular has been found to have increased South African

iversity students' levels of political awareness and students' participation in voting during e 2014 national election (Mhlomi and Osunkunle 2017). The mass media, as the nation's olitical educator outside the formal school system, has the capacity to shape individuals' nowledge of politics, enhances their sense of political judgment and activate their interest in olitics. This is possible by the nature and amount of information that is disseminated through political debates, news broadcasts and press briefings and other broadcasts that border on political events and issues of national and international interests. As much as the political information is received, individuals become mentally capacitated and are therefore mobilized to participate in all forms of political activities. This is in consonance with the proposition of the cognitive mobilization theory of political education and political participation as espoused by Onuigbo et al. (2018). Government officials, politicians and government departments or ministries do address the press for the purpose of bringing their activities and achievements to the awareness of the members of the public. The politically conscious students would therefore stick to the media platforms for the breaking news and broadcasts of the political happenings around them.

For instance, South African citizens have the opportunity to learn about a myriad of political issues via #The Big Debate programme aired weekly on the SABC2 television channel. It is one programme that brings together politicians, political parties, government functionaries, private sector players, community leaders, student leaders, activists, investigative journalists and many others to provide a robust discussion on certain political issues such as the state capture and corruption, radical economic transformation, citizens' bill of rights and land redistribution in South Africa. The viewers at home are also provided opportunities to participate in the discussion through the social media platforms such as the twitter @BigDebateSA, the Facebook-Big Debate South Africa or by phoning in using the hot line 010 442 3345 during the programme on air. Then, we argue that political discussion programmes provided by the media organizations are effectively educating the public about politics and governance. It may therefore be deduced that university students who follow political discussions via the media on a regular basis would certainly be more interested to participate in politics.

The findings of this study have implications for the practice and survival of democracy in South Africa. The practice and survival of democracy are dependent on the citizens' participation in its processes. The media has the potential of educating students and the citizens in general about their political rights and civic duties to their state and more importantly encouraging them to participate in its democratic processes. This is the only natural way by which citizens can contribute to growing and ensuring the survival of the nation's democracy.

o achieve this, political education is critical and the mass media can play an important role to eliver politically relevant contents of politics for increased political knowledge and effective articipation in the political processes.

CONCLUSION

Essentially, this study became necessary to make empirical contributions to the debate on the perceived paucity of the youths' political participation in South Africa. We have clearly established a fact that university students' political participation is below average in South Africa and there is the need to change this trend in order to help the country's democracy grow and survive. To this end, this study has highlighted the peculiar importance of the mass media's potential to contribute significantly to the political education of the university students with a view to fostering their active participation in the political processes. More importantly, the findings have added empirical contributions to the existing literature on the mass media as the political educator and a sure bet to help encourage and boost university students' political participation in South Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) should mobilize all the available mass media resources, especially through the internet platforms to create an increased awareness about the need for political education as well as political participation of the citizenry. The mass media organizations have to partner with the government and university authorities for the provision of efficient and effective delivery of political education intended to make the citizens more actively involved in democratic governance. The media sensitization should not be limited to the period of electioneering campaigns when media organizations would enjoy the patronage of the various political parties. Political education should continuously be offered through all available media platforms to increase political awareness and citizens' participation in politics.

It is also imperative for the universities to establish their own television and radio networks through which political education could be offered outside the four walls of the classrooms. Students should be encouraged to participate in on-air (live) television and radio programmes that discuss politics. Political education through the mass media would be significantly required to improve students' interest and participation in politics. The potential advantage of the media especially the social media must be tapped by the university authorities, political organizations and other concerned agencies of government to increase political knowledge, political interest and political participation of students in South Africa. Future