

Digital Culture Research Project

LINK = [Canva website](#)

Introduction (not very necessary, will be a sort of menu on the website, with our question/topic made super clear)

How does social media use impact young people's political engagement preferences and political opinion?

Brief Literature Review!!

Norris, P. (2002) model of political activism, emphasizes the role of mobilizing agencies such as unions, parties but also media → We wanted to study the particular role social media can play as mobilizing agencies. Then resources and motivation are essential to political activism. Also we thought social media could influence political interest and eventually political participation.

Verba et al. (1995) defined political participation as an activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action either directly or indirectly. This definition encompasses more than the classical direct activities often seen as the only legitimate one, e.g voting, demonstrating, signing petitions... Political participation can also be indirect: boycotting, sharing political content, staying informed about politics, debating about political issues. And we thought social media may help spreading these forms of low-cost engagement and participation among young people.

Together, these works frame social media as a potential new mobilizing agency offering new ways to participate and shape motivation.

There are several facts that made us to study specifically the influence of social media of political engagement and opinion of youth.

First, the fact that most young people inform on social media:

- The European Parliament youth survey of 2024 revealed that social media is the top source of information for political and social issues for 42% of respondents aged 16-30
- Ofcom (the UK's regulator for the communications services) published a research in July 2025, revealing that 80% of 16-24-year-olds went online to get their news, with 75% looking specifically to social media.

Then studies

- Warren, R. & Wicks, R.H. (2011). **Online political media activity strongly shape teen political engagement.** It confirmed the direct influence social media has on socialization pathways, and how it affects young people particularly, sometimes replacing the parent's influence on political views.
- Holt et al. (2013) suggested that frequent social media use among young citizens can function as a leveller in terms of motivating political participation.

Social media is consequential for young people's political views.

Then, we considered the selective exposure theory, according to which individuals tend to favor information that confirms their pre-existing views. Thus the content and the frequency to which young people are exposed would likely influence their motivation to engage with the content and to share it. That was highlighted by Dimitrova, D. V., & Matthes, J. 2018. Thus we hypothesized that the time spent on social media could be of importance for youth engagement and opinion in politics

According to Zhou and Pinkelton (2012), involvement in public affairs increases attention to political information sources, online political expression and increases political efficacy. We thus hypothesized that social science students would be more careful about sources and more likely to engage in politics.

Overall, the literature supports the idea that social media can increase political interest among youth, through exposure, facilitated communication and easy means of action. However, it can be conditioned by prior engagement, social context, and content type (Warren & Wicks, 2011; Zhou & Pinkleton, 2012; Schmuck et al., 2022).

Social media is also likely to increase trust in peer-like sources and reinforce existing opinions while decreasing trust in institutions and traditional media (Schmuck et al., 2022; Peter & Muth, 2023).

Our main hypothesis were that (1) social media use would increase political participation of young people, (2) that it would influence their political opinion and (3) that it would compose their main source of political information

Methods – V + conclusion

For this project, we surveyed 100 individuals between the ages of 17 and 25. Women represent 80% of our sample, and are therefore very overrepresented. Additionally, individuals between 18 and 20 make up over 75% of our sample. Half of our sample primarily studies the social sciences, and half does not. We made efforts to include non-Sciences Po students to combat the potential bias introduced by their more academic knowledge of politics. Indeed, we found that social science students report that they are exposed to more political content on social media than students in other fields (see Figure 1).

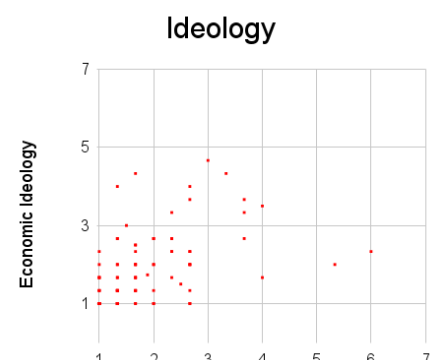
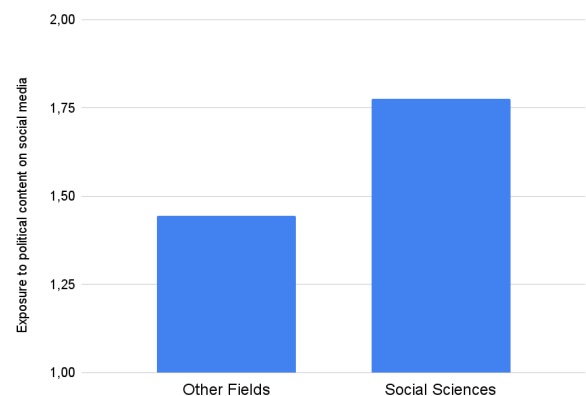
After collecting this demographic information, we investigated several dimensions of individuals' social media usage. We asked them to give an estimate of the time they spend on social media daily, to indicate which platform they use most, what type of content they primarily encounter, how this content makes them feel, which accounts those who use social media as a source of information trusted to provide reliable news, and whether they agree with the political content they are exposed to on social media.

Results

Political Opinion - Salome

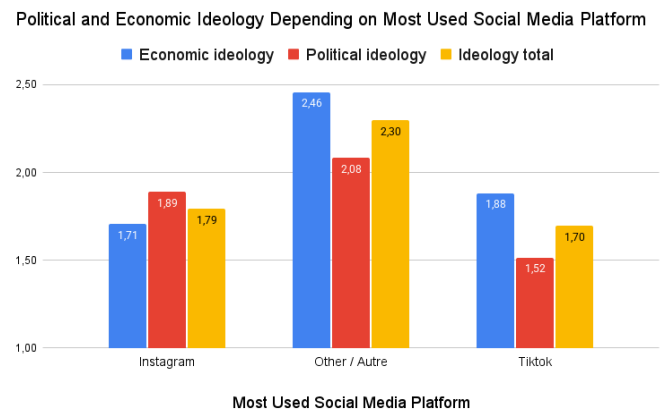
To estimate the political opinion of respondents, we adopted a survey model from one of our comparative politics lectures. We asked

Exposure to political content on social media based on area of study (1 = little exposure, 2 = much exposure)



respondents to express their opinion on an equal number of economic and social policies by offering seven options from “strongly support” to “strongly oppose.” We then coded these responses into numbers from 1 to 7, with smaller values representing leftist stances and larger values indicating those on the right. We then derived averages of social ideology and economic ideology for each person. In general, we found that a majority of respondents were located on the left of the ideological spectrum (see Figure 2).

Importantly, only two respondents reported that they never used social media. As such, we cannot study ideological divergence between those who do and do not use social media. We found no significant difference in people’s social and economic ideology based on the length of time spent on social media per day. However, we noticed small differences depending on which platform individuals used most (see Figure 3). We found that TikTok users were slightly more economically conservative and more socially on the left than Instagram users, but we noticed a more significant gap with users of other platforms, who are noticeably more economically and politically conservative than Instagram and TikTok users. Overall, they are further to the right of the ideological spectrum by about 8% than users of both other platforms.



Political Engagement – Elwynn

Staying Informed on Social Media

We asked respondents to indicate which content types they encountered most often. We found that humor, politics, art, and music were the leading categories of content people reported they were mostly exposed to (see Figure 4), representing about 50% of all content. Hence, politics represent a significant part of people’s social media consumption, with around 12% of respondents reporting they are primarily exposed to political content.

When asked where they got their political news, a majority of respondents (34%) answered “social media” (see Figure 5). It is essential at this point to recall that all individuals surveyed regularly use social media. We do not have data on how non-users inform themselves about politics.

Finally, we asked which accounts those who use social media as a source of information trusted to provide reliable news. Approximately 35% of respondents trust Hugo Décrypte to provide accurate news, while 16% trust French newspaper Le Monde (see Figure 6). All in all, about 54% of respondents said they mostly consulted the social media accounts of traditional and independent newspapers, while 46% trusted individuals (including Hugo Décrypte) instead. Several respondents expressed that they did not trust one singular source and instead preferred to compare various sources of information.

Impact of Time Spent on Social Media

Our measure of political engagement relies on people’s reported preferences, not their actual actions. This must be kept in mind during the discussion of our results. We asked respondents to attribute a value to eight political engagement methods, ranging from more traditional (such as voting) to more informal and social-media-based (sharing activist media). They were originally meant to rank these methods based on their effectiveness to achieve political change. Unfortunately, we later noticed that the survey allowed respondents to pick the same ranking for several methods. To remedy this issue, we deleted the few responses that ranked each method from 1 to 8, and counted only those that did not (the majority).

As a whole, we found that as the time spent on social media per day increases, individuals rate the efficiency of political engagement methods for enacting political change 17% lower on average (see Figure 7). Accordingly, we observe a negative correlation for each of the eight engagement methods between time spent on social media and perceived effectiveness of methods for achieving political change (see Figure 8). However, this pattern is most consistent when considering the extremes (“Between 0 and 1 hours per day” and “Between 5 and 7 hours per day”), as evidenced by the erratic shapes of the curves, with some being concave, some convex, and most of them a bit of both.

Between the individuals who spend less than an hour on social media per day and those who spend between five and seven hours there, we observe sharp declines in the perceived effectiveness of signing petitions (41%), staying informed about politics (33%), sharing activist media (23%), and debating about political issues (23%). Those activities, interestingly, are most easily performed on social media or the internet. Therefore, it seems that the more individuals use social media, the more they distrust political engagement in general, and political engagement primarily done on social media or the internet in particular (as opposed to voting, attending protests, or joining a political party).

Impact of Rate of Exposure to Political Content

We did not find any significant difference in the overall rating of political engagement methods based on individuals’ exposure to political content on social media. Nonetheless, those who are exposed to much political content value six of the methods more highly than those who are exposed to little political content (see Figure 9). Interestingly, sharing activist media and signing petitions are less effective methods of achieving political change (by 7 and 13%, respectively; see Figure 10), according to those who view a high amount of political content on social media.

This last result aligns with the previous finding that those who spend more time on social media distrust these specific political engagement methods. However, this section also allows us to nuance the previous finding. It would seem that while spending much time on social media is correlated with a general distrust of political engagement, viewing mostly political content on social media heterogeneously reinforces that effect.

Alignment of Individual Opinion and
Social Media Political Content

