BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

TITLE OF PROJECT

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION. A FOCUS ON 2018 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE.

BY

AUTHOUR

BRITA GWEZERE (B210968B)

DISSERTATION SUBMITED TO BINBURA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS) DEGREE IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

DATE

2025

APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned clarify that they have read and recommend the research project titled, **The Impact of social media on women's political participation. A focus on 2018 and 2023 general elections in Harare, Zimbabwe**, to Bindura University of Science Education. The undersigned agree that this research project has been under DR Makambanga's supervision and is from Brita Gwezere's own composition, where she acknowledged the use of other sources of information.

Signature………………………….   Date…..……./…..……./…………..

Dr Makambanga

Signature………………………….   Date…..……./…..……./…………..

Programme Coordinator

Signature………………………….   Date…..……./…..……./…………..

Chairperson

DECLARATION

I Brita Gwezere, declare that I originally worked on this research project, as it is submitted as a requirement for my Honors Degree in Development Studies at Bindura University of Science Education. The research project has never been submitted in any other institutions, for any purpose.

Signature …………………………………………

Date 18/ 06/ 2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to the government of Zimbabwe and women in political participation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my uniquely wonderful and amazing almighty God who is providing me with precious guidance and strengthened me during my academic journey. With much respect and humbleness, I sincerely acknowledge my immediate Supervisor from Bindura University of Science Education with the assistance, guidance, cooperation, commitment, devotion, advice and encouragement on my research project. Not forgetting my family especially my parents, words may be limited to express my humble appreciation but the heart knows.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to analyse the impact of social media on women's political participation, looking into Zimbabwe's 2018 and 2023 general elections. Women's political participation in Zimbabwe is still low and with emphasis on the relationship between gender and social media, this study attempts to close this gap by examining the distinctive way in which social media either positively or negatively impact women's political participation, specifically focusing on women in Harare during the 2018 and 2023 general elections in Zimbabwe. The need to create solutions that would increase women's political participation in Zimbabwe was the driving force behind this research. The literature review of the study is a construction of relevant studies and the researcher's point of view. The methodological technique employed in this study was a model of positive research combined with quantitative analysis. The researcher utilized the survey research design and collected data using structured questionnaire. Data was evaluated using statistical methods to determine main scores and standard deviations and hypothesis were tested using correlations and regression model. The study findings reflected that there is a significant association between social media's influence on political awareness and women's involvement in political discourse. Overall, the findings illustrate that while legal frameworks like the Cyber and Data Protection Act have a role to play in safeguarding women's political rights, but their impact is currently constrained by low awareness and understanding. The study concludes with recommendations on strategic investments in digital literacy, cybersecurity education, and targeted sensitization campaigns around legal protections which can amplify women's political agency and contribute to a more inclusive democratic process in Zimbabwe.

ACRONOMY

CCC…………………Citizen Coalition of Change

ICT…………………..Information Communication Technology

LEAD…………………Labour Economist Afrikan Democrats

SPSS…………………...Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

WPP……………………Women's Political Participation

ZANU-PF……………..Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front

ZCG……………………Zimbabwe Gender Commission

UN……………………..United Nations

ICCPR……………….International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

According to an examination of Zimbabwe's general elections from 2018 to 2023, women's political participation has been declining. The research also intends to examine how social media influence WPP. The chapter examines the study's history, goals, and scope as well as its problem statement, rationale, research questions, and hypothesis, as well as its general and particular objectives, terminology definitions, and organisational structure.

1.2 Background

Women's political participation has advanced throughout time, moving from total marginalisation to the highest political leadership positions. The late 19th and early 20th century saw a significant change in women's political participation. In 1893, New Zealand became the first country to provide women the right to vote, and other countries soon followed in the early 1900s (Ullah, 2024). According to paragraphs 2 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to take part in their country's administration without experiencing discrimination based on their sex (United Nations, 2015). On July 20, 1960, Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the first elected female prime minister in history as a result of women dismantling political barriers ("Sirimavo Bandaranaike: First woman premier," 2000). Members must adhere to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which stipulates in Article 12 that State Parties shall endeavour to ensure women's equal and effective representation in decision-making (SADC, 2008).

The 2013 Constitution, which supports women's political, social, and economic rights, was approved by Zimbabwe. According to the constitution's quota system, 60 seats are reserved for women. Despite the progress made by the constitution, women in Harare are still under-

represented in positions of political leadership. In Zimbabwe, the number of female political leaders has increased dramatically since the quota system was put in place; in 2023, there were 31% in parliament and 45% in the senate (IUP, 2023a and IUP 2023b). However, Women Lead Africa's analysis of Zimbabwe's harmonised elections in 2018 and 2023 showed that barriers including incompetence, gender-based violence, and cyberbullying caused women's political participation to decline by 1.4%.

Throughout Zimbabwe's pre-colonial, Chimurenga, and post-colonial eras, women's political participation has been documented via a variety of media. Popular views of women in politics in Zimbabwe were greatly impacted by traditional media, regrettably they were subjected to sexism and had limited access to media coverage. Traditional news media also exhibit many of the same gender biases as society at large (Rosenbluth, Kalla, and Teele, 2015). Former Zimbabwean Vice President Joyce Mujuru, who was appointed in 2004, used radios and televisions to reach a wider audience for campaigns.

As a way to encourage political participation globally, social media has swiftly supplanted traditional media. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow for visible feedback from online followers, women may engage in politics via these platforms. According to Yildrim (2022), social media may help fresh candidates for office humanise themselves and make themselves accessible by voters. Social media has helped marginalised groups and women, who have little political resources, become more politically involved. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have made it possible for female politicians to engage and communicate with a wider audience during campaigns.

While both men and women are impacted by online violence, women are disproportionately affected, especially in developing countries. Studies on the 2021 election in Uganda (Kakande et al., 2021) and the 2023 election in Kenya (Kakande et al., 2023) show how women's political participation is low and how they effectively utilise social media platforms to interact with voters and political campaigns. On social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, female politicians faced

sexual abuse, death threats, and body-shaming during the 2018 and 2023 campaigns in Zimbabwe. Online hate speech turned into gender-based violence when social media users singled out female candidates based on their sex (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2023). Cyberbullying hindered WPP since a number of voters, candidates, and activists ceased to participate. Cyberbullying still affects female politicians in Zimbabwe, despite the government's major attempts to boost WPP, including the creation of the Ministry of Information Communication Technology and Courier Services in 2009 and the enactment of the Cyber and Data Protection Act in 2021.

1.3 Statement of problem

Sexual harassment and physical abuse of female politicians are often encouraged by social norms and attitudes, which dehumanises and demotivates them and forces them to quit politics. Social media is a key piece of technology that empowers women to actively participate in politics. The impact of social media on WPP, particularly with regard to leadership roles, engagement, and voting habits, has received less attention than the impact of social media on political activities. With an emphasis on women in Harare during Zimbabwe's 2018 and 2023 national elections, this research attempts to close the gender and social media divide by examining the distinct ways that social media impacts WPP.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine how social media affects WPP while examining Zimbabwe's upcoming elections in 2018 and 2023. The study focusses on the disparity in social media coverage of women's political engagement. By 2030, the research hopes to ensure gender equality by advancing the execution of sustainable development objectives and boosting women's political involvement via the beneficial effects of social media. Additionally, the study will provide fresh insights on social media and political engagement to the corpus of current knowledge. In the past, most social media studies and political engagement were qualitative in nature. The aim of this study is to contribute to the phenomena by offering a quantitative perspective.

1.5 Scope of the study

Geography delimitation-This research is focusing on Harare Province, Zimbabwe, where Harare is the scope of the study, preventing generalization of results of other provinces in Zimbabwe.

1.6 Justification of the study

With an emphasis on the effects of social media on WPP in Zimbabwe's general elections, the study expands on the social media coverage gap. By offering a useful perspective on the influence of social media on women's political engagement in Zimbabwe, the study seeks to add fresh data to the body of current work. Research is essential in academia since it helps to compile existing information and assess the field's present situation (Abdullah, Roslan, and Llias, 2023). The research intends to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (2030) since the data may help authorities and development practitioners better understand the challenges experienced by women in politics while using social media and may be utilised to create effective policies and copying mechanisms.

Influencing the government and decision-makers to incorporate new tactics into policies may be greatly aided by the research. By encouraging the copying and adaptive capabilities of disadvantaged populations, policies help to ensure sustainable development and contribute to their long-term resilience (Sengupta and Costella, 2023; IPPC, 2023). In order to prepare for Zimbabwe's next elections, the study may provide information that may reinforce current laws and introduce gender-sensitive codes of behaviour.

1.7 Research Objectives

1.7.1. Main objective

    I.   To analyse the impact of social media on women's political participation in Harare.

1.7.2.Secondary objectives

II.   To examine the impact of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp), on women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe.

III.   To assess the effect of Zimbabwe's 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act on women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general elections.

IV.   To assess the influence of social media engagement and interaction on women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe.

1.8 Research questions

1.8.1. Main research question

I.   How does social media impact women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe?

1.8.2. Secondary research questions

II.   How does social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp), impacts women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe?

III.   How does Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act impact women's political participation in general election of Zimbabwe?

IV.   Does social media engagement and interaction impact women's political participation in Harare?

1.9 Research Hypothesis

H_1: Social media positively impact women's political participation in general election of Zimbabwe

H_2: Social media platforms (WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), positively and significantly impact women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general Elections

H_3: Zimbabwe Cyber Security and Data Protection Act positively impact women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general elections.

H$_4$: Social media engagement and interactions positively impact women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe.

1.10 Definition of terms

Women's Political Participation

The impact of women's activism on politics is known as WPP. Currently, women's political involvement encompasses a variety of activities, including voting, protesting, contacting public authorities, boycotting, attending rallies, blogging, volunteering, participating in flash mobs, signing petitions, and even staging suicide demonstrations (Deth, 2021). The majority of democracies now let all adults to participate in politics, despite the fact that women are still under-represented in leadership positions and in politics. Zimbabwe's local quota system in 2023 raised women's political engagement at that level by 19 percentage points, according to previous study on women's political involvement by International IDEA (2024), known as the African Barometer second edition. At the 2023 general elections, however, WPP in Zimbabwe fell by 1% in spite of the implementation of the quota system.

Social Media

The impact of social media on WPP is not entirely clear. Dollarhide and Kindness (2024) define social media as a digital technology that uses visual networks and communities to encourage the sharing of information, including language. On social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter, online violence against the WPP during political elections is both conceivable and frequent. Social media allows women in politics to reach a wider audience by expanding their reach beyond conventional legacy media outlets, claim Matsilele and Nkoala (2020). Women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general elections is impacted by the benefits and drawbacks of social media.

1.11 Organization of the study

The research includes a statement, acknowledgements, abstract, table and figure lists, appendices, table of contents, and approval form. The first chapter, known as the introduction, includes an overview of the study's background, purpose, scope, justification, problem statement, general and specific goals, research questions and hypotheses, word definitions, and organisational structure. The second chapter, titled "literature review," outlines the scientific literature that is pertinent to the research and in-depth literature reviews that are applicable to the research issue. The third chapter, titled "Methodology," covers the study design, research material, research technique, method of observation and interpretation, and data processing and analysis. The fourth chapter examines the research summary and presents it using tables and graphs. In light of the study's objectives, premise, and purpose, the last chapter analyses the results and conclusion and offers helpful recommendations that will impact Zimbabwe's next elections. The research includes the reference list and appendices, which include the data collection questionnaire.

1.12 Chapter summary

The chapter provided background information and the research introduction. The first chapter is an insight into what the researcher focused on. Chapter one, outlined a detailed problem statement, highlighting what the researcher hopes to solve. The chapter also focuses on research objectives, significance of the study, hypothesis and organization of study. Chapter two will unpack the literature review in connection with research objectives that were mentioned in chapter one.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter comprises of theoretical frameworks, used in the study which are the feminist theory and the resource-based theory. The chapter also include the literature review, where the researcher had an Insite of different studies, related to the impact of social media on WPP. The chapter explored on the effects on cyber and Data Protection Act (2021), regional and global legislation, in relation to the impact of social media on WPP.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Feminist Theory

The study examined the impact of social media on the WPP in Zimbabwe's most recent elections using feminist theory. Feminist theory aims to improve the situation of women in politics by challenging the underlying presumptions that have made it a male-dominated field (Oladipo and Chukwudi, 2023). Based on the statistical data of parliamentary seats gained by women in 2018 and 2023, the researcher was able to understand better how social media impacts WPP and how men dominate Zimbabwe's political sector according to the feminist theory.

The broad concept of feminist theory includes the impact of social media on WPP. The research looked at how women of different ages, races, and political parties used social media. This gave the researcher a better understanding of how women in politics handle the advantages and drawbacks of social media during Zimbabwe's national elections. During Zimbabwe's 2023 national elections, the researcher used feminist theory to analyse the social media accounts of notable women, such as Fadzai Mahere and Lynnet Karenyi-Kore from CCC, Linda Masarira from

LEAD, and Barbra Rwodzi and Tatenda Mavetera from ZANU-PF. The concept was used in this research to develop future programs that may reduce the negative impacts on WPP and increase women's political participation on social media platforms.

2.2.2 Theory based on resources

The researcher used the resource-based theory to understand the impact of social media on WPP in Harare, Zimbabwe. Women who have customised their social media efforts have received support from both online and offline citizens (Chikafa-Chipuriro, 2023). Social media is a helpful instrument that gives women a platform for mobilisation, political participation, and appearance. The researcher was aware of the ways in which women may use social media to transcend political and social constraints. According to a case study by DevCom Consulting Ltd. (2020), social media is a helpful tool for both new and seasoned female leaders to learn what the public is thinking about and a better gauge of public mood than conventional media. This research supports this finding. In order to determine how digital literacy, networks, and information access are crucial resources that either positively or negatively impact women's political involvement in Harare, the research-based theory was used to analyse how women utilise these platforms. Additionally, the theory helped the researcher comprehend how social media as a political instrument may either negatively impact WPP via the prevalence of disinformation, cyberbullying, and online harassment, or favourably improve WPP through online campaigns and voter engagement.

2.3 Global perspective on how social media impacts WPP

Women now have a worldwide forum for political engagement and participation through social media, which has allowed them to take on leadership positions and advance gender equality in political arenas. The research on social media's impact on WPP highlights how social media has been able to bring women's political opinions together in a real-world context, especially during the election process, with specific reference to Sri Lanka's 2019 presidential elections (Madushani and Uluwaduge, 2023). However, the researcher argues that inappropriate use of social media might deter women from participating in politics. According to Di Mecco (2023), women leaders who are demanding accountability as journalists, parliamentarians, and women's rights activists,

as well as speaking out in favour of liberal, democratic ideas and women's rights, are the primary and most vicious targets of online abuse and gendered misinformation.

52% of female congressional candidates said they had experienced some kind of political abuse, including as calls, messages, psychological attack, threats, defamation, and mockery on social media, according to the National Jury of Elections (2020). The researcher claim that online sexual harassment, cyberbullying, and gendered disinformation lower women's political participation and will affect future generations if they are not addressed. Therefore, the report recommends strengthening existing laws against online harassment, promoting digital literacy, and creating safer online spaces for female politicians worldwide.

2.4 Regional perspective on how social media impacts WPP

Social media has helped African women challenge gender norms and their political participation, which has positively impacted societal dynamics. Through social media, female politicians may actively contribute to the development of fresh public discourse and expand their audience (International IDEA, 2024). Even while it is crucial for women to have the confidence to speak, engage, and perform political leadership duties, the research found that social media may expose African women to cyberbullying and online harassment, deterring them from being involved in politics. During election seasons, it has been shown that fake news circulates on social media (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017), and falling for online scams has been associated with health issues and a reduction in productivity (Avom and Malah, 2022). To support the assertion, the researcher cited an IPU (2021) poll that reveals 46% of female MPs from 50 countries had been the victims of sexist cyberattacks. According to the findings, this research recommends using social media as a forum for social and political change in order to improve WPP in Africa.

2.5 How social media impacts WPP in Zimbabwe

Awareness of WPP and political reform has significantly increased on social media platforms. Social media may help level the playing field for female parliamentarians who would otherwise be at a disadvantage in politics, potentially boosting women's engagement in politics, especially

in Zimbabwe, a developing country (Women in Parliaments Global Forum, 2023). However, Zimbabwean women politicians are deterred from joining politics by sexual harassment and intimidation on social media. Male dominance in Zimbabwe is reflected on social media, where patriarchal views that reinforce preexisting sexual attitudes against women in real life are replicated, according to Mutsvairo (2020). Based on earlier research, the researcher finds that female politicians deactivate or delete their social media accounts as a result of being subjected to online harassment, account hacking, and false information. According to a study by the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies, online violence against political women may take many different forms, such as sexualised harassment, account hacking, and misinformation, which can cause women to delete their social media accounts.

2.6 How international cybersecurity laws impacts WPP

Globally, ICT regulations that safeguard digital rights are in different phases of development. In terms of the study's perspective, the researcher agrees with (UN Women, 2020), which demonstrates that national ICT laws on cybercrimes do not target the violation of women's specific rights, but rather just well-known offences including identity theft, hacking, phishing schemes, and copyright infringement. Simonovic (2018) asserts that new and unique types of online violence against women will inevitably arise as a result of the rapid development of digital environments and technology, including artificial intelligence. Older laws may not protect women from this new kind of abuse because they do not account for harassment that happens online, via social media, on mobile devices, or through email, among other channels (Reyhanne et al., 2023). According to this research, international bodies like the UN and EU should change their legislation often to take into account developments in digital technology.

2.7 How women's political engagement is impacted by regional cybersecurity laws

Social media cyberbullying prevents African women politicians from participating in regional legislatures. According to Al-Nasrawi (2021), prominent women, including journalists, politicians, and climate activists, are often the targets of cyberbullying and harassment. Africa has adopted the Cyber Security Convention of the African Union to regulate cyber activities (African

Union Convention Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, 2014). According to this research, even though African countries have incorporated the African Union Convention Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, 2014 into their national legislation, cyberbullying and online sexual harassment on social media still affect women's political participation.

Not all online offences against women are included under the cybercrime framework (Van der Wilk, 2021). The researcher calls for regional multilateral institutions in Africa to enact cybersecurity measures, especially for women in leadership positions, in order to maintain and expand women's political participation in African Parliaments.

2.8 How the Cyber and Data Protection Act of 2021 impacts WPP

Cybersecurity regulations that shield women from online harassment, false information, and data breaches have an influence on their political participation. Cybersecurity is crucial for protecting our information, devices, and even our health, claims Gawn (2023). Zimbabwe passed the Cyber and Data Protection Act of 2021. The study was shown via case studies of female politicians, such as Fadzai Mahere, Joana Mamombe, and Tatenda Mavetera, who were subjected to cyberbullying during and during Zimbabwe's 2023 national elections. On the internet, Masarira is one of the most trolling female politicians from Zimbabwe. The researcher claims that Zimbabwe's internet access has increased as a result of the Cyber Data Protection Act of 2021; but, WPP is negatively impacted by the Act's limitations (Mutongwiza, 2022). Accordingly, the study recommends that the Zimbabwean government inform all of its residents about the 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act and the revision that makes the ICCPR mandatory.

2.9 Review of empirical data

The research looked at a study done by Hidayat (2024) on how social media affected the size of the WPP in the 2024 elections. The study focused on how social media significantly influence WPP in Makassar. The results of the survey show that 70.7% of Makassar's female population voted in the 2024 general elections. The Makassar population, especially female voters, are

relatively active and proficient users of social media, which is a source of political knowledge (Hidayat, 2024).

The researcher looks at previous study by Prihatini (2020) on women and social media during Indonesian legislative elections. The utilisation of social media by women during Indonesia's 2019 parliamentary election campaign is examined in this article. The study's second key result is that some WPP tend to question the actual effectiveness of online ads. The researcher gained an insight on the impact of social media on WPP in Harare via the study's empirical data, which were centred on Zimbabwe's general elections in 2018 and 2023.

An empirical and theoretical assessment by Nkoa et al. (2023) assesses the impact of social media on women's political empowerment in Africa and finds that it improves it. The study's findings show that social media has a favourable impact on African women's political empowerment. The study claims that social media has the ability to change the balance of power in favour of women and young people, who are under-represented in positions of political leadership. The study recommended expanding the energy sector, building telecommunications infrastructure, and strengthening social media use restrictions to reduce cybercrime and promote women's political empowerment.

Previous studies have looked at social media and women's political participation on a local and international level. The influence of social media on WPP is the main subject of this research, which also looks at women in Harare Province and Zimbabwe's political environment. This research focused on Zimbabwe's 2018 and 2023 general elections and investigates the influence of social media on women's political engagement in order to get a better understanding of how digital platforms influenced women's participation in the political process. The research shows how, during these pivotal elections in Zimbabwe's independent history, social media emerged as a key tool for political engagement, mobilisation, and communication. The research explains the empowering and challenging effects of social media on women in the context of changing political dynamics, offering insight into how it influenced their activism, political discussion participation, and decision-making.

2.10 Chapter summary

Although social media may help women participate more in politics, it also restricts them by encouraging online aggression. In order to get insights from a global, regional, and national viewpoint, the chapter examined several scholar evaluations, including the researcher's opinion on the impact of social media on WPP and recommendations about its detrimental effects. The chapter also examined regional and international cybersecurity laws and the impact of Zimbabwe's Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) on women's political engagement. The methods and instruments used for data collection will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three focuses on the research methodology, that is outlined through the research design, materials, procedure, methods of observation and interpretation and data analysis of the impact of social media on WPP. The resolution of this chapter is to highlight a detailed description of the study's procedures.

3.2 Research design

The researcher used a survey study design. Survey design is one method that is used as a data collection tool (Tessler et al., 2019). The researcher used online questionnaires to gather information from a broad geographic area and a varied sample size in order to evaluate the effect of social media on WPP in Harare, Zimbabwe. Survey research design is often highly valued since it gives participants a quick and simple way to voice their thoughts, enables the researcher to test hypotheses, and tracks changes over time (Mills, 2024). The researcher was able to gain a comprehensive picture of women's patterns of political activity, which was the ideal approach for efficiently examining a large database. It helped the researcher understand how social media influence WPP and generated a comprehensive report of results.

3.3 Research Methods

Mixed, qualitative, and quantitative research methodologies are the three primary categories. Qualitative research examines the nature of phenomena and is especially well-suited for assessing complex multi-component interventions, concentrating on improving treatments, and exploring the reasons why something is (not) observed (Busetto et al., 2020). In order to address a study chalange, a researcher using mixed methods intentionally blends quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Sanders and Clark, 2015). Numerous subjective and objective points of view are

included into the methodology. Needs assessments and intervention evaluations are guided by quantitative data to address social challenges (Heyse et al., 2024). The researcher used the quantitative research technique to evaluate the study's hypothesis. The quantitative approach allowed the researcher to accurately analyse observable events via statistical analysis of social media's impact on WPP in Zimbabwe's recent elections. Positivism states that in order to identify the causal relationships, the research used quantitative techniques to analyse the independent factors, with social media and WPP acting as the dependent variable.

3.4 Target population

The study's main participants were female activists and politicians in Harare, Zimbabwe. In order to achieve the sustainable development objectives by 2030, women must have equitable leadership and involvement in politics and public life (UN Women, 2024). Men and women in Harare who have leading roles in politics were among the study's secondary respondents. 714 study participants between the ages of 18 and 60 were anticipated by the researcher.

3.5 Sample Sizes and techniques

Sampling, according to Saunders et al. (2015), is the process of selecting a subset of the target community's responses to reflect the whole population. Sampling provides reliable generic information. To guarantee an accurate and representative study outcome, the researcher used the stratified random sample approach. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula was used by the researcher. The following is the formula:

$$s = \frac{x^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

S is the sample size on the formula, and is x^2 the chi-square value for one degree of freedom at the necessary level of confidence (1.962 = 3.8416). On the formula, N stands for the population size (714), P for half of the population, and d for the accuracy level expressed as a percentage (0.05

in this study). Calculating the sample size using the method developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the following formula was used to determine the sample size:

$$s = \frac{1.96^2 \times 714 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2(714 - 1) + 1.96^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}$$

S= 250

Using the formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), 250 was the sample size of the study.

3.6 Study area

The research was conducted in Zimbabwe's Harare Province. The northeastern region of Zimbabwe is home to Harare Province. According to the World Population Review (2025), Harare province has 1.6 million residents and influences Zimbabwe's national political discourse and dynamics. With mobile phones and social media platforms available for both personal and political communication, Harare is also the hub of Zimbabwe's digital and technical environment. Harare Province was chosen as the research location because it offers empirical reviews of how social media affects WPP.

Figure 3.1 shows the map of Harare Province in Zimbabwe.

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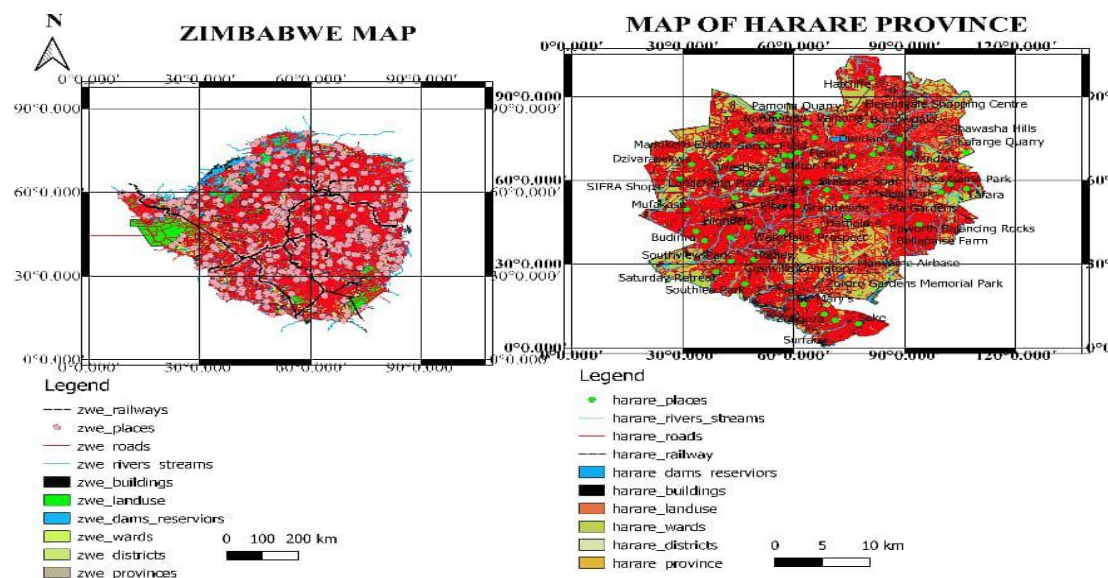
3.7 Research Material

Questionnaires

The researcher gathered data from respondents and was able to acquire results quickly and reach a wider audience, using online questionnaires. Bhat (2024) defines an online questionnaire as a collection of questions created specifically to gather survey data on a certain audience or group of people. Through the electronic survey approach, the researcher was able to get feedback on how social media impacted the WPP in Zimbabwe's general elections in 2018 and 2023. Participants found it easier to complete the online questionnaires since they were closed-ended, and the researcher was able to analyse and evaluate the data more rapidly. Participants were given access to online surveys via a variety of channels, including social media and emails. The quantitative research technique produced safe respondent data and a high response rate since the researcher automatically reminded the respondents via their emails and social media profiles. The researcher was able to statistically examine the quantitative data collected by the questionnaires using the latest version of SPSS.

Data gathering with Google Forms

According to Martin (2020), data collection is a process or a means to gathering and storing data. Using Google Forms, the study used an administratively designed electronic questionnaire. Because the study concentrated on how social media platforms influence WPP, it was designed to gather data using digital means. The researcher obtained data through providing respondents with URL, of Google CSV, which contained the research questionnaire. Before analysing, presenting, and summarising the data, the researcher verified its completeness, consistency, and dependability.

3.8 Procedure

To collect a lot of information from ministers, MPs, council members, party leaders, and other individuals in leadership roles, the researcher used the cross-sectional survey research approach. Online questionnaires with closed-ended questions were used to collect data. The study examined how social media impacts WPP, enabling the researcher to examine social media profiles of female politicians. 250 participants completed the English-language surveys, which were sent to them by

email, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts. The researcher addressed any questions that remained unanswered. The strategy gathered extensive data since it covered a large population.

3.9 Data reliability and study validity

Population validity refers to an instrument's ability to provide data that may be applied to respondents who are not part of the sample. External validity was based on random population samples selected from a large sample of the female political sphere. By confirming that the questionnaire covered every aspect of the study topic, content validity was guaranteed with the help of the research supervisor's knowledgeable advice. Predictive validity is the capacity of test results to precisely forecast important future events. The research used regression modelling to determine statistical significance. The degree to which instrument items of questions reflect the same constructs must be at least 0.7 in order to be referred to be internal consistency, according to the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Bujang et al., 2018). The researcher utilised the Cronbach Alpha (a) coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 1, to evaluate the internal consistency of the scales used in the online questionnaire, which looked at internal reliability with a large number of possible responses.

3.10 Data analysis

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 to examine study data. The social sciences employ a program called SPSS to analyse scientific data (Williams, 2024). The researcher was able to do thorough analyses of how social media affected women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general elections.   Significant and better study outcomes were obtained by the researcher. The researcher statistically investigated the connection between women's political participation and social media usage using SPSS.

 Analysis of variance was used to determine whether the regression model used was statistically significant in explaining whether WPP is based on social media-related factors; correlation

analysis was used to measure the strength and direction of social media use and women's political engagement and interaction; and coefficient analysis was used to determine whether independent variables in the regression model had individual impacts. Regression analysis was used to predict dependent variables on independent variables of the study. The researcher examined the substantial association between WPP and social media exposure utilising inferential analysis and statistical methods like the Chi-Square test.

Microsoft Word and Excel were used in this process. Microsoft Word displayed the data's tables, graphs, and explanations. The analysis's conclusion supported the research's positive hypothesis by demonstrating how social media influence WPP.

3.11 Ethical consideration

Before administering online surveys, the researcher obtained approval from the Department of Sustainable Development. An individual must have a thorough grasp of the research before participating in a study in order to provide their informed consent (Anderson, 2015). Through the material presented at the start of the questionnaire, the study ethics made sure that participants understood the goal of the research. Usually used in quantitative research, confidentiality and anonymity are moral procedures to protect the privacy of human subjects throughout data collection, processing, and reporting (Lachlan, 2017). Only the researcher and the study supervisor evaluated the data that participants provided, protecting their privacy.

3.12 Limitations

Out of 250 replies, 200 were received because some respondents were unable to reply or delayed because they believed the research was too sensitive. Additionally, this made it difficult for the researcher to collect data and to get biased data, particularly from participants who opposed the administration and those who defended their parties. By enabling respondents to freely engage in the study without forcing them, the researcher adhered to ethical considerations.

3.13 Chapter summary

The chapter discussed about data collection and analysis methods. The research methodology was governed by survey research design. The targeted population was women in politics in Harare. Close-ended research questionnaires on google forms were used for data collection. The researcher adhered to required research ethics principals on validity and reliability. The subsequent chapter will present analyse and interpret study findings.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four presents the results of the study. The chapter will outline the participation response rate and demographic information of respondents. The chapter concludes with interpretation of research findings in relation to research objectives that were mentioned in chapter 1 and these are: To assess the effect of Zimbabwe's 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act on women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general elections; To examine the impact of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp), on WPP in general elections of Zimbabwe; To assess the influence of social media engagement and interaction on WPP in general elections of Zimbabwe.

4.2 Response rate

The research distributed online questionnaire, to participants. The targeted population of the research was 260 and 200 participants completed the questionnaires, resulting to 80% response rate. Table 4.1 below reviews the response rate that was attained by the study:

Table 4.1: Questionnaire Response Rate

Target	250 Participants
Successful	200 Participants
Overall Response	80%

4.3 Demographic information of Participants

4.3.1 Gender

From the 200 participants, the research analyzed the gender response. The gender response highlights that 113 participants were females and 87 were male, recognizing the efforts of women

in increasing WPP and men's contribution in gender inclusivity within the political sphere. Figure 4.1 below shows the gender of the participants:

Figure 4.1: Gender of the participants
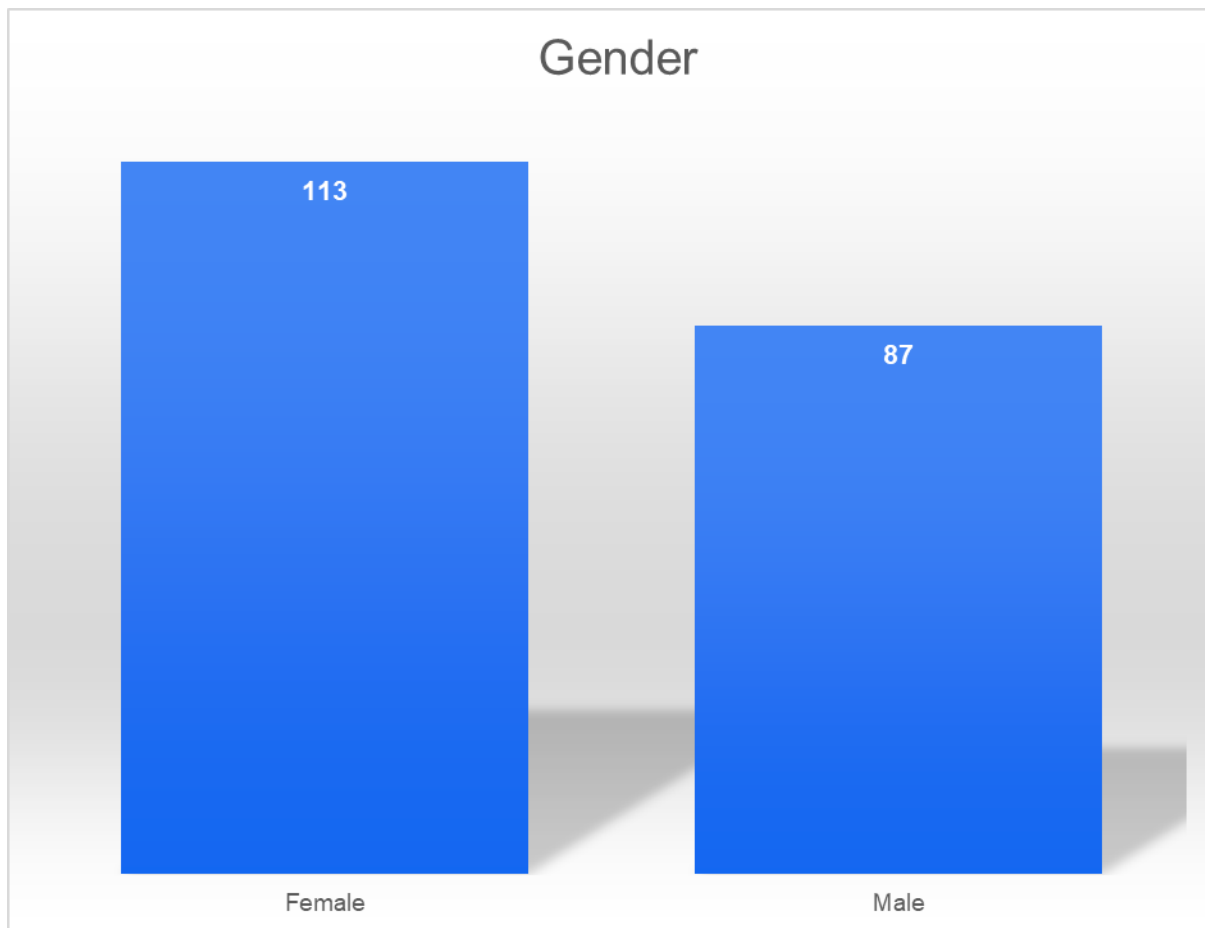
4.3.2 Age Group

The research analyzed the ages of participants, which ranged from 18 years to 60 years. The age distribution of the participants shows a clear predominance of younger individuals, with those aged 18 to 28 making up the majority at 58% (116 out of 200 total participants). The next largest group, aged 29 to 38, accounts for 31.5% (63 participants), while older age groups are significantly smaller those aged 39 to 48 represent just 9% (18 participants), and the oldest cohort (49 to 60)

comprises only 1.5% (3 participants). This suggests a strong skew toward younger participants in the sample. The age group of the research participants is presented in Figure 4.2 below:

Figure 4.2 Age Group of Participants
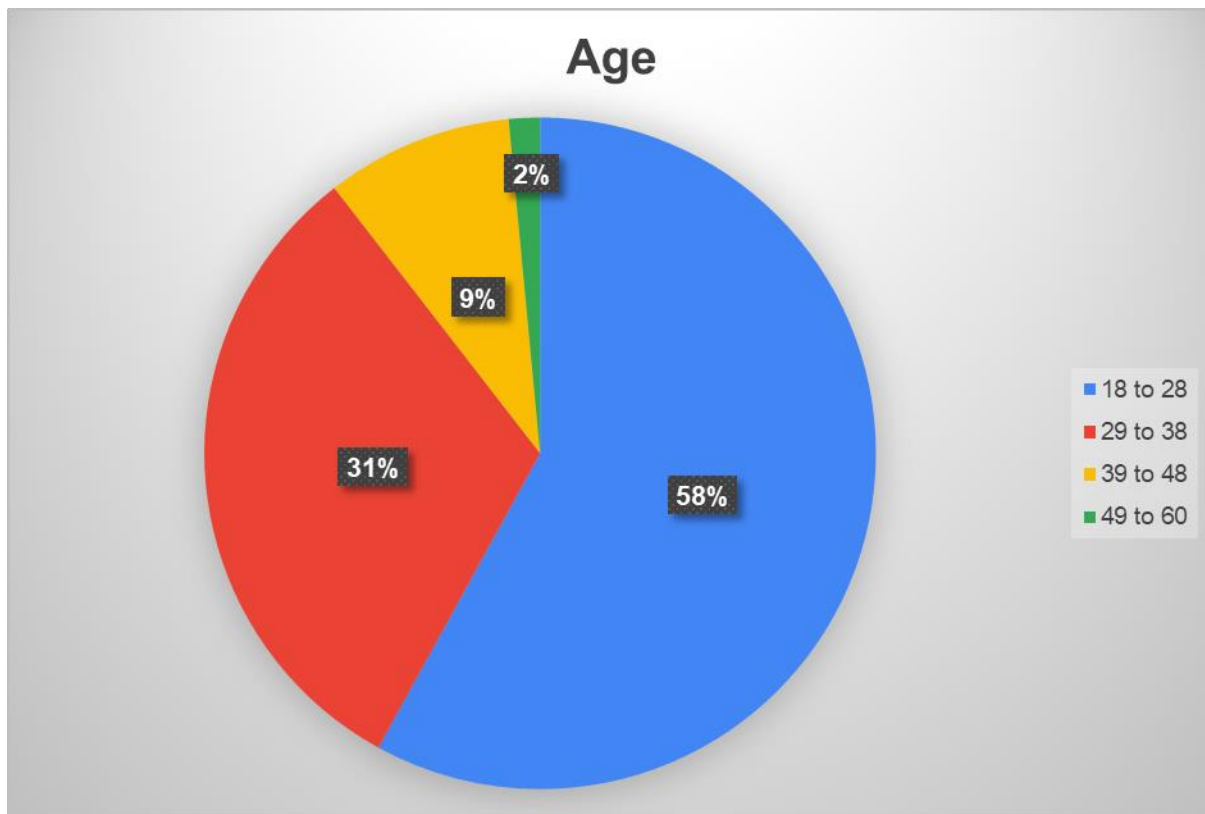
4.3 To examine the impact of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp), on women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe

The study findings shows that social media platforms, has a major contribution in shaping women's participation in voting and campaigning in Zimbabwe. A majority of respondents (55.5%) expressed agreement (either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree") that these platforms contribute to women's political engagement, with 31.5% agreeing and 24% strongly agreeing. Meanwhile, 22.5% of respondents disagreed ("Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree"), and 22% remained neutral, indicating a lack of strong opinion on the matter. These findings suggest that while a clear majority

perceive social media as an enabler of women's political participation, a notable portion either remain unconvinced or undecided. The relatively high neutral responses (22%) may reflect uncertainty about social media's impact or varying levels of digital access and engagement among women. The strong positive skew (with more responses leaning toward agreement than disagreement) highlights the growing influence of digital platforms in mobilizing women politically, though further research could explore barriers causing scepticism or ambivalence among some respondents.

4.3.1. Social Media's Role in Political Awareness and Women's Engagement in Discourse

The table 4.2 shows findings on chi-square and correlation between social media's role in political awareness and women's engagement in discourse.

Table 4.2: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	309.244[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	217.492	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	100.041	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	198		

a. 10 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .61.

The study found a highly significant association between social media's influence on political awareness (Q4) and women's involvement in political discourse (Q13), as evidenced by the Pearson Chi-Square value of 309.244 (p = .000). This indicates that women who perceive social media as a key source of political information are far more likely to engage in political discussions and actions when exposed to political content. The p-value of .000 confirms this relationship is statistically robust, meaning it is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. However, 40% of cells had expected counts below 5, suggesting some categories had sparse responses, warranting

cautious interpretation for those specific sections. The following results reveal the correlation between the variable:

Table 4.3: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.713	.051	14.221	.000[c]
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.710	.048	14.130	.000[c]
N of Valid Cases		198			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Further supporting this finding, the correlation investigation revealed a strong positive association between the two variables, with Pearson's R = .713 and Spearman's ρ = .710 (p = .000). These high correlation coefficients suggest that increased exposure to political content on social media is strongly linked to heightened political engagement among women. The consistency between the Chi-Square and correlation tests underscores that social media not only informs women about political issues but also actively encourages their participation in political discourse, reinforcing its role as a mobilizing force in Zimbabwean elections.

4.3.2. Social Media's Impact on Awareness and Political Confidence

Table 4.4 shows findings on chi-square and correlation between the impact of social media on awareness and political confidence:

Table 4.4: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	261.636[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	220.378	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	107.950	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	198		

a. 11 cells (44.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .79.

The analysis also confirmed a powerful link between social media's role in raising political awareness (Q4) and its effect on boosting women's confidence in political leadership (Q14). The Pearson Chi-Square value of 261.636 (p = .000) confirms a statistically significant association, meaning women who rely on social media for political news are more likely to feel empowered to participate in political activities. 44% of cells had low expected frequencies (minimum 0.79), the overwhelming significance of the results suggests the trend is reliable despite some variability in participation distribution. The following findings depict the correlation analysis:

Table 4.5: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.740	.048	15.414	.000[c]
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.739	.045	15.341	.000[c]
N of Valid Cases		198			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

The correlation analysis further solidified this association, with Pearson's R = .740 and Spearman's ρ = .739 (p = .000), indicating a very strong, statistically significant link between social media exposure and political confidence. These findings imply that social media does not merely inform women but also strengthens their self-assurance in engaging with political processes, whether through voting, campaigning, or advocacy.

4.3.3. Regression analysis

The following results on table 4.6 shows the regression analysis, regression coefficients and analysis of variance. This is as presented below:

Table 4.6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.799[a]	.639	.631	.801	.639	84.083	4	190	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), 15.   Does reading, posting and responding on social media raise awareness of rights and political challenges in Harare?, 9. Is the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) designed to protect women in politics?, 13. Do women become more involved in political discourse and action when they interact with political-related content on social media?, 14. Does interactions on social media boost women's confidence in partaking in political activities and decision- making process?

The regression model outlines a strong predictive relationship (R = 0.799, R² = 0.639), indicating that 63.9% of the variation in WPP can be explained by four key factors: (1) social media's role in raising rights awareness, (2) perceptions of the Cyber Act's protective intent, (3) social media-driven political engagement, and (4) confidence from online interactions. The highly significant F-change (p = .000) confirms the model's robustness, while the adjusted R² (0.631) and low standard error (0.801) suggest reliable predictions. These results underscore that social media

engagement and policy perceptions collectively empower women's political involvement in Harare. Table 4.7 shows the ANOVA:

Table 4.7: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	216.031	4	54.008	84.083	.000[b]
	Residual	122.041	190	.642		
	Total	338.072	194			

a. Dependent Variable: 5. Does social media motivate women to participate in political activities?

b. Predictors: (Constant), 15. Does reading, posting and responding on social media raise awareness of rights and political challenges in Harare?, 9. Is the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) designed to protect women in politics?, 13. Do women become more involved in political discourse and action when they interact with political-related content on social media?, 14. Does interactions on social media boost women's confidence in partaking in political activities and decision- making process?

The ANOVA results reveal that the regression model is highly significant (F = 84.083, p = .000), explaining a considerable portion of the variance in whether social media motivates women's political participation. The model's predictors social media's role in raising rights awareness (Q15), political engagement through content interaction (Q13), confidence-building from online interactions (Q14), and perceptions of the Cyber Act's protective role (Q9) collectively account for 216.031 sum of squares (64% of total variance), with minimal residual error (122.041). Table 4.8 below presents the coefficients of regression:

Table 4.8: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.233	.224		-1.039	.300
	9. Is the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) designed to protect women in politics?	.067	.054	.057	1.226	.222
	13. Do women become more involved in political discourse and action when they interact with political-related content on social media?	.288	.083	.255	3.474	.001
	14. Does interactions on social media boost women's confidence in partaking in political activities and decision-making process?	.272	.084	.244	3.218	.002
	15. Does reading, posting and responding on social media raise awareness of rights and political challenges in Harare?	.419	.097	.346	4.297	.000

a. Dependent Variable: 5. Does social media motivate women to participate in political activities?

The coefficients table further clarifies these relationships: while perceptions of the Cyber Act (Q9) showed no significant influence (β = .057, p = .222), the other three predictors had strong positive effects. Rights awareness through social media (Q15) had the largest impact (β = .346, p = .000), followed by political discourse involvement (Q13: β = .255, p = .001) and confidence-building (Q14: β = .244, p = .002). This indicates that active social media engagement particularly reading, posting, and discussing political content is a more powerful motivator for women's political participation than policy perceptions alone, with interactive platforms serving as critical tools for empowerment and mobilization. The constant term's non-significance (p = .300) confirms that these predictors are essential drivers, not baseline tendencies.

4.4. To assess the effect of Zimbabwe's (2021) Cyber and Data Protection Act on Women's Political Participation in Zimbabwe's general elections

The following table 4.9 shows descriptive statistics on of women familiar with the Act and those who understand its implications.

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
7. Are women in politics familiar with the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021)?	200	2.93	1.125	1.266
8. Do women understand the implications of Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021)?	200	2.80	1.159	1.343
Valid N (listwise)	200			

The findings reveal limited familiarity and understanding of Zimbabwe's 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act among women in politics, with average scores below the midpoint of the 5-point scale (Q7: Mean = 2.93, Q8: Mean = 2.80), suggesting most respondents were only slightly familiar with the Act and had a moderate to low grasp of its implications. The standard deviations (1.125–1.159) indicate moderate variability in responses, meaning some women were more knowledgeable than others. Table 4.10 below presents the Chi-Square test between "7. Are women in politics familiar with the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021)?" and "9. Is the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) designed to protect women in politics?"

Table 4.10: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	145.314[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	136.973	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	78.793	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	200		

a. 9 cells (36.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.19.

The highly significant Pearson Chi-Square value (145.314, p = .000) indicates a strong association between women's familiarity with the Cyber and Data Protection Act (Q7) and their perception that the Act is designed to protect them in politics (Q9). The null hypothesis is denied, since the p-value is less than 0.05, meaning familiarity with the Act likely influences whether women believe it safeguards their political participation. The following table shows the correlation between "7. Are women in politics familiar with the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021)?" and "9. Is the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) designed to protect women in politics?".

Table 4.11: Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval — Pearson's R	.629	.049	11.392	.000[c]
Ordinal by Ordinal — Spearman Correlation	.644	.048	11.845	.000[c]
N of Valid Cases	200			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

The strong positive correlations (Pearson's r = .629, Spearman's ρ = .644, p = .000) indicate that women who are more familiar with the Cyber and Data Protection Act are significantly more likely to believe it is intended to keep them in politics. Both measures confirm a robust, statistically significant relationship, suggesting that awareness of the Act enhances trust in its protective intent. The high significance (p < .001) reinforces that this association is not due to chance, highlighting the importance of policy education in shaping women's perceptions of legal safeguards in political participation.

Through chi-square test of association and correlation analysis, the study went further to analyse the "8. Do women understand the implications of Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021)?" and "9. Is the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) designed to protect women in politics?". Table 4.12 below presents the Chi-Square findings.

Table 4.12: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	169.599[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	145.278	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	81.102	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	199		

a. 9 cells (36.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.20.

The table above, outlines the highly significant Pearson Chi-Square value (169.599, p = .000) reveals a strong association between women's understanding of the Cyber and Data Protection Act's implications (Q8) and their belief that the Act is designed to protect them in politics (Q9). The p-value being less than 0.001 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant, meaning women who better comprehend the Act's implications are more likely to perceive it as protective. However, 36% of cells having expected counts below 5 (minimum 1.20) suggests caution in interpreting some categories due to low response frequencies. Despite this, the overall trend is clear: greater understanding correlates with stronger trust in the Act's protective role for WPP. Table 4.13 displays the correlation analysis findings:

Table4.13: Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval — Pearson's R	.640	.053	11.691	.000[c]
Ordinal by Ordinal — Spearman Correlation	.635	.052	11.536	.000[c]
N of Valid Cases	199			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Table 4.13 above shows the strong positive correlations (Pearson's r = .640, Spearman's ρ = .635, p = .000) further reinforce that women who grasp the Act's implications are significantly more likely to interpretate it as a safeguard for their political participation. Both correlation coefficients, nearing 0.65, indicate a moderately strong, statistically significant relationship, with *p*-values below the 0.05 threshold. This consistency across tests underscores that policy comprehension shapes the perceptions of protection, highlighting the need for targeted education that enhance women's confidence in the Act's benefits.

4.5 To assess the influence of social media engagement and interaction on Women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe

The following table shows the Likert scale aggregation between gender and engagement score (Q13+Q14+Q15), this is as reviewed on table 4.14 below:

Table 4.14: Indicate your Gender * Engagement_Score Crosstabulation

Count

		Engagement_Score (Q13+Q14+Q15)													Total
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Gender	Female	1	1	3	3	2	4	4	8	20	22	4	13	28	113
	Male	4	0	6	5	11	8	18	6	10	7	5	1	2	83
Total		5	1	9	8	13	12	22	14	30	29	9	14	30	196

The information suggests that social media has a transformative impact on WPP compared to men, specifically in fostering discourse participation, confidence, and rights awareness. The stark

contrast in high-scoring individuals (15.00: 28 women vs. 2 men) implies that women may derive better motivational value from social media interactions in politics. Meanwhile, men's engagement is more reasonable and disjointed, possibly reflecting differences in platform usage patterns, political socialization, or perceived barriers. These findings align with the study's broader theme that social media serves as a critical equalizer for women's political participation in Zimbabwe.

4.5.1. Independent sample t-test

Table 4.15 below presents the findings on the independent sample t-test.

Table 4.15: Group Statistics

	3. Indicate your Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Engagement_Score	Male	83	8.8916	2.75421	.30231
	Female	113	11.8584	2.84689	.26781

The independent samples t-test results reveal a significant gender disparity in social media-driven political engagement, with women (Mean = 11.86, SD = 2.85) scoring substantially higher than men (Mean = 8.89, SD = 2.75) on the composite engagement scale (Q13+Q14+Q15). The 3-point mean difference (11.86 vs. 8.89) suggests that women in Zimbabwe derive stronger motivational effects from social media for political discourse, confidence-building, and rights awareness compared to men. The similar standard deviations (~2.8) indicate comparable variability in both groups, reinforcing that the gender gap is systematic rather than driven by outliers. This aligns with the study's broader finding that social media disproportionately empowers women's political participation, potentially due to its role in overcoming traditional barriers to engagement. (N: Male=83, Female=113).

Table 4.16:Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
									Lower	Upper
Engagement_Score	Equal variances assumed	.017	.896	-7.309	194	.000	-2.96684	.40594	-3.76746	-2.16622
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.346	180.029	.000	-2.96684	.40388	-3.76378	-2.16990

The independent samples t-test confirms a statistically significant gender disparities in political engagement scores (t = -7.31, p = .000), with women scoring 2.97 points higher on average than men (Mean Difference = -2.97, 95% CI [-3.77, -2.17]). Levene's test (F = .017, p = .896) indicates equal variances between genders, validating the use of the standard t-test. The extremely low p-value (p < .001) leaves no doubt that this gap is not due to chance, reinforcing that social media's empowering effect on political engagement is markedly stronger for women than men in Zimbabwe. The tight confidence interval (all values negative) underscores the reliability of this gender disparity. (df = 194, equal variances assumed).

4.6 Chapter summary

The chapter comprised of the participation rate and presented the respondents information. Chapter 4, outlined the study results pertaining to study objectives. The chapter also consist of

tables with descriptive statistics, that was extract ed from SPSS. The following chapter consist of the research conclusion and recommendation.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The chapter consist of the whole research summary and an overview of study findings from the previous chapter. Chapter five consist of recommendations that can be utilized in future studies for policy formulation.

5.2 Summary of findings

5.2.1. To examine the impact of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp), on WPP in general elections of Zimbabwe

The research revealed that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp significantly contribute to WPP during general elections in Zimbabwe. A majority of respondents (55.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed that these platforms enhance women's involvement in political processes, with 31.5% agreeing and 24% strongly agreeing. Statistical tests confirmed strong associations between social media usage and political discourse involvement ($\chi^2 = 309.244$, $p = .000$) and political confidence ($\chi^2 = 261.636$, $p = .000$). Correlation analysis showed high positive relationships (Pearson's $r = .710–.740$), indicating that increased exposure to political content on social media correlates with greater participation and self-assurance among women. Regression analysis reinforced these conclusions, demonstrating that reading, posting, and responding on social media ($\beta = .346$, $p = .000$) had the strongest influence on motivating women's political activities, followed by involvement in political discourse ($\beta = .255$, $p = .001$) and confidence-building ($\beta = .244$, $p = .002$).

These findings illustrate that social media serves as a powerful equalizer, enabling women to overcome traditional barriers to political involvement such as gender discrimination, lack of access to formal networks, and underrepresentation. Women who actively engage with political content on social media report higher levels of awareness, motivation, and readiness to participate in electoral processes. Notably, perceptions of the Cyber Act's protective role were not statistically

significant (p = .222); however, the overall model explained 63.9% of the variance in WPP, underscoring the central role of digital platforms in mobilizing female voters and candidates. Furthermore, an independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant gender disparity in engagement scores, with women scoring much higher than men (Mean = 11.86 vs. 8.89, p = .000), indicating that social media disproportionately empowers women politically. This aligns with broader patterns observed in the study, where women experience stronger gains in political confidence, discourse involvement, and rights awareness through online interactions.

The following hypothesis was to test the objectives:

$H_0.$ There is no association between Social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter), and WPP in Zimbabwe.

$H_1.$ Social media platforms (WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), positively and significantly impact WPP in Zimbabwe's general Elections.

Decision : There is statistical evidence which supports that social media platform positively and significantly impacts WPP in Zimbabwe's general election.

The research findings positively link with previous study by (Hidayat, 2024), with findings showing how social media has an important influence on, political participation of women in Makassar. Similarly with the finding by (Sianturi,2024), that shows the significant influence of social media on political engagement and community participation.

5.2.2 To assess the effect of Zimbabwe's 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act on WPP in Zimbabwe's general elections

The findings reveal that a significant portion of female politician in Zimbabwe have limited familiarity and understanding of the 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act. Descriptive statistics show that average scores for both familiarity (Mean = 2.93) and understanding (Mean = 2.80) fall below the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, indicating that most respondents were only slightly familiar with the Act and had moderate to low comprehension of its implications. However, statistical analyses demonstrated strong associations between familiarity with the Act

and the perception that it is designed to protect women in politics. The Pearson Chi-Square test was highly significant ($\chi^2 = 145.314$, p = .000), showing that as awareness increases, so does trust in the Act's protective intent. Correlation analysis further supported this relationship, with Pearson's r = .629 and Spearman's $\rho = .644$ (p = .000), reinforcing that policy education plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of legal safeguards.

Further analysis revealed a similarly robust connection between understanding the Act's implications and believing in its protective role for women in politics. The Chi-Square test for this relationship was also highly significant ($\chi^2 = 169.599$, p = .000), confirming that women who better understand the Act are more likely to view it as beneficial to their political engagement. Correlation coefficients (Pearson's r = .640, Spearman's $\rho = .635$, p = .000) highlight that comprehension of the Act directly influences how women perceive its benefits. Despite these positive correlations, the data suggests that many women remain unaware or only moderately informed about the Act, limiting its potential impact. These findings underscore the importance of targeted public sensitization campaigns, legal literacy workshops, and media-based outreach to ensure that women fully understand how the law can support and protect their political rights.

The following hypothesis was used to test the objective:

H_0. There is no relation between Zimbabwe Cyber Security and Data Protection Act (2021), and WPP in Zimbabwe's general elections.

H_1. Zimbabwe Cyber Security and Data Protection Act positively impact women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general elections.

Decision: There is statistical evidence which supports that Zimbabwe cyber security and data protection Act positively impacts women political in Zimbabwe general elections.

The interpreted results of the study, have a positive relation with key findings of a previous study by (ZGC, 2024), supporting that the cyber data protection Act(2021), was designed to positively and significantly impact WPP in Zimbabwe, increasing protection against gender-related cyber-bullying for female politicians.

5.2.3 To assess the influence of social media engagement and interaction WPP in general elections of Zimbabwe

Analysis of social media engagement scores (Q13+Q14+Q15) across genders revealed a pronounced disparity, with women exhibiting significantly higher levels of political involvement through digital platforms compared to men. Out of 196 participants, 28 women achieved the maximum engagement score of 15, whereas only 2 men did. The mean engagement score for women (11.86) was notably higher than for men (8.89), with a standard deviation of approximately 2.8 in both groups, confirming consistent variability within each gender. An independent samples t-test confirmed this gender gap was statistically significant ($t = -7.31$, $p = .000$), with a 95% confidence interval (-3.77 to -2.17) affirming the reliability of the difference. These findings demonstrate that social media has a disproportionately empowering effect on women, possibly due to its ability to bypass traditional gatekeepers, foster peer-to-peer mobilization, and provide accessible spaces for political expression.

This heightened engagement among women suggests that social media is not only a tool for information sharing but a catalyst for political transition, especially for previously underrepresented groups. Women's increased presence on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp appears to translate into greater participation in political discourse, decision-making, and activism. The overall engagement score measures this dynamic effectively, reflecting how interactive features such as commenting, sharing, and creating political content enhance political consciousness and mobilization. Importantly, these findings reinforce the idea that digital inclusion is a prerequisite for gender equity in modern democracies. As such, future efforts should focus on expanding internet access, promoting digital skills training, and ensuring that policies like the Cyber and Data Protection Act are effectively communicated and enforced to protect voices of women in the digital public sphere.

The following hypothesis was used to test the objective:

H_0. There is no relation between social media engagements and interactions and WPP in general elections of Zimbabwe.

H_1. social media influence engagement and interaction on WPP in general elections of Zimbabwe.

Decision: The study rejects the null hypothesis and conclude that there is statistical evidence that social media engagement and interaction positively impacts women political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe.

In relation with previous studies, social media has a beneficial impact on African women's political empowerment, through strengthened engagement and interaction online with political information, politicians and voters, (Nkoa et al, 2023).

5.3 Conclusion

The study comprehensively examined the influence of social media platforms on women's political participation during general elections and Zimbabwe's 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act. Findings discovered that, social media emerged as an influential enabler of women's political involvement, with significant correlations found between digital engagement and increased political discourse, confidence, and motivation to participate in electoral processes. Regression analysis showed that over 63% of the variation in women's political participation could be attributed to factors related to social media use, particularly in raising awareness of rights and fostering political discussion. The independent samples t-test further highlighted a statistically associated gender disparity in digital political engagement, with women scoring notably higher than men on a composite engagement index. This suggests that social media disproportionately empowers women, serving as a critical equalizer in a traditionally male-dominated political landscape. In contrast, awareness and understanding of the Cyber and Data Protection Act among women in politics were generally limited, there was a strong positive association between familiarity with the Act and the perception that it is designed to protect women in political spaces. Women who understood the implications of the Act were significantly more likely to believe in its protective role, underscoring the importance of policy education in shaping perceptions of legal empowerment. However, despite these insights, the overall low levels of awareness suggest that the Act's potential to support women's political engagement remains underutilized. Overall, the findings illustrate that while legal frameworks like the Cyber and Data Protection Act have a role to play in safeguarding women's political rights, their impact is currently constrained by low

awareness and understanding. In contrast, social media platforms are already making a tangible difference in mobilizing women politically offering accessible spaces for dialogue, advocacy, and collective action. Therefore, strategic investments in digital literacy, cybersecurity education, and targeted sensitization campaigns around legal protections can amplify women's political agency and contribute to a more inclusive democratic process in Zimbabwe.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1. Launch Targeted Awareness Campaigns on the Cyber and Data Protection Act

There is limited awareness and understanding of the 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act among women in politics. To address this, the government and civil society organizations should conduct nationwide sensitization programs, particularly targeting female politicians, activists, and voters. These campaigns should use accessible language and be disseminated through radio, community workshops, and social media to ensure wide reach and comprehension.

5.4.2. Integrate Digital Rights Education into Political Training Programs

Political parties and civic education initiatives should incorporate modules on digital rights, online safety, and legal protections under the Cyber and Data Protection Act. By equipping women with knowledge about how to safeguard themselves from cyberbullying, misinformation, and online harassment, they will feel more confident and secure when participating in digital political spaces.

5.4.3. Promote Social Media Literacy and Digital Inclusion for Women

The research revealed that women engage more actively on social media platforms compared to men, indicating its potential as a tool for political empowerment. Therefore, there should be targeted digital literacy programs aimed at improving women's ability to navigate, analyse, and contribute meaningfully to online political discourse. This includes training on identifying fake news, safe online interactions, and using digital tools for advocacy.

5.4.4. Encourage Safe and Inclusive Online Political Spaces

Given the strong link between social media usage and increased political confidence and participation among women, stakeholders including regulators, tech companies, and civil society should collaborate to create safe and inclusive digital environments . This includes enforcing anti-harassment policies, promoting gender-sensitive content moderation, and ensuring that women's voices are not silenced by online abuse or disinformation campaigns.

5.4.5. Support Women-Led Digital Campaigns and Movements

The study showed that women derive greater motivational value from social media in political contexts than men. To harness this potential, funding and institutional support should be provided to women-led political movements, grassroots organizations, and digital campaigns that advocate for gender equality, policy change, and electoral participation. This will help amplify women's influence in public discourse and decision-making processes.

5.4.6. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation of Digital Policy Impact on Women

To ensure that the Cyber and Data Protection Act and other digital policies serve their intended purpose, there should be regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms , especially focusing on how these policies affect marginalized groups such as women. Gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis should be institutionalized to inform future policy reforms and interventions aimed at enhancing digital inclusion and political equity for all genders.

5.5 Area of further research

An important area for future studies is the long-term impact of digital literacy and cybersecurity education to sustain WPP in Zimbabwe. While this research highlights the significance of social media in enhancing women's political engagement and confidence, it does not explore whether targeted interventions such as formal training on the Cyber and Data Protection Act or safe online political expression lead to lasting increases in participation or improved protection against online harassment and misinformation. Future studies could investigate how structured digital literacy

programs influence women's ability to leverage social media effectively and safely in political contexts. Additionally, understanding how younger versus older women engage with digital platforms for political purposes, and how cultural or socioeconomic factors moderate these interactions, could provide valuable insights into tailoring empowerment strategies. The study would contribute to the developing of research-driven policies that ensure equitable, secure, and meaningful political inclusion of women in Zimbabwe's evolving digital democracy.

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APPENDICES

Appendices 1.1: Research support letter

SCHOOL OF GEOLOGICAL SCIENCES, DISASTER & DEVELOPMENT

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BINDURA, ZIMBABWE
WhatsApp : +263773281212
E-mail: jbowora@buse.ac.zw

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

CHAIRPERSON'S OFFICE

Thursday 03 April 2025

TO WHO IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir or Madam

RE: RESEARCH SUPPORT LETTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STUDENT

I am writing on behalf of the Sustainable Development Department requesting your collaboration on the research of our fourth-year student, BRITA GWEZERE REGISTRATION NUMBER B212201B.

The student is studying for a 4-year Bachelor of Science (Honours) Degree in Development Studies (HBSc.DG). During the fourth year of study, students are required to do field research which require them to do their data collection for research purposes.

We will be highly obliged to furnish you with additional information about the research project if our request meets your favorable consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. J. Bowora
(Chairperson)

CHAIRMAN
GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF SCIENCE

Appendices 1.2: Research Questionnaire

Questionnaire for women and men in politics

My name is Brita Gwezere studying Bachelor of Science (Honors) Degree in Development Studies (HBSc.DG), with Bindura University of Science Education. I am carrying out a study on the impact of social media on women's political participation. A focus on 2018 and 2023 general elections in Harare, Zimbabwe. Your full participation will be appreciated. **Discretion and confidentiality will be maintained. Individual names will not be mentioned in the final report of this study**

Please respond by ticking in appropriate box

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

1.Position held

Member of Parliament (MP)

Minister

councilor

Party leader

Other

2.Age

Year	Tick box
18-28	
29-38	
39-48	
49-60	
61+	

3. Indicate your Gender

Female

Male

SECTION B: To analyse the impact of social media on women's political participation in Harare.

To what extend do you agree to the following statements in the tables below? Use the scale, 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Does social media influence awareness of political issues and candidates to women during general elections of Zimbabwe?					
Does social media motivate women to participate in political activities?					
Are women in politics empowered and supported through social media platforms?					

SECTION C: To assess the effect of Zimbabwe's 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act on women's political participation in Zimbabwe's general elections.

To what extend do you agree to the following statements in the tables below? Use the scale, 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Are women in politics familiar with the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021)?					
Do women understand the implications of Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021)?					
Is the Zimbabwe Cyber and Data Protection Act (2021) designed to protect women in politics?					

SECTION D: To examine the impact of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp), on women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe.

To what extend do you agree to the following statements in the tables below? Use the scale, 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent do you agree that women's participation in voting and campaigning is contributed by the rise of Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp ?					
To what extend do you agree that social media has increased awareness of political concerns that affects women in Harare?					
To what extend does social media platforms provide relevant information that encourages women in Harare to participate in politics?					

SECTION E: To assess the influence of social media engagement and interaction on women's political participation in general elections of Zimbabwe.

To what extend do you agree to the following statements in the tables below? Use the scale, 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Do women become more involved in political discourse and action when they interact with political-related content on social media?					
Does interactions on social media boost women's confidence in partaking in political activities and decision-making process?					
Does reading, posting and responding on social media raise awareness of rights and political challenges in Harare?					

THANK YOU!

Appendices 1.3: Similarity Index Summary Report

Research project

ORIGINALITY REPORT

15%	12%	10%	8%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	www.alignplatform.org Internet Source	1%
2	Submitted to Mancosa Student Paper	1%
3	Submitted to Midlands State University Student Paper	1%
4	www.sciencegate.app Internet Source	<1%
5	Bruno Emmanuel Ongo Nkoa, Blaise Ondoua Beyene, Jacky Flore Ngo Nsoa Simb, Georges Ngnouwal Eloundou. "Does social media improve women's political empowerment in Africa?", Telecommunications Policy, 2023 Publication	<1%
6	"Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe, Vol II", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2023 Publication	<1%
7	Submitted to University of Stirling Student Paper	<1%
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