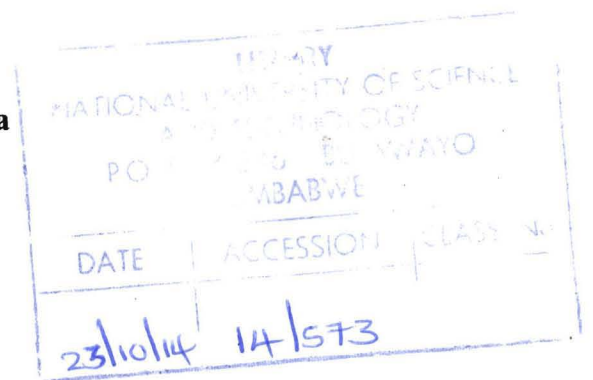
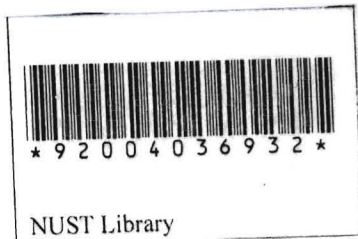


Appraising social media's suitability in encouraging youths to register to vote during elections: Case study of youths in Area 14, Dangamvura (Mutare)

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the suitability of social media in voter registration campaigns to encourage young people to vote. It sought to investigate the low turnout of youths during the 2013 harmonised elections despite the efforts by CSOs to encourage them to vote on the social media. Even though previous scholarly insights have been correct in identifying youths as the most active users of social media, the same age group still lagged behind in the 2013 harmonised elections. The main reasons that led to this outcome had never been researched on. In addition, research efforts had never attempted to speak on the impact of social media, in increasing participation of youths in political processes and discourses. The study used qualitative and quantitative in-depth interview and questionnaire findings to fulfil four key objectives: to find out where youths accessed voter registration information and education from and to establish the levels to which youths received voter registration information and education from social media; to establish confidence levels which youths had in voter registration information from social media, and to unravel factors determining these confidence levels; to verify youths' levels of appreciation of voter registration information from social media in comparison with voter registration information from mainstream media and other sources of information; to establish challenges encountered by youths and social media campaigners in using social media in voter registration campaigns. All this was done in reference to literature as well as multiculturalism and structuralism theories such as Habermas' public sphere concept, uses and gratifications theory, information overload concept, technological determinism and agenda setting theory. From the data that was presented and analysed it was concluded that Chandler (2000: 2) is wrong in arguing that new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals. 13% said they had no confidence at all in social media voter registration information while 33% said they had very low confidence in this information, this thereby indicating that technologies cannot on their own transform society or bring about social change. It was discovered that young people preferred to be educated and informed by traditional media, with television being the most trusted medium from which to receive voter registration information.