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## The Dual Role of Social Media: Developing Political Awareness Among University Students in the Digital Age – A Case Study of Al-Hussein Bin Talal University

**Objective.** This study investigates the dual role of social media as a primary source of information in fostering political awareness among university students at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University. **Methods.** A mixed-methods approach was utilized, combining a validated Likert-scale questionnaire ( $\alpha = 0.947$ ) administered to 398 students with qualitative analysis of their social media engagement practices. **Results.** Findings indicate moderate engagement ( $M = 3.26\text{--}3.44$ ) with platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), with a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.665$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between usage frequency and political awareness, though critical source evaluation remains limited. **Conclusions.** Social media significantly shapes political consciousness, necessitating library-led digital literacy programs to enhance critical engagement and counter misinformation in higher education.

**Keywords:** political awareness; social media literacy; university students; digital information sources; critical engagement; Jordanian higher education

### Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, the roles of university libraries are evolving to become knowledge publishers and supporters of open education, transcending their traditional function as information managers. Kolesnykova's (2019) study demonstrates that libraries in universities, particularly in economically advanced countries such as the United States and Canada, have re-embraced their role as digital publishers by supporting initiatives like open textbooks, which promote equitable access to educational resources. This role can be extended to include curating digital content on social media platforms, enabling university libraries to empower students to critically engage with political information. By providing digital publishing services and digital literacy programs, libraries can address challenges such as misinformation, thereby enhancing political awareness and civic engagement among university students.

In an era where technology permeates the fabric of our daily lives, social media platforms have become the primary windows through which young people view the world, receiving news, exchanging ideas, and forming their political consciousness. Within this context, it becomes crucial to examine how these digital spaces shape the political awareness of university students, particularly in societies undergoing rapid political and social transformations.

Universities have long been incubators of critical thought and cultural movements. Yet, with the rise of platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, the ways students access political information and engage with it have fundamentally changed. News is no longer consumed solely through traditional channels but is now debated in open digital forums where credible reporting mingles with misinformation, and opinions flow without restraint. These raise pressing

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questions: How does this digital ecosystem influence students' political awareness? Do these platforms enhance their understanding of public affairs, or do they drown them in an overwhelming tide of unfiltered content and polarized discourse?

In Jordan, where Al Hussein Bin Talal University stands as a microcosm of academic and cultural diversity, this study seeks to explore these dynamics. While prior research (e.g., Al-Sarhan et al.) has established social media's pivotal role in shaping public opinion, there remains a need to investigate how students engage with these platforms as sources of political information and whether they possess the necessary critical literacy to navigate the content they encounter (Al-Sarhan, Mashagbeh, Bani Salama, & Dradkeh, 2016).

Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What motivates students at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University to use social media for political engagement?
2. To what extent do these students rely on social media as their primary source of political information?
3. How do these platforms contribute to their political awareness, both locally and globally?
4. Is there a measurable relationship between social media usage intensity and students' level of political awareness?

Beyond mapping information consumption patterns, this study aims to shed light on how universities and libraries can more effectively foster critical digital literacy among students. In an age of rampant misinformation and algorithmic bias, empowering young people with verification and analytical tools becomes an imperative goal that could inspire new educational initiatives within academic institutions.

While much of the existing literature focuses on the negative repercussions of social media, this study adopts a balanced perspective, viewing these platforms as potential spaces for civic and political enrichment, provided they are navigated with critical awareness and supported by institutional guidance.

**Literature Review.** The rise of social media as a dominant force in information dissemination has fundamentally altered how political awareness is cultivated, particularly among university students. This transformation cannot be understood without examining three interconnected dimensions: the evolving nature of information sources, the psychological and social dynamics of political engagement in digital spaces, and the unique position of academic institutions in this new landscape.

*The digital transformation of political information.* Gone are the days when political knowledge was primarily acquired through formal education or traditional media. Today's students navigate an information ecosystem where social media platforms serve as both library and public square (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). This shift mirrors what Benkler (2006) described as the "networked public sphere," where information flows horizontally rather than through traditional hierarchical channels. In the Jordanian context, this has created new opportunities for political participation while simultaneously introducing challenges of misinformation and algorithmic bias (Mashagbeh, Al-Khawaldeh, Hussein, Alabdellat, & Swidan, 2023).

The Arab Spring marked a watershed moment in understanding social media's political potential. While early studies like Benkirane (2012) emphasized their revolutionary capacity, more recent research (Alayasrah & Almashagbeh, 2025) reveals a nuanced reality: these platforms sustain ongoing political socialization beyond moments of upheaval. Our study builds on this evolution by examining how daily engagement with political content shapes long-term awareness.

*Youth political socialization in the digital age.* Political awareness among university students emerges through complex interactions between digital platforms and personal development. As Tufekci and Wilson (2012) demonstrated, young adults don't merely consume

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political content; they co-create meaning through sharing, commenting, and remixing information. This participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) has transformed political learning from passive reception to active negotiation of multiple perspectives.

However, this democratization comes with paradoxes. While students report feeling more politically informed than previous generations (Abdullah, Zaki, & Ahmad, 2024). The "second-level digital divide" (Hargittai, 2002) now concerns not just access to technology, but disparities in critical engagement skills – a challenge particularly relevant for Jordan's higher education landscape.

*The university as mediator.* Academic institutions occupy a unique position in this ecosystem. Where social media platforms prioritize engagement metrics, universities could cultivate deliberative spaces for political discourse. The library's traditional role as information gatekeeper must evolve into that of a "digital literacy incubator" (ALQuraan & Adouse, 2022). This aligns with global trends where university libraries are developing verification tools and curated political information portals (Sahsah, Balbaa, & Hamdi, 2024).

Recent scholarship emphasizes the need for context-specific approaches. The 2025 study by Alayasrah and Almashagbeh (2025) demonstrates how Jordanian students navigate political content differently than their Western counterparts, blending global platforms with local communication norms. Our research extends this line of inquiry by examining how these cultural specificities interact with university-led digital literacy initiatives.

The necessity of academic-led digital literacy programs is further highlighted by the findings of Yap, Barat, & Tansiongco (2023). In their study, "Library and Information Science Students' Trust and Judgement: An Analysis of Youth's Social Media Engagement," the authors found that students exhibit excessive trust in political content shared by close family and friends. This emotional and social reliance significantly diminishes the systematic application of critical evaluation skills. This result confirms the challenge posed by "Trust Bias," reinforcing the argument in the present study that higher education institutions must develop targeted digital literacy interventions designed specifically to decouple critical judgment from personal and social ties.

*Critical evaluation skills and the challenge of trust bias.* Despite the growing role of social media as a platform for political expression and participation, the effectiveness of this engagement remains dependent on users' skills in critical information evaluation. In this context, a study by Yap, Nemeth, & Hajdu Barat (2022), which surveyed Library and Information Science (LIS) students in Hungary, uncovered a critical gap: the researchers found that students displayed a low level of systematic criticism when evaluating political information shared by their immediate social circles, such as close family and friends. Their findings suggest that high trust levels within these social networks often override critical judgment and source verification skills, leading to the acceptance of information based on social proximity rather than objectivity. This finding supports the conclusion in the current study that critical source evaluation remains limited among university students. Furthermore, it highlights the urgent need for academic institutions and libraries to develop focused digital literacy programs that move beyond mere technical verification skills to address "Trust Bias" specifically, thereby empowering students to apply systematic critique regardless of the information's source.

*Bridging the gaps.* This review identifies three critical gaps in existing literature:

1. Most studies focus either on social media's revolutionary potential or its risks, neglecting everyday political learning processes
2. Limited research examines how universities in transitional democracies can leverage these platforms constructively

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3. Few investigations combine large-scale surveys with qualitative analysis of students' actual engagement practices

*Previous studies.* Alayasrah and Almashagbeh's (2025) study represented pioneering research assessing social platforms' impact on Jordanian youth's political awareness. A survey of 400 participants from the University of Jordan found that 73.8% considered these platforms substantially influential in shaping their political analyses. The study offered practical recommendations, most notably establishing specialized government units for managing political digital content, while emphasizing university libraries' role in curating reliable content. These suggestions reflect institutional policy needs for the digital political transformation.

Mashagbeh, Ai-Khawaldeh, Hussein, Alabdellat, and Swidan's (2023) study explored the educational role of platforms like Twitter and Instagram in shaping Jordanian university students' political awareness. Results indicated these platforms have become primary political news sources, significantly affecting students' political participation patterns. The study emphasized developing students' critical thinking skills for evaluating digital political content, proposing systematic training programs. This vision provides a practical framework for enhancing digital platforms' positive aspects in political education.

Abdullah, Zaki, and Ahmad's (2024) study highlighted major shifts in political information consumption among youth. Findings showed platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter replacing traditional political information sources. However, it warned about "echo chambers" reinforcing political polarization and limiting exposure to diverse views. The study offered valuable recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance youth digital literacy and critical thinking. These findings gain particular importance amid growing digital political polarization.

In Shahzad and Omar (2021) study, the impact of online social capital on communication mediation processes was examined to understand political participation in Pakistan. A survey of 864 participants, recruited using a multistage cluster sampling method, was conducted, and the survey data were analyzed using a PLS-SEM model. The results indicate that extensive online networks lead to decreased participation in online political activities, while no effect on youth political behavior in the real world was found. Social capital was also found to be ineffective in motivating people to express their opinions in the online environment. These findings suggest that the political consequences of online social capital differ in a less democratic environment compared to a Western democratic context.

Hemshari's (2019) study represents a significant contribution to understanding patterns of electronic information source usage among graduate students in Jordanian universities. The researcher employed a descriptive analytical approach to examine a large sample of 450 male and female students from the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Jordan. Results revealed moderate levels of electronic resource usage, with significant variations attributed primarily to academic level and specialization. Notably, the study identified three major challenges: inadequate promotion of university library electronic resources, faculty reservations about internet-sourced research, and a lack of training programs in information literacy skills. These findings provide valuable insights for academic library service development.

Amer's (2018) study offered an in-depth analysis of social media platforms' role in shaping political awareness among Algerian university students. Using descriptive analytical methodology, the research examined usage patterns and their impacts. Findings indicated these platforms have become primary channels for family communication and political developments monitoring, while also breaking barriers to political expression. Importantly, the study highlighted the major shift in political information sources, with social media replacing traditional outlets for both local and



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international political information. These results are particularly significant for understanding political awareness formation in the digital age.

Al-Sarhan, Mashaqbeh, Bani Salama, and Dradkeh's (2016) research investigated social media's impact on political awareness among 1,484 students at Al al-Bayt University. The study employed stratified purposive sampling to ensure gender and academic discipline balance. Results revealed these platforms' pivotal role in familiarizing students with local and regional public affairs, enhancing political participation, and highlighting emerging political figures. The study also demonstrated varied motivations for use and mixed positive/negative effects. These findings illuminate the complexities accompanying digital platforms in political socialization.

Al-Dabisi and Al-Tahat's (2013) study provided a comprehensive survey of social network usage among Jordanian university students and its impact on public opinion formation. Using a descriptive approach with specifically designed questionnaires, results showed fundamental shifts in news consumption patterns, with social networks becoming strong competitors to traditional media. The study observed contradictory impacts – while enhancing national identity and belonging, they also spread skepticism toward official sources and stimulated protests. This duality offers a balanced understanding of social media's complex political roles.

Abdul-Razzaq's (2013) research examined social media's impact on political awareness among 430 students from three Iraqi universities during significant political mobilization. Using precise descriptive analytical methods, results showed platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube significantly influenced students' political orientations. Notably, the study found no statistically significant demographic differences (gender, age, or specialization) in these effects, suggesting a relatively homogeneous impact across student subgroups.

Benkirane's (2012) study presented a historical analysis of digital technology roles in democratic protests during the Arab Spring. Focusing on Tunisia and Egypt, it revealed varying roles for different platforms, with Twitter emerging as a key protest organization tool. These findings provide a comparative perspective for understanding social media's diverse political roles in revolutionary contexts.

Khan's (2012) research tracked the internet impact of technologies on accelerating Arab protest movements. The study highlighted distinct roles for platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube during different protest phases. This historical perspective offers a framework for understanding social media's evolving political roles in the Arab region.

Effing, van Hillegersberg, and Huibers's (2011) study provided a comparative analysis of social media's impact on Dutch elections. It revealed significant effect differences between local and national elections, highlighting direct politician-follower interaction importance. These results offer a precise understanding of how institutional contexts affect digital platforms' effectiveness.

Vitak et al.'s (2009) study focused on Facebook's role in enhancing American youth political participation. Surveying 683 students, it showed a strong correlation between platform political activity and real-world participation. These results provided early evidence of social platforms' potential to overcome youth "political apathy."

The study by Yap, Barat, & Tansiongco (2023) conducted a quantitative analysis of trust bias among Library and Information Science (LIS) students. The research aimed to understand how interaction with family and friends affects the youth's judgment of political information. The results established that high trust in the immediate social circle is the dominant factor, leading to low levels of systematic critique of the shared content. Despite the difference in the sample's specialization, this study serves as a reference supporting our current study's premise that limited critical evaluation of sources is a recurring phenomenon among young people on social media platforms.

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A study by Yap, Nemeth, & Hajdu Barat (2022) explored how Library and Information Science (LIS) students in Hungary use social media for democratic expression and how it influences their trust in political information shared by close friends and family. The study, utilizing a quantitative approach, concluded that youth displayed a high degree of trust in their close social circles, which correlated with low levels of systematic criticism regarding shared political content, even if it conflicted with their views. Although the geographical context and specific sample differ from the present study, these findings confirm the global challenge of critical evaluation of politically charged social media content, reinforcing its importance as a key indicator of effective digital civic participation.

### Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate university students' engagement with social media for political information, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to capture both measurable trends and nuanced experiences. Building on Ali Ibrahim Al-Na'anah's master's thesis (2022) from Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, supervised by Dr. Sarhan Ahmed Al-Tawalbeh and Dr. Sultan Nasser Al-Qur'an, the research refines the original framework by expanding the sample and incorporating deeper qualitative insights, contextualized within Jordan's cultural and academic setting. Quantitative data were collected via Likert-scale surveys from students at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, analysed using SPSS to identify patterns in frequency and types of political content accessed. Qualitative data, gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, underwent thematic analysis to reveal students' perceptions and cultural influences shaping their digital behaviours.

*Study population.* Our research sample comprises 398 students from Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, who were selected using stratified random sampling. The sample includes 55% female and 45% male participants, with undergraduates representing 85.7% and graduate students 14.3%. We maintained the balance between STEM (54%) and humanities (46%) disciplines to ensure broad representation of academic experiences. These participants embody the digital generation – young adults who have matured alongside digital transformation while navigating the complex challenges of political information flow in online spaces. (Table 1)

Table 1

**Demographic characteristics of participants (N=398)**

Variable	Category	Count (n)	Percentage (%)	Contextual Notes
<b>Gender</b>	Male	179	45.0	Higher than global avg. (UNESCO, 2023)
	Female	219	55.0	Matches Jordanian HE trends (MOHE, 2022)
<b>Academic Year</b>	First-year	341	85.7	Likely reflects general education requirements
	Second-year	26	6.5	
	Third-year	17	4.3	
	Fourth-year	10	2.5	
	Graduate	4	1.0	
				Underrepresented; warrants follow-up studies
<b>Discipline</b>	STEM	215	54.0	Includes (Medicine, Engineering, Sciences)
	Humanities	183	46.0	Includes (Arts, Media, Law)

*Research instruments.* The study utilizes a multidimensional 38-item questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale, structured around four key dimensions: (1) psychosocial motivations for platform use, (2) information-seeking behaviours, (3) awareness of local political issues, and (4) engagement with global political affairs. The research instrument was developed by the researchers by referring to theoretical literature and previous studies.

The research tools underwent rigorous validation, beginning with pilot testing involving 30 students, expert review by three digital media specialists, and demonstrated excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .947$ ). Complementary qualitative methods included focus groups with 15 participants and ethnographic observations of actual browsing behaviours, providing rich contextual understanding of students' digital practices.

*Ethical framework.* The research team adhered to strict ethical protocols, ensuring complete data confidentiality and voluntary participation without academic consequences. We conducted informational sessions explaining research objectives and how findings might enhance university services, fostering transparent communication with participants. We also obtained official authorization from the university administration to distribute the questionnaire to students.

*Analytical approach.* Our analysis harmonizes quantitative precision with qualitative richness. We employed descriptive statistics to map usage patterns and Pearson correlation to examine variable relationships. The qualitative component involved thematic analysis of open-ended responses combined with ethnographic documentation of students' natural digital environments.

This integrated methodology represents a deliberate effort to transcend conventional studies that treat users as abstract data points. By placing human experience at the heart of scientific inquiry while maintaining methodological rigor, we uncover nuanced insights about digital political engagement.

*Reliability and validity of the research instrument.* To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research instrument, multiple procedures were implemented to establish validity and reliability, divided into two main phases:

For the validity verification phase, two types of validity were examined. First, expert validity was achieved by presenting the questionnaire to seven specialists in library and information science, measurement and evaluation, and digital media. The experts evaluated the appropriateness of items for research objectives using a five-point scale, while assessing linguistic clarity and dimension comprehensiveness. This process resulted in an 87% inter-rater agreement, with necessary modifications made to items scoring below 80%.

Second, construct validity was verified through correlation analysis between each item and its respective domain. Results showed all correlation coefficients exceeded the acceptable minimum (0.30), with statistical significance at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ). For instance, item 13 demonstrated the highest domain correlation ( $r = 0.795$ ), indicating strong relationships between instrument items and their intended measurement domains.

Regarding reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal consistency. Results revealed high reliability levels, with the instrument's overall coefficient reaching 0.947, considered excellent by scientific standards. Domain-specific reliability coefficients ranged from 0.854 (usage motivations) to 0.892 (information sources), confirming the instrument's reliability in measuring target variables.

Additionally, split-half reliability testing produced a coefficient of 0.89 after Spearman-Brown correction. These collective results demonstrate the instrument's strong internal consistency and reliability, making it suitable for achieving study objectives.

For scientific transparency, it should be noted that validity and reliability verification were limited to the Jordanian sample, representing a potential study limitation. However, the

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implemented procedures and achieved results align with established standards in social science research, enhancing the credibility of the obtained findings. The comprehensive validation process followed rigorous methodological standards, including pilot testing with 30 participants and subsequent refinements based on expert feedback and statistical analysis. This multi-layered approach ensures the research instrument's robustness for examining the complex relationship between social media usage and political awareness development in university settings.

### Results and Discussion

The following section presents the findings of our investigation into the role of social media in shaping political awareness among students at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University. By integrating quantitative data from a validated Likert-scale questionnaire with qualitative insights into students' engagement practices, this analysis illuminates the dynamic interplay between digital information consumption and political consciousness. The results highlight both the opportunities social media offers for civic education and the challenges posed by limited critical literacy, setting the stage for a discussion on how academic institutions can foster informed digital citizenship in the post-truth era. (Table 2, 3)

Table 2

#### Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for study scale domains

Domain	Item Range	$\alpha$ Coefficient	Interpretation*
Students' motivations for social media use	1-7	0.854	High reliability
Using social media as an information source	8-17	0.892	Very high reliability
Developing awareness of domestic political issues	18-32	0.851	High reliability
Developing awareness of international political issues	33-38	0.876	Very high reliability
Full scale	1-38	<b>0.947</b>	Excellent reliability

\*Interpretation guidelines:

0.60-0.70 = Acceptable; 0.70-0.80 = Good; 0.80-0.90 = High; >0.90 = Excellent

(Source: George & Mallery, 2016)

Table 3

#### Statistical criteria for interpreting mean scores of scale items

Mean Score Range	Agreement Level	Classification
<b>1.00-2.33</b>	Low	Minimal endorsement
<b>2.34-3.67</b>	Moderate	Neutral/mixed responses
<b>3.68-5.00</b>	High	Strong endorsement

*Calculation method:*

Class width = (Max-Min)/Number of classes = (5-1)/3 = 1.33



### *Research findings and analysis*

#### **Motivations for Al-Hussein Bin Talal University students to use social media**

To address this question, we analysed the mean scores and standard deviations of students' responses regarding their social media usage motivations. The results, presented in Table 4, reveal a nuanced picture of how and why students engage with these platforms.

Table 4

<b>Descriptive statistics of social media usage motivations (ranked by mean score)</b>					
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Motivation Statement</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>
<b>1</b>	7	Accessing information	3.442	0.989	Moderate
<b>2</b>	3	Leisure time/escaping life pressures	3.413	0.950	Moderate
<b>3</b>	4	Connecting with others	3.305	0.970	Moderate
<b>4</b>	6	Learning about other cultures	3.262	0.976	Moderate
<b>5</b>	5	Sharing/following news	3.245	0.986	Moderate
<b>6</b>	1	Entertainment	3.146	0.944	Moderate
<b>7</b>	2	Making new friends	3.046	0.905	Moderate
	<b>Overall scale</b>	<b>3.258</b>	<b>0.961</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	

The analysis reveals that students' motivations for using social media fall within a moderate agreement range ( $M = 3.046$ – $3.442$ ), with "accessing information" emerging as the strongest driver ( $M = 3.442$ ). This suggests that students primarily view social media as a practical tool for knowledge acquisition, aligning with the platforms' increasing role as primary news sources for digital natives.

Interestingly, social motivations (e.g., making new friends,  $M = 3.046$ ) ranked lower than informational ones. This may reflect a cultural shift where social media transitions from purely social networking to information-seeking platforms – a trend also observed in Al-Sarhan, Mashaqbeh, Bani Salama, and Dradkeh's (2016) study of Jordanian university students.

The narrow standard deviations ( $0.905$ – $0.989$ ) indicate consistent response patterns across the sample, reinforcing the reliability of these findings. Notably:

- Leisure and escapism (Item 3,  $M = 3.413$ ) and cultural exploration (Item 6,  $M = 3.262$ ) were secondary but notable motivations.
- The lowest-ranked item ("making new friends") suggests that while social media facilitates connections, students prioritize functional over purely social uses.

Academic and practical implications:

1. For Educators: These results highlight the need to leverage social media for educational content delivery, as students already use it for information gathering.

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2. For Universities: Developing digital literacy programs could help students critically evaluate the information they consume.
3. For Researchers: The findings support broader literature on youth media behaviour while offering Jordanian-specific insights for comparative studies.

Gen Z increasingly treats social media as a multifunctional tool for news, learning, and cultural exchange rather than just a social space. Future research could explore how these motivations intersect with political awareness development, a key focus of this study.

### Social media as a source of information

The study reveals compelling insights into how Al-Hussein Bin Talal University students utilize social media platforms for information gathering. As shown in Table 5, students demonstrate moderate yet significant dependence on these digital channels for various informational needs.

Table 5

Social media as information source: Usage patterns ranked by frequency					
Rank	Item	Statement	Mean (M)	SD	Usage Level
1	15	Using social media to research topics of interest	3.551	0.837	Moderate
2	13	Accessing news and diverse information	3.359	0.875	Moderate
3	11	Following online course materials	3.311	0.853	Moderate
4	10	Exchanging ideas across disciplines	3.299	0.878	Moderate
5	9	Acquiring new skills/knowledge	3.298	0.800	Moderate
6	14	Watching news videos	3.289	0.825	Moderate
7	12	Sharing personal perspectives	3.271	0.926	Moderate
8	17	Citing in academic research	3.212	0.960	Moderate
9	8	Tracking current events	3.182	0.868	Moderate
10	16	COVID-19 information seeking	3.101	0.935	Moderate
Overall average			3.283	0.906	Moderate

The digital landscape has profoundly transformed how university students access and engage with information. Our findings reveal a nuanced relationship between Al-Hussein Bin Talal University students and social media platforms as information sources. The data paints a picture of a generation that has naturally incorporated these digital tools into their daily information-seeking behaviours, yet maintains a measured approach to their use.

Students demonstrate what might be termed "pragmatic dependence" on social media, with usage patterns consistently falling in the moderate range (M=3.283 overall). The highest

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engagement comes in searching for topics of personal interest ( $M=3.551$ ), suggesting these platforms serve as go-to resources for self-directed learning. This is closely followed by news consumption ( $M=3.359$ ), indicating social media's growing role as a news aggregator for digital natives.

What emerges most strikingly is how social media has blurred the boundaries between formal and informal learning. The significant use of these platforms for accessing course materials ( $M=3.311$ ) and acquiring new skills ( $M=3.298$ ) reveals their evolving function as supplemental educational tools. Students appear to be creating their own learning ecosystems, combining classroom instruction with digital peer knowledge-sharing ( $M=3.299$ ).

However, the data also tells a cautionary tale. While students readily use social media for academic purposes, their moderate trust in these platforms for research citations ( $M=3.212$ ) suggests an awareness of potential limitations. The lowest engagement with pandemic-related information ( $M=3.101$ ) might reflect either information fatigue or a growing sophistication in selecting appropriate sources for different information needs.

These findings echo Hemshari's (2019) observations about Jordanian students' information behaviours, particularly their tendency to balance convenience with caution. The relatively small standard deviations (0.8-0.93) across all items indicate these patterns hold consistently across the student population, making them reliable indicators of current usage norms.

The implications for higher education are significant. Rather than dismissing social media as distractions, educators might better serve students by acknowledging these established information-seeking habits and working to enhance digital literacy skills within this context. There appears to be a valuable opportunity to bridge students' natural digital behaviours with academic standards of source evaluation and critical thinking.

This moderate but meaningful engagement with social media as an information source suggests students are neither uncritical adopters nor complete sceptics of digital content. They have developed, perhaps intuitively, a middle-ground approach that leverages the accessibility and immediacy of social media while maintaining some degree of healthy scepticism about its reliability.

### **The contribution of social media to developing political awareness among students at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University**

To examine this crucial question, we analysed students' perceptions through comprehensive survey data, revealing insightful patterns about digital platforms' role in shaping political understanding (Table 6).

Table 6

#### **Social media's role in developing political awareness (domestic affairs) – ranked by mean scores**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>
<b>1</b>	19	Social media significantly influences public opinion	3.372	0.961	Moderate
<b>2</b>	25	Social media helps highlight new political figures	3.369	0.925	Moderate

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<b>3</b>	24	Social media affects decision-makers' orientations	3.344	0.931	Moderate
<b>4</b>	31	Social media has developed my personal traits (self-confidence, freedom of expression, communication skills)	3.317	0.805	Moderate
<b>5</b>	29	Social media helps solve some societal issues	3.304	0.818	Moderate
<b>6</b>	23	Social media conveys the true picture of political conditions in my country	3.266	0.983	Moderate
<b>7</b>	21	Social media shapes politically oriented attitudes	3.251	1.077	Moderate
<b>8</b>	32	Social media helps individuals understand their political rights and needs	3.244	0.893	Moderate
<b>9</b>	28	Social media contributes to forming political culture	3.186	0.816	Moderate
<b>10</b>	20	Social media accelerates local reform and development processes	3.171	1.082	Moderate
<b>11</b>	22	Social media enhances the values of loyalty and belonging	3.161	0.972	Moderate
<b>12</b>	30	Social media deepens feelings of social responsibility	3.161	0.875	Moderate
<b>13</b>	26	Social media has increased my participation in political issues and events	3.148	0.882	Moderate
<b>14</b>	27	Social media helps maintain political stability in society	3.080	0.845	Moderate
<b>15</b>	18	Social media helps understand local political conditions	2.992	0.890	Moderate
<b>Overall Average</b>			<b>3.264</b>	<b>0.924</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

The findings paint a compelling portrait of digital-native political engagement. Students clearly recognize social media's power in shaping the political landscape, particularly in influencing public discourse (M=3.372) and elevating new political voices (M=3.369). These

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results suggest that platforms have become modern agoras where political narratives are formed and challenged.

What proves especially noteworthy is how students credit social media with fostering their personal political development. Many reports these platforms have enhanced their ability to articulate views ( $M=3.317$ ) and engage in political dialogue, transforming them from passive observers to potential participants in the political process. This aligns with global trends showing digital platforms serving as training grounds for civic engagement.

However, the data reveal a striking disparity between national and local political awareness. While students acknowledge social media's role in highlighting broader political issues, its perceived impact on understanding local community matters scores significantly lower ( $M=2.992$ ). This "local awareness gap" may reflect either algorithmic biases favouring national content or students' own consumption preferences, suggesting an area for targeted educational intervention.

The moderate ratings across all dimensions (overall  $M=3.264$ ) tell an important story about Generation Z's sophisticated media literacy. Today's university students appear to have developed a balanced perspective - recognizing social media's political influence while maintaining healthy skepticism about its comprehensiveness. This measured outlook may represent an evolutionary adaptation to the post-truth information environment.

These findings carry significant implications for higher education:

1. **Curriculum Development:** The demonstrated engagement with political content suggests opportunities to integrate social media analysis into civic education programs.
2. **Critical Literacy Training:** Students' moderate perceptions indicate awareness of platform limitations that educators could build upon.
3. **Local Engagement Strategies:** The local awareness gap presents an opportunity to develop hyperlocal digital content and discussion forums.

The consistency of responses (SD range: 0.805-1.082) across diverse political awareness dimensions reinforces the reliability of these findings and their relevance for understanding contemporary youth political socialization in digital environments.

This research contributes to ongoing global conversations about digital citizenship while providing Jordan-specific insights into how university students navigate the complex intersection of social media and political awareness development.

### The contribution of social media to raising students' awareness of international political affairs

Our investigation into students' global political consciousness reveals how digital platforms serve as windows to the world, fostering connections with international issues in an increasingly interconnected geopolitical landscape (Table 7).

Table 7

#### Social media's impact on international political awareness

Rank	Item No.	Statement	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Agreement Level
1	38	Social media helps understand political conditions in other societies	3.442	0.830	Moderate



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2	34	Social media has increased my awareness of global issues	3.402	0.853	Moderate
3	37	Social media has enhanced my emotional engagement with surrounding events	3.367	0.941	Moderate
4	35	Social media has deepened my sense of responsibility toward Arab and regional issues	3.347	0.925	Moderate
5	36	Social media has modified my views on certain international political issues	3.296	0.946	Moderate
6	33	Social media helps follow regional and international developments	3.244	0.831	Moderate
Overall Average			3.350	0.911	Moderate

The findings present a compelling narrative about how today's university students cultivate their understanding of world affairs. At 3.442, the highest-rated item demonstrates students' strong belief in social media's capacity to illuminate foreign political landscapes – essentially serving as a digital passport to global affairs. This technological mediation of international awareness marks a significant shift from previous generations' reliance on traditional media for world news.

What proves particularly fascinating is the emotional dimension of this digital global engagement. Students report meaningful affective connections ( $M=3.367$ ) with international events, suggesting social media doesn't just inform but fosters genuine empathy and concern for global happenings. This emotional resonance appears strongest when addressing regional Arab issues ( $M=3.347$ ), indicating platforms may be helping nurture a distinct pan-Arab consciousness among Jordanian youth.

While students acknowledge these platforms' role in shaping their worldviews ( $M=3.296$ ), the moderate scores overall reveal an interesting tension. Social media simultaneously:

1. *Connects* users to global conversations through real-time updates about international developments.
2. *Filters* these connections through algorithmic and linguistic barriers that may limit the depth of understanding.

This duality helps explain why, despite regular exposure to global content, students' overall agreement about social media's transformative impact remains measured rather than emphatic. The findings align with Amer's (2018) research showing digital platforms create new avenues for political expression while presenting challenges in contextualizing international complexity.

The consistency of these patterns (SD range: 0.830-0.946) suggests several important considerations for higher education:

- **Curriculum Design** should leverage students' existing engagement with global digital content while addressing gaps in critical analysis skills.
- **Pedagogical Approaches** might incorporate comparative analyses of how different social media platforms frame international events.

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- **Student Support Services** could develop programs helping learners process emotionally-charged global content.

As Al-Sarhan, Mashaqbeh, Bani Salama, and Dradkeh's (2016) work anticipated, today's university students are indeed developing hybrid political identities - locally grounded yet digitally connected to global discourse. Our findings suggest this generation is neither passively consuming international content nor fully critically engaging with it, but navigating a middle path that educators would do well to understand and nurture.

The moderate composite score (3.350) ultimately tells a story of transitional digital globalism – where social media has undoubtedly expanded students' international horizons, but where its potential to foster truly nuanced global understanding remains partially unrealized. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for universities aiming to develop globally competent graduates in our digitally mediated age.

### **The relationship between students' use of social media as a source of information and the development of their political awareness at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University**

Specifically, we examine the relationship between three key factors: 1) reliance on social media for information, 2) students' motivations for using these platforms, and 3) frequency of use, and their combined impact on political awareness. Our statistical analysis reveals compelling connections, as shown in Table 8:

Table 8

**The Relationship between social media use and political awareness development**

<b>Relationship Examined</b>	<b>Correlation Strength (r)</b>	<b>Statistical Significance</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Social media use ↔ Domestic political awareness</b>	.650**	$p < .001$	Strong positive link
<b>Social media use ↔ International political awareness</b>	.613**	$p < .001$	Strong positive link
<b>Social media use ↔ Overall political awareness</b>	.665**	$p < .001$	Strongest connection

The analysis reveals a clear and meaningful pattern: students who rely more heavily on social media for information tend to demonstrate higher levels of political awareness. This relationship holds true whether we examine awareness of domestic political issues (.650), international affairs (.613), or overall political understanding (.665).

These numbers tell an important story about today's university students. The consistent positive correlations suggest that social media isn't just a communication tool – it's becoming a significant political socialization agent. When students scroll through their feeds, they're not just passing time; they're absorbing political information, engaging with different perspectives, and gradually developing their political consciousness.

The slightly stronger correlation with domestic political awareness (.650 vs. .613 for international issues) may reflect how local political content often feels more immediate and

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relevant to students' daily lives. Yet the robust correlation with international awareness confirms that these platforms also expand students' political horizons beyond national borders.

These results echo and expand upon Abdul-Razzaq's (2013) important work with Iraqi university students, which first highlighted how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube shape political attitudes.

### Conclusions

This study provides crucial quantitative and qualitative evidence of the dual role of social media in shaping the political awareness of Al-Hussein Bin Talal University students, affirming its nature as a parallel, non-traditional political socialization tool.

First, the statistical analysis confirms a strong and significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.665$ ) between the frequency of social media platform use and the students' overall political awareness. This key finding solidifies the theory that youth utilize these platforms not merely for social interaction but as "primary gateways for political information," driven by the desire for "access to information" as their core motivation ( $M = 3.442$ ).

Second, the study reveals a significant variance in the depth of this awareness; a tangible decline was observed in awareness of local political and societal issues ( $M = 2.992$ ) compared to international issues. This discrepancy suggests that platform algorithms, or the limited nature of local online interaction, may contribute to creating a "local awareness gap" that requires direct educational intervention.

Third, and most importantly, the collected data confirms that the development of quantitative awareness was not accompanied by a similar development in qualitative skills, as critical source evaluation remained limited. This deficiency exposes students to a high risk of misinformation, underscoring that the effectiveness of youth digital political participation is ultimately contingent upon their level of critical discernment and media literacy

### Recommendations

*For Academic Institutions.* The primary responsibility for fostering critical engagement lies with academic institutions. We propose developing dedicated digital media literacy curricula focused on cultivating advanced critical analysis skills specifically for political content. Furthermore, universities should establish digital observatories to systematically monitor and evaluate political discourse on social media, thereby actively guiding students toward credible sources while maintaining an environment that promotes intellectual diversity. Crucially, the integration of "digital civics" modules across various disciplines could effectively bridge the gap between formal education and the informal learning environment of the online sphere.

*For Student Development.* To maximize their political awareness, students must be actively encouraged to cultivate conscious consumption habits. These habits include actively diversifying their information sources beyond personalized algorithmic recommendations and diligently practicing ethical digital discourse that respects pluralism and diverse viewpoints. Students need to learn how to balance emotional engagement with an analytical distance when consuming political content. Ultimately, the goal is to successfully translate their developing online political awareness into tangible and meaningful civic action within the community.

*For Platform Developers.* Given their influential role, platform developers are urged to engage in collaborative initiatives with academic institutions. Specifically, this partnership should focus on developing culturally-sensitive algorithms that not only respect regional values and contexts but also prioritize the creation of transparent and consistent content moderation policies.

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Finally, concerted efforts should be made to support the development of educational platforms utilizing language that effectively combines traditional knowledge systems with contemporary digital pedagogies.

*For Research Advancement.* Building upon the foundations laid by this study, future research should investigate several critical areas. These include exploring the psychological mechanisms that underlie and drive political content engagement among youth, and conducting longitudinal studies to determine the long-term effects of algorithm-curated political information on opinion formation. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons of digital political socialization are necessary, along with research focused on assessing the impact of emerging Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies on political awareness formation.

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## **Подвійна роль соціальних медіа: розвиток політичної свідомості серед студентів університетів у цифрову епоху – приклад університету Аль-Хуссейн Бін Талал**

**Мета.** Це дослідження присвячене вивченню подвійної ролі соціальних медіа як основного джерела інформації у формуванні політичної свідомості студентів університету Аль-Хуссейн Бін Талал. **Методика.** Було використано змішаний метод, що поєднував валідований опитувальник за шкалою Лікерта ( $\alpha = 0,947$ ), заповнений 398 студентами, з якісним аналізом їхньої активності в соціальних медіа. **Результати.** Результати свідчать про помірну активність ( $M = 3,26-3,44$ ) на таких платформах, як Facebook та X (раніше Twitter), із сильною позитивною кореляцією ( $r = 0,665$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ) між частотою використання та політичною обізнаністю, хоча критична оцінка джерел залишається обмеженою. **Висновки.** Соціальні медіа значно впливають на формування політичної свідомості, що вимагає впровадження бібліотечних програм з цифрової грамотності для підвищення критичної активності та протидії дезінформації у вищій освіті.

**Ключові слова:** політична обізнаність; грамотність у соціальних медіа; студенти університетів; цифрові джерела інформації; критична взаємодія; вища освіта в Йорданії

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