



## SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN YOUTH POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE GAMBIA

Ebrima Jabbi

*University Pembengunan National Jatim, Indonesia*

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### Article Info

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of social media in fostering political engagement among teens within the Gambia through a systematic literature overview method. The look is pushed with the aid of the increasing reliance of Gambian teens on digital platforms such as FB, WhatsApp, Twitter, and TikTok to access political content, collaborate in discussions, and mobilize civic movements. As net penetration deepens in the country, social media is reworking conventional political participation by permitting instantaneous verbal exchange, diverse viewpoints, and real-time political mobilization. Drawing on academic articles, coverage papers, and local media reviews, this research synthesizes findings from over 30 scholarly resources published between 2015 and 2024. The evaluation highlights how virtual activism, influencer engagement, and peer-to-peer verbal exchange have redefined young people's participation in political strategies. Similarly, it identifies barriers inclusive of digital literacy gaps, incorrect information, and net-get entry to disparities that assign the efficacy of social media as a political tool. The findings screen that at the same time as social media serves as a gateway for youth engagement, its effectiveness is mediated by way of socio-political context, regulatory frameworks, and online content moderation. The look contributes extensively to existing literature with the aid of supplying a targeted examination of The Gambia's evolving digital panorama and the political consciousness of its children. It offers pointers for policymakers and civil society actors aiming to leverage digital structures to bolster democratic participation amongst younger residents.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as an important pressure in shaping political discourse and civic

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participation globally. Inside the context of The Gambia, a rustic that has passed through profound political transitions, digital structures have emerged as instrumental in informing, organizing, and mobilizing youngsters around political causes. Following the 2016 presidential elections and the peaceful transition from a 22-year authoritarian regime, Gambian youths have increasingly grown to become systems that include Facebook and WhatsApp to voice political issues, propose alternatives, and call for responsibility. (Freedom house, 2023).

The role of youth has been crucial to the Gambia's change. Through their activism, young people have played a key role in overthrowing the regime. With 70% of the population being young, their numerical strength as the largest demographic demonstrates that the nation is a youthful one. Additionally, according to the IEC, young people aged 18 to 35 make up 58% of the registered voters in the next election. This demonstrates how youth's significant demographic potential and political engagement may significantly strengthen and deepen democracy.

According to (Abdullah et al., 2024). youth involvement in political processes has a big impact on democracies since their thoughts and deeds influence future governments and social norms. Involving the next generation is crucial to maintaining democratic regimes and bringing new viewpoints and positive concepts to political debates. Additionally, the emergence of social media has given young people who have traditionally been underrepresented in political arenas a potent instrument to organize around causes that are important to them and shape political agendas. When young people use social media to raise awareness of issues like environmental preservation and social justice, it has a particularly powerful effect during non-election seasons, claims Røsok (2024). The younger generation may be able to transcend geographical and financial barriers with the use of social media, strengthening their collective political voice.

This study of the literature aims to investigate the ways in which social media affects young people's access to and involvement in politics, stressing both its advantages and disadvantages. Social media presents many chances for communication and involvement, but it also has drawbacks, like the propagation of false information and the development of echo chambers that can divide viewpoints. Youth political engagement can be increased by social media, but algorithm-driven content that reinforces users' preconceptions can also create highly tailored knowledge bubbles. Conflicting opinions and even disengagement from the greater political discourse may arise from this. This review looks at how different kinds of social media content, from in-depth discussions to strongly held posts, can affect young people's understanding and involvement with political topics.

This review emphasizes how crucial it is for young people to acquire digital literacy and critical thinking abilities in order to successfully navigate the massive volumes of information found on social media. Teachers and legislators are essential in helping young people develop these abilities, which will improve their capacity to assess sources critically and participate constructively in political discourse. This review offers a greater knowledge of how social media might affect young political activity in both positive and negative ways by synthesizing previous studies. Future study topics are also highlighted, including how cultural variations affect social media usage and the consequences for young people's political engagement around the world. This evaluation's ultimate goal is to present a fair assessment of social media's contribution to young people's political participation and offer helpful suggestions for maximizing its positive effects while minimizing its negative ones.

In keeping with DataReportal (2024), approximately 14.4% of The Gambia's population are active social media users, most people of whom are under 30 years old. This demographic's high engagement online has made social media an effective tool for political getting to know and engagement. In a rustic wherein conventional media is often limited, virtual systems provide alternative spaces for dialogue and mobilization. (Camara, Rizvi, 2021). However, challenges inclusive of incorrect information, limited access to technology, and national surveillance complicate the usage of social media for genuine democratic engagement. This research pursuits to observe the multifaceted role of social media in shaping kids political engagement within the Gambia thru a scientific assessment of the present literature.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Using the Media to Spread Political Knowledge**

The media, which serves as a conduit between the general public and decision-makers, has a significant impact on how the public views political matters. Print, radio, and television have always been the main media sources for political information. With the growth of digital media, social media and online news sources have emerged as essential instruments for political participation. By encouraging openness, public discourse, and real-time information availability, these platforms empower people to actively engage in political processes. Accessibility is one of the main benefits of digital media in politics. People may stay up to date on political developments at any time, regardless of their location or financial situation, thanks to social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. By following specific political figures, organizations, and topics on social media, consumers can engage with political content in a more customized manner. For younger viewers who might not rely on traditional media sources, the capacity to personalize news consumption promotes a more involved and politically conscious audience (Kharel, 2024). By making it easier to discuss, share, and consume political information, social media also promotes participatory discourse. By using hashtags and topical topics, users can argue opposing viewpoints or interact with like-minded people, promoting a wider discussion about important topics. For instance, hashtags like #ClimateAction and #MeToo have rallied supporters and raised public awareness of social movements and recent elections. By elevating perspectives that mainstream media might otherwise ignore, social media democratizes political discourse by enabling grassroots activism and collective advocacy (Alodat, 2023). Furthermore, users can actively participate in political narratives because of social media's participatory features. Politicians and the general public can now communicate in real time thanks to live-streaming and comment areas on websites like Facebook and YouTube. The public feels more involved in the political process as a result of this reciprocal dialogue, which also drives political leaders to respond to constituent issues more quickly. Studies demonstrating a link between social media exposure to political discourse and higher levels of civic participation indicate that people who feel connected to the issues they care about are more likely to volunteer, sign petitions, and participate in demonstrations. Matthews (2022)

### **The Use of Social Media by Young People to Get Political News**

Due to its widespread use, social media has emerged as the younger generation's main source of political news. According to studies, social media is the preferred primary source of political information for younger generations due to its accessibility, immediacy, and customization opportunities (Sianturi, 2024). Social media offers a more personalized experience than traditional journalism by enabling users to follow news organizations, advocacy groups, and politicians who share their interests and opinions. This degree of personalization guarantees that young people are aware of issues that are important to them by fortifying ties with particular political causes and fostering a sense of community among like-minded people.

### **Social Media's Effect on Political Engagement and Knowledge**

Studies reveal a robust association between teens' exposure to social media and their political consciousness. Youths can benefit greatly from social media as a tool for engaging and easily accessible learning about international concerns, political changes, and policies. According to research, peer-to-peer content sharing and online discussions, for example, can improve political awareness and knowledge (Sianturi, 2024). Younger audiences may also find it easier to relate to and comprehend difficult political subjects thanks to the variety of social media formats, including videos, infographics, and memes.

Because it enables people to express their thoughts, participate in conversations, and organize around issues, accessibility promotes greater involvement. Social media significantly boosts political engagement, according to studies. When exposed to political content online, users frequently participate in digital activism, sign petitions, and go to protests or rallies (Alodat, 2023). Furthermore, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have interactive features that promote a sense of agency and inclusion that conventional media cannot match, enabling users to actively engage in political discourse (Matthes, 2022).

## **Virtual Citizenship and adolescents Empowerment**

Numerous studies have proven that social media promotes digital citizenship by enabling teens to get the right of entry to political content material, express opinions, and participate in democratic talk (Gleason & von Gillern, 2018). In the Gambia, structures inclusive of Twitter and Facebook have enabled younger human beings to interact in campaigns for electoral reform and human rights.

### **Activism and Mobilization**

Social media has converted youth activism, making it simpler to prepare protests and petitions. For instance, at some point in the #GambiaHasDecided campaign in 2016, children mobilized en masse via WhatsApp corporations and fb pages, playing an important position in the electoral manner. (Version & Jammeh, 2025).

### **Political studying and records Sharing**

Structures like YouTube and Instagram function as informal educational gear in which children get admission to political observation, documentaries, and live discussions (USAID et al., 2022). This exposure contributes to political consciousness and encourages knowledgeable voting behavior.

### **Regulatory and Surveillance**

Issues about online surveillance and digital repression additionally form how freely children have specific political opinions online. The country's tracking of online structures has brought about instances of self-censorship among younger users. (International, 2010).

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Source and Collection**

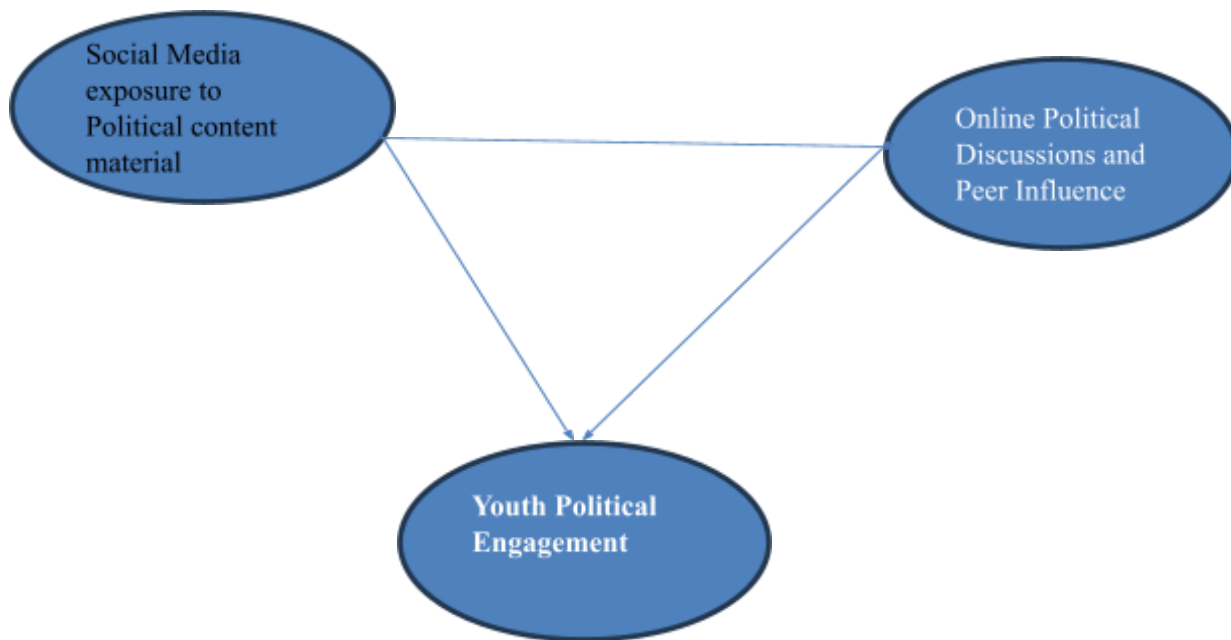
This examination makes use of a scientific literature overview methodology, sourcing peer-reviewed magazine articles, government reports, NGO publications, and news media launched between 2015 and 2024. academic databases along with JSTOR, Google Pupil, and ScienceDirect had been used to become aware of 16 relevant guides. Selection criteria included relevance to The Gambia, youth political participation, and the role of digital media. Thematic evaluation is used to extract key findings and pick out patterns related to social media use and political behavior.

### **Data Analysis**

All statistics were analyzed thematically, with key focus regions consisting of modes of political expression, structures most often used, and the socio-monetary determinants of digital participation. Coding became performed manually to identify habitual subject matters and gaps inside the literature. The synthesis helped triangulate findings across assets, offering a complete view of the virtual political area inside the Gambia.

### **Theoretical Framework.**

A theoretical framework offers an organized approach to considering a research issue, utilizing pre-existing theories and concepts to direct your study. It acts as the cornerstone of your research, assisting you in comprehending the background, the connections between ideas, and how to evaluate the results. Basically, it serves as a guide for your research, detailing the assumptions and theoretical foundations that will guide your investigation.



#### 4. DISCUSSION:

The reviewed literature continuously emphasizes that social media acts as both a catalyst and a space for teenagers' political engagement inside the Gambia. Young human beings are the usage of platforms to disseminate political statistics, organize occasions, and connect with like-minded people. The capability to bypass conventional media restrictions has empowered children's voices, especially in city settings. The evidence indicates that campaigns which include #OccupyWestfield and #JusticeForGambians won traction mostly through young people-led social media activism. These actions spotlight the function of virtual platforms in influencing public discourse and pressuring the government to behave.

But, the effectiveness of social media as a political tool is not widespread. Rural youngsters and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds face structural barriers that restrict their engagement. Furthermore, the presence of misinformation and politically influenced content undermines the credibility of online structures. Surveillance and the capacity for state retaliation have also brought about extended digital self-censorship. Despite these challenges, the capability of social media to facilitate political engagement stays huge, mainly when blended with digital literacy and supportive regulatory frameworks.

#### **Social Media's Impact on Gambia's Political Involvement**

During General Election 2021, social media platforms significantly increased youth political engagement in the Gambia by facilitating political debates, offering instant election information, and acting as a venue for news, interaction, and political entertainment. Due to the fact that young Malaysians viewed Instagram and TikTok as crucial tools for news consumption, political engagement, social media connection with peers and influencers, and political information consumption, the site's usability and capacity to promote political involvement were highlighted. While new channels like TikTok emerged as potent vehicles for campaign themes, all political parties and coalitions had access to a wide range of traditional and online media to disseminate information (Tapsell, 2023). Despite some barriers to digital literacy, technology availability, and the diverse political interests of young people, social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok had a discernible impact on political behavior. This emphasizes how important it is to use social media in civic education initiatives and political campaigns in order to effectively reach younger audiences.

#### **The Effects of Youth Political Participation in Gambia**

Youth political engagement in the Gambia has been greatly impacted by social media, which has completely changed how young people engage with politics. Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become essential tools for political engagement because they provide immediate access to election-related information, encourage political discourse, and serve as hubs for political news and entertainment. Young Gambians have been motivated to actively participate in political debate, voice their ideas, and mobilize support for a variety of topics by social media's interactive features and ease of use. This shift to digital media, which offers new platforms for activity and speech, has altered the political landscape of young people. By allowing young Gambians to voice their opinions and interact with like-minded individuals worldwide, social media has democratized political discourse and expanded the reach of political campaigns.

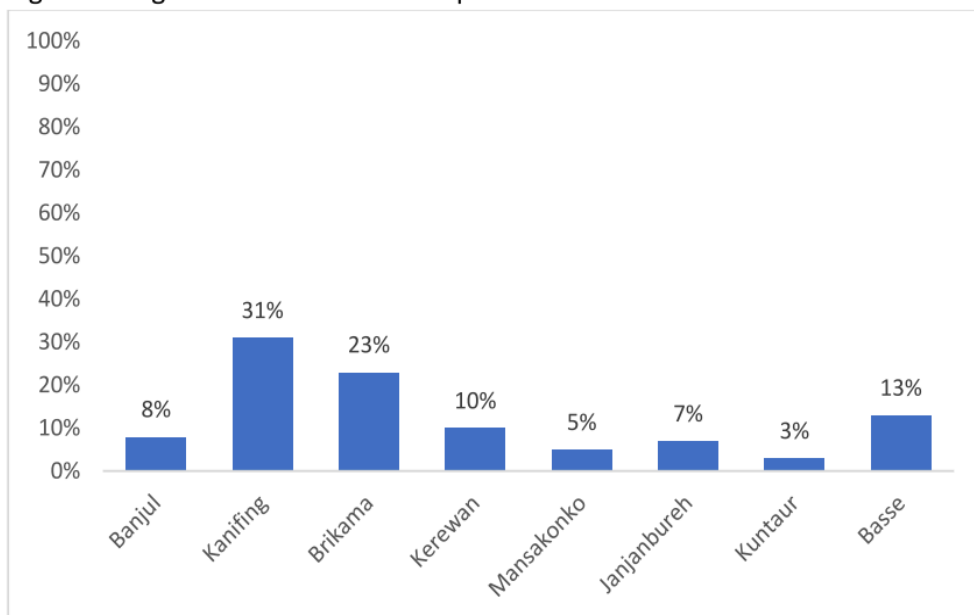
### The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model is a popular framework for understanding how people adopt and use new technologies in the fields of information systems and technology management. Since Fred Davis first put it forth in the late 1980s, other researchers have improved and expanded upon it. Users are more likely to accept and use a technology if they believe it to be both practical and simple to use, according to TAM. Additionally, TAM recognizes the impact of outside factors that could alter the relationship between perceived utility, perceived ease of use, and actual technology adoption, including subjective norms, personal experience, and facilitating circumstances (Su & Li, 2021). Researchers, designers, and practitioners can all benefit from this model's insightful information, which helps them pinpoint important factors that affect technology adoption and direct execution and adoption methods.

### 5. Findings

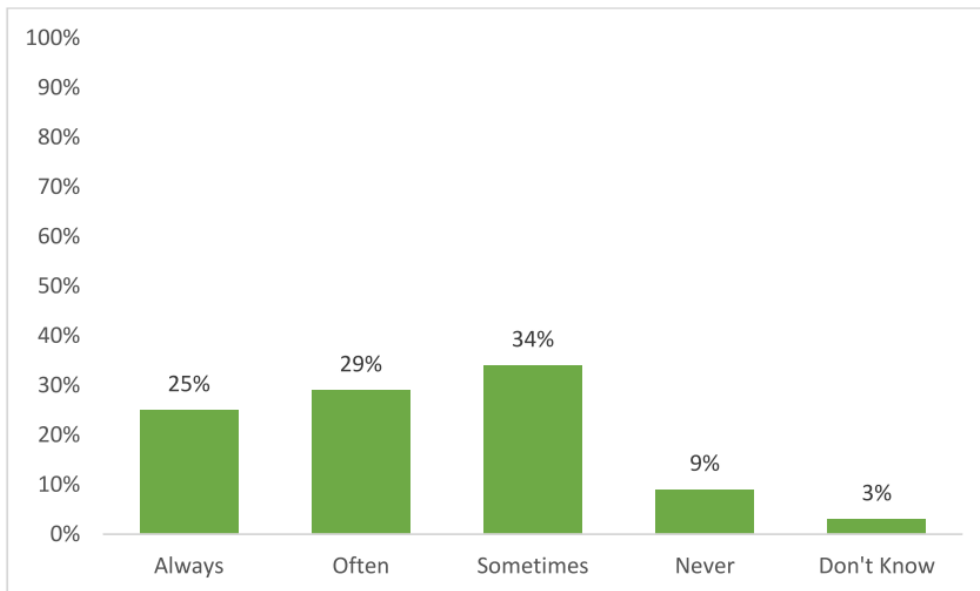
The assessment determined that social media has fundamentally altered the manner youth in the Gambia interact with politics. Virtual platforms offer handy, low-cost channels for civic education, political expression, and mobilization. However, engagement levels vary throughout socioeconomic and geographic divides. City youngsters are more lively and politically expressive online, at the same time as rural youngsters stay underrepresented. Despite issues over misinformation and surveillance, social media remains an important space for democratic participation, especially for most of the digitally savvy young people.

Figure 1: Regional Distribution of Respondents



The gender of the responders is displayed in the chart below. 33% of survey respondents are women, and nearly 70% of respondents are men.

### Figure 2: Treated Unfairly by government Office



### Youth Participation and Engagement

This section examines the degree to which young people interact and participate with important staff members. Understanding who they interact with comes after the first segment examines their involvement in the most recent election.

### Trust in the IEC and the 2021 Presidential Election

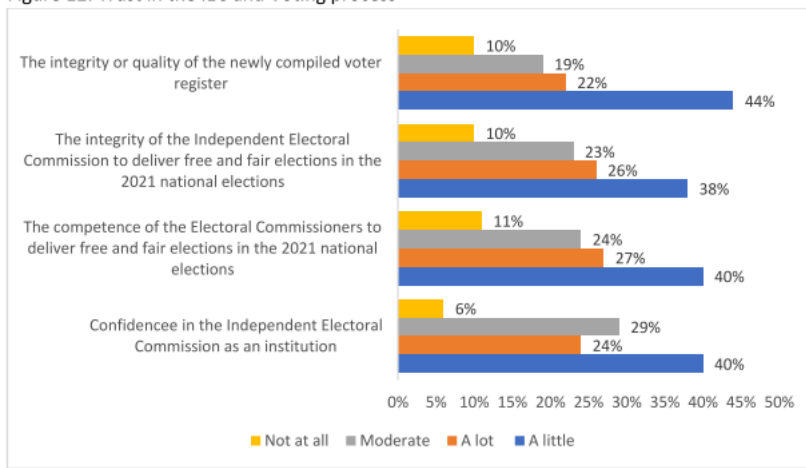
The public's confidence in the IEC's ability to conduct an impartial election has been called into doubt in light of recent public scrutiny of the body. Despite the commission's importance in the art of election management, certain choices made in a liberalizing and strengthening democratic culture have proven problematic. IEC has had to deal with a number of civil society court lawsuits this year alone, as well as more recent ones from two political parties whose nominations the commission rejected (Gambia, 2021). The Gambia Moral Congress and Citizen Alliance were both upheld by the High Court, raising doubts about the commission's legitimacy. A number of questions about respondents' trust in the organization, their honesty, the new voter list, and the institution's ability to hold a free and fair election on December 4, 2021, were included in our survey.

Regarding respondents' faith in the Independent Electoral Commission as an organization, 40% say they have "a little confidence," 24% say they have a lot of confidence, and 29% and 6% say they have little or no confidence at all.

As part of the general registration, the commission registered new voters from May to July 2021. The IEC's appointment of the Mayor of Banjul to serve as an attestation agent for prospective voters, however, was controversial due to claims that minors were enrolling. Two Banjul-based civil society organizations and a counselor filed a legal appeal against this ruling. The plaintiffs won their case in court. Regarding the freshly produced voter registration, 22% of respondents say they trust it, while 44% say they have little faith in its quality or integrity.

Just 27% of respondents say they have a lot of confidence in the IEC's ability to hold free and fair elections in the 2021 presidential election, while 40% say they have only a little faith in the commission's ability to do so. Similarly, 38% say they have some faith in the commission's honesty, while 26% say they have a lot.

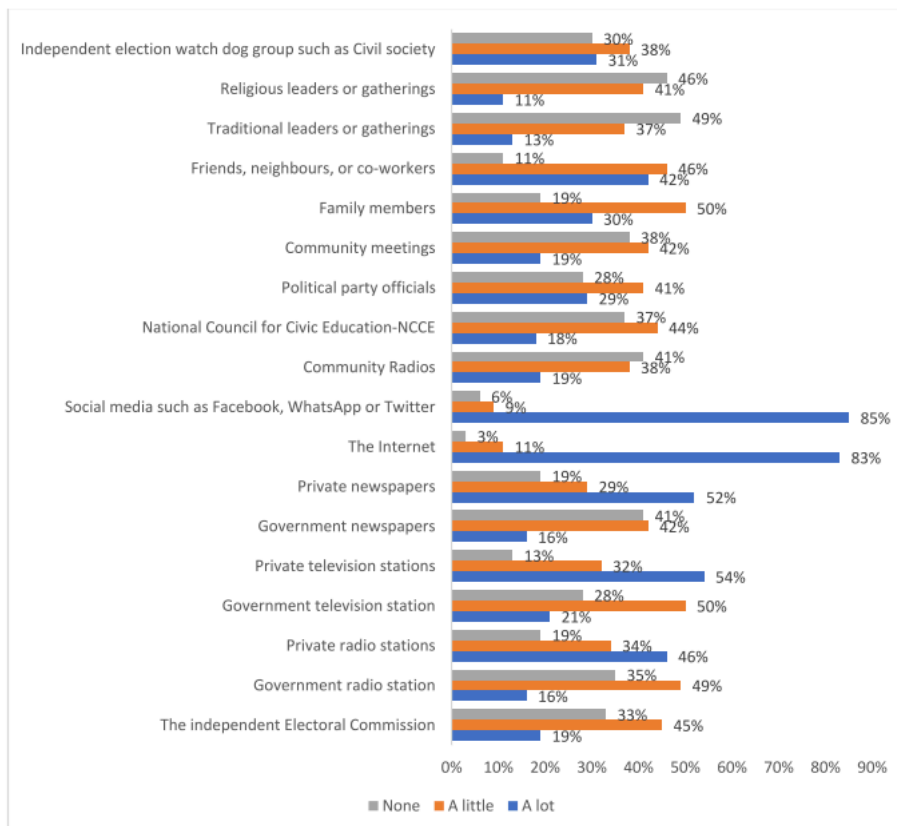
**Figure 3: Trust in the IEC and Voting process**



### Source of Political News

Youth primarily obtain their political news from the Internet (83%) and social media (85%). Young people can also find news from private newspapers and television stations. Nevertheless, important institutions like the National Council for Civic Education, the Independent Electoral Commission, and even civil society organizations have not been thought to be useful for reporting.

**Figure 4: Source of Political News**



## **6. Conclution**

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool in the Gambia's political landscape, particularly among teenagers. This systematic literature overview confirms that while demanding situations along with getting admission to inequality and content material credibility persist, the platforms provide unparalleled opportunities for political getting-to-know and activism. To optimize the advantages of digital engagement, there is a want for inclusive virtual training, supportive rules, and more desirable infrastructure. Using addressing these barriers, The Gambia can foster a politically energetic and digitally empowered teen populace that contributes meaningfully to democratic approaches. Although there are certain problems with young Malaysians' access to technology, digital literacy, and differing political interests, Twitter's ease of use and function as a center for news, conversation, and political amusement highlighted its significance in contemporary political engagement. The Uses and Gratification Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) are suggested by theoretical implications as helpful frameworks for comprehending how social media influences political conduct.

From a practical standpoint, the results indicate that social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok may be used by political campaigns and civic education programs to effectively reach younger audiences. In order to encourage informed and engaged youth engagement, policymakers ought to think about incorporating social media platforms into their plans. In order to maintain youth involvement and fortify Gambia's democratic process, future recommendations should focus on improving digital literacy initiatives and encouraging interesting political material on social media.

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