COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION IN THE 2021 AND 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE GAMBIA AND NIGERIA

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Abstract

Digital technologies have made the strategies of political mobilisation to change in this era. That is why political parties and their respective candidates no longer rely only on the conventional tactics and strategies of political campaign. This paper is a comparative study of the social media and political mobilisation during the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria respectively. The research design was survey, while the instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. The population of the study in The Gambia was from Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC), while the population from Nigeria was from Port-Harcourt. Out of the combined figure of 384 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 100 copies were given to The Gambian respondents, while 284 copies were given to the Nigerian respondents, using the logic of proportional distribution of questionnaire. Further, while purposive sampling technique was used in KMC, both cluster and simple random sampling techniques were used in Port-Harcourt. One key finding of the research was that both The Gambian respondents and the Nigerian respondents noted that they spent at least seven hours daily on the social media during the respective Presidential election. The author recommended, among others, that regulators such as PURA, for The Gambia, and the NCC, for Nigeria, must devise mechanisms to curb and prosecute those who post and upload fake news and hate speech during elections.

Keywords: Social media, political mobilisation, 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections, The Gambia, Nigeria

Introduction

In well over a decade now, especially on the African continent, there has been an exponential growth, popularity and ubiquity of the social media and other digital technological devices in political mobilisation with the attendant political ramifications. From Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, TikTok, Messenger, Instagram and YouTube, among others, political parties and their respective candidates have learnt and mastered the art and science of galvanising support among the voting population, especially the youths. Enamoured with certain affordances such as creation, conversation, curation, connection, and collaboration, as well as their unrestrained access and use, the social media have constituted a veritable battleground for politicians globally just to win the hearts and minds of the electorate.

The social media, according to Dollarhide and Drury (2023) refer to a computer-based technology that promotes the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Lindgren (2017), supports this by noting that the interactive nature of the social media is what has made them to be engaging and used for political activities. Globally, today, there are well over 4.7 billion users of the different social media platforms. According to Kemp (2023), the top ten social media platforms in terms of user-base are as follows: Facebook (2.96 billion); YouTube (2.51 billion); WhatsApp (2 billion); Instagram (2 billion); WeChat (1.31 billion); TikTok (1.05 billion); Messenger (931 million); Douyin (715 million); Telegram (700 million); and Snapchat (635 million). Political mobilisation on the other hand is usually a major tool in which political parties and candidates galvanise the people towards a premeditated political end.

However, right from 2016 when The Gambia went to the polls to elect a new president, an election that almost threw the country into a turmoil, the social media ecology has been vibrant. As of January 2023, the population of social media users in the country was 364, 400;

specifically, Facebook had 306, 100; Instagram- 98,000; Messenger- 130,500; and Twitter- 42, 100 (Kemp, 2023). Nigeria on the other hand, right from the 2011 presidential election, has had a very rich and vibrant media ecology almost to the point of toxicity. As of March 2023, Facebook had 36, 187, 600 users; YouTube- 31, 600,00; Instagram- 10, 397, 400; Messenger, 30, 679, 600; Twitter- 4, 950,000 (Kemp, 2023; and www.technext24.com).

Further, the 2021 Presidential election in The Gambia was a watershed in the sense that it was seen as a defining moment for the consolidation of democracy in the country having been under military rule under Yahya Jammeh, who took over power in a coup in July, 1994, later transmuted into a civilian president and was forced to step down in January, 2017, after he lost the Presidential election in 2016. In the 2016 presidential elections, Adama Barrow, who is currently the President of The Gambia, defeated the incumbent Yahya Jammeh who had been in power for 22 years. Jammeh initially conceded defeat but later refused to step down, which resulted in a constitutional crisis. Barrow eventually took over power under ECOWAS intervention, with Jammeh fleeing to Equatorial Guinea where he remains in exile till date. Barrow had been a member of the United Democratic Party (UDP) and ran in 2016 as the presidential candidate of Coalition 2016; a collection of opposition groups seeking to unseat Jammeh.

However, it was on the platform of the National People's Party (NPP) that Barrow ran for the 2021 Presidential election and won. Out of the 18 registered political parties in The Gambia, only six eventually contested the Presidential poll. Constitutionally, for somebody to be declared the winner, he/she must have the majority of the votes cast. So Barrow's NPP garnered 457,519, amounting to 53.23%; Darboe's UDP got 238,203 votes (27.72%); Mama Kandeh's Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC) secured 105,902 votes (12.32%); Halifah Sallah's People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS), got 32,436 votes (3.77%); Essa Faal, an Independent candidate, scored 17,206 votes (2.00%); while Abdoulie Ebrima Jammeh, of the National Union Party (NUP), got 8, 252 (0.96%). On December 5, 2021, President Barrow was declared by the Gambian Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), as the winner of the election. (www.reuters.com; www.bbc.com; and www.ifes.org).

It is instructive to note however, that during the campaign for the 2021 Presidential election in The Gambia, the social media ecology was agog, but not without misinformation and disinformation. The Gambians in the Diaspora were very active in mobilizing their relatives and friends back home to support their respective candidates. Facebook and WhatsApp were used mostly, and these two platforms were equally found culpable in being used to peddle fake news and hate speech (www.unesco.org; www.wanep.org; www.wfd.org).

The **2023 Presidential election in Nigeria** which was held on February 25, 2023, will go down in history as not only one of the most hotly-contested, but also as one election that has been perceived by both domestic and international observers as the worst in Nigeria's history since the return of democracy in 1999. Out of the 18 political parties that contested in that election, only three were seen as strong contenders, with one tagging along. The three leading candidates, their political parties and the results are as follows: Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) scored 8,794,726 votes, representing 36.1%; Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), got 6,984,520 votes (29.07%), while Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), garnered 6,101,533 votes (25.40%). The forth candidate, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), secured 1,496,687 votes 6.23% (www.premiumtimes.com; and www.vanguardngr.com).

During the campaign for the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria, the social media ecology was equally as charged and vibrant as the offline campaign. The respective political parties and their candidates left nothing to chance in their deployment of the social media for mobilisation. The focus of this research therefore is to compare how the social media were used in political mobilisation during the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria respectively.

Statement of the Problem
In the times past, before the digital revolution, especially the evolution of the social media, political mobilisation was done through the

conventional media and through rallies. Opposition political parties were often not given equal airtime on state-owned broadcast stations, as the party in power, in spite of the provisions of the code of conduct of broadcasting outlined by the Public Utilities Regulation Authority (PURA) of The Gambia, and The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria. So political mobilisation strategies, according to Sinha (2021), involved campaign rallies, town-hall meetings, door-to-door campaign, and press briefings, among others. These strategies are still being used today. However, with the emergence of digital technologies, and their democratised nature, have the social media become a game-changer in political mobilisation; to what extent do the people use the social media in political mobilisation, and what is the extent of their influence in the campaign process. This research will attempt to unravel the problem with respect to the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study
The broad objective of this research is to evaluate on comparative basis, the use of the social media in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria, but specifically, it is to:
1.	Determine the extent of use of the social media in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria.
2.	Ascertain the social media platforms used most in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria.
3.	Find out the extent of influence of the social media in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria.

Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:
1.	What was the extent of use of the social media in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria?
2.	What were the social media platforms used most in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria?

3.	What is the extent of influence of the social media in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria?

Literature Review
Electoral democracy is not just about the right of the people to vote and be voted for, but also about how to educate, sensitise, and mobilise the people to make the democratic process more participatory (Amat, Boix, Munoz, and Rodon, 2016). One of the hallmarks of a good electoral process is the predictability of the process, and the unpredictability of the outcome. In other words, the process that leads to the eventual casting of the ballot should not only be transparent, but should be clearly-seen to be so, while the outcome of an election, in spite of opinion polls, should be unpredictable. But with the emergence of the social media as veritable platforms of civic engagement and mobilisation by political parties and their candidates, adopting offline political campaign strategies alone could detract from the chances of such political parties, because a majority of the voters now are the youth, as exemplified by The Gambia and Nigeria.

In a study by Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, and Bimber (2020), they argue that the social media have more positive effects on political mobilisation than the traditional approach. Skoric, Zhu, Goh and Pang (2016), as well as Boulianne (2019), in a meta-analyses, assert that in a democratic society that has a free press, the social media have certain effects on political participation, ranging from being platforms for newsgathering or information, networking, and expressing political opinion. In a research by Mngusuul (2015), she discovers that a good number of Nigerian youths are spending time on the social media, engaging in socio-political issues that affect the country. Chinedu-Okeke and Obi (2016), note that political campaign in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, using the social media has significant effects on the voters' decision-making and participation in elections in Nigeria.

Further, Kalyango and Adu-Kumi (2013), note that people gain political and social capital from the use of the social media, and that this in turn helps them to mobilise for a political cause and also contribute to issues of governance. Kasenally and Awatar (2017), underscore the

place of the social media in politics by noting that during the 2015 Presidential election Nigeria, from March 18-April 22, 13.6 million tweets were posted by 1.38 million unique users; that Twitter was found to be ten times more active than before the election period; and also that 12.4 million tweets were generated on the election day alone. Jonjua and Kashyap (2020), in their study, discovered that 75% of the youths, within the age-range of 18-25 use the social media more in discussing political matters, with some, spending more than four hours at a time; and that a great majority of the respondents use the social media for political communication. In a study by Tamba (2021), on the influence of the social media on political participation in The Gambia, the author notes that the respondents take offline political engagements more serious than that of the social media; and that social media political campaign do not influence their voting choices.

Specifically on Twitter as tool for social mobilisation, Ott (2017), argues that the microblogging platform is now increasingly performing the agenda-setting function, once dominated by television, during politics, and that TV now follows the lead of Twitter. He argues further that Twitter, by its narrative and interactive structure, facilitates communication among its users, especially because it is characterised by simplicity in the creation of content. Perez-Martinez, Gonzalez, and Gracia (2017), agree with Ott's views. On WhatsApp and political participation, Sumartono (2017), as well as Gil-de-Zuniga, Ardevol-Abreu, and Casero-Ripolles (2021), assert that this social media platform has been found useful among groups. One noticeable gap in the literature reviewed so far is that there is no comparative study on the social media and political mobilisation with respect to elections in the West African sub-region. This research will make a modest contribution in that regard.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and the Cognitive Mobilisation Theory. TAM was developed by Fred Davis and Richard Bagozzi in 1989 as an extension of Ajzen and Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action. The theory believes that when users are presented with a new technology, there are some factors that determine the decision on how and when to use such technology. These factors are: Perceived Usefulness (PU), which means the extent to which a person believes that using a particular technology would enhance his or her job performance; and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), which means the degree to which a person using a new technology believes that using it will be without stress. It follows therefore that the open, democratic, and flexible architecture of the social media, has made them the platform of choice among the youths especially, when it comes to socio-political mobilisation.

The Cognitive Mobilisation Theory on the other hand, is traced to the work of Ron Inglehart and also that of Russell Dalton. According to Inglehart (1970), cognitive mobilisation theory describes a broader process of the increasingly wide distribution of the political skills necessary to cope with an extensive political community. The theory believes that the spread of formal education among the people and the simultaneous increase in new forms of the media leads to the acquisition of new political values, new attitudes, and changes in political behavior. Dalton (1984), has also contributed to this theory. So the level of education of a people, in addition to their exposure to any form of new media, like the social media, will definitely lead to a change in their political attitudes, behaviour and values, that is why they see the social media as platforms of political engagements and mobilisation.

Methodology

The study used survey, which according to Ha, Fang, Henize, Park, Stana, and Zhang (2015) is one of the most commonly used research designs in mass communication. The purpose of survey is to collect a large quantity of data from a sample of respondents that are generalisable to the population. The population of the study consisted of 382,096 from the Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC), which was the area of the study in The Gambia, and 2,100,809 (www.worldpopulationreview.com) from Port-Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State. According to The Gambian Bureau of Statistics (2013), KMC is the most cosmopolitan part of the country, and has over 20% of The Gambian population. So the total population of the study areas in The Gambia and Nigeria was 2,482,905.

Following the above, the sample size was 384, based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, which states that

when the population is 1000,000 and above, the sample size should be 384

Employing proportional distribution of questionnaire, which is usually on the logic of the larger the population, the larger the sample size, 100 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents in KMC, while 284 copies were distributed to the respondents in Port-Harcourt. Further, the sampling technique used in KMC was purposive; while the sampling techniques adopted in Port-Harcourt were cluster and simple random. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire, while the techniques of data analysis were frequency tables, percentages, and charts.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 384 copies (284 for the respondents in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria, and 100 for the respondents in KMC, The Gambia), 272 copies from the Port-Harcourt respondents, representing 95.8% were returned, while 89 copies, representing 89% from the respondents in KMC were returned. However, the sex, age-range, and level of education of the respondents in KMC, The Gambia are presented in the below:

Table 1: Demographic Data of The Gambian Respondents

Items	Respondents	Percentage
Sex		
Male	49	55%
Female	40	45%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Age-range		
18-22	32	36%
23-27	27	30%
28-32	20	23%
33 & above	10	11%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Education		
Undergraduate	47	52.8%
BA/B.Sc	37	41.6%
MA/M.Sc	05	5.6%
PhD	Nil	Nil
Total	**100**	**100%**

From Table 1 above, the male respondents are more than the female. This tends to reflect the distribution of the population of KMC by gender. According to The Gambian National Population and Housing Census Provisional Report (2013), the percentage of the population of men in KMC is 50.3%, while that of women is 49.7%. For the age-range, this attests to the fact that the youth constitute a majority of the population in KMC in particular, and The Gambia in general. According to the National Youth Policy of The Gambia (2019), 31.0% of the youths are within the age-range of 15-19; 26.6% (20-24 years); and 23.1% (25-29 years). Concerning the educational status of the respondents, a majority of the respondents are undergraduates, followed by first degree holders. This is understandable because the country has one state-owned university, which is The University of The Gambia, which was established in 1999. Juxtaposing this with Nigeria that had her first university in 1948, and today has 170 universities as of 2023, will bring to the fore why The Gambians with postgraduate degree are quite few

Table 2: Demographic Data of Nigerian Respondents

Items	Respondents	Percentage
Sex		
Male	154	56.6%
Female	118	43.4%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Age-range		
18-22	103	37.9%
23-27	97	35.7%
28-32	70	25.7%
33 & above	2	0.7%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Education		
Undergraduate	147	54.04%
BA/B.Sc	101	37.13%
MA/M.Sc	22	8.09%
PhD	2	0.74%
Total	**100**	**100%**

From Table 2 above, the male respondents are clearly more than the female; but this does not reflect the true picture of the gender distribution of Port-Harcourt residents. As of April 2023, the men had 33.35% of the population, while the women had 66.65% (www.bdeex.com). For the age-range, the youths between the age-range of 18-32 are more in number, justifying the findings of the Rivers State Youth Policy (2020). Concerning level of education, this reflects in the fact that River State has two universities; a federal university, two polytechnics, a school of nursing/health technology, and two private universities. So a good of number of the youths are either undergraduates or graduates, some holding postgraduate degrees.

Research Question 1: What was the extent of use of the social media in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria?

The above research question was based on the premise that the respondents were already social media-savvy, and so what was pertinent was to measure their degree of usage in the respective country's Presidential election. It is important to note that all the respondents, both The Gambians and Nigerians said they took keen interests in the elections including those in The Gambia who were not up to the mandatory 18 years of voting in 2021. However, the respondents were asked first, how long they have been using the social media. Below are their responses:

Chart 1: The Number of Years of Using the Social Media by The Gambian Respondents

■ 1-3 years   ■ 4-6 years   ■ 7 years & above   ■
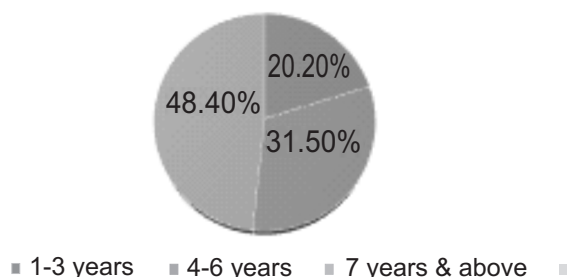
From Chart 1 above, a great number of the respondents have used the social media for seven years and above. These were the people who were already on the social media during the 2016 Presidential election in The Gambia when these digital platforms started to gain traction. So during the 2021 Presidential election, some of them were already influencers.

Chart 2: The Number of Years of Using the Social Media by the Nigerian Respondents
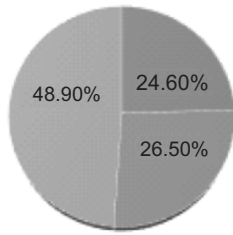
- 1-3 years - 4-6 years - 7 years & above -

From Chart 2 above, it can be gleaned that a majority of the respondents have been using the social media for seven years and above. It will be quite apposite to state that some of them were active in the electoral process during the 2015 and 2019 Presidential elections in Nigeria.
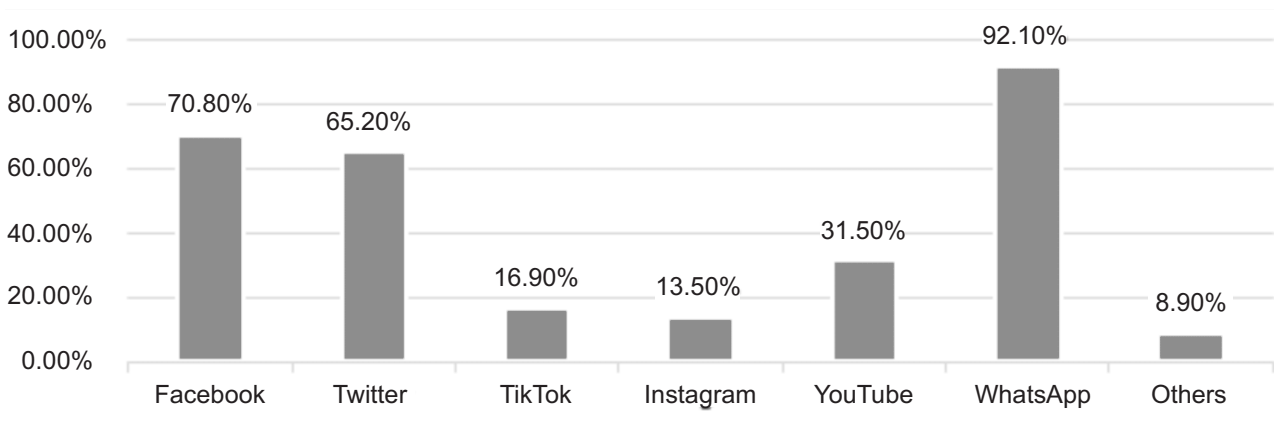
Chart 3: Frequency of Using the Social Media during the 2021 Presidential Election by The Gambian Respondents
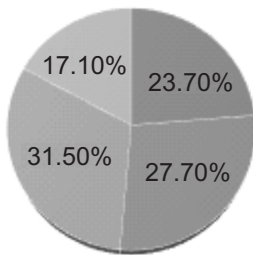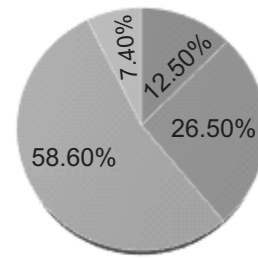

- 1-3 hours daily - 4-6 hours daily - 7 hours & above daily - I don't know

Because of the kind of passion that was attached to the 2021 Presidential election in The Gambia in 2021, it is therefore not surprising a majority of the respondents spent an average of 7 hours and

above daily on the social media; some respondents could not even put a figure to the hours spent on the social media daily.

- 1-3 hours daily - 4-6 hours daily - 7 hours & above daily - I don't know

From Chart 4 above, a majority of the respondents spent an average of 7 hours and above daily on the social media during the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria. Never in the political history of Nigeria has any election caused so much frenzy that predicting who would win became difficult, especially with the emergence of a formidable third force- the "Obidient Movement". The social media became a hotly-contested space as well as a battleground in the election.

Research Question 2: What were the social media platforms used most in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria?

This research question demanded from the respondents to mention in the order of frequent usage, the social media platforms used the most during the respective election. It follows therefore that they were given the latitude to choose more than one option, if applicable. Below are their responses:

Chart 5: The Social Media Platforms Used the Most during the 2021 Presidential Election by the Gambian Respondents

From Chart 5 above, the architecture, algorithms, flexibility, and user-friendly nature of the respective social media platforms possibly informed their frequent usage during the election. Even if Facebook has the highest number of users worldwide, WhatsApp that was acquired by Meta, was used more in political mobilisation.

Chart 6: The Social Media Platforms Used the Most during the 2023 Presidential Election by the Nigerian Respondents
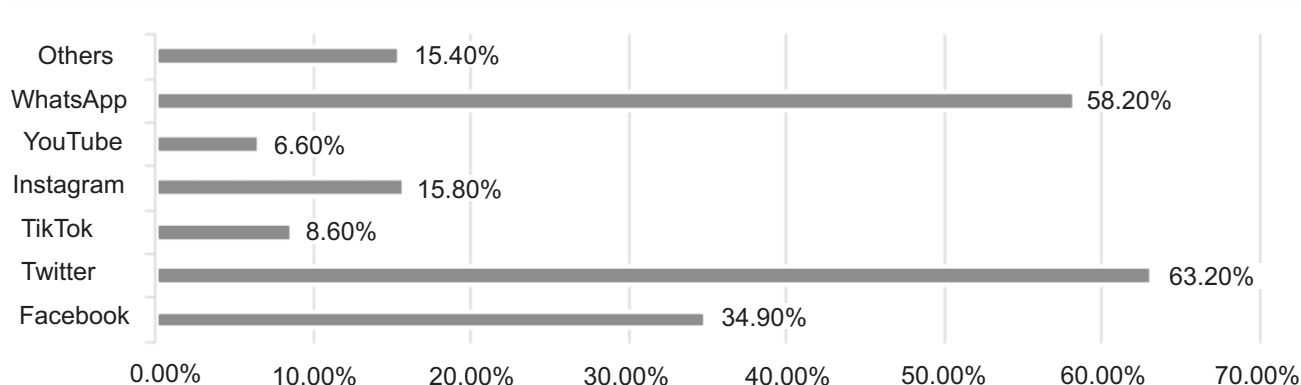
Although, the number of WhatsApp users in Nigeria is by far higher than those who use Twitter, more respondents used the latter the most than the former during the Presidential election. One major reason could be that WhatsApp is restricted to contacts of the user as well as the groups he/she belong to; but Twitter is more open. Even non-followers of a Twitter account can still get political messages. It is also the most popular platform for breaking news even by the media.

Research Question 3: What is the extent of influence of the social media in political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria?
This research question sought to determine if social media platforms had influence in political mobilisation during the respective election, and the extent of such. Their responses are presented below:

Table 3: Respondents Views on If the Social Media Were Effective in Political Mobilisation During The 2021 and 2023 Presidential Elections Respectively

Items	Frequency	Percentage
The Gambian Respondents		
Yes	47	52.8%
No	28	31.5%
I don't know	14	15.7%
	100	**100%**
Nigerian Respondents		
Yes	147	54%
No	98	36%
I don't know	27	10%
	100	**100%**

From Table 3 above, it is glaring that the influence of the social media in politics, especially in political mobilisation can no longer be taken for granted. A majority of both The Gambian and Nigerian respondents have answered in the affirmative. In Nigeria for instance, the "Obidient Movement" were initially dismissed as a bunch of social media mobs and trolls who did not know that polling units were not on the social media. But the outcome of the election proved that online mobilisation can translate to a positive offline gain. In The Gambia, the major opposition party- the UDP, especially those in the Diaspora, used the social media more in mobilisation for support.

For the respondents who answered in the affirmative that the social media were influential in political mobilisation in the respective election, their views were further sought in respect to the extent of such influence. For the sake of clarity and measurement, their responses are interpreted as follows: (a) A large extent refers to active social media campaign for one's candidate and political party including voting; (b) Some extent refers to moderate social media campaign including voting; while (c) Little extent means expressing sympathy and support on the social media without voting. Their responses are presented below:

Table 4: Respondents Views on the Extent of Social Media Influence in Political Mobilisation during the 2021 and 2023 Presidential Elections Respectively

Items	Frequency	Percentage
The Gambian Respondents		
A large extent	27	57.5%
Some extent	14	29.8%
Little extent	06	12.7%
	100	**100%**
Nigerian Respondents		
A large extent	83	56.5%
Some extent	55	37.4%
Little extent	09	6.1%
	100	**100%**

From the views of respondents in Table 4 above who stated that the use of the social media in political mobilisation has influence, it has now become clear the electorate, most of whom are youths, leverage on the social media not only to participate in politics, but also to influence the outcome of elections.

Discussion of Findings

The imperative of this research was hinged on the fact that digital technologies have engendered holistic ramifications in virtually all spheres of human endeavour. In the area of politics, the social media in particular have redefined the strategies of political engagements, making candidates and political parties to maintain presence on various social media platforms. To this end, findings from the research show that a majority of both The Gambian and Nigerian respondents spent seven hours and above daily on the social media during the respective Presidential election, and that a majority of them were below 30 years, justifying the work of Kashyap and Jonjua (2020), who found similar correlation in their research in New Delhi, India. The obvious fact that the respondents are either graduates or postgraduates, lend credence to the Cognitive Mobilisation Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model, in the sense that their level of education predisposes them to their exposure to new forms of media, making them to find it convenient and easier to use for political education, information, and mobilisation.

Concerning the number of years spent as a social media user, while a majority of The Gambian respondents have spent between 4-6 years, the Nigerian respondents have spent seven years and above. On this point, the research of Tamba (2021), justifies the findings from The Gambian respondents, while the work of Mngusuul (2015), justifies the finding from the Nigerian respondents. Although Facebook is quite popular among The Gambians, with over 306,000 of them using the platform as of March, 2023 (Kemp, 2023), in the 2021 Presidential election, WhatsApp was the most-widely used platform, followed by Facebook, and Twitter, corroborating the work of, Sumartias (2017), Gil-de-Zuniga, Ardevol-Abreu, and Casero-Ripolles (2021), as well as Westminster Foundation of Democracy (2021), who found WhatsApp to be the most-widely used platform in politics in their studies. Findings on this point from the Nigerian respondents indicate that Twitter was used more

in political mobilisation during the 2023 Presidential election, followed by WhatsApp. This is in spite of the fact over 90 million Nigerians use WhatsApp, while over 4.95 million Nigerians use Twitter (www.clickatell.com; and Kemp, 2023). This justifies the work of Perez-Martinez, Gonzalez, and Gracia (2017), as well as Ott (2017).

Concerning if social media political mobilisation has influence during elections as well as the extent of influence, the views of The Gambian respondents tend to disagree with the findings of Tamba (2021), who discovered that respondents in her study said they viewed offline political campaign more serious than that of the social media; and that social media political campaign did not influence their voting choices. But the findings from the Nigerian electorate on this point, corroborates the views of Bartlett, Krasodomski-Jones, Gondyi, Fisher, and Jesperson (2015), as well as Kasenally and Awatar (2017), who found considerable empirical evidence that social media political mobilisation can influence the voters in Nigeria. Even the Minister of Aviation in the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, Hadi Sirika, said that with the performance of Peter Obi in the 2023 Presidential elections, it shows that there were ballot boxes on Twitter (Silas, 2023), while Labaran Maku, the Minister of Information during the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan, also said that Peter Obi's performance showed that there was actually political structure on the social media (Egobiambu, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations
There is no disputing the fact that international protests in which the social media played an active part in mobilising the people for social action have also inspired the youths in Africa, especially in The Gambia and Nigeria, to translate that into the arena of partisan politics. For example, the massive protests in Iran against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009, the Red Shirt uprising in Thailand in 2010, the Arab Spring in early 2011, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in 2014, and the Black Lives Matter protests in America in 2020, were all pointers to the power of the social media in socio-political mobilisation. It is against this backdrop that political parties now prepare budgets for social media influencers, as part of their campaign tactics and strategies.

The unfortunate developments as seen both in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in The Gambia and Nigeria, in using the social media for campaign was the bile, fake news (deep fakes, misinformation, and disinformation) and hate speech, that attended the process. But in spite of this, the social media would likely be veritable platforms for political mobilisation for a long time to come. Arising from this research, the following are the recommendations:

1. It is the responsibility of social media users, their candidates, and political parties during elections to exercise self-restraint and engage in fact-checking before posting content. In order words, there should be social media-literacy.

2. Technology giants who provide the social media platforms must take keen interests in African elections by updating their policies on political comments so as to curb fake news and hate speech. Democracy is still fragile in most African countries.

3. Regulators such as PURA, for The Gambia, and the National Communication Commission (NCC), for Nigeria, must devise mechanisms to curb and prosecute those who post and upload fake news and hate speech during elections.

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