

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN GHANA

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MA PUBLIC RELATION (MAPR19027)

**A LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
RESEARCH, GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS (MA) DEGREE IN
PUBLIC RELATIONS**

SEPTEMBER 2020

DECLARATION

I Akosua Gyamfiwaa Mpare, hereby declare that, this submission is my own work towards the award of MA (Public Relations) and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person, nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the Institute, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

.....
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.....
DATE

SUPERVISOR’S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this long essay was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines of supervision laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

.....
DR. LOUISE CAROL SERWAA DONKOR

.....
DATE

DEDICATION

This work is particularly dedicated to my supportive mother, Mrs Charity Mpare, your investment and prayers paid off! It is also dedicated to my dad, Mr Kwame Mpare who never gave up on me throughout my studies, and my wonderful and loving siblings – Abena Adjeiwaa Mpare and Kwame Mpare jnr for motivating and being there for me through the hard times. This study is again dedicated to Richard Ahiagble who made me love Public Relations and to Maame Dufie Cudjoe for her kind words of encouragement through this journey. And to all my friends who in one-way or the other helped me come this far with my work. And above all, this study is graciously dedicated to God Almighty for giving me strength and Guidance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study could not have been possible without the unfailing grace and favour of God Almighty. I appreciate the gift of life, strength and wisdom. I owe the success of this work to the advice, patience, constructive criticism and supervision of my supervisor- Dr. Louise Carol Serwaa Donkor. May the good Lord bless you for making time regardless of your busy schedule to guide and examine this work. Your inputs and advice helped make this a success.

ABSTRACT

This long essay sought to uncover the impact of social media on political communication in Ghana. Social media has increasingly become an important aspect of our everyday lives and it is extremely important to consider the possible impact these tools could have on our political process, including the actions of the politicians. Building on existing literature evolving around social media and communication as well as the use of social media in a general election campaign, this long essay provided an insight to the subject. The research adopted a qualitative approach of which thirty respondents were targeted but only fifteen responded to partake in the interview. The study found that, through information on trending political issues on social media their knowledge to engage in political matters was influenced. Social media served as a channel between the citizens and the government and inform them on what is happening to be able to make decisions when it comes to politics. It served as a source of current affairs issue to focus on and research related stuff. The study found that through videos, hashtags, articles, pictures, posts and links, participants were informed about political matters via social media. Participants believed messages on social media influenced non-political actors and still remain relevant when election was over. The study was limited considering a Ghanaian population of close to thirty million people and using a participant size of fifteen cannot be used as basis for generalizations. Moreover, the views of gathered can be applied to a Ghanaian context and may not be applicable in another country or region

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This section discusses the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the research and research limitations.

1.1 Background of the study

The internet has made new technologies available to organizations in terms of reaching a large audience and such platform is social media. (Ehikwe, 2015). The most remarkable changes are the breakthroughs in information technology and social media.

Today, the use of social media is not only changing whole sectors of society, it also offers numerous possibilities for modern, meaningful and equal participation and deliberation, as well as chances for new forms of transparency and accountability, in ways and on a scale that was until recently unheard of (Gyampo, 2017). Social media driven campaigning political organizations appear more attractive to citizens at the expense of traditional party political activism (Murthy, 2013)

The world has evolved drastically as a result of the emergence of the social media communication (Wang, Chen, & Liang, 2011). The obstacles to communication have been eliminated by decentralizing communication in such a manner that nearly everyone can express themselves and engage in other things impacting them in society. (Amedie, 2015)

This plays a major part in transforming people's lives in society (Siddiqui and Singh, 2016). In modern years, social media has been an important part of popular debate and collaboration in contemporary society (Victor, Ikechukwu, Gerald, & Chinedum, 2017)

The exponential growth of social media has contributed to significant shifts in the way people identify clusters of individuals with common values, the quality of the content, the news outlets available, or the opportunity to demand and exchange ideas (Stieglitz & Xuan, 2012). It has had a significant influence on sectors such as advertisement, public affairs, marketing and political discourse. (Husain, et al., 2014).

More recently, the role of social media has been especially emphasized in elections, provided that the use of social networking platforms (Facebook) and micro blogging services (Twitter) is perceived to have the ability to have a significant effect on political engagement (Stieglitz & Xuan, 2012).

The use of social media channels is an important tool in political engagement strategies to achieve success and promote contact between political parties / candidates and supporters, and much of the time to show the positive face of political candidates. (Austin, 2008).

In many parts of the world, people have found alternative ways to participate in politics through online petitioning and action groups rather than through political parties (Aichmer & Jacob, 2015) This may appear to be a phenomenon that is mainly common in the developed world.

The pace at which information technology penetrates southern countries, means that this is a fact that will soon become the rule rather than an anomaly, even in Africa and Ghana, in that regard. Particularly in the wake of Arab Spring, one can note several commentators and opinion makers suggesting that social media or digital technologies can play enormous role in shaping the activities of political parties as well as help advance democratic participation in countries that believes in the tenets of democracy like Ghana.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Social media has acted as a sophisticated medium for contemporary human contact and is now part of the popular community of most democratic nations across the globe, including Ghana. The use of social media is one of the most dominant forms of communication between politicians and the electorate; and it is being massively and strategically exploited by politicians around the globe to achieve their goal of projecting positive images, retaining offices, and maintaining relationships with their audiences. Social media (Internet, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SMS, E-mail, YouTube) have proven helpful in promoting the sharing of information between political parties and voters; it allows people to be aware and affect their voting decisions, perceptions, opinions and actions against other political candidates (Victor, Ikechukwu, Gerald, & Chinedum, 2017)

Incidentally, in Ghana, the day-to-day use of social media by politicians and the way the user-citizen communicates with the social networking sites / pages of politicians have gained far less coverage (Gyampo, 2017). In fact, policymakers want the communication to be constructive and advantageous to them, such that political gladiators of various types of views, beliefs, motives and ambitions use the media under the expectation that political discourse with them will inflict control or impact on people's attitudes and behaviors.

This interpretation of the influence of social media is analogous to the historical and societal supremacy of print and online media and the assumed hypodermic / needle influence of mass media communications. In view of the supposed influence of the media, whether from a 'maximalist' or 'minimalist' viewpoint, the profit-driven mindset of competition for political space has given rise to both ethical and unethical political discourse using all available channels of interpersonal and mass communication.

However, there is a significant need for better political knowledge, awareness and enlightenment, by appropriate and effective / efficient social media, controlled by relevant practitioners with a strict commitment to their professional ethics and codes of conduct, rich in practice. Public campaigns will be focused on reality and accurate facts that will make it easier for the public to make a smarter and informed judgment that will help get the best people into politics.

It is because many believe the development of a nation is not just about the performance of successful elections, but also about the approval of a suitable leader and party with strong ideologies and programs to rule the people. If this needful is not taken into cognizance and made the norm, there is no doubt of experiencing desperate political contenders that will manifest with bad governance, thereby, leading to social and economic infrastructural neglect and security of lives and property.

1.3 Research Objectives

The central objective of the research is to examine the impact of social media impact on political communication in Ghana. The specific objectives are to;

1. To identify how social media influences public knowledge and action on political matters.
2. To determine the extent to which political message dissemination on social media influence young voters.
3. To determine the extent to which political message can influence non- political citizens on social media.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions;

1. How does social media influence public knowledge and action on political matters?
2. How does political message dissemination on social media influence young voters?
3. What extent does political message influence non-political citizens on social media?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Firstly, this study will be of great benefit to Ghanaian politicians and prospective politicians as it would unravel the importance of using social media tools to achieve success in during and after elections, helping project images of infrastructure development and creating awareness especially among the younger generations.

Secondly, this study will be relevant to political managers and media consultants of political candidates as well as campaign managers as it will help them to know and appreciate the gains and efficacy of using social media tools and how best to handle it for projecting the image of their clients and increasing awareness of the political candidates.

Finally, this study will be of great benefit to researchers and other seekers of knowledge in this wide field of learning, as it will contribute to the existing literature on usefulness of social media in politics.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study will be limited to Ghanaian citizens both political and non-political citizens based in Accra and members of political parties. This is because of proximity and convenience in gathering data from sample size to be used. A sample size of thirty respondents will be chosen for simplicity of information gathering and limited constraints in relation to project deadline.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The chapter outline of the long essay is as follows:

The chapter one consists of research background, research problem, objectives of the study, research questions, research significance and limitation of the research. The chapter two will reviewed literature on social media as tool of communication and analyse a chosen conceptual framework. The Chapter three will cover methodology which consist of the population from which the research is organized, sampling techniques and sample size, data collection instrument method, data processing and mode of analysis. The last chapter comprise of the conclusion. The references and appendices follow after this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on social media as tool of communication and provides a theoretical framework as basis to explain further.

2.1 Concept of Social Media

Social networking is a network of electronic communication platforms devoted to community-based feedback, engagement, content sharing and collaboration (Victor, Ikechukwu, Gerald, & Chinedum, EFFECTS OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE MARKETING OF POLITICAL CANDIDATES IN NIGERIA, 2017). Websites and apps for blogs, micro blogging, social networking, web bookmarking, web curation, and wikis are among the various forms of social media.

Social networking can be defined as a series of web-based applications that expand the political and technological framework of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and distribution of user-generated content. (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013). One of the most fascinating aspects of social media is the word "user-generated content," which refers to various types of online content that are freely accessible and created by end-users. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Therefore, people use social media not only to consume online information, but also to produce unique content themselves, transforming from content “consumers” to content “producers” (Gil, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014).

A majority of Americans use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube but young adults are especially heavy users of Snapchat and Instagram (Smith & Anderson, 2018). More than three-quarters of

sub-Saharan Africans who go online also use social media sites (Silver & Johnson, 2018). As with internet use, social media use is much more common among younger people, higher earners and those with more education.

Facebook is a social networking site founded in 2004, by Mark Zuckerberg, with the purpose of being used by Harvard students. Rapidly, it gained worldwide popularity, and today Facebook represents the most used social networking site, with over 1 billion users worldwide (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Twitter is a micro blogging platform that enables users to read and send short text-messages, keeping its service simple, by limiting the length of the updates to 250 characters. Compared to the more private environment provided by Facebook, most messages on Twitter are public and searchable, as the main feature of Twitter is the hashtag, which allows content organization by categorizing information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

2.1.1 Social Media as Tool for Communication for Political Campaigns

Social media provides a number of ways in which elected parties can interact with voters. In reality, social media is considered to have been extensively used by politicians either to increase awareness or to make people see it as open and trustworthy. (Austin, 2008).

In the past 30 years, the form of connectivity has experienced a major transition and is still evolving. Facebook has had a huge impact on how people stay in contact. In modern years, leaders have used this tool to reach out to their constituents, generating views that they feel would be beneficial to them. Using emails, communications are shorter and more frequent than when letters were standard and response time was significantly reduced. Instant Messaging has created another form of contact, one where the length of messages is shorter and the type of contact becomes more conversational (Goldstein & Freedman, 2002)

Broadcast technology like Twitter, turn these brief bursts of contact from one-on-one conversations to small news (or trivia) programs: where we can tune in anytime we want an update or have something to say. Online communication devices also have the ability to increase our understanding of the progress of our professional or social connections. Twitter, for example, gives us an insight on things people we meet tend to do at a certain moment of time.

According to Pennington et al (2015), in recent times the worldwide use of social media for political activities has increased considerably, especially among young adults. The ability that social media uses give them for political intelligence, producing user-generated content and sharing their political views is of interest for this particular age group. For consumers and policymakers alike to find answers to the increasing political use of social media, researchers continue to study the impact of social media on political activities such as political effectiveness, political literacy and political engagement.

Ghana's 2012 and 2016 multiparty democratic elections were fiercely contested on social media (Dzisah, 2018). In Ghana, the resort to social media by supporters of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC), who continuously engaged in political campaigns, on Facebook and Twitter, even when official campaign activities had ended, explains the utmost importance they attach to social media.

The issue that emerges then is whether the use of social media by the appropriate political actors has an effect on users' political effectiveness, political literacy and eventually political engagement in general. Scholars involved in political messaging and electoral campaigns who examined the impact of social media use on political participation found who social media and

the Internet are likely to encourage political participation ((Bucy & Gregson, 2001; Corrado, 1996; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Shah et al., 2005; Whillock, 1997).

However, some studies have shown that the use of social media is effective and has enhanced conventional offline participation, including voting (Bakker & Vreese, 2011), donations and fundraising (Vitak, et al., 2011). Other researchers have noted, however, that the use of social media is in no way related to higher rates of political participation (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Davis & Owen, 1998; Margolis & Resnick, 2000).

Statistics show that younger generations are less interested in voting, contributing money, volunteering or protesting than older people by conventional measures (Bauerlein, 2008; Mindich, 2005). Despite the rapid growth of the internet, inadequate attention has been paid to how young adults participate in politics because of their use of social media (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010)

Is the usage of social media channels bombarding them with political resources that ultimately help them gain political influence and awareness, and actively engage consciously or unconsciously in politics? The problem raised becomes relevant as young people who are usually considered not to be interested in politics now have the ability to be exposed in their comfort zones and to participate in politically related topics on social media (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

This study is therefore to examine the extent of the possible relationship and impact of political communication on the Ghanaian young voters' political efficacy, political knowledge and political participation.

2.1.2 Social Media and Political Engagement in Africa

In recent years Africa has seen the world's highest internet penetration growth rates. This means that we should expect social media to play an increasingly prominent role in politics and security on the continent.

Social media has now become a more popular means of communication than the traditional print and electronic media in recent times (Smith & Anderson, 2018). The spate of users of social media could partly be attributed to the ease and convenience in using them.

Political leaders often view social media as a threat because it can provide the public with greater access to information. It also has the potential to mobilise and challenge leadership (Daley, 2019). Some authors found ways in which digital platforms were creatively used to expand political participation.

But many authors found the opposite to be the case. In researching cases in Kenya, Diepeveen and Patel (2016) demonstrated how social media contributed to reinforcing existing power structures and dominant narratives. Similarly, a study by Falisse and Nkengurutse (2019) found that public political discussions on Facebook and Twitter in Burundi generally didn't include ordinary citizens. Instead, they were dominated by a small number of elites who acted as brokers.

WhatsApp was an especially important avenue for smaller political parties and new voters in Sierra Leone (Hitchen, 2018). Furthermore, studies by Riley (2019) and Orji (2014) show that civil societies in Senegal and Nigeria use social media in the hope of adding transparency to the electoral process. Orji (2014) cautions that the absence of a strategy to address misinformation can incite election-related violence.

In addition, many government attempts to limit social media occurred during election periods or at unanticipated moments of instability. This happened in Ethiopia during the internet shutdown following the “coup attempt” in June 2019 (Daley, 2019). Other states have taken more sustained measures to curtail the use of digital platforms. Tanzania, for instance, outlaws the spreading of “false” information under its Cybercrimes Act.

2.1.3 Social Media Usage in Political Communication in Ghana

In Ghana, the use of Facebook and WhatsApp are the two most dominant mechanisms of social media common, essentially among the elites of the society (Gyampo, 2017). The leadership of the main political parties over the last decade has touted the uses and importance of social media to the growth and development of political parties in Ghana. In their view, the use of social media makes their respective parties attractive to the youth who are majority users of social media in Ghana and constitute over sixty percent of the voting population (Asiedu-Nketiah, 2016), as well as the floating or undecided voters who constitute between five to ten percent of the voting population (Boadu, 2016).

If the youth constitute the majority of Ghana’s voting population and are also the dominant users of social media, then it makes sense for political parties to target them on social media. Political parties’ leaders believe that, social media enables them to utilize the resources at their disposal more effectively at great speed and to a larger audience at lower cost. It also alters the rigid internal party systems by allowing a bottom-up decision making process.

Generally, the political parties in Ghana have used social media for the purposes of;

1. Communicating their respective party policies and positions on key socio-economic and governance issues;

2. Discussing and soliciting the voice of people on key and current issues;
3. Mobilizing support and membership for the parties; and
4. Raising funds.

The use of social media for the above purposes by political parties in Ghana is indeed innovative. Prior to social media, political parties in Ghana, like their counterparts elsewhere, relied solely on the traditional communication channels to reach out to their constituents and “would-be-voters/supporters”. These channels include campaign rallies, community broadcasts with information vans, house-to-house/door-to-door campaigns with the help of party foot-soldiers, radio and television advertisement and announcements and recently, through presidential debates and town hall meetings (Asante, 2006)

2.1.4 Electoral Campaigns and Social Media Across the World

Enli and Skogerbø (2013) look at the ways politicians use social media in Norway. The findings of their study suggest three main motives for using social media during an election campaign: marketing, mobilisation and dialogue. The first motive, around marketing, was to highlight their candidacies as well as the positions of their parties in the public sphere. However, on politicians’ personal accounts, this marketing becomes more personal as they keep followers updated on their lives as well as on politics (Enli & Skogerbø , 2013).

Mobilisation refers to the use of social media to encourage followers to take part in something, usually to attend rallies, meetings, and to persuade people to vote for them (Enli & Skogerbø , 2013). Lastly, in terms of dialogue, social media presented an opportunity to connect and engage with voters in discussion, as well as receive feedback on political issues (Enli & Skogerbø ,

2013). However, it really depended on the politician as to what degree of dialogue, if any, they would engage in.

Graham et al. (2013) expand on the notion of broadcasting messages vs interaction with voters, focusing on the 2010 UK general election campaign. They described Twitter as a “core communication tool” throughout the general election. The authors see social media as having the potential to increase interest in participation and for politicians to build a more meaningful connection with citizens. They base this argument on the concept of ‘direct representation’, developed by Coleman (2005). There are three essential conditions for direct representation: first, two-way communication between representatives and citizen; second, “this conversation has to be of an on-going and permanent nature”; and third, politicians should regularly hold themselves accountable, not only when challenged, but instead by “regularly justifying their decisions to the public” (Graham et al., 2013).

Social media provides the means of fulfilling all three of these conditions. However, the authors state that politicians often use sites like Twitter as a means of broadcasting their message, rather than for interaction. Their findings suggest that social media has provided a toolkit of political communication with an invaluable add-on to establish on-going communication. Most of the campaigning carried out online reflected the kind of campaigning that is carried out offline (Graham et al., 2013).

However, even if politicians were using Twitter primarily as a means of broadcasting messages, this platform still gives a greater degree of autonomy over what those messages say. Therefore, the communication and broadcasting aspect of social media as a means of allowing politicians to broadcast their views rather than as a tool for interaction.

Brun and Highfield (2013) discuss the use of social media during election campaigns in Australia, speculating that a growth in social media use across Australia is more than likely to result in social media becoming present in political campaigns. They note the way social media is often used by traditional media outlets, as Twitter has now become a common way to report breaking news in real-time and to garner how people react to these kinds of events (Bruns & Highfield, 2013).

A benefit of more politicians beginning to use social media is the potential to increase the interactions between citizens and politicians, raising the level of participation in public debate, by putting these different voices in the same space (Bruns & Highfield, 2013). However, this does not necessarily mean debate between politicians and citizens will take place - a lot of politicians use websites like Twitter simply as a means of broadcasting messages, rather than a means of engaging with people. It should also be considered whether or not a politician tweets from their own account, or if a member of their staff posts messages on their behalf instead.

Brun and Highfield (2013) also point out that the position of parties is important in how they use social media - “while major parties are essentially guaranteed mainstream media coverage, smaller parties may choose to adopt social media as a key tool for publicising their messages, in order to make up for their more limited mainstream media presence” (Brun and Highfield, 2013).

Christensen (2013) focused on the way minority “third parties” used Twitter during the 2012 US elections, focusing on the Libertarian Party, Green Party, Constitution Party and Justice Party. He makes the point that while Twitter may not be shaping politics in any useful way, by examining what minority parties are tweeting about, and which of these tweets gain the most

attention, it can “shed light upon issues which the mainstream media, and their mainstream political counterparts, tend to miss or wilfully ignore” (Christensen, 2013).

Brun and Highfield (2013) work suggests social media is primarily a broadcasting tool rather than for two-way communication, though they also see the potential of social media for promoting interaction between politicians and the electorate. Christiansen also sees social media as allowing minority parties to broadcast their views and as shedding light on issues, but makes less of an argument for social media as an interactive space.

2.2 Analyzing Political Party Use of Social Media in Ghana.

2.2.1 Communicating Party Policies and Positions on Key Issues

Social media presents an advocacy platform for the communication of party policies with the view to winning support for such policies (Asiedu-Nketiah, 2016). Prior to social media, some political parties experienced severe challenges communicating their policies to the public through the traditional media, particularly the print and electronic ones. This was due to several factors such as frigid relations between the political parties and the traditional media outlets or the fact that some parties were perceived as too small and not capable of winning an election, outdated, and having nothing to offer Ghanaians (Gyampo, 2017).

The National Democratic Congress (NDC) was for instance not properly accepted in the traditional media because of its revolutionary attack on media freedom by its antecedent regime of the Provisional National Defense Council” (Gyampo, 2017). Consequently, the traditional media, prior to social media, had a very lukewarm attitude to publishing and communicating NDC policies to the Ghanaian citizenry. The NDC therefore took to social media as a platform to communicate party policies, manifestoes and achievements to the people (Gyampo, 2017).

Given the vibrant use of social media as a platform for the communication of party policies, the traditional media now uses it as one of its sources for news reportage (Boadu, 2016). To show the seriousness attached to social media by political parties, they have designated people whose mandate is to post party policies, manifestoes and positions on key socio-economic and governance issues on Facebook pages. Such individuals designated by the parties are charged with the responsibility of constantly monitoring how people “like” or express support for the posts on Facebook. Also, the political parties, especially the two main parties, have several WhatsApp platforms that they use for the purposes discussed above. An official of the party is tasked to create this platform and add as many telephone numbers as possible. These essentially are telephone numbers of core party supporters, people regarded as floating or undecided voters and sometimes, people who completely do not belong to the political party that created the platform.

Communicating party policies and positions on key issues to people via social media is however fraught with several setbacks. Many party supporters and undecided voters have derogatory but sometimes deserving perception about party information posted on social media. Over the years, social media has also served as platform for internet fraud, scams, defamation of character, publication of lies, circulation of doctored tape recordings to malign people as well as pornographic materials (Flanigin and Metzger, 2007; Spears et al., 2015).

In this regard, publishing important documents and information such as party policies and positions on social media, is seen by many, especially undecided voters as condescending, sheer propaganda and political gossips that must be discounted. Whereas hard copy documents are deemed acceptable and credible, the same information and documents published on social media are sometimes received with doubt and serious credibility issues are raised to reject them.

Consequently, instead of such publications on social media generating constructive feedbacks from supporters and non-supporters, they sometimes result in insults, unhealthy arguments, less constructive criticisms and dangerous allegations by “faceless people” (people who choose to hide their names and identities on Facebook)

2.2.2 Discussing and Soliciting Voice and Opinion on Key Issues

Social media is also used by political parties to discuss and solicit voice or opinion on key issues affecting the nation. Indeed, social media allows millions of political party supporters and the undecided voters to voice their views on all critical national issues under discussion. This opportunity is lost to such people who cannot all contribute to radio discussions through their “phone-in sessions”.

The massive feedback to issues generated from social media is what governments use to formulate and perfect their policies (Asiedu-Nketiah, 2016; Boadu, 2016). Social media therefore presents a swift mechanism that facilitates the solicitation of opinion of both party supporters and undecided voters on topical issues of national concern.

It must however be noted that often times, the views solicited on social media tend to be overly partisan and emotional sentiments sometimes not backed by logic and critical thinking. Even though occasionally, the views of the very discerning undecided voters come through, such laudable views are often times dwarfed by the emotionally charged and partisan ones which may not necessarily be in the enlightened interest of Ghana (Gyampo, 2017).

2.2.3 Mobilizing Support and Membership for the Parties

It is however instructive to note that young people are normally used by political parties in Ghana as voting-machines (Gyampo, 2012). Therefore, any attempt to mobilize them on social media is geared towards getting them to play active role in campaigning and voting for political parties (Asante, 2006). Over the years, they have played this role in their capacity as foot-soldiers campaigning in rural communities, selling party paraphernalia to raise funds and actually showing up in their numbers at the various polling centres to vote for their respective political parties. On the contrary, the use of social media as a mobilization tool by the political parties does not necessarily translate into voting among the youth as noted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). Young people on social media may be articulate and vociferous in support of their parties but most of them do not simply vote in elections.

People who consume more news on social media have a greater probability of being civically and politically engaged across a variety of measures (Wihbey, 2015). In an era when the public's time and attention is increasingly directed toward platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, scholars have been seeking to evaluate the still-emerging relationship between social media use and politics.

2.3 Social Media, Politics and Young Voters

According to Stranberg (2013), the use of social media especially Facebook and Twitter generate an excessive effect to involve in political activities. Users who ordinarily would not be so much involved in politics are more likely to consciously access political content through social media.

Vitak et al. (2011) posit that there is a positive correlation between the usages of Facebook for political purposes among college students, they further note that the use of Facebook encourages

the gathering of political knowledge and as well improve political efficacy of college students. This claim by Vitak et al. (2011) is alluded by the Pew research center, according to Pew research center, younger social media users are likely to use the platform for civic and political activities than their older counterparts.

They further note that, younger users of social media are most likely to express themselves about political issues on the social media platforms, post links to materials of political nature, encourage others to take political actions, belong to a group involved in politics on social media, follow or is a friend to an elected official on social media, and promote or 'like' materials of political content that have been posted by other social media users.

2.4 Relevant Theories in Political Communication

2.4.1 Cognitive Response Theory

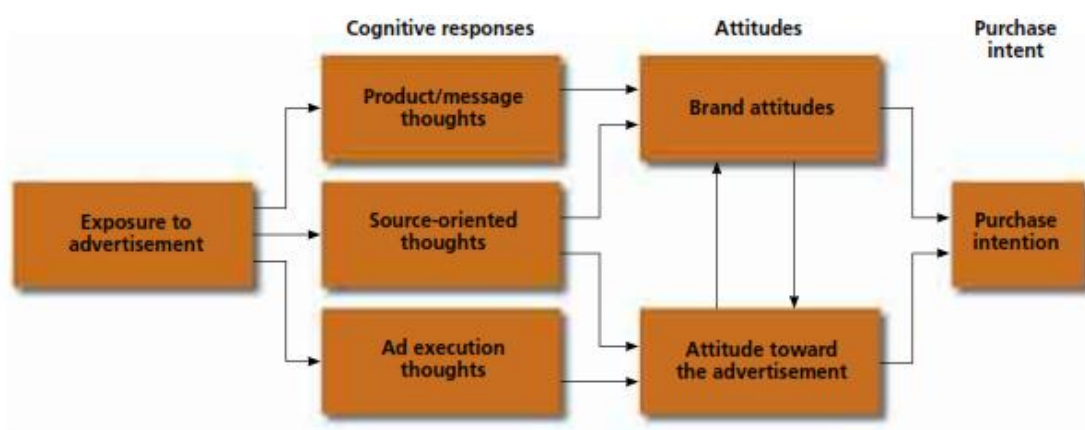
Cognitive Response Theory originated from a variety of experiments and scientific findings that emerged in the 1930's on shifts in behavior. (Eagly & Shelly, 1993). Sections of the behavioral models were mixed up in the late 1970s by Anthony5-007 and termed it "cognitive reaction. The theory aims to explain how people learn and change their mindset and behavior in response to convincing speech. A cognitive response is a 'thought' generated in response to a persuasive communication (Wright, 1981) which thus, triggers an attitude change. The reason the cognitive response influences the mindset after being subjected to compelling communication has to do with the reason the communication receiver manipulates produces and absorbs the content. (Greenwald, 1968).

When people are introduced to knowledge, they link it to pre-existing thoughts they already have on the subject. People are, of course, most likely to be swayed by things they have never spoken

optimistically about. The cognitive response theory attempts to explain the connection between the initial reaction to contact and the shift in attitude that follows. It states that the cognitive response influences the final attitude and therefore may affect the behavior of the patient.

This theory has been adopted in a myriad of existing political advertising research studies (Clinton and Owen, 2006; Goldstein and Freedman, 2002). By building on the work of Hovland (1953) and McGuire (1969), Zaller (1992) argues that yielding to political messages (being persuaded) is a function of not only being exposed to a message but also having the cognitive ability to take in or reject that political message. He claims that it is the interplay between predispositions, reception, and the balance of messages that determines whether citizens are influenced by media in general.

When the balance of powers is right — high rates of receipt of one-sided messages from those with no capacity to resist — massive media consequences will occur (Zaller 1992). We are more likely to see results when one party gets most ads on the radio than the other, and we are most likely to find results in people with lower links to all political parties.



Source: Egan (2007)

2.4.2 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion of innovation theory as asserted by Rogers (2003) provides a frame work mostly used by researchers in the area of technology. The theory holds that the adoption of any innovation is dependent on certain factors such as relative advantage, compatibility and complexity.

However, other demographic factors as age, sex, educational and social background also play a role in the adoption of an innovation. Rogers (2003) further argues that people in any cultural or social context differently react to and adopt innovation at differing levels as a result they choose to adopt technology at various stages.

According to Moseley (2004) the theory of diffusion of innovation by Rogers (2003) has been widely applied across disciplines to help researchers understand the theoretical underpinnings through which new ideas and technologies are transformed into wide spread practices.

The diffusion of innovation framework overtime has been tremendously transformed and made flexible theoretically now encompassing more interactive forms of communication where participants are able to create and share information to mutually understand and agree on issues.

More importantly, the diffusion of innovation framework has proven to be substantially flexible to the conceptualization of numerous and different kinds of social change and processes such as civic participation, public and political dialogue, politics and media effect. (Moseley, 2004; Valente, 1996).

2.4.3 Metamorphosis Theory

Fiddler (1997) posits that Mediamorphosis refers to the transformation of the media which happens as a result of the interplay of perceived needs by citizens, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovations. To him, the social media grow out of the

metamorphosis of the traditional media. This development is as a result of the inadequacies and denials of opportunities perceived by the citizenry and the persistent need of their participation in democracy. Thus the social media become a consolation for them to fulfil their information and communication desires.

2.4.4 Democratic Participant Media Theory

The democratic participant theory by McQuail (1987) is of the tenet that individual citizens and minority groups should have right of access and right to communicate through the media of their choice according to their determination of need. And that media organization and content should not be subjected to centralized state or political bureaucratic control particularly in democracy where popular participation is crucial for good governance.

These two theories are deemed relevant to this study because the perceived needs of people seem not to be well satisfied by the traditional media in Ghana hence the widespread acceptance of social media in sourcing and disseminating information which is believed to be an important facilitator to democratic participation.

2.4.5 Expectancy Violation Theory

Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) focuses on the relationship between language use and its persuasive effect (Burgoon & Miller, 1995). Most cultures and societies shape their own patterns of language and determine normative or non-normative patterns of the use of the language. When messages conform to people's culture, folklores, perception and expectations, the norms and expectations are strengthened, but the messages exert minimal impact on their attitudes.

On the other hand, when communicators intentionally or accidentally violate the norms governing appropriate language usage, they violate the expectations of message receivers, and in

turn, affect their receptivity (Victor, Ikechukwu, Gerald, & Chinedum, 2017). The expectancy violation theory identifies two violations: 'positive' or 'negative' violation. In regard to the persuasive effects of the two violations, the theory assumes that when messages positively violate people's linguistic expectations, the violation has a positive impact toward people's attitudes and evokes persuasive effectiveness (Burgoon & Miller, 1995). In contrast, when messages negatively violate people's linguistic expectations, a boomerang effect occurs, with receivers changing to the position opposite to the one advocated by the communicator (Surlin & Gordon, 2007).

Expectancy Violation Theory was introduced by Judee K. Burgoon in 1976 from her Nonverbal Expectancy Violations Model and has been applied to many fields of study. Based on the theory, it can be assumed that voters have normative expectations about political advertising campaigns because such advertisement is one of the most common genres in today's politics, and, as a result, voters have been exposed to numerous political ads. If political ads conform to people's normative expectations, expectancy theory defines it as a positive violation and predicts that it evokes positive effects toward the sponsor which could be the political candidate or the party.

Many studies support this prediction (Surlin and Gordon, 2007; James & Hensel, 2001; Garramonne, 2004) but unfortunately, they have the limitation that they were not carried out or conducted in actual elections. In a true election, factors such as news coverage of the campaign and especially news coverage of a candidate's advertising may influence reactions to a particular political advertising strategy. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1999) assert that news coverage of ads create a "ripple effect". Campaign advertisements have become so important that they are now a subject of news coverage and public debate in and of themselves. This ripple effect in the news coverage is usually the significant incentive that prompts many political candidates to devote

more of their resources to advertising campaigns (Goldstein & Freedman, 2002). Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1999) further assert that media coverage of such ads can turn off independent voters and reinforce partisan voters' inclinations, amplifying the effects of the ads, thus, playing into the hands of the candidates and their handlers

To adapt this Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) to this current study, it can be observed that Ghanaians are often of high expectations from their political leaders each election times. The atmosphere in the country is always charged as people expect to know what the new government has in store for them and this has always been because the incumbent government's policies and plans often time don't benefit the common masses. If the various political ad campaigns particularly the presidential ad campaigns in the country can conform to the people's normative expectations, it can be presumed that there will be positive or negative persuasive effects, thereby impacting election results for the sponsoring candidates or parties

2.4.6 The Source Credibility Theory

This theory was introduced by Hovland, C., Janis, I., and Kelly, H. in 1953 during the World War II when the US government sought to use propaganda to influence public opinion in support of the war effort. It states that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible (Kalbfleisch, 2003). Using this theory to explain the forming of an effect in political ads as well, Self (2007) describes 'Source Credibility' as "the believability of a communicator as perceived by the recipient of the message".

The theory was further broken into three sub-models that can be used to make the theory more aptly applicable. These include: the factor model, the functional model, and the constructivist model. The factor model (a covering laws approach) helps determine the extent to which the

receiver judges the source as being credible. The functional model (a covering laws approach) views credibility as the degree to which the source satisfies the receiver's individual needs. The constructivist model (a human action approach) analyzes what the receiver does with the source's proposal. There are different elements that may comprise a person's credibility but, according to this source credibility theory, the two elements most commonly identified are 'perceived expertise' and 'trustworthiness' of the source.

Source credibility theory research also indicates that the ability to internalize the message is influenced by the potential impact the message has upon the receiver. Based on this theory therefore, it can be assumed that a political ad can form an effect on the masses only if the 'source' to an ad message is believed to a greater extent and that the candidate advertised is perceived credible and able to satisfy the curiosities of the masses then, the masses will cast their votes in favor of such candidate.

It can work perfectly when a presidential candidate engages in a manifesto in order to persuade the masses of what he/she has for them. it can be assumed that a political ad can form an effect on the masses only if the 'source' to an ad message is believed to a greater extent and that the candidate advertised is perceived credible and able to satisfy the curiosities of the masses then, the masses will cast their votes in favor of such candidate. It can work perfectly when a presidential candidate engages in a manifesto in order to persuade the masses of what he/she has for them.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review and the result of the empirical data gathered and analysed, it is proposed that the use of social media for political communication should be systematic with

well-defined separated strategic, tactical and operational approach for effectiveness. It is important to note that the key areas should not be treated in isolation, but integrated and refined continuously for better results. Figure 1 presents a diagrammatic representation of a proposed conceptual framework for use of social media for political communication.

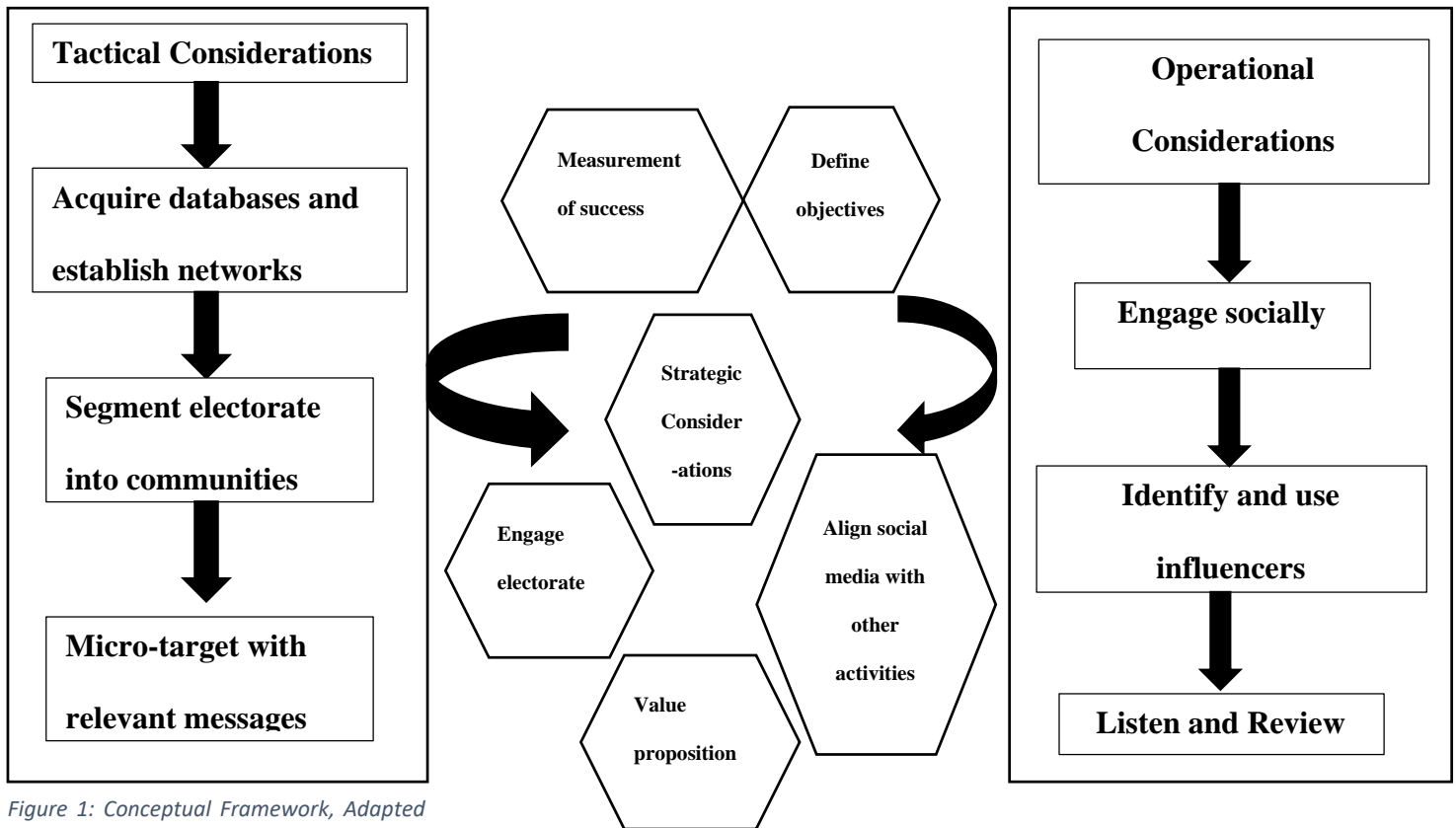


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework, Adapted from (Ayankoya, Calitz, & Cullen, 2015)

The conceptual framework assumes that the electorates are all familiar with the use of the internet and mobile technologies as demonstrated by the result of the empirical survey. It proposes a strategic plan with clear objectives for the use of social media, a value proposition and the need to align the use of social media with the other strategies adopted for political

communication to ensure a synchronised effort. Also, the strategic component of the framework emphasises the need for internal control, a leader that the electorate will interact with socially and a clear definition of how success will be measured.

The involvement of the leadership of the party in the use of social media will give the electorate the social interaction that could develop political capital and increase the level of political engagement and mobilisation. It is important that the organisation has a clearly defined policy on the use of social media, training the leaders and the employees adequately and has a measurement of success that aligns with the objectives. The strategic issues should form the foundation for the tactical and operational execution of the use of social media. However, care should also be taken to update the strategy continuously based on learnings from execution and changes in the environment.

The proposed conceptual framework suggests that a tactical approach should be employed to acquire the data of potential voters/electorate. This should include data from social media and other sources. Analysis of the acquired data should reveal different segments of possible voters that can be regarded as homogeneous communities. Thereafter, the political party can target the electorate based on demographic data, socio-economic segmentation and their social network of choice.

The framework incorporates the importance of listening and engaging. Social media is designed for two-way communication, listening, responding and engaging the user. Actions like recognising and taking advantage of the influencers can increase the chances of success in implementing social media as marketing tool for politics (Dawson, 2009). Above all, listening

and actively engaging the users will provide feedback that should help in shaping and evolving the organisations activities on social media (Safko & Brake, 2009).

Research has shown that politicians and political organisations can benefit from social media, by taking advantage of the ability to network with their members, the people in the network of their members and other potential members (Ayankoya, Calitz, & Cullen, 2015). In using social media for political communication, it is observed that politicians and political organisations need to be aware, manage and take advantage of the interactions that exist among the user of social media. This could provide increased brand equity, political engagement, participation and drive collective efforts in political processes.

The degree of social interactions that is facilitated by social media and the amount of information that is created have become very important in the decision making process of people about political issues.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the research methodology employed in this study and discusses how the study would be carried out in order to achieve the objectives of the study. The chapter discusses the research approach, sample and population considered as well as the sampling procedures in the study.

3.1 Scope of Study

Ghana is a country along the Gulf of Guinea and Atlantic Ocean, in the sub region of West Africa. Ghana is bordered by the Ivory Coast in the West, Burkina Faso in the North, Togo in the East and the Gulf of Guinea and Atlantic Ocean in the South. Ghana's population of approximately 30 million with Ashanti and Greater Accra regions as the most populated regions with a population growth rate of 2.16%. The country currently has 16 region capitals (Daily Graphic, 2019). Ghana is a unitary constitutional democracy led by a President who is both Head of State and Head of Government.

In Ghanaian democracy, elections finalize political decisions of the majority. The first three and half decades of Ghana's independence was a characterized by short-lived civilian governments interspaced with military regime. However, the story has been different since the return to democratic rule in 1992. From 1992 to 2016; Ghana has organised several general elections in which power has alternated three times between the two main political parties. Thus, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) (Kweitsu, 2018).

Elections are evidently vital to the political campaigns and candidates, who are running with the sole aim of getting victory, which boils down to receiving majority of votes. To achieve this, candidates must have their followers and supporters both cast a ballot and do so in favour of the contender. This research therefore, examines how political communication is conducted using social media.

The research is limited to the scope of registered voters in Ghana and have access to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. as a social media networking tool. The scope of the research does not include unregistered voters who have not previously casted a vote or do not cast a ballot currently. The research also does not include discussion on political parties' strategies, political campaigns and parties stands on social issues. Although these play a role in influencing individual voters and their decision to vote, are outside the scope of this research.

3.2 Research Approach and Choice

There are four main approaches to research. These are quantitative, qualitative, mixed method and participatory approach (Alzheimer, 2009). The research adopted a qualitative approach for this study. There are many merits both a qualitative or quantitative approach, however having chosen qualitative for this project, it is important to outline why this was seen as the most effective approach for answering this question.

As Becker (1996) discusses, both kinds of research try to see how society works, to describe social reality, to answer specific questions about specific instances of social reality. However, there is difference between the two epistemologies.

While quantitative researchers often seek numerical differences between two groups of people in order to find explanations of an act based on logic of difference between groups with different

traits, qualitative researchers look more for descriptions, which will allow them to make sense of what they have observed throughout the course of their research. Furthermore, in terms of the data that can be collected, quantitative methods tend to be more restrictive in the information that can be found, as questions tend to be more closed. Qualitative methods on the other hand tend to be more open, and so there are plenty of opportunities for unexpected data to emerge.

The benefit of carrying out qualitative research is it allows researchers to understand a situation from the point of view of the actor. According to Becker (1996), epistemologically, “qualitative methods insist that we should not invent the viewpoint of the actor, and should only attribute to actors’ ideas about the world they actually hold, if we want to understand their actions, reasons, and motives.

The disadvantage may be that we attribute meaning to something that the participant didn’t actually intend. Mack et al. (2005) describe further benefits to carrying out qualitative research, following on from the point that was previously made in that participants have the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses.

In this sense, the responses that the participant gives will be meaningful and culturally salient to the participant; unanticipated by the researcher; and rich and explanatory in nature. The researcher is then able to decide which areas to delve deeper into by asking the participant to elaborate on certain points they make, moving beyond the original list of questions the researcher had come up with. By gathering responses like these it is possible for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the subject from the participant’s point of view. Qualitative methods were chosen for this project because the aim is to understand the role of social media

from the point of view of those engaging with it. Rather than understanding how often it was used, instead this project looks at why it was used and in what ways.

An important consideration in carrying out research of any kind is that of validity, reliability, and generalisation. In order for research to be valid, the researcher needs to make sure they are measuring what they intend to measure. To have reliability, results would be the same if the same research was repeated multiple times. In other words, the results would be consistent no matter how many times you carried out the study (O'Leary, 2014).

Generalisability refers to whether or not the findings from one study could be applied to a larger population in a different time or setting (O'Leary, 2014). Validity was ensured by making sure interview questions related to the topic and that responses were fully explored to ensure the researcher understood the point the interviewee was trying to make. Reliability is more difficult to guarantee due to how small the project was. The same set of questions was prepared for each interview, however to truly ensure reliability, the study would possibly need to be repeated over a number of general election campaigns.

Lastly, due to the number of participants interviewed being so small, this project could not be considered generalizable to the wider Ghanaian population but rather, explores the understanding of the topic from the point of view of those directly involved.

3.3 Target Participants

Population refers to a group of individuals or items that share one or more characteristics from which data is being collected and analysed. As the focus of this study is on the impact of social media on political communication in Ghana, citizens are considered an appropriate population.

3.4 Selecting Respondents

Thirty Ghanaian voters were targeted. Participants were contacted through social media groups, emails, text messages and phone calls and given a summary of what the research was about their and how their contributions would be beneficial in contributing to current literature. This was due to covid-19 restrictions thus the need to revert to social media and personal network to reach out to participants. Out of the targeted number, 15 responded to participate in the study. This is an ideal number for a study which is qualitative in nature. For a qualitative study, some studies have noted having a sample size at little as 10 can be extremely fruitful and still yield applicable (Shetty, 2020). Shetty (2020) a sample size should be large enough to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research question at hand. But at the same time, a large sample size risks having repetitive data.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The underlying need for data collection is to capture quality evidence that seeks to answer all the questions that have been posed. Through data collection, a researcher can deduce quality information that is a prerequisite for making informed decisions. To improve the quality of information, it is expedient that data is collected so the researcher draws inferences and makes informed decisions on what is considered factual.

Data collection can fall under two broad categories; Primary data collection and secondary data collection (Formplus, 2020). Primary data collection by definition is the gathering of raw data collected at the source (Formplus, 2020). On the other hand, secondary data collection, on the other hand, is referred to as gathering of second-hand data collected by an individual who is not the original user (Formplus, 2020). It is the process of collecting and analysing an already existing data which can be found in published books, journals and online portals.

The researcher opted for a primary method of data collection by engaging directly with respondents.

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative data is often subjective, rich and consists of in-depth information presented in the form of words. Analysing qualitative data entails reading a large amount of transcripts, looking for similarities or differences and subsequently finding themes and developing categories (Wong, 2008). Data gathered from the respondents was systematically searched and arranged to draw out similarities and themes to increase the understanding of the phenomenon.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

When carrying out any kind of research it is important to bear in mind the principles of ethics around that research. According to Mack et al. (2005), there are four core principles to carrying out research:

1. Respect for persons, meaning “a commitment to ensuring the autonomy of research participants and, where autonomy may be diminished, to protect people from exploitation of their vulnerability” (2005: 9)
2. “Beneficence” meaning “a commitment to minimising the risks associated with research, including psychological and social risks, and maximising the benefits” (2005: 9)
3. Justice meaning “a commitment to ensuring a fair distribution of the risks and benefits resulting from research” (2005: 9)
4. Respect for communities” which means the researcher should respect “the values and interests of the community in research and, wherever possible, to protect the community from harm” (2005: 9)

5. Another important ethical issue is informed consent, meaning participants understand what it is they are agreeing to and are aware they have the right to stop participating at any time (2005: 9)

Care was taken throughout the research to ensure these ethical requirements were met. All interviewees were over 18, and were given a consent form to read and sign before the interview was carried out.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, limitations and the direction for future research.

4.1 Summary of Findings

The focus of the study was to assess the impact of social media on political communication in Ghana. Previous studies have acknowledged the fact that social media in this current dispensation is an active communication channel for politicians to reach out to populace. The purpose of the study was therefore to look at the various ways by which political communication via social media plays an active role in this era.

In terms of the demographics of the respondents who agreed to participate in the research, 67% were male and 33% were female. The highest age range was between 26-30 years represented by 40%. 33% were aged between 31-35 years and 27% were between 18-25 years. The majority of the participants had a Master's Degree accounting for 60% and 40% of the respondents had a Degree. All fifteen respondents indicated to be of a Ghanaian descent, registered voters and had access to all social media account. Participants also revealed they visited their social media site every day. Furthermore, 40% indicated to spend more than two hours on their social media handle. 33% spent within 31 minutes to an hour whilst 27% spent less than 30 minutes.

The first research question sought to find out from respondent how social media influence public knowledge and action on political matters. Respondents indicated that, through information on trending political issues on social media their knowledge to engage in political matters was influenced. Social media served as a channel between the citizens and the government and

inform them on what is happening to be able to make decisions when it comes to politics. It served as a source of current affairs issue to focus on and research related stuff. It however, does not form the source/foundation of any assessment or opinion they form about a subject. The recurrence of political messages via social media attracted their attention to engage in politics.

The second research question aimed at finding out how political message dissemination on social media influence young voters. The study found that through videos, hashtags, articles, pictures, posts and links, participants were informed about political matters via social media. Some indicated that through news pages and also certain political accounts followed, they are well informed about political matters. The study found out that, through campaign broadcast of achievements, policies, ideas and debates via the different social media outlets to an extent influenced voters' decision.

The third research question was to confirm the extent to which political message on social media influence non-political citizens. Participants also believed messages on social media influenced non-political actors and still remain relevant when election was over.

In terms of guidelines on to handle political communication via social media, participants recommend decorum in the choice of words and the need for relevant and factual information backed by data. Miscommunication, misunderstanding and disrespect were identified as challenges when political parties engage with electorates via social media.

4.2 Limitations

Considering the Ghanaian population of close to thirty million people and using a participant size of fifteen cannot be used as basis for generalizations. Moreover, the views of gathered can be applied to a Ghanaian context and may not be applicable in another country or region.

4.3 Future Research

The impact of the social media in Ghana has been unprecedented. However, there is the need for a scientific analysis study on the effect of social media on cost of campaigns and traditional media sources.

4.4 Conclusion

Social media have become an integral part of public discourse and communication in the contemporary society. Globally, the use of social media in recent elections has significantly intensified, especially in engaging millions of voters through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This has become a cost effective way for politicians to reach their constituents. Though TV, radio phone-ins, stickers, and flyers are still used for political campaign. Social media offers a cheap alternative to communicate a political message to constituents, making social media an imperative political campaign strategy.

Social media has therefore revolutionized political communication by diversifying news sources and increasing the possibility for feedback in a timely manner, with no exception in Ghana, particularly because of its potential to allow for proper targeting and direct and cheap access to political information.

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