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A systematic review of social media research in Ghana: gaps and future research avenues

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of internet-based communities, popularly known as social media, has transformed communication drastically. Due to its importance, scholars have written on the subject within the Ghanaian context. However, the literature remains fragmented without knowledge of its current state, gaps, and opportunities for future research. To address this, we synthesised 29 peer-reviewed articles in academic databases from 2013 to 2023. Through a systematic literature review, we observed that social media research in Ghana had been underpinned by the quantitative approach at the expense of the others. Likewise, the most explored theme is Social Media and Politics, whereas the least is Health Communication and Social Media. Based on the gaps identified, we made recommendations for future research.

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1. Introduction

The advent of computer-mediated communication and internet-based communities such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and, more recently, TikTok has arguably bridged the physical gaps and distances between people and countries worldwide (Coudry & Hepp, 2017; Croteau & Hoynes, 2019; Kim & Hollingshead, 2015). Today, just by the click of a button, users can receive and send information instantaneously with the help of the internet. Social media platforms have also allowed users to generate and share their personal content, making them content producers and consumers simultaneously (Yoong & Lian, 2019). This has birthed a form of social interactivity that goes beyond geographical boundaries so much that organisations have also thronged these platforms to maximise their potential and create lasting relationships with their stakeholders through a series of social media engagement activities.

The surge in the usage of social media across industries and disciplines has also resulted in a corresponding growth in research on the subject matter (Eriksson Krutrök & Lindgren, 2022; Nguyen, 2023; Nutsugah et al., 2022) which is also due in part to the proclivity of social media to engender two-way communication among users. The case is not different in Ghana. Ghana has enjoyed relatively steady media freedom since the inception of the 1992 republican constitution, which ushered in the fourth republic (Dzisah, 2018). Traditionally, the citizenry only had the opportunity to

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comment on issues through the radio, television, or print media. However, with the advent of social media and the repeal of the criminal libel law, social media adoption and use continue to be a booming phenomenon (Agana & Prempeh, 2022).

Despite the numerous scholarly efforts in Ghana on the subject matter, there have been minimal efforts to synthesise, analyse and make meaning of the current state of the literature. This lack of knowledge on the state of social media research within the Ghanaian context will likely create confusion for future researchers who intend to research social media because the studies continue to sprawl and are currently fragmented. Knowing that researchers would anchor their future studies within the Ghanaian context on the existing literature and scholarly gaps, this study has been commissioned to review the current state of social media research in Ghana to establish the existing gaps and provide avenues for future research. As such, the following research questions guided the study.

RQ1: What is the yearly distribution of social media research in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023)?

RQ2: Which journals have published social media research in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023)?

RQ3: What are the dominant disciplines and subfields within which social media studies have been conducted in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023)?

RQ4: What are the dominant methodological approaches that have underpinned social media studies in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023)?

RQ5: Which theories or frameworks undergirded social media studies in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023)?

RQ6: What are the dominant thematic areas that have been explored in social media studies in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023)?

RQ7: What are the prevailing gaps in social media studies in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023)?

RQ8: What are the opportunities for future researchers who intend to conduct social media research in Ghana?

1.1. Why the Ghanaian context

Even though digital cultures have been proven to be multinational in nature, transcending different borders globally and should warrant a more global study, we limited our study to the Ghanaian context only for the following reasons. First, the government of Ghana, in recent years, have made several attempts at bridging the digital divide through a number of policy interventions like the Digital Ghana Agenda, One Laptop Per Child, Mobile Money Interoperability, and Paperless Services across selected government institutions, among others (NCA, 2018). In addition to this, Ghana has been touted as a country with one of the most youthful populations globally, with a median age of 20.7 years, according to the recent housing and population census conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2021), and typically, such youthful populations are more amenable towards the adoption and use of digital technologies. These occurrences have made Ghana one of the most important contexts for scholarly interest in topics on digital tools like social media. Indeed, one of the most cited research works on social media in emerging economies (Odoom et al., 2017) was conducted in Ghana with a Google Scholar citation score of 343 citations as of August 2023. Despite the growth in scholarly interest within the Ghanaian context, little effort has been made to aggregate the previous studies thus far to make sense of the current state of research and also inform future researchers on the possible avenues available to drive research in the area. As such, we argue that this study becomes the needed intervention towards driving the future research agenda by deploying a systematic literature review on social media studies that have been conducted in Ghana from 2013 to 2023.

2. A review of the literature on social media: the trends

There have been a number of recent scholarly attempts at understanding the state of social media research in different disciplines and geographical contexts (Arora et al., 2022; Damstra et al., 2021; Freeman et al., 2022; Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021; Magoi et al., 2017; Ruparel et al., 2023; Shawky et al., 2022). These studies have primarily focused on analyzing key findings in the literature, the general growth of the field, and the key thematic areas that have preoccupied the scholars within the social media discipline. This, they argue, will help them unearth potential avenues for future research. For example, Shawky et al. (2022), through a systematic review of studies that explored the potency of social media to maximise campaigns, found that about 51% of the 31 studies under review supported the assertion that the ability of social media to reach a wide range of targeted audience makes it a more effective medium for health campaigns than traditional media platforms, despite its potential to create fertile grounds for the spread of fake news and misinformation especially as observed during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Damstra et al., 2021). Again, they observed that about 29% of the 31 studies under review supported the assertion that social media provides campaigners with the opportunity to get a more precise insight into the online behaviour of users, which helps in the efficiency of campaigns.

Furthermore, Ruparel et al. (2023), through synthesis and analysis of research articles conducted on the uses and gratification of professional social media platforms, found that the majority of the 51 studies under review focused mainly on thematic areas such as motives, uses and drivers for stakeholders, and undercurrents of professional social media platforms for employers and employees. They also observed that one of the single most used theories in the 51 studies under review was the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), whereas Ahmed et al.'s (2019) systematic review of social media studies that focused on knowledge sharing found the Social Capital Theory to be the most dominant of the 103 studies under review. These findings leave some theoretical gaps to be filled by future studies.

Cartwright et al. (2021) also undertook a systematic review of studies that have been conducted on social media use in the business-to-business (B2B) context and observed that the majority of the studies under review support the assertion that social media has mainly been deployed to facilitate employee engagement, sales, and integrated communication within the B2B context. Methodologically, they observed that most of the studies under review employed the quantitative methodology, as opposed to the qualitative and mixed method approaches, thereby leaving some methodological gaps that need to be filled by future research in the discipline.

One phenomenon consistently witnessed in the review of the extant literature on systematic reviews of social media studies is that most of the studies under review have been overly concentrated in the developed world, leaving the developing world context, especially Africa, heavily marginalised. For instance, Ruparel et al. (2023) found that out of the 51 articles under review, only one emanated from an African context (South Africa), with countries like Greece, Belgium, Spain, USA, and Canada having a combined 27 of the 51 articles. Similarly, Freeman et al. (2022) found that over the 34 studies under review, only four were identified as emanating from countries outside the Global North and called for future studies to be explored in other cultural contexts to beef up the extant literature on social media.

This conspicuous side-lining of studies from developing world contexts like Ghana is disadvantageous to the theory development and practice of the social media discipline, as future researchers within these contexts will need a thorough understanding of the extant evidence to inform future scholarly efforts. As such, a systematic review of studies on social media from the Ghanaian context is timely to unravel existing evidence and knowledge gaps in the literature and engender the appropriate future research response.

3. Methodology

The study was underpinned by the systematic literature review (SLR) because it aims to gather social media studies conducted within the Ghanaian context and critically appraise them to understand the current state of the research subfield based upon which future research avenues will be proposed. As postulated by Davis et al. (2014) and Schäfer (2023), SLR is the most rigorous form of literature review due to its capacity to synthesise and appraise existing literature in a transparent, unbiased, and reproducible manner. This increases the validity and reliability of the review because the selection of the literature is based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria which the researcher is obliged to report (Snyder, 2019). This methodological choice is also consistent with previous studies that aimed to systematically collect and analyse the existing literature on various facets of the social media discipline (Arora et al., 2022; Freeman et al., 2022; Ruparel et al., 2023).

3.1. Inclusion and exclusion strategy

The search strategy adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines as proposed by (Moher et al., 2009) to be able to screen and select studies that suit the predetermined criteria systematically. The literature search was carried out in the Taylor and Francis, Emerald, and Sage databases because they comprise recognised databases hosting quality peer-reviewed journal articles. Other equally genuine academic databases were not chosen for this study because they did not house a lot of the studies that meet our inclusion and exclusion criteria. The search was limited to only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English because, as opposed to grey literature, these materials go through a robust process of review by experts in the field before they are approved and published (Lee et al., 2012).

3.1.1. Keywords search

The keywords that were searched include 'social media in Ghana,' OR 'social media research in Ghana,' OR 'social networking sites in Ghana.' Across the three databases, this search generated over 10,000 records. At this point, the researchers applied filters such as year range (2013–2023), Language (English), and Articles to the search. This reduced the number of records to 1,650 across the three databases. The researchers went ahead to identify and delete duplicates. That brought the records to 1,206.

3.1.2. Further screening strategy

The researchers started reading the titles of the papers to be sure they were in line with the focus of the study. Those titles that fell far from the subject matter under investigation were excluded. This process further reduced the records to 86 across the three databases. The researchers then read the abstract and the methodology section of the studies to be sure that (i) the studies made social media its primary focus and (ii) collected data from Ghana. As such, cross-country studies that included data from Ghana and other countries, such as Hinson et al. (2019) and Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2023), were excluded because Ghana was not the sole source of data. Furthermore, authors who had Ghanaian names and were affiliated with Ghanaian universities but did not make Ghana the primary data collection point were excluded on that basis. On the other hand, authors who did not bear Ghanaian names and were not affiliated with Ghanaian universities but made Ghana the primary data collection point were included on that basis. All of these screening activities led to the final selection of 29 articles that were deemed suitable and qualified for the systematic review. Figure 1 below gives a pictorial overview of the selection process based on the PRISMA guidelines.

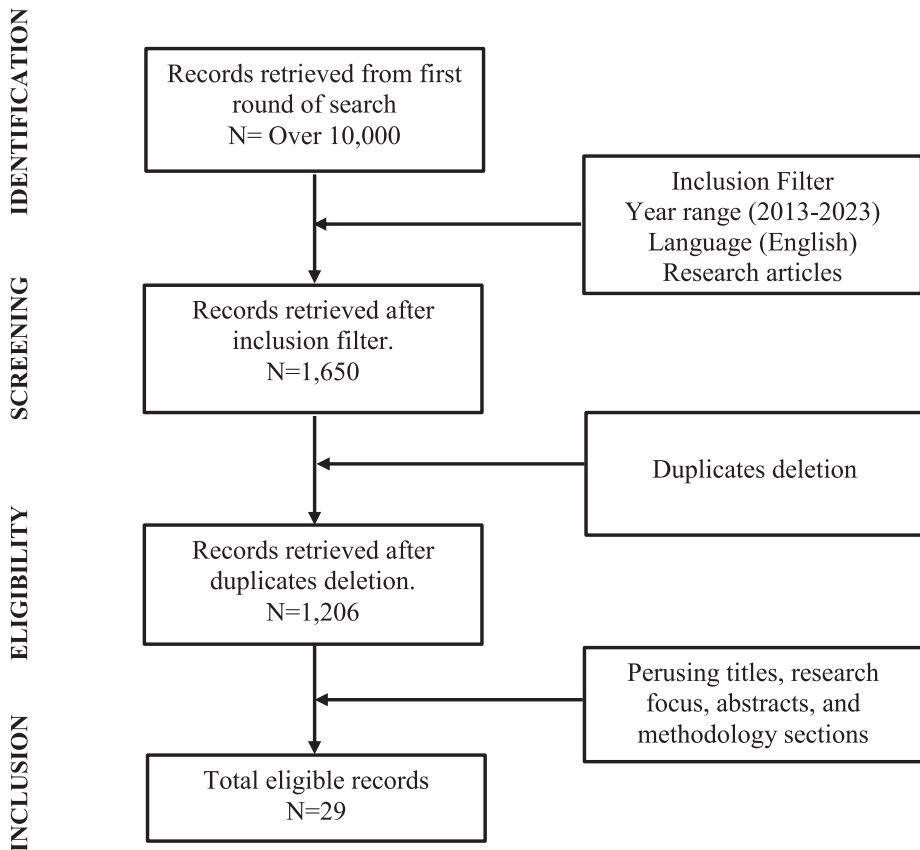


Figure 1. Inclusion and exclusion based on the PRISMA guidelines (Authors' own creation).

4. Results

4.1. Yearly distribution of social media research

The yearly distribution of social media studies in Ghana over a period of 10 years (2013–2023) shows steady growth, with the year 2022 recording the highest number of publications ($n = 5$), constituting about 17% of all the studies under review. The steady growth demonstrates the continuous scholarly attention and interest the field is gaining. This is consistent with Cartwright et al. (2021), Kubin and von Sikorski (2021), and Arora et al. (2022), who made similar findings in a systematic literature review of social media research. The year 2023 looks promising as it has recorded four of the 29 studies under review, even though the data was collected in the month of April, which is relatively early in the year. However, 2013 and 2014 did not record any publication per the literature search criteria established in this study. A possible explanation could be that the phenomenon of social media use was still at an infant stage around that period, especially in the Global South, and as such, many scholars at the time would only be nurturing the thoughts of researching in that area (Ruparel et al., 2023).

4.2. Journals that published social media research in Ghana

It is important to discuss the journals that have published research on social media in Ghana because it indicates to future researchers the category of journals to target for publications. From Table 1 below, it can be gleaned that a total of 22 journals are responsible for the 29 publications under

Table 1. Journals that published social media research in Ghana (Authors' own creation).

Journals	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Information Development			*	*				*	*	*		5
Cogent Business & Management									*	*	**	4
African Journalism Studies						*						1
Cogent Education											*	1
Communication and Critical/ Cultural Studies										*		1
Digital Health								*				1
Health Education					*							1
Information Technology & People							*					1
Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education								*				1
Journal of Consumer Marketing							*					1
Journal of Creative Communications			*									1
Journal of Enterprise Information Management					*							1
Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society								*				1
Journal of Librarianship and Information Science									*			1
Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning										*		1
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing			*									1
Library Hi Tech						*						1
Library Review				*								1
Management Research Review						*						1
Media, Culture and Society										*		1
Reference Services Review				*								1
Social Media and Society											*	1
Grand total	0	0	3	3	2	3	2	4	3	5	4	29

review. Of the 22, two journals (Information Development and Cogent Business Management) are responsible for nine of the 29 articles under review, representing about 31%. The remaining 20 journals are responsible for each of the rest 20 articles. The Information Development is published by Sage, whereas Cogent Business Management is published by Taylor and Francis. However, the majority of the studies under review were published by Emerald ($n = 12$), followed by Sage ($n = 10$) and Taylor and Francis ($n = 7$).

4.3. Dominant disciplines and subfields

Social media research in Ghana has been predominantly conducted within four different disciplines, with the marketing discipline dominating. 13 of the 29 articles under review, constituting about 45%, were conducted within the marketing discipline. Education is the second most explored discipline, accounting for 10 of the 29 articles under review, representing 34%. The last two disciplines are Politics ($n = 5$) and Health ($n = 1$). The dominance of social media research within the marketing discipline can be attributed to the increasing commercial interest of businesses to deploy technology in building relationships and sustaining customer loyalty (Moran & Gossieaux, 2010). Other disciplines and subfields, like Telecommunication, Banking, Mining, and Security, even though they are booming industries in Ghana, have received no scholarly attention.

4.4. Dominant methodological approaches

From a philosophical standpoint, methodological approaches are foundational to every scientific endeavour because they detail the process of collecting study data and open the study up for

constructive criticism and peer review (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As such, analysing the dominant methodological approaches underpinning social media research in Ghana is important to establish the methodological gaps (Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015). Social media research in Ghana has been predominantly underpinned by the quantitative research approach ($n = 20$), followed by the qualitative research approach ($n = 6$). The mixed-method approach ($n = 3$) is the least utilised methodological approach. The dominance of quantitative-based studies is not entirely strange, as it is consistent with previous research on the systematic literature review of social media studies (Ahmed et al., 2019; Cartwright et al., 2021). Even though Ahmed et al. (2019) and Cartwright et al. (2021) found a similar methodologically imbalanced trend, they did not offer any explanations on why the case is so. One would have expected that for a relatively burgeoning field, especially in an emerging market, studies would rather adopt more qualitative approaches suitable for developing the foundational frameworks of a field. Again, Table 3 below, which depicts the dominant themes explored by the studies under review, shows that some of the most dominant thematic areas are within the marketing discipline (SMEs and Social Media, Consumers and Social Media Brands and Social Media). This could also explain the dominance of the quantitative methodology at the expense of the other methods, as Zeithaml et al. (2019) bemoan the preponderance of quantitative approaches within the marketing discipline.

4.5. Dominant theories or frameworks

Of the 29 articles under review, 10 are non-theory-based studies, constituting about 34%. The rest of the 19 articles have been underpinned by either a theory or a framework. Table 2 below shows the most dominant theories underpinning the studies under review. Consistent with the findings of Ruparel et al. (2023), it can be gleaned from the table that the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and the Diffusion of Innovation Theories are the most utilised theories to underpin social media research in Ghana. They have been used in three studies each. This is followed by the Social Movement Theory, which has been used by two studies under review. As expected, social-based theories such as Social Exchange Theory, Social Identity Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Sociocultural Theory have dominated social media research in Ghana.

4.6. Dominant thematic areas explored

Through a thematic analysis, the 29 studies under review were grouped under seven different themes based on the reoccurrence of the themes. These themes are shown in Table 3 below. It

Table 2. Dominant theories/frameworks (Authors' own creation).

Theories/Frameworks	Frequency
Non-specific	10
Diffusion of Innovation Theory	3
UTAUT	3
Social Movement Theory	2
Dynamic Capability Theory	1
Social Capital Theory	1
Social Cognitive Theory	1
Social Exchange Theory	1
Social Identity Theory	1
Social Media Engagement Theory	1
Sociocultural Theory	1
Theory of Planned Behaviour	1
Uses and Gratification Theory	1
Customer knowledge Management Framework	1
TOE Framework	1
Grand total	29

Table 3. Dominant themes explored (Authors' own creation).

Themes	Frequency
Social Media and Politics	6
Students and Social Media	5
Libraries and Social Media	5
SMEs and Social Media	5
Consumers and Social Media	4
Brands and Social Media	2
Social Media Campaign	1
Health Communication	1
Grand total	29

can be gleaned from the table that the most explored thematic areas are Social Media and Politics, Students and Social Media, Libraries and Social Media, SMEs and Social Media, Consumers and Social Media, Brands and Social Media, and Health Communication and Social Media.

4.6.1. *Social media and politics*

Beyond engaging in social conversations and building relationships, social media platforms have afforded socio-political activists the platform to demand accountability and social change from political authorities, with scholars like Enli (2017) describing the relationship between media and politics as symbiotic. This has birthed a rise in scholarly interest in the subfield with scholars such as (Adu, 2020; Agana & Prempeh, 2022; Anim et al., 2019; Dzisah, 2018; Nartey, 2022; Nartey & Yu, 2023) contributing to the theme in Ghana.

Nartey and Yu (2023) analysed tweets that were made at the peak of the 'Fix The Country' campaign, which was an online demonstration against the government of Ghana to drive home socio-economic growth and alleviate hardship. Using the social movement theory as a lens, the study observed that during the online protest, the government was framed as irresponsible, whereas the citizens were framed as victims of political molestation and starvation. The protestors also used social media to call the government to action by demanding that they deliver the social transformation they promised during the elections. By displaying these three major discursive strategies by the protestors online, the study concluded that the affordance of social media had empowered them to make linguistic choices that are rooted in the Ghanaian culture, thereby attracting the attention of both local and international media. Similarly, Nartey (2022) found that online protestors who campaigned with the hashtags 'OccupyFlagstaffHouse' and 'RedFriday' framed the government of Ghana as impervious and the masses as victims of hopeless and poor political leadership. Furthermore, Agana and Prempeh (2022), through a rhetorical analysis of videos on social media that seek to appraise the development policies of the government of Ghana, found that online socio-political commentators aver that the average Ghanaian has been preconditioned to be content with 'low hanging fruits' and this derails genuine development.

On social media and elections, Anim et al. (2019) examined how the participation of young Ghanaian voters in politics is influenced by the effectiveness of the social media presence of a political party. They observed that most young Ghanaian voters between the ages of 18 and 29 years rely heavily on social media for political information, which influences their political decisions. They concluded that politicians must be visible on social media and build strong relationships with this cohort of electorates to maximise their election fortunes. These observations have been corroborated by Dzisah (2018), who argued that social media is increasingly becoming an important tool in political discourses in Ghana, thereby shaping democratic outcomes, especially among the youth.

4.6.2. *Students and social media*

One of the questions that continue to linger in the social media literature is how the use of social media impacts students. This question is important because the youth mostly form the dominant social media users (Jung & Sundar, 2016), and the effect thereof is an important discourse. In this

review, five scholars have written extensively on the subject (Asafo-Adjei et al., 2023; Asiedu & Badu, 2018; Dzogbenuku et al., 2020; Dzogbenuku et al., 2022; Owusu et al., 2019).

Owusu et al. (2019) examined the factors that motivate university students to adopt and use social media for educational reasons. They observed that the adoption and use of social media platforms by students for academic reasons are positively linked with their perception that the platforms are useful, easy to navigate, and provide facilitating conditions. Similarly, Dzogbenuku et al. (2020) found that entertainment and innovation on social media drive the knowledge generation of students, which positively influences their learning outcomes. This assertion is in consonance with the findings of Dzogbenuku et al. (2022), who also argued that social media use has a positive implication for academic performance among university students.

What is more, Asiedu and Badu (2018) investigated the motivations behind the use of social media by tertiary students and the gratifications they derive from same and observed that WhatsApp was the most widely used social media platform. This, they argue, helps the students to keep communication within and outside school, mainly for socialisation as opposed to academic purposes. Again, they observe that the younger the student, the more time they spend on social media, sometimes derailing their academic commitments. This is in direct contravention of the postulations of Dzogbenuku et al. (2020) and Dzogbenuku et al. (2022), as captured above.

Asafo-Adjei et al. (2023), whose study was conducted on a senior high school population, found that the use of social media adversely affected the English language learning and writing capabilities of the students because on social media, texts are mostly written in shorthand, and the students are mostly exposed to many sub-standard contents. The study observed that the students smuggle these sub-standard writings into their academic scripts, thus affecting their general performances.

4.6.3. Libraries and social media

Since the emergence of social media, organisations have been incorporating it to redefine their service delivery. Academic libraries are no exceptions. According to Mensah and Onyancha (2022a), academic libraries have recently gone beyond their conventional roles of just being a knowledge bank to engage diverse stakeholder groups with the help of social media. As such, understanding what has been studied in this subfield is timely. As per this review, five articles (Ahenkorah-Marfo & Akussah, 2016a; Ahenkorah-Marfo & Akussah, 2016b; Akeriwa et al., 2015; Mensah & Onyancha, 2022a; Mensah & Onyancha, 2022b) have written on the subject.

For instance, Ahenkorah-Marfo and Akussah (2016a) studied the responses of academic librarians to the adoption and use of social media to render quality reference and user services and found that the majority of the respondents had a good knowledge of social media and used them for personal and job-related activities. They, however, lack the prerequisite proficiencies needed to maximise social media for reference and user services. This was corroborated by Mensah and Onyancha (2022a), who argued that the perceived presence of facilitating conditions is positively linked with the adoption and use of social media in academic libraries in Ghana. In a similar study, Ahenkorah-Marfo and Akussah (2016b) observed that most of the academic libraries in Ghana did not have any clear social media strategy or policy that would drive user service delivery, even though the librarians generally agree that incorporating social media in their service delivery would have been a game changer.

From the perspective of library patrons, Mensah and Onyancha (2022b) aver that the official social media accounts of libraries helped disseminate useful information to users. In spite of that, they observed a low level of engagement on these platforms which speaks to the absence of a holistic social media strategy. Similarly, Akeriwa et al. (2015) observed that most university students agree that it would have been more convenient to have references and other library user services delivered to them via social media.

4.6.4. SMEs and social media

Incorporating social media into small and medium enterprises (SMEs) activities is crucial for their survival in this digital age, so a thorough practical and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon is timely. As per this review, five articles (Amoah et al., 2023; Bruce et al., 2023; Odoom et al., 2017; Odoom & Mensah, 2019; Shi et al., 2022) focused on social media and SMEs.

Amoah et al. (2023) explored the social media adoption behaviours of SMEs and how they impact SME sustainability. They observed that factors such as cost-effectiveness, the availability of financial resources, and the social media capabilities of employees are positively linked with social media adoption and use, which in turn contributes to SME sustainability. However, industry competition and pressure, as well as perceived pressure, negatively influence the adoption and use of social media by SMEs in Ghana. These findings were consistent with Bruce et al. (2023), who observed that the performance and sustainability of SMEs in the manufacturing sector of Ghana are positively influenced by their social media adoption and use.

What is more, Odoom et al. (2017) also found that the adoption of social media by SMEs has a positive impact on their performance, except that product-based SMEs adopt social media mainly because it is cost-effective, whereas service-based SMEs adopt social media mainly because of inter-activity purposes.

4.6.5. Consumers and social media

Research on the attitudes of consumers toward the messages of firms continues to sprawl in the literature because many firms have thronged the social media space in a scramble for largely fragmented consumers (Chu & Kim, 2011). The case is not too different from Ghana as key scholars such as Boateng (2014), Boateng and Okoe (2015a), Boateng and Okoe (2015b), and Majeed et al. (2022) contribute to the field.

Boateng and Okoe (2015a) examined how the corporate reputation of the advertiser moderates the response of consumers to social media advertising. They argue that where a firm has a good corporate reputation, the response of consumers to social media adverts from the firm is positively influenced. Similarly, Boateng and Okoe (2015b) confirmed the findings above by arguing that corporate reputation and value corruption moderate the attitude of consumers towards social media advertisement.

On the issue of customer knowledge management, Boateng (2014) has explored how two telecommunication giants in Ghana utilise social media to manage the knowledge of their customers. The study found that the two firms use Twitter and Facebook to test the knowledge of their customers on their firm's offering and use the same platform to provide information and create awareness about their products and services. In a closely related study, Majeed et al. (2022) aver that where consumers are satisfied, they are highly likely to engage in brand activities like product recommendations, product ratings, and participation in brand conversations on social media which will, in turn, lead to repeat purchases.

4.6.6. Brands and social media

For this theme, Osei-Frimpong et al. (2020) and Majeed et al. (2021) wrote extensively on it. Osei-Frimpong et al. (2020) examined brand engagement practices on social media and their implications for brand knowledge and trust. The study found that the knowledge and trust of consumers in a brand can lead them to higher forms of brand engagement on social media. Again, they observed that perceived social pressure could lead to consumers searching and following the official social media accounts of brands, which will, in turn, lead to participation in brand activities online.

Majeed et al. (2021) examined how social media engagement can induce repurchase intentions, especially when a variable like brand equity is introduced into the equation. They found that consistent social media engagement has a significant positive implication for repurchasing behaviour

and concluded that firms must continue to invest in their social media strategy to boost sales and brand equity.

4.6.7. Health communication and social media

As can be gleaned from Table 3 above, two articles (Aryeetey et al., 2020; Bannor et al., 2017) were written on this theme as per this systematic review. Aryeetey et al. (2020) examined the content and cultural suitability of a social media health campaign developed to encourage breastfeeding in Ghana. The study led to the creation of a framework that guides the development of culturally suitable text and image-based materials for health campaigns on social media. The study also detailed other processes that should be followed for approval from authorities, such as the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA).

Meanwhile, Bannor et al. (2017) investigated the effectiveness of social media platforms as avenues for communicating health messages. The study observed that social media users and health communication professionals agree that social media is an effective avenue for promoting health messages. Again, they aver that social media users take health messages they see on social media seriously and act on them.

5. Discussions

The main aim of this study was to synthesise and analyze studies conducted on social media within the Ghanaian context over ten years (2013–2023) to make meaning of the current state of the fragmented literature, based upon which future research avenues will be proposed. This was necessitated by the lack of convergence of the dispersed literature for such a burgeoning field of study, especially in a developing economy context like Ghana.

We observed a steady growth in scholarly interest in the field as the years went by, with the year 2022 recording the highest number of publications ($n = 5$) and the year 2023 recording the second highest, even though the search for the review was performed in April 2023. This finding is consistent with Cartwright et al. (2021), Arora et al. (2022), and Ruparel et al. (2023), who made similar observations in their systematic literature reviews on social media research in other contexts. However, the years 2013 and 2014 showed zero records each, which we argue may be a result of a lack of interest in social media research at the early stages of its inception. This also depicts the generally low research output from developing economy contexts like Ghana, where academics are fraught with several research challenges, including the lack of adequate resources dedicated to research (Sharmelly & Ray, 2021). This means that managers of Higher Education Institutions and other entities interested in scientific research must make adequate resources available to drive research in the digital space.

Furthermore, we observed that the most dominant discipline explored in social media research in Ghana is the marketing discipline. This could be attributed to the argument of Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016) that many firms are deploying digital tools for marketing purposes. Again, we observed that the least explored discipline is the health discipline.

Methodologically, research on social media from Ghana has been heavily underpinned by the quantitative approach as opposed to the qualitative and mixed-method approaches. It is in consonance with the findings of Ahmed et al. (2019) and Cartwright et al. (2021), who found similar traits in systematic literature reviews on social media. Even though this may be due to the widely held conception that quantitative-based studies are easily published, future researchers may have to pay attention to the use of qualitative and mixed-method approaches as the subject matter in Ghana is still a burgeoning one. This finding also contradicts that of Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023) who found that the qualitative research methodology was the most utilised paradigm when they conducted a similar systematic literature review of public relations studies in Ghana over a decade. This contradiction confirms the assertion that every scientific sub-domain has its own dominant research paradigms.

5.1. Gaps and future research avenues in the studies under review

From a methodological standpoint, future researchers may have to vary their methodological choice because the studies under review have been heavily hinged on the quantitative research paradigm. The methodological variation and the adoption of the qualitative and mixed-method approaches are crucial for every subject area that is budding. This call aligns with previous researchers like Ahmed et al. (2019) and Zeng and Gerritsen (2014).

Again, there is a need for future researchers to vary the disciplines and industries within which to conduct social media research. Notable industries and disciplines such as public relations, journalism, oil and gas, telecommunication, mining, and banking, albeit booming in Ghana, have been largely marginalised in the studies under review. Future research would have to examine the use of social media in these areas. In addition, future researchers can consider exploring the use of social media by public institutions for the administration and discharge of public duties because answers to how these institutions deploy social media to engage the citizenry are almost unavailable.

What is more, the studies on the theme of *Social Media and Politics* have been mainly conducted with youthful populations. Again, the voices of key political actors, such as the political parties, candidates, and the Electoral Commission, have been largely ignored in the studies under review. Future researchers may consider expanding the study population beyond the youth and also incorporating the perspectives of key political actors and stakeholders.

Many of the studies conducted on the theme *Students and Social Media* have predominantly collected data from single universities instead of multiple universities. This goes a long way to restrict the ability of the studies to extrapolate their findings. Future researchers can consider expanding the dataset and, where possible, draw a comparative analysis of the impact of social media on students in public and private schools.

Furthermore, many studies conducted on the theme *SMEs and Social Media* mostly employed Facebook and Twitter, ignoring other equally patronised social media platforms. Future researchers may have to expand their scope to cover other social media platforms, especially emerging ones like TikTok, which are increasingly being employed for commerce. This call for a shift is important because the internet architecture is rapidly changing (Mukherjee, 2020).

Health communication remains the least explored theme in all the 29 studies under review. Only two articles were published on the theme. One would have expected that with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, health communication on social media would have attracted scholarly attention deeply. Future researchers in Ghana can explore the phenomenon of fake news and its implications for authentic health messages on social media. Alternatively, they can examine the viability of government regulations on social media to restrict harmful information to the citizenry, taking inspiration from Asmolov (2022).

5.2. Limitations of this study

Even though this study has sufficiently dealt with the objective of collecting, synthesising, and analysing social media research within the Ghanaian context over a period of 10 years (2013–2023), it is not bereft of limitations, just as any other scientific endeavour. Firstly, it is possible that some useful academic materials may be missing from the analysis due to the inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as the databases (Taylor & Francis, Sage, Emerald) used for this study. Future research on SLR can expand the database and scope of the study to increase the chances of incorporating other useful academic resources.

Furthermore, this study was limited to only social media research within the Ghanaian context. Albeit sufficient, future studies can expand the context scope to cover many other African countries to present a more holistic picture of social media research on the continent. Finally, book chapters and conference papers were excluded from this study even though they wield some useful information. Future research may consider including them.

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