



**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES & RESEARCH**

**SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ONLINE ACTIVISM ON CONTENTIOUS
ISSUES**

BY

AMPO PHYLLIS SELINAM

(MADC 20048)

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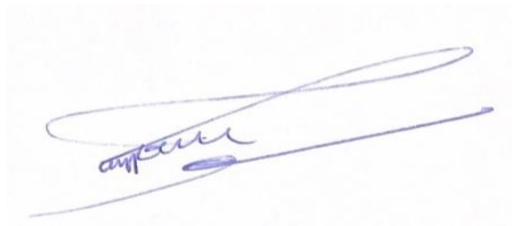
NOVEMBER, 2021

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation was undertaken by me, under the supervision of Dr. Stanley Sermaco. Where other people's references are made, full acknowledgement had been given. I wish to state that all omissions and shortfalls in this work are entirely mine. Therefore, I declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this institution or elsewhere.

AMPO PHYLLIS SELINAM

MADC 20048

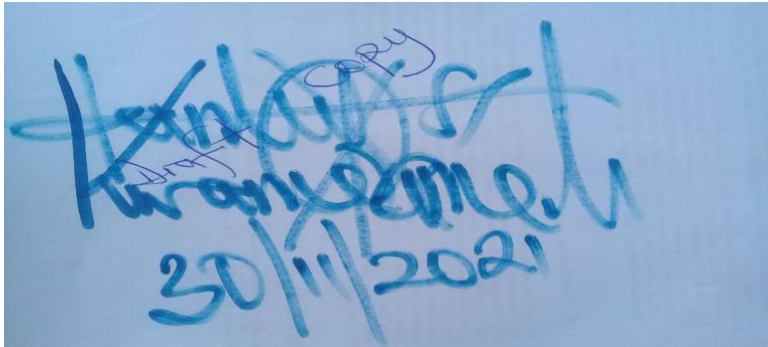
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'AMPO PHYLLIS SELINAM', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with a large loop at the top.

Candidate's Signature:

Date: 09/12/ 2021

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this dissertation was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines of supervision of dissertation laid down by School of Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism.



Handwritten signature and date in blue ink on a light blue background. The signature is written in a cursive style and includes the name "Stanley Semarco" and the date "30/11/2021". There are also some faint, illegible markings above the signature.

Dr Stanley Semarco

(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation firstly to the Almighty God for his enabling strength he bestowed on me. Secondly, I dedicate it to two of my comrades Sadique Ahmed and Curtis Yoofi Barnes-Dabban who without fail motivated me all through my academic journey. Most importantly I cannot leave out my mother who provided me with love and my basic needs.

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ABSTRACT

In our world today, social media has become increasingly pervasive. With the ever growing and diverse landscape of online communication, the literature on social media and activism has mostly highlighted on the consequences of social media activism, and the formative role social media plays in activism especially in the developed world leaving a gap in the literature of social media and activism in developing countries.

This study brings together a collection of articles that highlight and comment on the field of social media and activism. The study contributes to literature in this area by assessing the influence social media has on activism particularly on contentious issues in Ghana. The study set to divide the main objective into three specific objectives. It was based on these specific objectives that the researcher critically examined the variables under review. With the analysis and discussions conducted, the study was able to achieve the set objectives by systematically sampling a population of students who had the right characteristics and opinions for the study. Finally providing insights for a better understanding of social media activism, an area that is fundamentally important to a variety of disciplines but severely under researched.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The term, “we agree to disagree” has gained widespread acclaim and acceptance, all over the world. This is due to the meaning and effect it brings in relation to tolerance, peace, and social progression. Humanity has always moved through stages, with advancements coming from the resolution of conflict and conflicting situations. Evolution and revolution, share within themselves the capacity of human beings to express their challenges and grievances, whilst seeking and demanding changes within society.

According to Ousey and Kubrin (2018), contentions, arguments, dialogues, agreeing to disagree, and idealism are concepts that transverse societal norm. Many a time, people are divided based on their dispositions, views, and opinions on a subject matter, requiring the formation of groups or schools of thought. Krimsti (2019) asserted that contentious issues are pervasive, as they exist in the field of academia, social, political, security, economic, religious, and even cultural discussions. Thus, creating the need for one to agree to disagree on issues that tend to drag on or remain unresolved over time. As defined by Ousey and Kubrin (2018), contentious issues pertain to situations that are puzzling or unclear, with decisions being difficult to make. Grobbelar and Jones (2021), also, intimated that generally, contentious issues relate to murky or grey areas that lead to arguments, conflicts, and even violence.

Shaha, Tuttle and Wreesmann (2021), noted that contentious issues vary across the spectrum of society, including issues like gun control, religious freedom, privacy right, sexual orientations, abortion, civil rights, and climate change, inter alia. Hubner, Deman and Balik (2017) noted that contentious issues, however, are relative in nature based on the culture, social

norms, and traditions of society. Thus, what may be contentious in Nigeria, may be different from what may be considered contentious in the USA, UK, Rwanda, and Japan.

In the USA key contentious issues that were raised between 2020 and 2021 have been their election results, ways of governance, gun control, and abortion rights. Whilst, in Ghana, key contentious issues that have come up in recent times have been on illegal mining ‘galamsey’, LGBTQI rights, economic and social related issues, amongst others (Oppong, 2018). This has always triggered political and social uprising, with people wanting their views and opinions to be heard, assessed, and considered, without which they keep pushing, advocating, and inciting like-minded people to join their cause.

In the bid to get their voices heard and their views appreciated, especially to make sure their views count for something, people have always used various mediums, platforms, and strategies (Hatakka, 2017). The author was of the view that this includes street marches, dialogues, demonstrations, violence, and strikes, amongst others. Goodwin and Jasper (2009), argued that all these factors and activities can be captured under the overarching term, activism. Activism is a widespread phenomenon that has permeated the very fabric of society (Yang, 2018). Activism is not a new concept or undertaking, it has always been a part of society; a fundamental crux in the evolution of the world, its principles, and methods of engagement. Over the century and in times past, people have always come together to revolt against social, religious, cultural, and economic issues that they find wanton, bringing about change (Fileborn, 2017). Thus, the motto ‘A Luta Continua, Victoria Ascerta’, which means the struggle continues, victory is certain, was popularized by activism.

Due to the changes in the social situations, mediums, and platforms for activism, the strategies employed have changed over time. Goodwin and Jasper (2009) categorized activism broadly into traditional and online activism. Traditional activism has mostly come in the form of street

marches, dialogues, demonstrations, and strikes (Obar, 2012). However, the recent use of social media and the internet has spurred a new form of activism. This new strategy incorporates the use of hashtags that promote discussions on major social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. A case in point is the #LGBTQI #metoo #endsars #fixthecountry that have created the platform for people to voice their concerns and opinions about social, economic, environmental, and cultural issues. This has notably changed the terrain and dimensions of activism and needs extensive investigation and examination, based on its effectiveness and capacity to accomplish the objectives of activism.

The concept of activism is entrenched in the belief that collectiveness is the key to development (Obar, 2012). As a people, within a country, each and every individual's view needs to be heard and assessed, for effective decision making. However, this has not been the case. As maintained by Oppong (2018), the country lacks the platforms and mediums, that allows people to express their opinions and views about socially and economically sensitive matters that they face in their everyday life. As such these feelings of being limited, undervalued, and appreciated are mostly repressed, and with the slightest crack people vent out their grievances, opinions, and views. Although several traditional means of activism exist which include: street marches, picketing, and strikes have played a role in traditional activism, they seem to be limited by issues of reach and geographical dispersion, amongst others, challenged especially in Ghana (Hubner, Deman, and Balik, 2017). Thus, creating the need for people to embrace other mediums such as social media platforms. As effective as this may be, the empirical evidence support it is lacking, as most studies have assessed the consequences of social media activities, but not its effectiveness. It is based on this backdrop that the current study will examine the effectiveness of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana.

1.2 Problem Statement

Studies have shown that contentious issues are dynamic, as they always are subject to change over time (Shaha et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has been argued that contentious issues are relative, as they relate based on the challenges and problems that are expressed by a group of people, within a certain context (Yang, 2018). Thus, contentious issues, as a concept, is not straightforward but rather based on perceptions and perspectives.

Although there are global issues that are contentious in nature, every country has what is considered a contentious issue or not. A case in point was when the Ghanaian president, His Excellency Nana Addo-Danquah Akuffo-Addo, was asked when Ghana would accept homosexuality, he states that although homosexuality is a major issue, in the world, it is not currently significant to Ghanaians (Oppong, 2018). This statement presents the view that contentious issues vary according to regions and countries, and also dependents on situations and problems; within the remits of this argument, one can argue that contentious issues are examined within the cultural fabric of the society, where the issues occur and are deliberated upon. As such, to the dynamism shown in contentious issues, it becomes relevant that both global and local contentious issues are examined within the contextual perspective of a particular society, giving it a broader and holistic approach to it. Thus, the researcher to examine contentious issues within the context of Ghana.

Additionally, studies have shown that in recent times, there has been a drastic change in the methods, strategies, and approaches that are applied in tackling contentious issues. According to Ousey and Kubrin (2018), changes in technology have led to drastic changes in the way contentious issues are approached and discussed, as many millennials now resort to social media and the internet, rather than the traditional media. This has been largely due to the fact that many social advocators are limited by the traditional media and methods, as they are mostly within the control of the government (Lee, 2018). In the words of Obar (2012), social media

denotes “... spaces of autonomy largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that had monopolized the channels of communication as the foundation of power”. As such many resorts to the use of social media activism, to the neglect of the traditional approaches. A critical examination of the effectiveness of social media activism can be tied to the 2011 Egyptian uprising, which was one of the first examples of how social media could be used in bringing people together to tackle an issue of concern- setting the precedence for other of such nature.

However, this example also presented the fact that activism goes beyond social media, as the traditional mediums are also important and cannot be overemphasized. Krimsti (2019) was of the view that the Egyptian uprising and much other activism that has been undertaken, that employed social media, still had to apply the traditional forms of activism, such as picketing and demonstrations, amongst others. Thus, the effectiveness of social media activism, cannot be extensively verified without the traditional forms of activism. This creates the need for further studies to be conducted to examine the phenomenon.

Furthermore, a critical examination of literature like that of the Arab Spring (Murthy, 2018), the #Blacklivesmatter movement (Yang, 2016), the #MeToo movement (Bhattacharyya, 2018) and the #HeForShe campaign (Puspita and Antoni, 2019) are some studies that have been conducted on social media activism, but almost all these studies have been conducted in the developed countries. Thus, a major gap in the literature exists that needs to be bridged. It is based on these problems that the current study examines the effect of social media activism for online activism on contentious issues.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to assess how effective social media is for online activism specifically on contentious issues. Based on this, the specific objectives outlined are:

- To examine the perception of Ghanaians on key contentious issues in Ghana.
- To compare the effectiveness of online activism (social media activism) to traditional/offline activism in Ghana.
- To examine the effect of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana.

1.4 Research Questions

- What is the perception of Ghanaians on key contentious issues in Ghana?
- How effective is online activism (social media activism), as compared to traditional/offline activism in Ghana?
- What is the effect of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study discusses the benefits to important stakeholders. And this relates to how important the study is to practice and further research.

Firstly, the study will have a lot of significance to the government, the citizenry, and individuals that engage in activism in Ghana. The government of Ghana, based on the study findings, will understand the dynamics of activism (online and offline) and how to cooperate with the citizenry in managing the country. Furthermore, the study findings will provide information to the citizenry and institutions that promote and engage in activism, as to which medium is effective and the impact it has on contentious issues. Further, assisting them on the ways to get their views heard and incorporated into national decision making.

Furthermore, the study will be beneficial to further studies in the area of activism and contentious issues. The study will provide the basis for further studies to be conducted, as the study will present recommendations for further studies to be conducted. Additionally, the

information presented by the study will bridge the gap in the literature, as most of the studies, on the topic, concentrating on the consequences, neglecting the effectiveness.

1.4 Justification

The study is crucial as such as time as this, when social media and the interconnectivity of the internet allows for people to defy the limitations of geographical locations to undertake a specific course of action, against a set goal and objective. Additionally, the role of the youth within the management and decision-making systems of Ghana has been limited and neglected, as such the study sets precedence as to the role of social media activism in presenting the youth with a platform that gives them a voice. Furthermore, the shifting preference for online activism, from offline activism, is worth assessing, thus creating the need for comparative analysis of which form of activism is more effective. Finally, the effectiveness of online activism on contentious issues needs to be assessed, in the wake of sensitive issues such as LGBTI, fixing the economy, and illegal mining (galamsey).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents information on the literature review of the study. The literature review of the study presents the theoretical framework and review of the literature. The purpose of the chapter is to present the current study within the context of already existing literature, as well as presenting gaps that exist in literature.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study examines the various theories that underpin the study. According to Saranthchandra and Haltinner (2020), the theories of social activism can be grouped categorically into two classical approaches and the contemporary approaches.

The classical theories are theories that were developed at the turn of the century and they have been observed to border on the causal mechanisms (Amenta, 2006). The main assumption underlining these theories is that social movements are based on structural strains. Thus, structural weaknesses such as rapid industrialization, urbanization, unemployment, corruption, and mismanagement of resources put people under subjective psychological pressure, which when a threshold is reached leads to tension within society (Amenta and Neal, 2010). The theory postulates that tensions in society, when it reaches a certain limit, leads to a disposition amongst the citizenry to engage in unconventional methods of political participation, such as picketing, demonstrations, and protesting. Examples of such theories are the deindividuation model, mass society theory, and relative deprivation theory, amongst others. However, these theories are limited as they have the assumption that protestors are irrational as they are acting out of frustration and emotions rather than being logical or rational (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). As such the study draws from the contemporary approaches, due to the challenges posed by the classical approaches.

The contemporary theories and approaches include structural approaches, resource mobilization theory, social constructivist approaches, and the social movement impact theory, with all of them looking at social movements from a different perspective or angle (Blee, 2017). For purposes of this study, the researcher relies on the social movement impact theory (outcome theory), as its main intention is to assess the outcomes of activism on society, as well as the factors that led to those effects. This captures the letter and spirit of the study, as the study intends to examine the effect of activism on contentious issues from the social media standpoint of view.

2.1.1 Social Movement Impact Theory

The social movement impact theory (SMIT) is the least studied theory amongst the social movement theory and this has been due to the complexity of the methodology used in assessing it (Wiltorowicz, 2002). However, amongst the theories that examine social activism, this theory is the only theory that assesses the impact or outcomes of social activism- that is, if social activism is effective or not. The SMIT is a relatively new theory that was introduced in 1975 in the book *The Strategy of Social Protest*, written by William Gamson (Smith and Fergusson, 2010). To develop the theory, Gamson examined over 50 social movement organizations between the period of 1800 to 1945, collecting data from them and assessing their impact- as the present study intends to do.

2.1.2 Channels of Activism

A key assumption underpinning the theory relates to the efficacy of a movement based on the channels used; either, radical and disruptive (general disorder, riots, and violence) or mainstream tactics (including political lobbying, rallies, and marches) (Serrano, 2020). The theory assumes that the choice of movement is critical to the success of the movement. The theory further asserts that the success of the choice is also contingent on the context within

which they operate (Smith and Fergusson, 2010). Gamson postulated that the application of violent strikes and other mediums of violence were sometimes met with uncertain results (Wiltorowicz, 2002). They further indicated that social movements that have achieved a certain level of success in earlier endeavors were more likely to apply violence, as opposed to those that had not chalked any level of success. Furthermore, the theory postulates that the application of violence in social movements was more of a result of strength rather than a cause of it (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). Thus, the theory affirms the fact that violence or radical approaches to activism only give an advantage to the side that is already ahead, whether applied by the state or movement. That is to say, the application of radical strategies can only suffice when the person applying the violent approach has an upper hand. Otherwise stated the one with the lower hand has to stick to less radical approaches (Greger, 2017). However, these assumptions still remain largely controversial.

2.1.3 Factors that influence outcomes (Organizational or external factors)

Furthermore, the theory assesses the factors that contribute to the impact of social activism. The theory examines the influence of external versus organizational factors. As maintained by (Serrano, 2020), studies have consistently investigated if the success of social activism is based on the organization or by other external factors. The SMIT theory postulates that although organizational factors play a critical role, they are influenced by other external forces (Wiktorowicz, 2002). The theorist asserted that external supports, mostly in situations where it comes from elite allies, push the impact of social activism movements to achieve more success, as they influence the outcomes (Smith and Fergusson, 2010). Thus, it is difficult for activism groups to make an impact, without the role of external forces of influence including the media, celebrities, and experts in the field that they are advocating for.

2.1.4 Types of Impact

According to the theory, the impact of social activism is enormous, however, there exist four main important outcomes (Blee, 2017). These four important impacts or outcomes include individual change, institutional change, cultural change, and political change.

The individual change considers the impact the social activism on the psychology of the people who engage in the movement (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). Numerous studies have concluded that when individual activists come together to form a movement for a certain social change or to address a contentious issue, they tend to affect each other, as shared values are accentuated and new networks are formed. Sarathchandra and Haltinner, (2020) argue that the contact and interaction between the individual activists lead to changes within the values of the group members; with Blee (2017) indicating that the change is more of an empowering change, where the individual members become more adept for advanced activism.

Secondly, the institutional changes have been observed to be key changes that occur as a result of social activism (Moradi and Grzanka, 2017). Studies have shown that this occurs mostly in state and non-state institutions where members of the organization organize a social movement to seek changes within the institution (Sarathchandra and Haltinner, 2020; Darden, 2021). These studies have noted that the institution that the movement target mostly tend to change policies, activities, and strategies that are noted by activists to be negative to their wellbeing or cause. However, evidence suggests that such movement and its influence on institutions can be weakened due to change within the movement and this comes in the form of 1) decentralization or diffuseness of organization, 2) rapid growth in terms of money or members, 3) strength of links between professionals and clients, and 4) ties to the state (Moradi and Grzanka, 2017). These factors have been noted to change the structures of a movement, thus reducing the impact that they make over the institution that they intend to influence.

Furthermore, the impact of culture is considered a very important outcome for social activism. It has been suggested that culture is mostly the target of most social activism that is engaged in by social activists (Blee, 2017). This is due to the fact that most issues under contention are subjected to an organization or societal culture, and a change in culture goes a long way to help make the required changes. According to Luder, (2010), culture mostly becomes the target when the challenge has to deal with personal action, with the feminist movement as a clear example. The purpose of this targeting is to help shift the perception, social norms, and values within institutions, societies, families, and individual groups (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015).

Finally, the impact is also measured within the political domain. Numerous studies have shown that political change is mostly the target of activism (Wiktorowicz, 2002; Malhaner, 2014). The view of researchers has been that social activism mainly targets political institution and ideations, with the intention of changing the political structures and decision making. Furthermore, social activism tends to focus on the policy direction of government and state, as most contentious issues have an underlining policy implemented or neglected- that is, in situations where a certain policy has contentions around it, activists try to get it changed, whereas in other situations the lack of policy in a certain area becomes a contentious issue.

2.2 Review of Literature

The contextual review presents a review of the concepts of the study. The key concepts of the study include contentious issues, online activism (social media activism), and traditional activism. These concepts form the remits of the study, and thus the framework of the study is built on this concept. The conceptual review of the study is important for the study, as it determines how the concepts relate to the objectives of the study, as well as presenting the stipulated definitions of the concepts as they relate to the study.

2.2.1 Contentious Issues

Mils, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010) stated that in general an issue may be considered contentious when there is no agreement amongst the actors and/or experts as to reasons that support each other's argument. Another definition was given by Ousey and Kubrin (2018), as controversial issues that have the capacity to undermine social cohesion. From this definition it can be asserted that contentious issues prevent cooperation amongst members of the society, thus preventing social and economic progression- although this is in extreme situations. Furthermore, contentious issues are defined as any situation, concept, or subject that tends to create arguments and disagreement between opposing parties (Sen, Gupta, Yadav and Kumar, 2020).

A critical examination of contentious issues show that the concept is multi-dynamic and covers a broad range of areas within society. According to Hensel (2017), contentious issues, are a multi-dynamic construct that transcends social, religious, political, environmental, psychological, legal, academic, and historical interactions and practice, amongst others. Additionally, Hensel (2017) stated that in every area of life where people have diverse opinions, views, and values, there exist contentious issues that many do not agree on and this creates contentions. This view was reiterated by Sen et al., (2020), when the researcher stated that disagreeing on certain legal, social, political, environmental, and religious creates the need for dialogue and discussions in order to ascertain, which party's view needs to be accepted or rejected based on merit. It is sufficient to note that in a free-thinking society, contentious issues will always exist as people are likely to form groups based on shared values leading to contentions.

Although contentious issues are mostly debated and argued out by the opposing parties, thus giving it the needed attention, there are various categories of contentious issues that get more

attention than others (Chon and Park, 2020). This is based on the fact that certain issues affect a larger population of people and are more sensitive than others. According to Ousey and Kubrin (2018), contentious issues that border on social issues, human rights, political, economic, environmental, and religious issues relatively gain more traction than issues that relate to academic, research, and education. This is due to the fact that contentious issues within these fields of endeavour are mostly popular within the media landscape (Blee, 2017).

The importance of contentious issues varies according to the number of people that it affects, level of sensitivity, level of influence, and the capacity of the said people to get the attention that is required to get the results that are needed. Studies have shown that when an issue affects a lot of people and is opposed by a larger set of people it becomes a major contentious issue that comes up for discussion (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). Studies have shown that the larger the number of people and groups that are contenting an issue, the more attention that it gains and the more diverse opinions and views are expressed for discussion (Wiktorowicz, 2002). This makes it impossible for the issues to be neglected, as well as makes it difficult for consensus building. However, Sen et al., (2020) were of the view that there are issues that do not require number but influence. In this instance, the researchers were of the view that there are certain issues that have come to the forefront for discussion that wouldn't have been considered except for the influence of the people involved. As maintained by Chon and Park (2020), this easily expresses the role of lobbyists, celebrities, and influential people in issues such as homosexuality, child trafficking, and other human rights abuse. Thus, contentious groups may arise due to the influence of a small group of people rather than a larger group of people.

Additionally, it has been observed that the sensitive nature of the issue determines how contentious an issue is and the contentions that form around the subject matter. Literature suggests that most sensitive issues are related to religious, human rights, and culturally defying

subjects. These issues mostly touch the core and entrenched values that find it difficult to change (Darden, 2021). In recent times, one of the most sensitive issues globally has been LGBTQ+ rights that has gained a lot of attention. This is a major contentious due to the religious and cultural sensitivity that is attached to LGBTQ+, especially in traditional societies like Ghana. The sensitivity of LGBTQ+ discussions fall below the threshold of sensitivity that is attached to the economic woes of the country, and its associated corruption allegations- although all these subjects were up for discussions within the last three months in Ghana (Mesmer and Socha, 2020).

2.2.1.1 Current Global Contentious issues

In the past decade, there has been a lot of contentious issues globally (Sandbrook et al, 2019). The categories of contentious issues that have been extensively debated, with various activists seeking redress, have been in line with LGBTQ+ rights, climate change, the global conflict between various countries, gender equality related issues, sex trafficking, the depletion of the world's resources, and sustainable development and trade (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015; Blee, 2017; Serrano, 2020).

According to Serrano (2020), climate change and action has been a major contentious issue between parties that believe that climate change is real and others who are of the view that it is a hoax. Experts, politicians, advocates, theorists and researchers, celebrities and lobbyists, have kept this decade-old debate alive, as many consider it to be very critical to the survival of humanity. Research suggests that the year 2020 was the warmest in recorded history, this contributed to the deadly wildfires including those in Canada and Australia, extreme weather events, hunger in many parts of the world, hurricanes, and the rising of the sea levels (Sen et al., 2020). Studies have further shown that the melting of the ice caps put the ecosystem at risk, however many researchers still do not accept these findings and views, leading to the

contention that surrounds it (Blee, 2017). Reviews made by several researchers show that many people still deny the scientific facts associated with climate change, as they believe that most of the figures and facts have been manipulated (Sarathchandra and Haltinner, 2020).

Another major global issue that gained a lot of attention was LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ relates to people who accept that sexual orientation and proclivities should be subjected to the individual involved and that society doesn't have to limit these people as they express their sexuality (Kaniuka et al., 2019). The contention is that various parties, also believe that certain sexual orientations and sexuality are unnatural and such interactions should not occur, as they are against the natural order of things. Furthermore, others argue that the carnal relationship between people of the same sex or changing one's sex is against religious and cultural principles, and as such making it difficult for them to accept LGBTQ+ (Craney et al., 2018). However, those advocating for LGBTQ+ rights argue that the sexual choices of people are basic human rights and that every individual retains the right to express their sexuality in ways and manners that they want and not based on what society attributes to them (Craney et al., 2018; Chon and Park, 2020). Due to the sensitivity of the issue and the global nature of the problem, a lot of countries, political, activist, lobby groups and institutions have come up to either support or come against the agenda- thus making it one of the key contentious issues subjected to scrutiny.

Other contentious issues of such on a global scale include global conflict between various countries, gender equality-related issues, the depletion of the world's resources, sustainable development and trade. Examples of global conflicts between countries, based on economic, political, and other social agendas, including the USA and China's trade wars, the conflict in the middle-east between Israel, Palestine, and the other Arab States, conflicts in Ethiopia between the rebels and the state, the China and Taiwan conflict, as well as the China and Hong Kong conflicts (Mattoo and Staiger, 2020; Luder, 2010). Furthermore, in relation to gender

equality, at the global scale, the UN wants the world to achieve gender equality across the globe, with both women and men having equal rights and access to resources (Kaniuka et al., 2019). This comes in the form of employment, poverty alleviation, political participation, and involvement in decision-making. Additionally, the depletion of the world's resources talks about how the excessive usage of unrenewable resources, like crude oil, the population of animals, and water, leads to the depletion of the resources (Hensel, 2017). In this regard, many argue that the world should rather use renewable sources of energy, sources of food and water, and sustainable building strategies.

2.2.1.2 Current Contentious Issues in Africa and Ghana

Due to the global nature of contentious issues the world over, there are similarities within the issues in Africa and Ghana, with a few diversities occurring. The diversities may exist in the perspective and position of Africans on certain issues, as well as certain specific issues that pertain to a specific country or region (Mesmer and Socha, 2020).

In terms of perspective, studies have shown that the cultural and religious traditions of African make them more conservative, thus making it difficult for them to accept liberal issues such as LGBTQ+ and gender equality, amongst others (Moradi and Grzanka, 2017). Studies have shown that within the African setting, only a few countries have accepted gay rights, with the majority of the countries opposing these rights (Ousey and Kubrin, 2018; Sandbrook et al., 2019). Thus, gay rights have been a major contentious issue in Africa.

The challenge with Africa is that due to the level of development the countries within the continent have a lot of challenges such as poverty, inequality, underdevelopment, and trade, that they do not consider certain other issues such as LGBTQ+ as pertinent needing immediate attention (Wilner, 2020). This was a view expressed by the president of Rwanda during a press conference, where he was asked about his views on LGBTQ+ “.....LGBT hasn't been our

problem, and we don't intend to make it a problem, so we struggling with all kinds of problems that we have..." (Wilner, 2020). With this statement, the president wanted to indicate that LGBT is not a core priority since it doesn't contribute directly to national development.

In line with this argument, it can be assumed that Africans have a lot of problems with socio-economic development, poverty, bribery and corruption, and ineffective health care systems, which in themselves are major contentious issues than to think of LGBTQ+ agenda, climate change, and depletion of the world's resources (Berriane and Duboc, 2019). As such the contentious issue include LGBTQ+, bribery and corruption, gender equality, economic challenges, politicizing of various social issues, constant changes in culture and religion.

In Ghana, the current major contentious issue was the economic woes that have plagued the country after the Covid-19 pandemic (Sibiri, 2021). Many Ghanaians argue that the country is being mismanaged by the leaders of the country, especially the Nana Addo led government (Sibiri, 2021). This issue became a major issue of contention leading to the #fixthecountry movement, demonstrations, and activism. This issue brought up arguments from all sides of the political divide, with individuals and groups coming with their views on the topic. To a certain large extent, the 'fix the country' movement and activities were linked to the death of one of the activists called 'Kaaka' and the violent acts that were carried out in the Ejura community (Ackah, 2019). Furthermore, the movement gathered a cross-section of Ghanaians, both online and an offline population. Additionally, the issue was rekindled after it was announced that the government of Ghana intended to pay the first and second lady when a larger section of the population indicated that it was needless looking at the economic state of the country.

Another contentious issue that gained a lot of media attention and discussion, was the LGBT+ rights and their intention to have held a conference in Ghana (Mesmer and Socha, 2020). This

was vehemently opposed by religious and political groups, as well as the average citizenry. A case in point was when members of the parliament, across the political divide, drafted a document to the speaker to entrench Ghana's position against the gay movement within the country (Asare-Donkor, 2021). Furthermore, the police task force ransacked the premises of the office of the LGBTQ+ advocates, apprehending them and confiscating their equipments and machine. A critical observation of the collective opinions of the average Ghanaian showed that the majority of the people were against the proliferation of gay activities within the country (Mesmer and Socha, 2020). Arguably, the opposition comes from the traditional, cultural and religious nature of the average Ghanaian (Ackah, 2019). However, members of the gay community have also indicated their displeasure for the way they are being treated, and their fear of being harmed or killed due to their sexuality and sexual preferences (Mesmer and Socha, 2020). The gay rights conundrum started during the Mills administration, continued through the Mahama administration, and again has peeked its head during the Nana Akuffo-Addo's administration. Thus, it is an issue that seems never to be resolved and continues to pervade the social space of the country.

2.2.2 Activism

Generally, activism has defined the action or policy of applying vivacious campaigning to bring about the social, environmental and political change (Cooper, 2021). Additionally, activism has been defined as the application of direct action to accomplish an outcome, either against or for an issue (Ousey and Kubrin, 2019). Furthermore, activism is engaging in an action that goes beyond traditional or conventional routine on behalf of a cause. O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward, (2018) also defined activism as engaging in a set of activities to stop a change or make a change in society. These definitions indicate that activism involves engaging in a set of activities or actions that is directed towards attaining a certain change or maintaining a situation that doesn't merit change.

Activism can be broadly categorized into action and advocacy, although some argue that advocacy in itself is action (O'Brien et al., 2018). Furthermore, as maintained by Cooper (2021), activism can be grouped into traditional and modern activism. The traditional form of activism refers to the use of physical activity to achieve an expected change or attain a set outcome, whilst modern forms of activism refer to the use of the online medium to promote a certain action. That is, traditional activism doesn't apply technologically related tools like the internet and social media, whilst modern activism makes use of these tools to reach a larger group of people. The literature, thus, delves into traditional and modern (online) activism.

2.2.2.1 Traditional Activism

According to Lin (2018), there are three main types of traditional activism and these include demonstrations and protests, boycotts, strikes, petitions, and social media campaigns. Arguably, demonstrations and protests are considered the most popular form of activism. Studies have shown that demonstrations are when a group of people united by a common belief comes together to march, hold a vigil or sit at a specified location in order to create attention (Nyanang, 2021). In Ghana, there have been a lot of demonstrations, for example, the 'Kumi Preko Demonstration', the 'dumsor' demonstration, and quite recently the 'fix the country' demonstrations. Demonstrations are mostly conducted on the rights of people to engage in a peaceful protest, although they have to seek permission from the security agencies before conducting the demonstration (Asante and Hellbrecht, 2019). However, it has been observed that demonstrations mostly become complicated when counter-protesters and law enforcement officers come to the scene of the demonstration. Furthermore, studies have shown that demonstrations and protest are more successful when it involves a large group of people.

Another form of traditional activism is boycott. This type of traditional activism involves a group of people, mostly workers of an organization or labour group, who intend to desist from

working in order to protest or push an agenda (Oppong, 2018). As maintained by Oppong (2018), due to the nature and intention of boycotts it is much likely to take place when it involves a large group of people. An example was when a group of universities students in the USA and UK pressured their universities to boycott products from the Fruit of the Loom, when they engaged in unfair labour practices in Honduras- their activities led to the loss of about 1800 jobs thus the intention of the university students to ensure the workers get their jobs back (O'Brien et al., 2018). This method of activism has been extensively used outside Ghana, and by gender and LGBT+ rights activities. Another case in point was when the Ireland Parliament, boycotted a speech by the government of Ghana, during the Mahama administration, due to the entrenched position of the government on gay rights (Oppong, 2018). Boycotts are mostly effective as they can cause pressure to the party involved, an accomplishment that was achieved by the university students when they boycotted the products of Fruit of the Loom- as the company was forced to reopen the closed industries and reemploy the laid-off workers. Furthermore, (Sandbrook et al., 2019) was of the view that for boycotts to work there is the need for a strong leadership, with clear and effective goals.

Furthermore, another form of traditional activism comes in the form of strikes and as the name implies, workers refusing to work until their demands are met. This happens when workers are forced to work in dangerous or unfair working conditions, with low wages and unpaid salaries (Sarathchandra and Haltinner, 2020). Numerous studies have asserted that strikes were a dominant feature of the industrial revolution era, because during those periods there was little to no workers protection and companies needed mass labour (Blee, 2017; Sibiri, 2021). During those periods, a few countries made strikes illegal to prevent workers from participating in them, although in recent times it has become a dominant means of workers getting their claims across (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). In Ghana, most labour unions engage in strikes, for instance, the University Teachers Association of Ghana, the Teacher, Educational Workers

Union, and the Senior Staff Association of the various University, amongst others (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). These strikes are mostly to get the attention of government about unpaid salaries, low wages, and other delayed/unavailable benefits.

2.2.2.2 Benefits and Disadvantages of Traditional Activism

Traditional forms of activism have been tested decades ago, and they have been found to be effective in attaining set goals and objectives (Blee, 2017). A key advantage of traditional activism is that it has a physical and real-world impact as it required physical action (Greger, 2017). The tangibility of traditional activism cannot be overemphasized, which is an advantage that it has over online activism. Furthermore, the traditional form of activism also gets the needed attention, especially when has a larger population and people with influence. Additionally, the coming together of people with shared principles and values enforces the beliefs attached to a certain cause. Moreover, traditional activism tends to create a sense of empowerment and belongingness that comes with people with like minds coming together. Also, Chon and Park, (2020), were of the view that activists coming together increases interactions amongst the people, which helps them strategize well to achieve set goals and objectives. In addition, traditional activism has a lot of options available to achieve the desired action or response (Berriane and Duboc, 2019).

Nonetheless, there are a few challenges and disadvantages associated with the use of the traditional form of activism. According to Hensel (2017), due to geographical challenges, it becomes difficult to mobilize all the people that support a cause, thus leading to only a few within a certain geographical location joining demonstrations and protests. This challenge becomes less of an issue when using social media activism. Besides, traditional activism doesn't allow the views and opinions of a wider set of individuals, as the platform for communication and interaction may become one-way not allowing effective communication

and attitudinal change (Kaniuka et al., 2019). Again, traditional activism can easily be interrupted by external force from counter-protesters and law enforcement agencies- this can be done with the use of physical force or persuasion. Additively, the use of traditional activism may lead to destruction, harm, deaths, and even disasters due to the physical nature of the approach, especially when there is violence (Wilner, 2020).

2.2.3 Online Activism- Social Media Activism

Online activism, can be defined as any form of activism that applies advanced technologies in the form of the internet and other forms of communication to elicit an action or for advocacy (Chon and Park, 2020). Studies suggest that these have become a huge platform for advocating for change, as they provide access to a larger group of people and individuals. Social media, falls under online activism, as a medium that applies advanced communication and social interaction tools for activism (Lee, 2018). The use of online mediums like social media platforms has become popular in recent times, both as a means of getting support for a certain cause, as well as taking action on the cause (Wang, Yang and Thorson, 2021).

To examine the extent of the power inherent in the use of social media platforms for activism, one can look at the Egypt uprising, the #metoo movement, the #blacklivesmatter movement, the LGBTQ+ advocacy, and the #fixthecountry movement. These clear examples provide evidence to the fact that online activism, using social media platforms are very vital in mobilizing and enforcing change within the political, social, environmental, and economic landscape of every country. According to statistics, 90% of forms of activism start from social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, with proponents advocating for a certain change within society (Smith and Ferfuson, 2010; Serrano, 2020). Also, evidence suggests that more than 70% of these movements gain momentum and causes a lot of disruptions that promote change within society. In most forms, these are called social media campaigns.

As opined by Sen et al., (2020), social media activism is a relatively novel form of activism that has taken the world by storm. It has also been nicked-named the ‘hashtag activism’ where people express their opinions and views on contentious issues creating arguments and further contentions. Using these platforms, research indicates that people, organizations and governments, are able to create awareness about issues, through videos, posts, and graphics, amongst others. According to a study published by Pew Research (2020), the popularity of social media reached an all-time high during the Blacks Lives Matter Movement, which relied on social media for its mobilization and attention seeking strategies. The data showed that the hashtag was used more than 47 million times on Twitter from 26th May to 7th June, showing how powerful social media activism is in activism.

Additionally, writing petitions and open letters have been a medium used by activism to drive home an idea, advocate for a change, and to help change the opinions of people about an issue (Blee, 2017). Studies have shown that letter writing and petitions have been noted to be one of the most popular forms of activism. This form of activism is used in pressuring corporations, public officials, and other people at the helm of authority. However, the efficacy of such platforms relies on the number of signatories to the letter and/or petition, due to the fact that the more the number the more attention than it gets (Sarathchandra and Haltinner, 2020). This form of activism is mostly captured under the online/social media activism due to the fact that petitions and letters are likely to gather a lot of signatories when it is sent through social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Gofundme, and emails (Siribi, 2021). Moreover, they have been noted to be beneficial as it can reach a lot of people and gather a lot of support within a short period of time. A case in point, was when about 5000 mothers came together to sign a petition to remove Rick Ross, an American musician, as a brand ambassador for Adidas, due to certain statements that he made (Sandbrook et al., 2019). In Ghana, such petitions do exist

but mostly involve the petitioning of the law courts, and other institutions like the Special Prosecutor's office, CHRAG, and the government.

2.2.3.1 Benefits and Disadvantages of Online Activism

The benefits associated with the application of social media platforms for activism are enormous. This includes the fact that according to statistics, social media is a much larger group of people, thus getting the required reaction from a broad range of groups, individuals, institutions, and governments (Wang et al., 2021). This increases the information shared, explanations made and discussions carried out with the purpose of reducing the wrong notions attached to a certain issue, a case in point is the LGBTQ+ (Nyanang, 2021). Additionally, using social media allows people to express themselves as they seek recognition, redress, and support, thus reducing the repression that they feel when they voice out their opinions. It further gives everyone a voice. Furthermore, evidence suggests that social media reaches a much younger generation between the ages of 18- 45, thus creating more influence and desired social change (O'Brien et al., 2018). Likewise, social media platforms create a lot of engagement, which is impossible with the traditional mediums, due to the enhanced interactions and communication that it allows (Wang et al., 2021).

Contrarily, the application of social media in activism has its disadvantages. Studies have shown that social media activism cannot be effective without the added traditional form of activism (Ousey and Kubrin, 2018). The researchers are of the view that posting videos and graphics, as well as using hashtags, may only end up as a post without any real-world change or action. That is to say, creating hashtags like #fixthecountry and #blacklivesmatter doesn't change the problem that occurs in real life without people actually taking the needed steps to push for more physical activity. What is more, the application of social media in activism has been noted to be performative rather than action oriented (Oppong, 2018). This creates the view

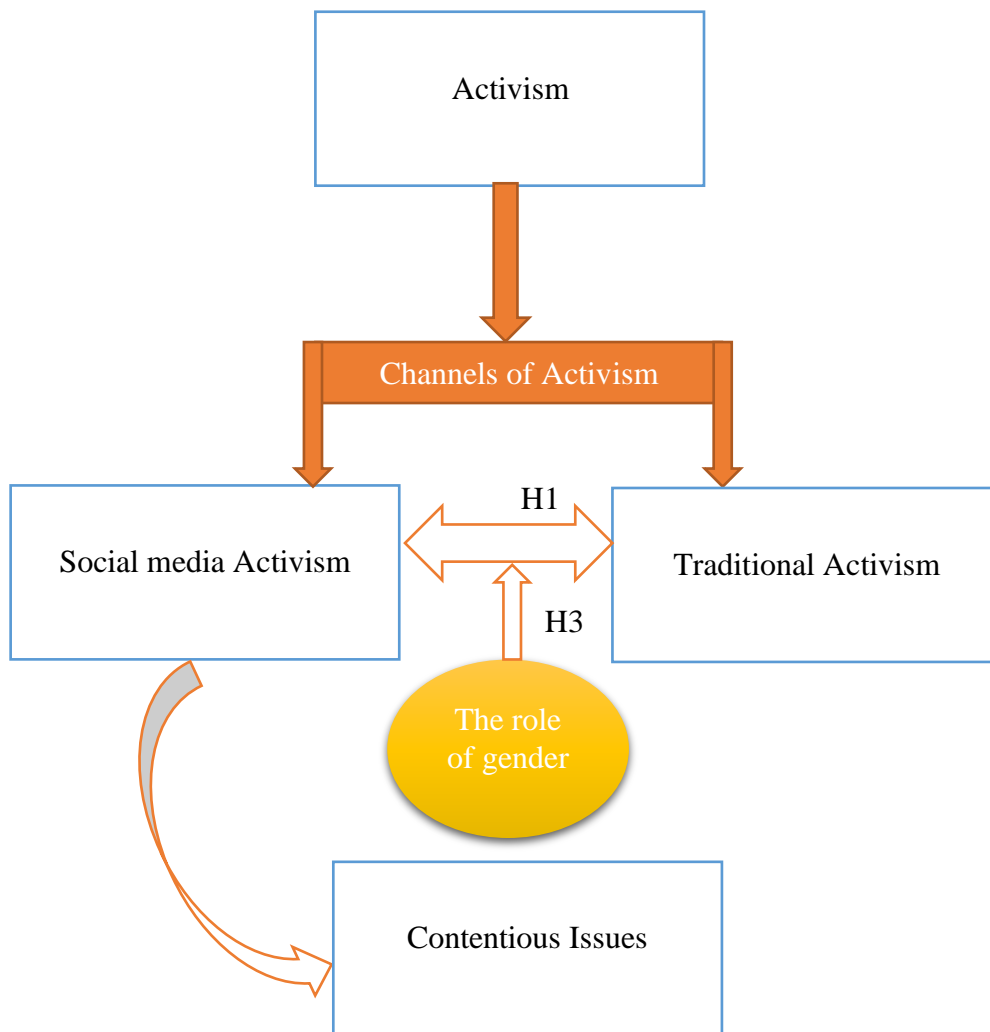
that social media activism, may be appropriate for interaction, influencing, attention seeking, and mobilization, and without the needed action it becomes useless.

2.2.4 Gender and Online Activism

Reviewing literature around gender and activism shows that compared to the past century and decade, more women are involved in activism now more than ever (Jupp, 2017; Hensel, 2017). The change within the norm can be attributed to the challenges that women have faced due to inequality, poverty, low wages and salaries, and less political and decision participation (Kanuika et al., 2019). What is more, studies have shown that in recent times women have become more vocal, as they are taking advantage of the opportunities that are given to them within the social structures.

However, it should be noted women mostly limit themselves to activism that is linked to their gender and its associated empowerment (Lee, 2018), to the neglect of other global issues that may not directly concern them (Craney et al., 2018). That is to say, women are less likely to engage in activism unless it applies directly to them. Also, studies have shown that women are more likely to engage in online activism as opposed to traditional mediums of activism. This is due to the fact that women do not like to expose themselves to altercations, as compared to men (Cooper, 2021). Thus, online activism is more suited for women as compared to men (Jupp, 2017). Additionally, studies suggest that women are less likely to expose themselves to danger or harm, as well as break the law or engage in violence during activism, as they see them as crimes. This makes them less likely to engage in any physical altercation for any cause (Sandbrook et al. 2019).

2.3 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework above presents the relationship between the variables under study. The framework shows that activism can be generally divided into channels and there are two main channels of activism, including social media activism and traditional activism. The framework further juxtaposes the two channels, as a means of assessing the most effective form of activism, which is captured in hypothesis one (H1). Additionally, the framework shows the relationship between social media activism and contentious issues, as indicated by H2, with the purpose of assessing the impact of social media activism on contentious issues. Finally, the framework showed the role of gender on social media and traditional activism, as shown in H3.

2. 4 Hypotheses

The study states these hypotheses, which will be tested by the researcher:

H1: Social media activism will be better than traditional/offline activism in Ghana.

H2: Social media activism will affect contentious issues in Ghana.

H3: Women are more likely to engage in online activism, as opposed to traditional/offline activism in Ghana.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter three of the study details information on the research methodology of the study. The methodology focuses on the strategies, methods, instruments and procedures that were used by the researcher to assess the opinions of Ghanaians on contentious issues, the effect social media has on these contentious topics and the efficacy of online activism as compared to offline activism. Thus, the methodology presents the research design, population of the study, sources and type of data, sample, and sampling technique, instrument of data collection, procedure for data collection, data analysis and ethical framework.

3.1 Research Design

The research design of the study will expand on the choices of methodology that will be applied by the researcher in conducting the study and captures details of the type of research design that is selected for the study. As maintained by Atindanbila (2013), a research design is defined as methods and strategies that are applied by a researcher in conducting a study. There are several research designs and these include: experimental, correlational, quasi-experiments, case study, exploratory and survey designs.

The study adopted an exploratory design to gain further insight into the study variables that have not been extensively examined within the study area (Ghana). Furthermore, a critical review at literature suggests that the effectiveness of social media activism on contentious issues has not been extensively examined, calling for the need for the exploratory type of research. Additionally, the study explored using the survey design. The survey design is defined as the strategy that allows researchers to sample the opinions and views of a population for data analysis purposes (Creswell, 2014). There are two main types of survey designs and these are the cross-sectional and longitudinal survey designs. Due to the purpose of the

researcher, the study adopted the cross-sectional survey study design. This design allowed the researcher sample the opinions and views of a cross-section of the students of the University of Ghana, Legon. This method was also be used because it will be more practical and easier to manage (Atindanbila, 2013). Additionally, the design allowed the researcher to get more work done.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study presents information population used for the study. Ader, Mellengergh and Hand (2008) defines a population as a group of entities, people, places and/or events that are examined by a researcher for data collection purposes. There are two main types of a population and these include the target population and accessible population of the study. The target population refers to the entire population that is under review, with the researcher having an intention of sampling from for research purposes (Gill et al., 2008). The population is mostly large and contains all the people that fall within the study area. However, due to the large nature of the target population, every study deduces an accessible population from the target population within the intention of having an easy access to the population. Thus, the accessible population is an aspect of the target population that the researcher actually samples from.

The study had the University of Ghana as the study area, thus students within the university were considered for the study and served as the target population. This target population was selected because they are heterogeneous and use social media extensively. However, for the accessible population, the researcher selected the students who reside in the Pentagon hostels as the accessible population of the study.

Furthermore, they had all the characteristics that were needed by the researcher and had experiences in the variables considered for the study.

3.3 Sources and Types of Data

The sources and types of data are a key aspect of every research, as they determine how the researcher gathered the data used for the study (Belcher, 2009). The types of data refer to the data types and falls under primary or secondary types of data. The primary type of data indicates data that remains in its raw form and has not been summarized (Ledford and Gast, 2018). Whilst secondary types of data are data that have been processed and summarized. Primary sources of data mostly include diary entries, data collect through questionnaires and interviews, data from medical records of respondents amongst others. On the other hand, secondary sources of data include journals, published and unpublished thesis, and other online sources of data. The study used both primary and secondary types of data and these were sourced from online data bases like Emerald, Jstor, Google Scholar and Academia, whilst the primary sources were mainly collected through the use of a questionnaire.

3.4 Sample

As indicated above, the study sampled from the accessible population of students who are residents of the Pentagon hostels, of the University of Ghana, Legon. The Pentagon hostel complex is made up of the new and an old hostel block that houses students. The sample will be taken from the new pentagon hostels which has three main blocks namely Block A, B and C. Each Block has a capacity of 1600 students. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the population, the study had to select a larger sample size to ensure that the sample was representative of the population. To achieve this the researcher sampled 100 students from the accessible population; this number was appropriate and representative due to the academic calendar and the number of students available in the hostels.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The study, in selecting the sample form the accessible population, had to apply a sampling technique. As defined by (Creswell, 2014) a sampling technique refers to the strategy that is

applied by a researcher in selecting members of the accessible population to participate in a study. The researcher further added that sampling techniques include quota sampling, convenient sampling, and simple random and systematic random, snow ball and purposeful sampling etc., with each serving a specific purpose in research.

The study selected the systematic sampling technique in sampling from the study. This is a probability sampling technique when a researcher wants to make sure the respondents are selected randomizing without any bias. Furthermore, the systematic random sampling used as fixed periodic interval, especially from a larger population. The sampling interval, is calculated by using the desired sample size to divide the population size. The researcher to achieve this had to get the entire population size and list, to ensure the sampling formulae to select from the population. The researcher used the formulae is selecting members of the population that were to participate in the study.

3.6 Instrument of Data Collection

The instrument of data collection details the instrument that the researcher applied in collecting the data from the respondents of the study. The instrument of data collection used for the study was a questionnaire. This was adopted due to the quantitative nature of this study, as well as the use of the cross-sectional survey design.

Additionally, the study used questionnaires with a Likert Scale that allowed the respondents to express their opinions and views on a continuum of strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). This allows for objective and subjective expression of opinions and views. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to quantitative measures the views and opinions expressed, as numerical values were attached to them.

Additionally, the question mainly used close-ended questions, as opposed to open-ended questions; close-ended questions are questions that have a specified set of options that a

respondent chooses from, whilst the open-ended questions are questions that a researcher allows open for the respondents to provide their views and opinions. The questionnaire had mainly four sections. The first section, which was section A, captured information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Furthermore, the section B, which is the second section, collected information on the perception of Ghanaian on contentious issues in Ghana. Additionally, section C focused on the effectiveness of online activism, with section D focusing on the traditional means of activism in Ghana.

3.7 Procedure for Data Collection

Firstly, the researcher spoke to the hall manager on granting permission to distribute questionnaires among students in the hostel. The researcher then approached the students using the systematic sampling technique to sample them. Upon their permission, the questionnaires were distributed to them and the data collected after it was filled. The researcher made sure only a minimum level of assistance was provided to prevent conflict of interest and to ensure the opinions of expressed were candid and not influenced by the researcher. After data was collected, the respondents were briefed and thanked for their participation.

3.8 Data Analysis

For data analysis purposes, the study used the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) for data analysis. The researcher first entered and coded the data into SPSS to ensure the data was represented numerically based on the options provided on the questionnaire. Furthermore, the researcher applied statistical tools like mean scores, standard deviation, independent t and other forms of statistical analysis to examine the data collected. After which the data was presented in table to aid in presentation.

3.9 Ethical Framework

The study applied various ethical and legal frameworks in conducting the study. Firstly, the study ensure that permission was sought, with the introductory letter that was collected. Thus,

permission was collected before the research was conducted. Additionally, the researcher sought for informed consent from the respondents before data was collected this was to ensure that they were informed about the data collected. Furthermore, the researcher ensured there was confidentiality and anonymity in the data collection processes. This was to ensure that the views and opinions of the respondents were not linked to them directly. Again, the study ensured that the respondents were debriefed after the study was conducted.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The chapter four of the study presents the data analysis, presentation of results and discussion of the study. The chapter follows after the chapter three of the study, which handled the data collection aspect of the study. Thus, the chapter four presents the aftermath of data collection and data analysis that was conducted by the study. The chapter presents the data based on the following section, first the demography, then the data on the objectives which were: to examine the perception of Ghanaians on key contentious issues in Ghana, to compare the effectiveness of online activism (social media activism) to traditional/offline activism in Ghana, and to examine the effect of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana are individually presented followed by a discussion of the results.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section of the study presented the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The section is mostly applied as a means of putting the sample within the context of the population. And this is to ensure that the sample is representative of the sample is representative of the population and that generalization is possible. The demographic characteristics examined were seven and the results are presented in subsections below.

4.2.1 Gender

This section examined the sex/gender of the respondents that were used for the study. The results were presented in table 4.1 below.

Table 4. 1: Gender of the Respondent

Variable	Charateristics	Frequency	Percent

What is your sex?	Male	54	54.0
	Female	46	46.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The study examined the gender of the respondents that were selected for the study. The results showed that out of 100(100%) respondents, 46(46.0%) of them were females and 54(54.0%) of the respondents were male. Thus, the majority of the respondents were males.

4.2.2 Academic Qualification

This section examined the academic qualification of the respondents that were used for the study. The results were presented in table 4.2 below.

Table 4. 1: Academic Qualification of Respondents

What is your highest academic qualification?				
Variable	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Certificate	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
Diploma	4	4.0	4.0	6.0
Bachelor's Degree	50	50.0	50.0	56.0
Master's Degree	40	40.0	40.0	96.0
PHD	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table 4.2 presents the details of what the highest educational qualifications of the respondents used for the study had. The results showed that out of 100(100.0%) respondents that were used for the study, 2(2.0%) had a general WASSSEC certificate, 4(4.0%) had a diploma. 50(50.0%) had a bachelors degree, 40(40.0%) had a master's degree and the

remaining 4(4.0%) had a PhD. This shows that majority of the respondents used for the study had their bachelor's degree, showing an education sample.

4.2.3 Social Media Platforms

This aspect of the study examined whether the respondents were on social media and the platforms that they were on. The researcher used frequency distribution to analyze the options that were selected by the respondents and these were presented in table 4.3 and figure 4.1 below.

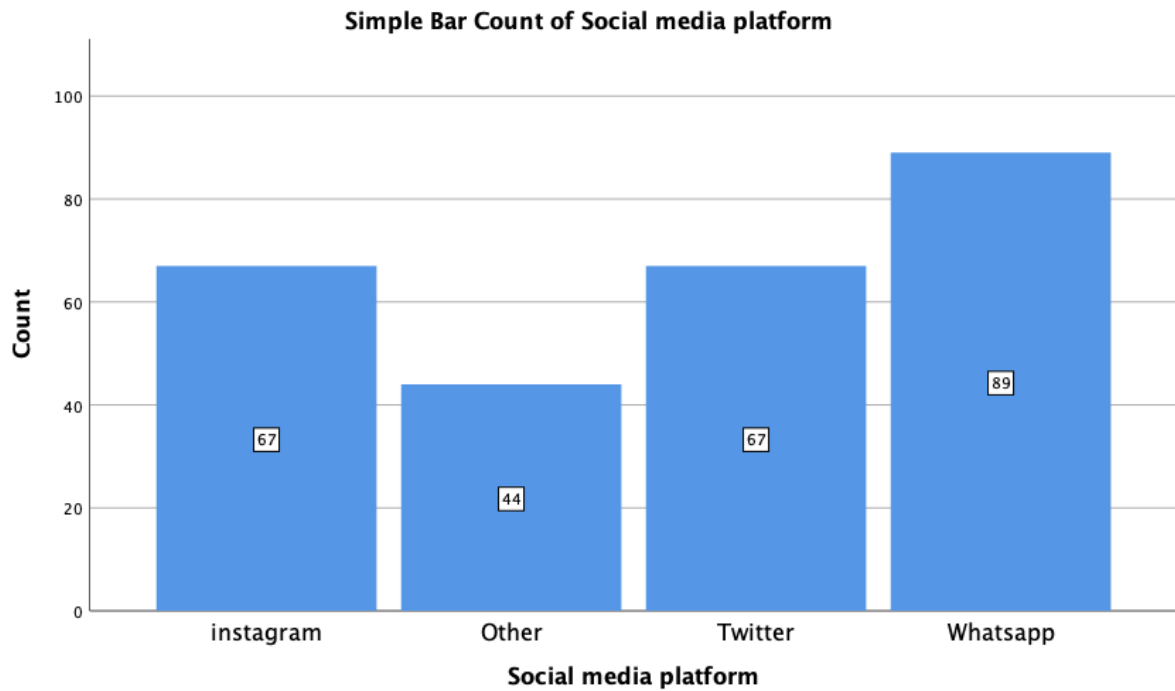
Table 4. 2: Social Media Platform

Are you on any social media platform?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	99	99.0	99.0	99.0
No	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table 4.3 above presents information on the whether the respondents were on any social media platform or not. The results showed that out of the respondents, 99(99.0%) with only one respondent indicated that they were not on any social media platform. Thus, the study sample were within the capabilities of answering the questions presented. Furthermore, the researcher examined the types of social media platforms that the respondents were on and the results were presented in figure 4.1.

Figure 4. 1: Type of Social Media Platform



Source: Field Survey, 2021

The figure 4.1 above presents the types of social media platforms that the respondents used or engaged with. The results showed that WhatsApp was the most used social media platform 89(89.0%), followed by both Twitter and Instagram each with 67(67.0%) and then other social media platforms (which included LinkedIn, Viber). Thus, the results showing that out of the total number of respondents who indicated that the use social media, the majority used WhatsApp.

4.2.4 Length of Time Participant had Used Social Media

The study examined the length of time participants had used social media. The table 4.4 below presents the results from the study.

Table 4. 3: Length of Time Participants had Used Social Media

How long have you used social media?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Less than two years	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
	2-5 years	16	16.0	16.2	18.2
	6- 10 years	52	52.0	52.5	70.7
	Over 10 years	29	29.0	29.3	100.0
	Total	99	99.0	100.0	
Missing		1	1.0		
Total		100	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The result showed that out of 99(99.0%) -since one respondent did not fill out the details- 2(2.0%) of the respondents had used social media less than two years, 16(16.0%) had used it for 2-5 years, 52(52.0%) had used social media for 6-10 years, and 29(29.0%) had used it for over 10 years. This shows that out of all people that use social media, the majority of them have used it for 6-10 years and thus they have had experiences with using the social media.

4.2.5 Contentious Issues

This aspect of the study presents the contentious issues that the respondents had expressed opinions about. The researcher asked the respondents about the contentious issues that they had expressed opinions about and the results were presented in table 4.5 below.

Table 4. 4: Contentious Issues

Do you know what contentious issues are?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	78	78.0	78.0	78.0
No	22	22.0	22.0	100.0

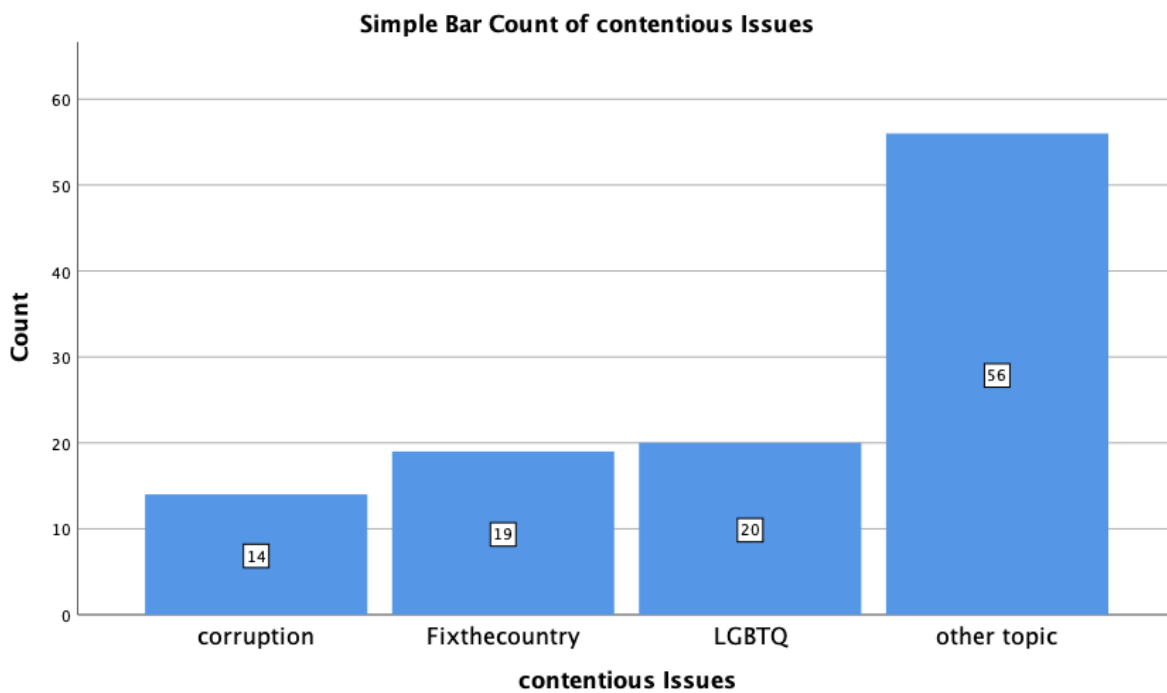
Total	100	100.0	100.0	
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Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table presented above shows the results of the study pertaining to whether the respondents knew any contentious issues that were occurring or up for debate within their environment. The result showed that out of 100(100.0%) of the respondents, 78(78.0%) indicated that they knew about contentious issues in their country, whilst 22 (22.0%) stated that they did not know about any contentious issues in Ghana. However, the results showed that majority were aware of contentious issues that were present within their vicinity thus making the respondents appropriate for the study. A follow up question was to ascertain the specific types of contentious issues that the respondents were aware of and this was shown in the figure 4.2 below.

4.2.6 Contentious Issues Respondents Had Expressed Opinions About

Figure 4. 2 Contentious Issues



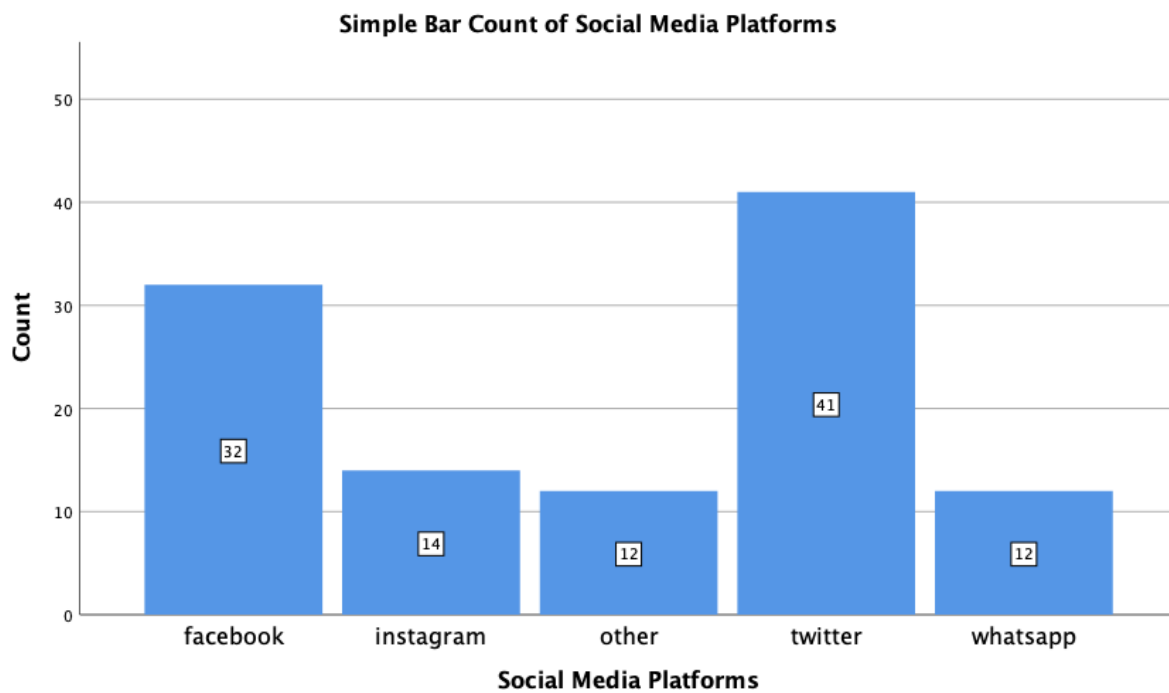
Source: Field Survey, 2021

The figure shows that out of the respondents who showed that they were aware of contentious issues in Ghana, 56(56.0%) stated that the topics were related to issues other than LGBTQ like Galamsey, Womens rights etc., whilst 20(20.0%) stated that LGBTQ was the most contentious issue that they had been exposed to, 19(19.0%) stated that they were more concerned about #fixthecountry agenda, and finally 14(14.0%) were of the view that they were exposed to more issues of corruption. This shows that in relation to the contentious issues highlighted by the study, the most contentious was LGBTQ, which is line with the period within which the study was conducted, as LGBTQ was a major issue had come up for discussion.

4.2.7 Mediums for Expressing Contentious Issues

This aspect of the study examined the mediums that were applied by the respondents in expressing their contentious issues. The results were presented in figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4. 3: Mediums for Expressing Contentious Issues



Source: Field Survey, 2021

The study results showed that out of the respondents that indicated that they had expressed their opinions on contentious issues included WhatsApp 12(12.0%), Instagram 14(14.0%), Facebook 32(32.0%), Twitter 41(41.0%) and then others (LinkedIn, Snapchat etc.) 12(12.0%). This shows that majority of the respondents used the major social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp but the main platform was Twitter, as it was the most popular.

4.3 Perception about Contentious Issues in Ghana

The first objective of the study was to examine Ghanaian’s perception about contentious issues in Ghana. The study examined the various contention issues by ranking the contentious issues based on the means scores. The respondents were asked to express their opinions based on a Likert Scale and the results are presented below in table 4.6 below.

Table 4.5: Perception about Contentious Issues in Ghana t-test Results

One-Sample t-Test						
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Fixthecountry	100	9.81	4.24	23.14	99	0.000
Corruption	100	12.00	2.82	42.53	99	0.000
LGBTQ	100	12.20	2.38	51.21	99	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table shows that the perceptions of Ghanaians towards statements that relate to earlier indicated concepts such as LGBT, Corruption and issue pertaining to fixing the country. The study showed all the noted contentious issue were of prime importance, with Fixthecountry ($M = 9.81$, $SD = 4.24$, $t = 23.14$), Corruption ($M = 12.00$, $SD = 2.82$, $t = 42.53$), and LGBTQ ($M = 12.20$, $SD = 2.38$, $t = 51.21$). Thus, the study results showed that the most contentious issue of concern was the LGBTQ, followed by corruption and finally Fixthecountry. This shows that passing of the anti-LGBTQ bill became centrepiece to online conversations as it is currently the trending contentious issue for Ghanaians.

4.4 Comparison of Online Activism to Offline Activism

The second objective sought to compare the effectiveness of online activism to offline activism. The researcher examined this objective using the One-sample T test to examine the means, standard deviations and the t coefficient. The results are captured in table 4.7 below.

Table 4. 6: Comparison of Online Activism to Offline Activism

One-Sample Test							
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
online activism	100	28.52	5.49	0.55	51.96	99	0.000
online activism	100	24.28	4.36	0.44	55.71	99	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table showed results from the comparison using the One-Sample t- test and the results showed that both forms of activism were applied and used extensively by the respondents. The results showed online activism ($M = 28.52$, $SD = 5.49$, $t = 51.96$) and offline activism ($M = 24.28$, $SD = 4.36$, $t = 55.71$), with the results showing that offline activism was seen as better than online activism in presenting opinions on contentious issues. This can be attributed to the fact that people feel they are taken much more seriously when they express themselves in person.

4.5 The Effect of Social Media Activism on Contentious Issues in Ghana

The third objective was to examine the effect of social media activism in Ghana and how it impact contentious issues within the region. The researcher applied the Pearson Correlation as the study intended to examine the relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the variables were on at least an interval scale thus, making the Pearson R the best test. The results are presented below.

Table 4. 7: Correlations between Contentious Issues

Correlations				
	M	SD	Contentious Issues	Online activism
Contentious Issues	34.01	6.85	-	
Online activism	28.52	5.49	.2*	-

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table 4.8 shows the results from the Pearson R that was conducted to examine the effect of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana. The study table showed that there was a positive relationship ($p = 0.05$, $r = .220$) between the application of social media activism ($M = 28.52$, $SD = 5.49$) and the ability to discuss opinions on contentious issues ($M = 34.01$, $SD = 6.85$). However, the results further showed that although the relationship was highly significant at $p = 0.05$, it was not strong as it could only explain 22.0% of the variance.

4.6 Discussion of the Study

This subsection of the study presents the discussion of the findings of the study. The purpose of the discussion is to examine the results of the study in light of the theory, concepts, and empirical literature that was presented in chapter two of the study. This was done based on the objectives of the study, with the main objective of the study being, to examine the effectiveness of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana.

4.6.1 The perception of Ghanaians on Key Contentious Issues in Ghana

This objective was to examine the perception of Ghanaians on key contentious issues in Ghana. To examine this, the researcher ranked the various contentious issues based on the mean scores to see which contentious issue was more predominant than the other, based on how Ghanaians perceived the issue. The contentious issues examined included corruption, LGBTQ, and the

#fixthecountry agenda. The study findings showed that although all the contentious issues were of importance and dominated contentious issues in Ghana, the most dominant issue was the LGBTQ, followed by the #fixthecountry agenda and then corruption.

A plausible reason for these findings can be linked to the fact that during the time of the study the LGBTQ topic had gained a lot of attention, even surpassing that of the #fixthecountry agenda. This was explained by Moradi and Grzanika (2017), when they stated that in terms of perspective, studies have shown that the cultural and religious traditions of Africans make them more conservative, thus making it difficult for them to accept liberal issues such as LGBTQ+ and gender equality, amongst others. Studies have shown that within the African setting, only a few countries have accepted the gay rights, with the majority of the countries opposing these rights (Ousey and Kubrin, 2018; Sandbrook et al., 2019). Thus, gay rights has been a major contentious issue in Africa.

However, contrarily to the findings of this study, Sibiri (2021) was of the view that in Ghana, the current major contentious issue was the economic woes that have plagued the country after the Covid-19 pandemic. Many Ghanaians argue that the country is being mismanaged by the leaders of the country, especially the Nana Addo-led government (Sibiri, 2021). This became a major issue of contention leading to the #fixthecountry movement, demonstrations, and activism. It brought up arguments from all sides of the political divide, with individuals and groups coming with their views on the topic. To an extent, the 'fix the country' movement and activities were linked to the death of one of the activists called 'Kaaka' and the violent acts that were carried out in the Ejura community. According to (Kaledzi, 2021), the movement gathered a cross-section of Ghanaians, online, and offline population numbering about 4,000 people. Fuelled by, lack of jobs, and economic hardships, the agenda of the movement was to register the youth's displeasure at the state of the country. Additionally, studies have shown that parts

of the #fixthecountry agenda advocacy was linked to the issues of corruption, therefore making corruption another highly contentious issue in the country.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the debate on LGBTQ+ only became more prominent when the community tried to have a conference in the country and was vehemently opposed by religious and political groups, as well as the average citizenry. A case in point was when members of the parliament, across the political divide, drafted a document to the speaker to entrench Ghana's position against the gay movement within the country. What is more, the police task force ransacked the premises of the office of the LGBTQ+ advocates, apprehending them and taking equipment and machines. A critical observation of the collective opinions of the average Ghanaian showed that the vast majority of the people were against the proliferation of gay activities within the country (Mesmer and Socha, 2020). Arguably, the opposition comes from the traditional, cultural and religious nature of the average Ghanaian (Ackah, 2019). Nonetheless, members of the gay community have also indicated their displeasure for the way they are being treated, and their fear of being harmed or killed due to their sexuality and sexual preferences (Mesmer and Socha, 2020). The gay rights conundrum started during the Mills administration, continued through the Mahama administration, and is still peeking its head during the Nana Akuffo-Addo's administration. Thus, it is an issue that seems never to be resolved and continues to pervade the social space of the country.

Hence, showing that LGBTQ+ was the main issue of contention although the other issues of contention were equally prominent within the country. One can also argue that the dominance of contentious issues within an environment depends on the social relevance within a certain period of time, although there are contentious issues that are entrenched within the psyche of the people existing within the society.

4.6.2 Comparison of Online Activism to Offline Activism

The next objective of the study examined or compared online activism to offline activism. The purpose of this objective was to compare, based on the perception of the respondents, the effectiveness of online activism to offline activism. The results of the study concluded that offline activism was more effective, as compared to online activism.

The Social Movement Impact Theory highlights the reasons behind these findings. The theory postulates that the efficacy of an activist movement is contingent on the channels that are applied by the members to achieve the purpose of contention. As such movements try to achieve this by selecting the best option that is available to them (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). The theory assumes that the choice of movement is critical to the success of the movement. The theory further asserts that the success of the choice is also dependent on the context within which they operate (Smith and Fergusson, 2010). Gamson's theory hypothesized that the application of violent strikes and other mediums of violence were sometimes met with uncertain results (Wiltorowicz, 2002). They further indicated that social movements that have achieved a certain level of success in earlier endeavors were more likely to apply violence.

Thus, the choice is path-dependent. This argument is supported by literature as arguably, demonstrations and protests are considered the most popular form of activism. Nyanang (2021) explains that demonstrations are when a group of people united by a common belief come together to march, hold a vigil or sit at a specified location in order to create attention. In Ghana, there have been a lot of demonstrations, popular ones were: the 'Kumi Preko Demonstration', the 'Dumsor' demonstration and the much recent 'Fix the Country' demonstration. Demonstrations are mostly conducted on the rights of people to engage in peaceful demonstrations, although they have to seek permission from the security agencies before conducting the demonstration (Asante and Hellbrecht, 2019). Notwithstanding, it has been

observed that protests and demonstrations mostly become complicated when counter-protesters and law enforcement officers clash at the scene of the demonstration.

Blee (2017) is of the opinion that traditional or offline forms of activism have been tested decades ago, and they have been found to be effective in attaining set goals and objectives. A keynote advantage of traditional activism is that it has a physical and real-world impact as it required physical action (Greger, 2017). The tangibility of traditional activism cannot be overemphasized, which is an advantage that it has over online activism. Moreover, the traditional form of activism gets the needed attention, especially when it has a large population and people with influence. Additionally, the coming together of people with shared principles and values enforces the beliefs attached to a certain cause. In the same vein, traditional activism tends to create a sense of empowerment and belongingness that comes with people with like minds coming together. Chon and Park, (2020), opined that activist coming together increases interactions amongst the people, which helps them strategize well to achieve set goals and objectives. Furthermore, traditional activism has a lot of options available to achieve the desired action or response (Berriane and Duboc, 2019).

As compared to offline activism, the application of online forms of activism also come with several benefits. However, these benefits can be overshadowed by the several challenges. Studies have shown that social media activism cannot be effective without the added traditional form of activism (Ousey and Kubrin, 2018). The researchers are of the view that posting videos and graphics, as well as using hashtags, may only end up as a post without any real-world changes or action. That is to say, creating hashtags like #fixthecountry and #blacklivesmatter doesn't change the problem that occurs in the real world without people actually taking the needed steps to push for social change. Furthermore, the application of social media in activism has been noted to be performative rather than action-oriented (Oppong, 2018). This creates the

view that social media activism, may be appropriate for interaction, influencing, attention-seeking and mobilization, but without the needed action it becomes useless.

4.6.3 The Effect of Social Media Activism on Contentious issues

Lastly, the objective of the study was to examine the effect of social media as a platform is used in advocating contentious issues in Ghana. The study findings showed that there was a positive relationship between the application of social media activism and advocacy for contentious issues. The study findings showed that that the relationship was significant and also that the model explained for 22.0% of the variance.

The study findings were supported by both literature and the Social Movement Impact Theory. The theory suggests that the channels of activism contribute extensively to the impact that is made by an activist group (Smith and Fergusson, 2010). This is also emphasized on the fact that the theory assesses the factors that contribute to the impact of social activism. The theory also examines the influence of external versus organizational factors. As maintained by (Serrano, 2020), studies have consistently investigated if the success of social activism is based on the organization or by other external factors. The theory postulates that although organizational factors play a critical role, they are influenced by other external forces (Wiktorowicz, 2002). The theorist asserted that external supports, mostly in situations where it comes from elite allies, push the impact of social activist movements to achieve more success, as they influence the outcomes (Smith and Fergusson, 2010). Thus, it is difficult for activism groups to make an impact, without the role of external forces of influence including the media, celebrities, and experts in the field that they are advocating for.

Additionally, research studies like that of Tye et al, (2018) and Valenzuela, (2013) suggest that social media platforms have become a huge platform for advocating for change, as they provide access to a larger group of people and individuals. Social media activism, has become synonymous to online activism, as it is the medium that applies advanced communication and

social interaction tools for activism (Lee, 2018). The use of online mediums like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram has become popular in recent times, both as a means of getting support for a certain cause, as well as taking action on the cause (Wang, Yang, and Thorson, 2021). To examine the extent of the power inherent in the use of social media platforms for activism, one can look at the 2011 Egyptian uprising, the #metoo movement, the #blacklivesmatter movement, the LGBTQ+ advocacy, #EndSARS and the #fixthecountry movement. These clear examples provide evidence to the fact that online activism, that is, using social media platforms is very vital in mobilizing and enforcing change within the political, social, environmental, and economic landscape of every country. According to statistics, 90% of forms of activism start from social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, with proponents advocating for a certain change within society (Smith and Ferfuson, 2010; Serrano, 2020). However, evidence suggests that more than 70% of these movements gain traction and cause a lot of disruptions that eventually promote change within society. In most forms, these are called social media campaigns.

As opined by Sen et al., (2020), social media activism is a relatively novel form of activism that has taken the world by storm. It has also been nicknamed the 'hashtag activism' where people express their opinions and views on contentious issues creating arguments and further contentions. Using these platforms, research indicates that people, organizations and governments, are able to create awareness about issues, through videos, posts, and graphics, amongst others. According to a study published by Pew Research (2020), the popularity of social media reached an all-time high during the Blacks Lives Matter Movement, which relied on social media for its mobilization and attention seek strategies. The data showed that the hashtag was used more than 47 million times on Twitter from 26th May to 7th June, showing how powerful social media is in activism of today.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction

The summary of findings, conclusion and recommendation of the study was captured by the chapter five of the study. The chapter served as a denouement of the entire study, as it puts together entire study, its findings, conclusions and various recommendations that have been made by the researcher.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The summary of findings summarizes the study based on the objectives set at the beginning of the study. The main objective of the study was to examine the effect of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana, the specific objectives are outlined below within the respective conclusions attached to them.

5.2.1 The Perception of Ghanaians on key Contentious Issues in Ghana

The objective was to examine Ghanaian's perception on key contentious issues in Ghana. To assess this, the researcher ranked the various contentious issues based on the means scores to see which contentious issue was more predominant than the other, based on how Ghanaians perceived the issue. The contentious issues examined included corruption, LGBTQ and the #fixthecountry agenda. The study findings showed that although all the contentious issues were of prime importance and dominated social media conversations in Ghana, the most dominant was the trending topic of LGBTQ, followed by #fixthecountry, and then corruption.

5.2.2 Comparison of Online Activism to Offline Activism

Another objective of the study compared online activism to offline activism. Based on the perception of the respondents, the study's assessment of the effectiveness of online activism as

compared to offline activism showed that offline activism was more effective, as compared to online activism.

5.2.3 The Effect of Social Media Activism on Contentious issues

The final objective was to examine the effect of social media activism on contentious issues in Ghana. The objective sought to examine if social media as a platform that is applied in advocating for contentious issues. The study findings showed that there was a positive relationship between the application of social media activism and advocacy for contentious issues. The study findings showed that that the relationship was significant and also that the model explained for 22.0% of the variance.

5.3 Conclusion

In a nut shell, the focus was to examine the influence of social media activism on contentious issues. To achieve this, the study set to divide the main objective into three specific objectives. It was based on these specific objectives that the researcher critically examined the variables under review. The study was able to achieve the set objectives, with the analysis and discussions that subsequently conducted. The study used a population of students who had the right characteristics and opinions for the study, with the population further having heterogeneous qualities. The findings of the study are worth reiterating, with the study finding out that: 1) LGBTQ+ was the most contentious issues in Ghana; 2) offline activism was better than online activism; 3) social media activism impacted contentious issues. These findings support the view that the study was successful and the researcher was able to achieve all that was set out at the beginning of the study. Additionally, the study makes various recommendations that are outlined below.

5.4 Recommendations of the Study

Based on literature and the findings, the study makes recommendations for future works in this area. The study makes two main categories of recommendations and these are

recommendations for practice and recommendations for further studies, which are outlined below.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Practice

This section of the study examined and made recommendations for practice and these are outlined below.

- The study recommends that activists should endeavour to interact with each other as they intend to form similar ideologies and opinions.
- To achieve this the study recommends that there should be more rapport using social media platforms that allow for more conversation on the contentious topic between group members.
- Furthermore, the study recommends that further studies should endeavour to apply both channels of activism to ensure that they can reap benefits from both channels rather than one channel of activism.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Studies

The study makes various recommendations for future studies and these are outlined below.

- Future researchers should attempt to examine the role of gender on the use of online or offline activism.
- Additionally, future studies should consider examining the reason why offline was much preferred rather than online activism.
- Also, future studies should look at the instances where one form of activism is better than the other form of activism.

In addition, further studies should examine the effect of both traditional and online activism on contentious issues.

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