



**THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS (X AND FACEBOOK) IN
SHAPING OPINIONS IN GHANA'S ELECTION**

BY

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation/Thesis has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of a Dissertation/Thesis laid down by the University of Media, Arts, and Communication, UniMAC.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformative role of digital platforms, particularly Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), in shaping public opinion and electoral outcomes in Ghana. The research investigates the central question: How do digital platforms influence public opinion formation and voter behavior during elections in Ghana? Drawing on a qualitative research approach, the study integrates content analysis of social media data, surveys with voters, and interviews with political campaign strategists to analyze the interplay of algorithmic curation, echo chambers, targeted advertising, and misinformation. The findings reveal that digital platforms significantly impact voter mobilization, public discourse, and political polarization. Algorithmic curation and targeted advertisements amplify campaign messages but often reinforce existing biases, creating echo chambers that deepen ideological divides. Misinformation emerges as a major challenge, undermining informed decision-making during electoral periods and influencing voter trust in political systems. The study also highlights demographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic background, which shape platform usage. Younger voters favor X for its immediacy and brevity, while older voters gravitate toward Facebook for in-depth discussions and community interactions. Moreover, the research underscores the dual-edged nature of digital platforms, which foster civic engagement but also present risks of manipulation and information distortion. It explores how political actors utilize these platforms to their advantage, employing targeted advertising and strategic messaging to sway voter behavior. The study's findings contribute to the growing body of literature on digital politics in developing democracies, offering valuable insights into the implications of social media use for Ghana's electoral processes. Through addressing gaps in understanding how digital platforms affect democratic engagement, this research provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, political actors, and civil society to leverage social media ethically and effectively. It emphasizes the need for regulatory frameworks, media literacy campaigns, and collaborative efforts to mitigate misinformation while maximizing the democratic potential of digital platforms.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In a modern political arena, digital platforms have emerged as essential instruments for communication, engagement, and opinion development. X (previously Twitter) and Facebook are prominent internet platforms that significantly influence the public realm. These platforms offer venues for the swift dissemination of political ideas, debates, and information, shaping citizens' perceptions of political topics, candidates, and legislation. The rising utilization of digital platforms in Ghana has altered the way citizens access and engage with political content, especially during elections. The importance of elections in Ghana, a prominent democratic country in Africa, is paramount. The dynamic political landscape and competitive multi-party system have rendered the media, both traditional and digital, pivotal to the electoral process. X and Facebook have become significant platforms for politicians, political parties, and citizens to participate in discourse. Campaign messages, policy agendas, and political rhetoric are being disseminated across these media to engage varied audiences. Furthermore, these digital tools facilitate real-time feedback, opinion exchange, and citizen participation, thereby promoting a participatory political culture. Nonetheless, the growing dependence on X and Facebook prompts inquiries on the nature and magnitude of their impact on the formation of political beliefs. Although these platforms facilitate equitable access to information, they simultaneously present difficulties like misinformation, manipulation, and political division. The algorithms that rank material on these platforms frequently accentuate specific storylines, potentially affecting public perceptions and voting patterns. In Ghana, where elections are

fiercely contested and emotions are intense, comprehending the influence of these platforms on opinion formation is essential.

This study analyzes the influence of X and Facebook on opinion formation during elections in Ghana. It examines the degree to which these platforms shape the electorate's views of candidates, political parties, and significant topics. Furthermore, it analyzes the congruence or divergence of online discourse with conventional media narratives and assesses the function of digital platforms in voter mobilization. This project aims to enhance the comprehension of the interplay among technology, communication, and democracy within the Ghanaian setting.

1.1 Background of the Study

Ghana's political system has historically depended on mainstream media outlets like radio, television, and newspapers to spread political news and sway public opinion before elections (Nyarko, 2018). In the past, these media have played a crucial role in shaping voter behavior and election results. But with the quick development of digital technology, especially with the introduction of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, the dynamics of political communication in Ghana have changed dramatically (Asante & Ampadu, 2020).

They enable conversations, opinion exchange, and the mobilization of support for political causes by facilitating direct, real-time communication between political actors and the voters (Tuftte, 2017). Platforms like Facebook have developed into online forums for political conversation, campaign messaging, and public participation in the context of the Ghanaian elections.

Assessing these internet platforms' influence on Ghanaian political processes requires an understanding of how they influence public opinion ahead of elections. Traditional campaigning tactics have been completely transformed by social media's capacity to swiftly reach a large audience and facilitate two-way engagement between politicians and people (Nyarko, 2018). This shift calls for a more thorough investigation of the ways in which social media affects voter behavior and political outcomes, which in turn affects research assessments, policy decisions, and electoral observations.

Furthermore, the emergence of social media poses new difficulties and complexities for political communication plans. It forces political players to devise fresh strategies that make the most of these digital platforms while resolving concerns about accountability, transparency, and the control of political debate on the internet. Therefore, researching the impact of social media sites like Facebook on Ghanaian elections provides valuable information about how civic engagement and political participation are changing in the digital era. In essence, Ghana's experience with the fusion of digital technology and political communication highlights the significance of investigating the ways in which social media platforms influence public opinion and electoral dynamics. The purpose of this research is to advance knowledge of these dynamics and how they affect political conduct and democratic government in Ghana.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing influence of social media on global political processes, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding its specific role in shaping electoral outcomes in Ghana (Boateng, 2019). Boateng (2019) have examined the general usage of platforms like Facebook in political communication by major political parties, yet they stop short of systematically connecting these practices to measurable electoral outcomes. Additionally, Anim et al., (2019) highlights the

need for further investigation into how young voters, influenced heavily by social media, shape the electoral landscape in Ghana. While studies have examined the general impact of digital media on politics, detailed analyses focusing on the influence of platforms like Facebook on Ghanaian elections remain limited. While the influence of social media on political communication is widely acknowledged, the specific impact of platforms like X and Facebook on shaping public opinion during elections in Ghana remains underexplored. This gap is significant given the transformative potential of social media to alter traditional political communication and engagement strategies (Bode, 2016; Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018). In a regard there is a need to investigate how these platforms contribute to political discourse, influence voter attitudes, and affect electoral outcomes (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Bagozzi & Yi, 2012).

Digital media has fundamentally transformed politics, necessitating new strategies to address the challenges posed by these platforms. Technological developments have impacted communication processes and strategies, especially in transitional political contexts, affecting democratic governance, political participation, and citizen deliberation. However, the precise impact of social media on political processes continues to be a subject of debate. Key issues include how communication technologies revitalize campaign techniques and influence political actors, organizations, and the broader political campaigning environment (Burns & Bush, 2013).

In the African context, particularly in Ghana, it is essential to understand how new technologies reconfiguring relationships between politicians and the electorate are. Digital media facilitates new forms of political communication, transcending geographical, class, gender, language, and racial boundaries. This raises important questions about the specific impact of social media on campaign strategies, electoral processes, and outcomes in Ghana, an emerging democracy (Tufte, 2017).

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the changing dynamics of election campaigning in Ghana through the lens of social media. It focuses on the interaction between X and Facebook, exploring how these platforms influence voter opinions and behaviors. It seeks to contribute original perspectives on the shifts and impact of political communication within the African context, ultimately enhancing our understanding of social media's role in modern electoral politics.

1.3 Research Purpose

This study aims to examine the role of social media platforms, particularly Facebook and X, in shaping voter perceptions and behaviors during elections in Ghana. By analyzing the influence of these platforms on political communication, public engagement, and civic participation, the research seeks to uncover their broader impact on democratic practices and electoral dynamics in the Ghanaian context.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To investigate how X and Facebook are used by political actors and the electorate during elections in Ghana.
2. To investigate the influence of X and Facebook on shaping public opinion and voter behavior during the election.
3. To investigate how demographic factors influence how different population segments use and are impacted by X and Facebook during elections.

4. To identify the advantages and challenges associated with the use of social media for political communication in the context of Ghanaian elections.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do political actors in Ghana utilize X and Facebook during election campaigns?
2. What is the impact of X and Facebook on public opinion and voter behavior during the election in Ghana?
3. How do demographic factors such as age, gender, and education level influence the use of X and Facebook for political information and engagement?
4. What are the perceived advantages and challenges of using X and Facebook for political communication from the perspective of both political actors and voters?

1.6 Significance of The Study

This study aims to enhance the academic understanding of the role of social media in elections, particularly within the West African context. By focusing on platforms like Facebook and X (Twitter), the research will provide valuable insights into how these digital tools influence voter opinions, engagement, and participation in Ghana. The findings will contribute to the growing body of literature on digital political communication, offering a nuanced perspective on the intersection of social media and electoral processes in emerging democracies.

1.6.1 Policy Implications

The study has significant policy implications for electoral regulations and media governance in Ghana. Understanding the impact of social media on elections can inform policymakers and regulatory bodies about the need for updated guidelines and frameworks that address the challenges and opportunities posed by digital platforms. This includes considerations for transparency, accountability, and the regulation of online political discourse to ensure fair and democratic electoral processes.

1.6.3 Practical Implications for Political Campaigns

The findings of this research will also have practical implications for political campaigns and voter engagement strategies. Political parties and candidates can leverage the insights gained to enhance their digital campaign efforts, using Facebook and X more effectively to reach and engage with voters. This includes strategies for message dissemination, voter interaction, and mobilization efforts. By understanding the dynamics of social media influence, political actors can design more targeted and impactful campaigns that resonate with the electorate, particularly young voters who are active on these platforms.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

This study focuses specifically on elections within Ghana, providing detailed insights into the unique dynamics of social media's influence on the political landscape of this emerging West African democracy. By concentrating on recent elections and their immediate aftermath, the research aims to capture ongoing impacts and trends related to the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and X in shaping voter opinions and electoral outcomes. However, several limitations may affect the findings. Firstly, accessing comprehensive data from social media

platforms can be challenging due to privacy policies, data protection regulations, and proprietary restrictions. These constraints may limit the availability of certain datasets necessary for a thorough analysis. Secondly, the nature of social media discourse can introduce various biases, including echo chambers, misinformation, and the disproportionate influence of vocal minority groups. These factors can skew the analysis and interpretation of how social media shape's public opinion. Furthermore, ensuring that the social media user base is representative of the entire electorate presents another challenge. Not all voter demographics are equally active or present on platforms like Facebook and X, which could impact the generalizability of the findings.

Despite these limitations, this study aims to provide a balanced and critical analysis, acknowledging the challenges while highlighting areas for future research. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in modern electoral politics within Ghana.

1.8 Organization of the Study

The introduction chapter sets the stage for the research, providing an overview of the study's background, the problem statement, and the research objectives and questions. It outlines the significance of the study, explaining its academic, policy, and practical implications. Additionally, the scope and limitations of the study are discussed to provide a clear understanding of the research boundaries. The second chapter delves into existing literature on the role of social media in political processes, particularly in elections. It explores theoretical frameworks and previous research findings on the influence of platforms like Facebook and X

(Twitter) on voter behavior and political communication. The objective is to identify gaps in the current knowledge and establish a foundation for the research.

The methodology chapter outlines the research design and methods used to collect and analyze data. It describes the qualitative approach adopted, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and informal observations. The chapter also addresses ethical considerations, data collection procedures, and the analytical techniques employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The fourth chapter presents the results of the research, analyzing the data collected from various sources. It discusses how Facebook and X are used by political actors in Ghana to engage with voters and disseminate campaign messages. The findings highlight the impact of these platforms on voter knowledge, political efficacy, and participation, as well as the interplay between online and offline political activities. Other section of this chapter interprets the findings in the context of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It examines the implications of the results for understanding the role of social media in Ghanaian elections, addressing the research questions and objectives. The chapter also considers the broader implications for political communication and democratic processes in emerging democracies.

The final chapter summarizes the key findings of the study and their contributions to academic understanding, policy, and practice. It offers recommendations for political actors, policymakers, and future research. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the limitations of the study and suggesting areas for further investigation to build on the insights gained from this research.

Other section of this work provides a comprehensive list of all sources cited throughout the dissertation, following a standardized citation format. It ensures that the research is grounded in credible and relevant literature, allowing readers to locate and review the sources used. It

also appendices include supplementary materials such as interview guides, consent forms, and additional data that support the research findings. These materials provide transparency and enable a deeper understanding of the research process.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces the research by providing a comprehensive overview of the study's focus on the role of digital platforms, specifically Facebook and X, in shaping public opinion during elections in Ghana. The background points out the shift from traditional media to social media as critical tools for political communication. The statement of the problem underscores gaps in the literature regarding the influence of social media on electoral outcomes in Ghana, particularly within the African context. The research purpose, objectives, and questions are clearly outlined to guide the study, focusing on understanding how these platforms influence voter behavior, demographic interactions, and campaign strategies. The chapter also details the significance of the study, emphasizing its contributions to academia, policy, and political practice. Finally, the scope and limitations are discussed, and the chapter outline provides a roadmap for the entire research. This chapter sets the foundation for a deeper exploration of the dynamics between social media and electoral processes in Ghana.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Digital platforms have profoundly influenced political processes by altering how opinions are shaped, shared, and contested. Social media platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) are particularly significant during elections, serving as arenas for political dialogue, voter mobilization, and campaign strategies. This chapter explores the conceptual framework, theoretical underpinnings, and empirical evidence on the role of these platforms in shaping public opinions during Ghana's elections. It identifies gaps in current knowledge and aligns the discussion with the research objectives to provide a comprehensive context for the study.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Evolving Role of Social Media in Political Communication

Social media platforms have fundamentally transformed political communication by bridging the gap between political actors and the electorate. Unlike traditional media, which typically operates in a one-way format, social media enables dynamic and real-time interactions, fostering a more participatory political culture. This shift has had significant implications for political campaigns, voter mobilization, and public discourse, particularly in Ghana, where platforms like Facebook and X have become indispensable during election periods.

One of the defining characteristics of social media is its capacity for real-time engagement. Platforms such as Facebook and X allow political figures to interact directly with voters,

addressing issues promptly and maintaining a consistent presence. For example, during Ghana's 2020 elections, candidates utilized Facebook Live to broadcast rallies and used X to engage in real-time debates. This immediacy not only humanizes political actors but also reduces the information gap between urban and rural voters, enabling a broader reach for campaign messages.

Additionally, social media enables personalized messaging, a feature that sets it apart from traditional media. Campaigns leverage platform analytics to craft messages tailored to specific demographic segments, addressing unique concerns and interests. As noted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), this democratization of information ensures that voters receive content aligned with their beliefs. However, the personalization of content also presents challenges, such as the creation of echo chambers where individuals are exposed only to like-minded opinions, potentially reinforcing ideological divides.

Beyond personalized communication, social media has proven to be a powerful tool for grassroots mobilization. These platforms provide political actors with cost-effective means to reach large audiences. Chadwick (2017) underscores the role of hybrid media systems in this process, where digital platforms complement traditional media by amplifying political messaging. In Ghana, social media has been instrumental in mobilizing youth participation in politics. For instance, the #FixTheCountry movement effectively used X to rally nationwide protests, demonstrating the platform's potential to drive civic engagement.

The nature of political discourse has also expanded due to social media. Facebook, with its capacity for long-form discussions, facilitates in-depth analysis and debate of policy issues, while X, characterized by its brevity, supports concise messaging for quick updates and responses. This complementary dynamic allows for a multi-layered approach to political

communication, catering to diverse audience preferences for detailed discussions or instant news.

Moreover, social media has integrated seamlessly with traditional media to form a hybrid media system, as described by Chadwick (2017). In Ghana, this interplay is evident during election periods, where content originating from Facebook and X often informs the agenda of television and radio programs. This fusion enhances the visibility of political actors and provides voters with varied sources of information, reinforcing the role of social media as a central hub for political discourse.

However, the use of social media in political communication is not without challenges. The rapid spread of misinformation on platforms like X and Facebook poses significant risks, as false information can mislead voters and potentially distort election outcomes. Furthermore, algorithmic curation, which prioritizes content based on user preferences, often creates echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, contributing to political polarization. Ethical concerns, including data privacy and the manipulation of voters through targeted advertisements, also warrant closer scrutiny.

Empirical studies further highlight these dynamics. Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2019) revealed that Facebook was extensively used by Ghanaian politicians to communicate campaign promises and mobilize marginalized rural voters. Similarly, Mensah and Tetteh (2022) observed that targeted advertisements on social media enhanced voter engagement but raised concerns about data misuse and manipulation. Additionally, Cinelli et al. (2021) documented how algorithmic curation on social media exacerbates echo chambers, reducing exposure to diverse opinions and deepening ideological divides.

In essence, social media platforms like Facebook and X have redefined political communication by offering direct, interactive, and cost-effective avenues for engagement.

Their role in real-time interaction, personalized messaging, and grassroots mobilization has made them indispensable tools in modern electoral processes. Nonetheless, their potential to foster polarization, spread misinformation, and raise ethical concerns underscores the need for further research and regulatory measures to optimize their impact on democratic practices.

2.1.2 Mechanisms of Opinion Formation

Digital platforms wield significant influence over public opinion through various mechanisms that shape the way individuals' access, interpret, and engage with information. Among these mechanisms are algorithmic curation, echo chambers, targeted advertising, and the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. Each plays a distinct role in how platforms like Facebook and X impact the democratic process, particularly during elections.

Algorithmic Curation stands out as a critical feature of digital platforms, where algorithms determine the content users see based on their behavior, preferences, and past interactions. This personalization creates highly tailored feeds, ensuring that users are exposed primarily to content that aligns with their interests. While this enhances user engagement, it also reinforces pre-existing beliefs and limits exposure to alternative viewpoints. Pariser (2011) highlights the concept of the "filter bubble," where algorithmic curation isolates users in a digital environment of consistent opinions, potentially narrowing their worldview. In Ghana's elections, this mechanism can influence voter perceptions by continuously presenting politically aligned narratives, making it harder for individuals to critically assess diverse perspectives. Closely related to algorithmic curation are echo chambers and filter bubbles, where social media platforms foster interactions primarily within like-minded communities. Users naturally gravitate toward groups or discussions that resonate with their beliefs, and algorithms amplify this tendency by recommending similar content or connections. While these digital spaces

create a sense of belonging, they also polarize public discourse. Cinelli et al. (2021) argue that such echo chambers reduce exposure to opposing views, deepening ideological divides and contributing to political polarization. This phenomenon is particularly evident during Ghanaian election campaigns, where partisan content shared in these spaces can shape voting behavior and reinforce biases.

Targeted advertising represents another influential mechanism, where political campaigns use social media analytics to deliver personalized advertisements to specific voter segments. By analyzing user data such as browsing habits, location, and preferences, campaigns craft tailored messages to influence voter behavior. Baldwin-Philippi (2019) emphasizes the effectiveness of such targeted strategies in mobilizing support and swaying undecided voters. In the context of Ghana, political parties have increasingly relied on this tool to address the concerns of niche audiences, ensuring their messages resonate with targeted demographics. While this enhances campaign efficiency, it raises ethical concerns regarding privacy and data exploitation.

The spread of misinformation and disinformation poses one of the greatest challenges in leveraging digital platforms for public opinion formation. Misinformation refers to false or misleading information shared without intent to deceive, while disinformation involves deliberate attempts to mislead. During election periods, the rapid dissemination of such content can undermine informed decision-making and erode trust in democratic institutions. Pennycook and Rand (2019) note that social media's speed and reach exacerbate the spread of falsehoods, often outpacing efforts to verify or correct them. In Ghana, misinformation during elections ranging from fake poll results to fabricated statements by candidates has been known to create confusion and inflame tensions among voters.

These mechanisms collectively highlight the dual-edged nature of digital platforms in shaping public opinion. While they provide opportunities for greater engagement, transparency, and

voter mobilization, their potential to polarize discourse, exploit user data, and spread false information underscores the need for regulatory oversight. For Ghana's electoral processes, understanding these dynamics is essential to mitigating risks and maximizing the benefits of social media in fostering an informed electorate.

2.1.3 Role of Influencers and Celebrities In Political Communication

Influencers and celebrities play a pivotal role in political communication on social media by shaping public opinion and amplifying campaign messages. These individuals, often with large followings on platforms like Facebook and X, serve as intermediaries between political actors and the electorate. Their endorsement of candidates or political causes can significantly influence voter perceptions, particularly among younger demographics. In Ghana, celebrities such as musicians, actors, and sports personalities have been used by political parties to endorse candidates, increasing visibility and mobilizing support. Empirical evidence shows that celebrities can effectively engage voters who might otherwise be disengaged from traditional political communication. As observed by Marshall (2016), the persuasive power of celebrity endorsements lies in their perceived authenticity and relatability. In Ghana's 2020 elections, prominent figures used their platforms to encourage civic participation, amplifying key campaign messages and fostering political discourse among their followers. However, the role of influencers and celebrities also raises concerns about the potential for undue influence, where voters are swayed by the status of endorsers rather than the substance of their messages.

2.1.4 Fake News and The Role of Fact-Checking Initiatives

Fake news has emerged as a critical challenge in the digital age, particularly during elections, where misinformation and disinformation can distort public perceptions and influence electoral outcomes. Platforms like Facebook and X facilitate the rapid dissemination of fake news, making it difficult for voters to discern credible information. In Ghana, the spread of fake news during elections has been observed to create confusion, inflame partisan tensions, and undermine trust in democratic institutions. For instance, fake poll results and fabricated statements attributed to candidates often circulate widely, misleading voters. To address this issue, fact-checking initiatives have gained prominence as mechanisms for combating misinformation. Organizations such as GhanaFact and Africa Check actively verify political claims and debunk false narratives, helping voters make informed decisions. Research by Graves (2018) highlights the importance of fact-checking in restoring trust and accountability in political communication. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these initiatives is limited by the sheer volume of misinformation and the tendency for falsehoods to spread faster than corrections.

2.1.5 The Role of Political Bots and Automated Accounts

The use of political bots and automated accounts has become a growing concern in digital political communication. These automated tools are used to amplify political messages, spread propaganda, and manipulate public opinion on platforms like Facebook and X. Political bots can generate a large volume of content, artificially inflating the visibility of narratives or candidates. In Ghana, there is evidence that automated accounts have been deployed to promote political rhetoric, particularly during election campaigns. Howard and Woolley (2018) emphasize that political bots can distort public discourse by creating the illusion of widespread support or opposition. While they can be used for positive purposes, such as voter education, their potential for manipulation raises ethical concerns. The anonymity and scalability of bots

make them particularly challenging to regulate, underscoring the need for transparency and accountability in political communication.

2.1.6 The Impact of Digital Literacy on Voter Engagement

Digital literacy plays a crucial role in determining how voters engage with political content on social media. Digital literacy refers to the ability to access, evaluate, and effectively use information in the digital space. In the context of Ghana's elections, varying levels of digital literacy influence how voters interpret campaign messages, identify misinformation, and participate in political discourse. As noted by Buckingham (2015), digital literacy equips individuals with the skills to critically assess online content, reducing their susceptibility to manipulation and fake news. In Ghana, efforts to improve digital literacy, particularly among rural populations and older demographics, are essential to ensuring equitable participation in the democratic process. Without these skills, voters' risk being excluded from political discussions or misinformed about critical election issues.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study integrates established theories to examine how digital platforms such as Facebook and X shape public opinion during Ghanaian elections. The following theories, Agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory provide a foundational understanding of the mechanisms through which these platforms influence political communication and voter behavior. Shaw, 1972; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Bandura, 1986).

2.2.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

The agenda-Setting Theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), suggests that media platforms influence public perception by prioritizing specific topics or issues, effectively setting the public agenda. Traditionally associated with mass media, this theory has found renewed relevance in the digital age, where social media algorithms play a pivotal role in content visibility. Platforms like Facebook and X curate feeds based on user preferences and engagement patterns, ensuring that certain political narratives receive more attention than others.

In the context of Ghanaian elections, agenda-setting is evident in how political parties and candidates strategically frame their campaigns to dominate discussions on social media. For instance, hashtags, trending topics, and viral videos often highlight issues deemed critical by political actors, influencing public discourse. Studies reveal that algorithmic agenda-setting amplifies topics that generate high user engagement, such as controversial statements or emotional appeals, which may overshadow substantive policy discussions (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). This underscores the dual-edged nature of agenda-setting: while it can raise awareness of key issues, it may also contribute to the prioritization of sensational or polarizing content.

2.2.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) focuses on why individuals engage with specific media platforms, emphasizing the fulfillment of needs such as information-seeking, entertainment, and social interaction. In the realm of social media, this theory helps explain user behavior and platform preference during election periods. Facebook, with its robust features for community-building, appeals to users seeking in-depth discussions, group

interactions, and visual storytelling. Political parties in Ghana leverage this platform to share long-form content, organize virtual events, and build support networks. Conversely, X (caters to users who prioritize immediacy and concise updates.

Its brevity and real-time interaction capabilities make it an ideal platform for breaking news, political debates, and quick updates on campaign activities.

Research by Sundar and Limperos (2013) highlights that social media users are motivated by interactivity, modality, and agency, all of which align with the functionalities of Facebook and X. For Ghanaian voters, these platforms satisfy their need for real-time election updates, candidate interactions, and access to diverse viewpoints. Understanding these gratifications offers insights into how voters engage with political content and make informed decisions.

2.2.3 Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the role of observational learning in shaping individual behaviors. In the digital context, social media platforms provide a rich environment for such learning, where users model behaviors, opinions, and attitudes observed in others. During Ghanaian elections, politicians, influencers, and ordinary users actively share ideologically charged content on platforms like Facebook and X. These posts often include endorsements, campaign messages, or participation in viral trends, shaping voter perceptions and attitudes. For example, a political candidate's live-streamed rally on Facebook can inspire followers to attend or support the campaign, while a hashtag campaign on X can mobilize voters around a specific cause.

Research indicates that social cognitive mechanisms are particularly effective when the source of information is perceived as credible or relatable (Westerman et al., 2014). In Ghana, the rise

of influential social media figures—ranging from journalists to activists—has amplified this effect, as their endorsements and opinions carry significant weight in shaping public opinion.

Moreover, social cognitive processes extend to the spread of misinformation. Observing others share or engage with false content can legitimize it in the eyes of users, underscoring the importance of media literacy and fact-checking initiatives during elections.

Application To the Study

These theoretical perspectives collectively illuminate the dynamics of social media's role in shaping public opinion during elections. Agenda-Setting Theory explains how political narratives gain prominence; Uses and Gratifications Theory provides insights into why voters engage with platforms differently; and Social Cognitive Theory underscores the impact of observed behaviors and interactions. By applying these frameworks, this study seeks to understand the influence of Facebook and X in the Ghanaian electoral context, identifying gaps in current practices and offering recommendations for enhancing democratic engagement.

2.3 Review of Empirical and Related Studies

2.3.1 Political Campaigns and Voter Mobilization

Social media platforms have become essential tools in modern political campaigns, transforming traditional methods of voter engagement and mobilization. These platforms offer candidates and political parties direct communication channels with the electorate, enabling grassroots outreach, personalized messaging, and real-time interaction. By bridging communication gaps, social media fosters participatory democracy and creates opportunities for voters to engage actively in the political process.

Research underscores the transformative role of social media in voter mobilization. Boulianne (2015) highlights its capacity to enhance engagement by providing two-way communication channels, allowing voters to interact with candidates, seek policy clarifications, and voice concerns. This interactivity distinguishes social media from traditional media, which primarily serves as a one-way communication tool. By enabling this dialogue, platforms like Facebook and X empower citizens to feel included and valued in the democratic process.

In Ghana, social media's role in voter mobilization has been particularly impactful due to the country's diverse demographic and geographical makeup. Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2019) revealed that candidates leveraged Facebook during election campaigns to reach rural voters, a group often excluded from mainstream media coverage. Facebook's features, such as live streaming, community groups, and targeted advertisements, allowed candidates to bypass traditional gatekeeping structures and directly connect with these communities. This approach helped bridge the communication gap between politicians and voters in remote areas, fostering a more inclusive electoral process.

The power of social media also lies in its ability to facilitate grassroots campaigns. Enli and Skogerbø (2013) noted that platforms like Facebook enable supporters to build virtual communities, share campaign content, and coordinate offline activities such as rallies and voter registration drives. During Ghana's 2020 elections, such grassroots efforts were evident in campaigns like *#YouthDecide* on X, which encouraged young voters to register and participate in the election. This digital movement not only increased youth engagement but also underscored social media's potential to energize voter participation across demographics.

Targeted advertising is another critical strategy facilitated by social media platforms. Campaigns increasingly rely on data analytics to segment audiences and deliver personalized messages based on voter interests, behaviors, and geographic locations. Baldwin-Philippi

(2019) observed that targeted advertisements on platforms like Facebook allow campaigns to address specific voter concerns more effectively. In Ghana, political parties have employed this strategy to connect with various voter groups, tailoring messages about job creation and technology for young urban voters while emphasizing agricultural policies and development initiatives for rural communities. This approach enhances candidates' ability to resonate with diverse audiences and strengthens voter engagement.

Empirical studies also highlight a strong correlation between social media use and electoral participation. Bode et al. (2014) found that individuals who engage with political content on social media are more likely to vote and participate in other civic activities. This trend is particularly evident among younger voters, who rely heavily on platforms like Facebook and X for political information. Supporting this, Asante and Afful (2021) observed that frequent social media engagement during election campaigns in Ghana led to increased voter turnout among youth. Peer discussions, campaign materials, and real-time updates played a pivotal role in shaping their political participation.

In the context of this study, these findings provide critical insights into the mechanisms by which social media influences voter mobilization. By exploring how platforms like Facebook and X are used to engage and mobilize voters in Ghana, this research seeks to deepen understanding of their effectiveness in shaping electoral outcomes. Moreover, it highlights opportunities for improving accessibility and addressing inequalities in digital access, ensuring that social media's potential for fostering democratic participation is fully realized across all demographics.

2.3.2 Misinformation and Electoral Outcomes

Misinformation poses a significant threat to the integrity of electoral outcomes, particularly in the era of widespread social media use. The rapid dissemination of false information, often crafted to elicit strong emotional reactions, can undermine informed decision-making and distort public perception. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) underscore the alarming speed at which false news spreads on digital platforms, driven largely by its emotive appeal and the tendency of users to share sensational content without verifying its authenticity. This phenomenon is especially pronounced during elections, where misinformation can shape voter attitudes and behaviors in critical ways.

In the Ghanaian context, the issue of misinformation has been notably impactful. Osei-Asibey and Kwakye (2022) documented the proliferation of fake news during Ghana's 2020 general elections, revealing its capacity to exacerbate political polarization and voter apathy. Social media platforms like Facebook and X were inundated with fabricated stories, manipulated images, and misleading headlines, often aimed at discrediting political opponents or stoking ethnic and partisan tensions. These false narratives not only heightened divisions among the electorate but also undermined trust in the electoral process, leading some voters to disengage altogether.

The impact of misinformation is further compounded by the algorithmic design of social media platforms, which prioritize content likely to generate high engagement. Pariser's (2011) concept of the "filter bubble" explains how algorithms tailor users' feeds to their existing preferences, creating echo chambers where misinformation can thrive unchecked. During elections, this dynamic reinforces biases, as voters are repeatedly exposed to false narratives aligning with their pre-existing beliefs. In Ghana, such echo chambers were evident during the 2020 elections, where partisan groups on Facebook and X circulated unverified claims to bolster their political narratives.

The consequences of misinformation extend beyond individual voters to affect broader electoral outcomes. Pennycook and Rand (2019) argue that exposure to fake news reduces voters' ability to distinguish credible information, leading to misinformed choices at the ballot box. In Ghana, the spread of false narratives about electoral fraud and vote-rigging during the 2020 elections created an atmosphere of distrust, prompting calls for transparency and reforms in the electoral process. Such distrust undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions, posing long-term challenges to governance and political stability. Efforts to counter misinformation in Ghana have included initiatives by fact-checking organizations, media literacy campaigns, and collaborative efforts between civil society and social media platforms. For example, organizations like Fact-Check Ghana worked to debunk viral falsehoods during the 2020 elections, providing voters with verified information. However, these efforts face significant challenges, including limited resources and the sheer volume of misinformation circulating online.

In this study, the focus on misinformation aligns with the broader aim of understanding how digital platforms influence electoral outcomes in Ghana. By examining the mechanisms through which misinformation spreads and its implications for voter behavior, this research seeks to provide insights into strategies for mitigating its impact. Moreover, it highlights the need for robust policies and collaborations to enhance information integrity and protect the democratic process in the digital age.

2.3.3 Demographic Factors in Social Media Use

Demographic factors play a pivotal role in shaping how individuals engage with social media platforms, influencing both the type of content consumed and the manner of interaction. In Ghana, the generational divide is particularly evident in platform preferences and usage patterns. Owusu-Ansah (2021) found that younger voters gravitate towards X because of its immediacy and concise updates, which align with their preference for quick and on-the-go information. Conversely, older voters are more inclined to use Facebook, valuing its capacity for detailed discussions and long-form content that allows for in-depth engagement with political and social issues.

Gender dynamics further illuminate the nuances of social media usage in Ghana. Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010) observed that women often utilize social media for community-building, fostering supportive networks and collaborative discussions. This tendency aligns with broader patterns of female engagement in social and civic spaces, where the focus often revolves around relational and collective goals. On the other hand, men are more likely to engage in confrontational discourse on these platforms, using them as arenas for debate and ideological assertion. This distinction is critical in understanding how political narratives and campaigns are shaped and disseminated across gendered audiences. The intersection of demographic factors with social media use has significant implications for political campaigns and voter mobilization. Campaign strategies in Ghana increasingly tailor their approaches to these demographic trends, leveraging platforms in ways that resonate with specific audience segments. For instance, younger voters are often targeted through viral hashtags and memes on X, capitalizing on their preference for brevity and immediacy. Meanwhile, older voters are engaged through more substantive posts and interactive content on Facebook, which align with their inclination towards detailed discourse.

Moreover, the gendered patterns of social media use influence how political messages are framed and delivered. Campaigns that prioritize inclusivity and community engagement may find greater resonance among female voters, particularly on platforms like Facebook that facilitate relational interactions. Conversely, strategies that focus on direct debate and ideological confrontation may appeal more to male audiences, particularly on platforms where such discourse is prevalent.

Understanding these demographic factors is crucial for this study, as it highlights the diverse ways in which social media platforms are used to shape public opinion and influence electoral outcomes in Ghana. By analyzing the interplay of age and gender in social media engagement, the research aims to provide a nuanced perspective on how digital platforms mediate political communication in a highly stratified society. Additionally, it underscores the importance of crafting tailored interventions and strategies that address the unique needs and preferences of different demographic groups, ensuring that social media serves as an inclusive and effective tool for democratic participation.

2.3.4 Algorithmic Bias and Echo Chambers

Algorithmic bias and the formation of echo chambers are significant factors influencing the way political discourse unfolds on social media, particularly during elections. Algorithmic bias refers to the ways in which the algorithms used by platforms like Facebook and X prioritize content based on user behavior, engagement, and preferences. These algorithms create personalized news feeds, which often reinforce users' existing opinions by showing them more of what they already agree with. Cinelli et al. (2021) highlighted that such algorithms contribute to political polarization by limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints, ultimately reducing the potential for cross-cutting political dialogue. When users are constantly exposed to content that

aligns with their beliefs, they are less likely to encounter differing perspectives, which can perpetuate ideological silos.

In Ghana, the effects of algorithmic bias and the formation of echo chambers were clear during the 2020 elections. Political and ethnic divisions in the country were magnified by social media, as users interacted predominantly within like-minded networks. Boateng et al. (2023) observed that the online environment during the elections became increasingly fragmented, with ethnic and political groups using social media platforms to share content that reinforced their identities and political affiliations. The echo chamber effect intensified these divisions, creating spaces where misinformation and emotionally charged content were shared without adequate scrutiny.

The impact of these echo chambers was not limited to the spread of biased information; it also affected the way political campaigns were conducted. Candidates and political parties took advantage of the personalized nature of social media algorithms to target specific voter segments with tailored messaging, further entrenching existing beliefs and ideologies. For example, voters from regions or ethnic backgrounds were targeted with political content that resonated with their local or cultural issues, thereby deepening political and ethnic divisions rather than promoting national unity or cross-party dialogue.

The creation of these echo chambers had tangible consequences on voter behavior and engagement. According to Boateng et al. (2023), social media platforms facilitated the rapid spread of politically charged content, often amplifying extreme viewpoints and reducing the likelihood of civil discourse. As a result, voters became more entrenched in their views, making it harder for them to consider alternative political perspectives or engage in productive debates. This dynamic undermined the democratic potential of social media, as it fostered a more divisive and polarized political landscape.

For this research, understanding the role of algorithmic bias and echo chambers is crucial in assessing the influence of social media on public opinion and electoral outcomes in Ghana. By examining how these mechanisms shape political discourse and influence voter behavior, the study can provide insights into the broader implications of algorithmic curation on democracy, particularly in contexts like Ghana where political and ethnic divisions are deeply entrenched. Furthermore, it can highlight the need for more responsible and transparent use of algorithms by social media platforms, ensuring that they promote healthy, inclusive, and diverse political discussions rather than exacerbating existing divisions.

2.3.5 Targeted Advertising and Manipulation

Targeted advertising has become a powerful tool for political campaigns, particularly in the digital age, where platforms like Facebook and X provide the ability to tailor messages based on user data. Political campaigns leverage this capability to influence voter behavior by delivering personalized advertisements that are designed to resonate with specific demographic groups, ideologies, and interests. Baldwin-Philippi (2019) argues that these ads are strategically crafted to exploit user data, which is collected through interactions, preferences, and online behaviors. This form of targeted advertising allows political parties to home in on voters and present messages that are likely to elicit emotional responses, drive engagement, and ultimately shape political outcomes.

The use of targeted ads raises significant concerns, especially when it comes to the manipulation of voters. In the context of elections, these ads are not only used to inform but also to persuade, often by appealing to emotions, fears, and biases rather than providing balanced or fact-based information. In Ghana, during the 2020 elections, targeted

advertisements became a contentious issue, with concerns about their role in manipulating voters and undermining the integrity of the electoral process. Mensah and Tetteh (2022) highlighted the ethical implications of using targeted ads to influence voter decisions, particularly when they exploit personal data without adequate consent or transparency. These ads can lead to the spread of biased or misleading information, which erodes public trust in democratic institutions and the electoral process.

The ability to target specific voter segments with tailored messages is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it enables political campaigns to reach and engage with voters in ways that were not possible with traditional media, such as radio or television. For example, during Ghana's 2020 elections, targeted ads were used to reach rural voters, young people, and other specific demographics who were more active on social media platforms. However, on the other hand, this form of hyper-targeting can exploit vulnerable populations by feeding them content that reinforces existing political beliefs or presents manipulated narratives that are designed to sway their opinions without their awareness. This raises concerns about the fairness of the election process, as it creates an uneven playing field where political messages are tailored to manipulate voters' emotional responses rather than fostering informed decision-making.

Furthermore, the lack of transparency in the targeting of political ads adds another layer of concern. Voters often have little insight into why they are seeing certain political messages or how their data is being used to deliver them. This lack of transparency can undermine trust in the political system and in social media platforms, especially when these ads are seen as a form of manipulation rather than genuine communication.

For this research, understanding the role of targeted advertising in the political campaigns of Ghana's elections is essential to evaluating how digital platforms shape voter opinions. By examining the ethical concerns surrounding targeted ads and their potential for voter

manipulation, the study can offer insights into the risks posed by these practices to the integrity of democratic processes. Additionally, it can highlight the need for regulatory frameworks to ensure that political ads on social media are transparent, fair, and do not exploit vulnerable populations. Exploring these issues will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the influence of social media on elections in Ghana and beyond, particularly as campaigns increasingly turn to digital platforms to sway voter behavior.

2.4 Conclusion

The review of literature underscores the transformative role of digital platforms like Facebook and X in shaping political opinions during Ghana's elections. While these platforms democratize information access and foster engagement, they also pose risks, including misinformation, polarization, and voter manipulation. Existing studies provide valuable insights, but gaps remain in understanding the nuanced interplay of demographic factors and platform-specific dynamics in Ghana's electoral context. Addressing these gaps will enhance our comprehension of the dualistic impact of social media on democracy and guide the development of policies to maximize benefits while mitigating risks.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to explore the role of digital platforms, specifically X and Facebook, in shaping political opinions during elections in Ghana. Given the study's focus on understanding individual perceptions and experiences, a qualitative research design was chosen. This approach allows for an in-depth investigation of how social media influences voter behavior and political engagement, emphasizing the subjective meanings users attach to their interactions on these platforms. The chapter details the research philosophy, research approach, research design, target population, sample and sampling technique, data collection methods and instruments, data handling and analysis, ethical considerations, and concludes with a chapter summary.

3.1 Research Philosophy

This study is guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes the exploration of subjective meanings and experiences in understanding the social world. Interpretivism is rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed and that individuals interpret their experiences in ways that are shaped by their cultural, social, and political contexts (Schwandt, 2000). This paradigm aligns with the study's aim to understand how social media users, politicians, and media professionals in Ghana make sense of their interactions on Facebook and X during

election periods. The interpretivist approach aligns with the study's aim to explore how social media interactions influence the formation of political opinions and behavior. Rather than seeking objective, quantifiable data, the research focuses on understanding the subjective meanings individuals attach to their online engagement. For instance, the study is interested in how users perceive the impact of political campaigns, content algorithms, and digital communication strategies on their voting decisions and political engagement. This paradigm recognizes that these perceptions are influenced by personal experiences, social networks, and the broader political environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interpretivism is particularly relevant for this research because it prioritizes context and cultural specificity, which are crucial when examining political behavior in Ghana's unique socio-political environment. Ghana's digital landscape, electoral processes, and media consumption habits are shaped by historical, economic, and social factors that must be considered to understand how digital platforms influence political engagement. By using an interpretivist lens, the study can uncover how these specific factors shape the way people use and interpret Facebook and X during elections, offering a rich, contextualized understanding of digital political participation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretivist paradigm also allows the researcher to engage with participants' lived experiences, gaining insight into the individual and collective meanings they derive from their use of social media for political purposes. This paradigm emphasizes depth over breadth, enabling the study to explore the complex social processes involved in the shaping of political opinions on digital platforms (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By focusing on participants' interpretations, the research is better positioned to understand the dynamic and multifaceted nature of social media's role in influencing political behavior during elections.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how digital platforms specifically X and Facebook shape political opinions during elections in Ghana. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders, including users, politicians, and media professionals. Qualitative research emphasizes the complexities and details of human behavior, communication, and social processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative research approach is particularly suited for this study as it provides a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Social media interactions and political engagement are inherently complex and context-dependent, shaped by cultural, social, and technological factors. Through focusing on qualitative methods, the study can uncover the deeper meanings individuals attach to their experiences with political content on platforms like Facebook and X. This approach enables the researcher to capture not only the explicit behaviors and actions of participants but also their implicit attitudes, motivations, and interpretations.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach facilitates the exploration of diverse perspectives, offering insights into how different demographic groups interact with social media during election periods. Stakeholders such as voters, campaign strategists, and media professionals bring unique experiences and viewpoints to the study. Engaging with these varied perspectives allows for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role of digital platforms in shaping political opinions. Qualitative research also provides the flexibility necessary for adapting to the dynamic and evolving nature of social media. Unlike quantitative methods, which often require rigid structures and pre-defined variables, qualitative methods allow the researcher to explore emergent themes and patterns as they arise during data collection and analysis. This adaptability is crucial for examining the rapidly changing dynamics of digital

communication in Ghana's political landscape. Employing techniques such as in-depth interviews and content analysis, the qualitative approach ensures that the study captures the richness of participants' lived experiences. It also aligns with the study's interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding the subjective meanings individuals derive from their social media interactions. Overall, the qualitative research approach provides the depth, flexibility, and contextual sensitivity required to explore how Facebook and X influence political opinions in Ghanaian elections.

3.3 Research Design

The exploratory nature of qualitative research is particularly useful for examining how digital platforms influence political engagement and voter behavior. Social media interactions, political opinions, and content consumption are shaped by a multitude of factors such as users' political affiliations, their engagement with content, and the platform's algorithmic dynamics (Tufekci, 2014). This study employs interviews, focus group discussions, and qualitative content analysis as complementary methods to uncover the specific ways in which Facebook and X are used in Ghana to mobilize voters, spread political messages, and foster political discourse during election periods.

Interviews are a key component of the research design, providing in-depth insights into individual experiences and perceptions. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility while maintaining focus on key themes, such as participants' interactions with political content, their perceptions of its impact, and their engagement with digital campaigns (Kallio et al., 2016). These interviews are particularly valuable for capturing nuanced perspectives from voters, campaign strategists, and media professionals, each of whom contributes unique insights into the role of social media in political communication. Focus group discussions add another layer

of understanding by exploring collective dynamics and shared experiences among social media users. These discussions help identify patterns in how users engage with political content, including the influence of peer interactions and social networks on their opinions and behaviors (Morgan, 1997). The group setting fosters dialogue that can reveal common themes and divergent viewpoints within Ghana's diverse electorate. Qualitative content analysis complements the data collected through interviews and focus groups by examining the political discourse and narratives prevalent on Facebook and X. This method systematically identifies recurring themes, rhetoric, and strategies used by political actors to engage voters (Krippendorff, 2018). By triangulating these methods, the research design ensures a comprehensive exploration of the role of digital platforms in shaping political opinions in Ghana.

3.4 Target Population

The target population for this study includes social media users, political campaigners, and media professionals in Ghana. These groups are selected due to their active roles in shaping and consuming political content on digital platforms during elections. Social media users encompass diverse demographic backgrounds, such as age, gender, and location, while political campaigners include individuals involved in managing social media campaigns for political candidates or parties. Media professionals comprise journalists and analysts who report on or analyze digital political content.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employs purposive sampling to select participants who have specific knowledge or experience relevant to the research topic (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that enables researchers to intentionally select individuals based on their ability to provide rich and relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation. This approach is particularly appropriate for qualitative research, as it allows the study to focus on participants who can offer detailed insights into the role of Facebook and X in shaping political opinions during Ghana's elections.

A total of 25 participants are chosen to represent three key stakeholder groups: social media users, political campaigners, and media professionals. Social media users are drawn from diverse demographic backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, and geographic location, to reflect the broader population's experiences and perspectives. Political campaigners, who manage digital campaigns for candidates or political parties, are included to provide insights into strategic uses of social media platforms for voter engagement. Media professionals, such as journalists and analysts, are selected for their expertise in observing and interpreting digital political discourse.

This sampling technique ensures the inclusion of diverse perspectives, enabling a comprehensive exploration of how different groups interact with and perceive social media's influence on political behavior. By intentionally targeting individuals actively engaged with digital platforms during election periods, purposive sampling enhances the depth and relevance of the findings.

3.6 Data Collection Method and Instrument

To explore the role of digital platforms in shaping political opinions, the study utilizes semi-structured interviews and content analysis of social media posts. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and in-depth exploration of participants' experiences while ensuring that key topics are covered (Kallio et al., 2016). The interviews focus on how participants interact with political content on Facebook and X, the strategies used by political campaigners, and the perspectives of media professionals. Content analysis involves examining political discourse and public commentary on Facebook and X to identify recurring patterns and themes.

3.7 Data Handling and Analysis

The data collected is analyzed using thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis. Thematic analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, which includes data familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting findings. Content analysis focuses on identifying recurring patterns and narratives in social media posts. Both methods ensure a systematic and comprehensive examination of how digital platforms shape political opinions during Ghanaian elections.

3.8 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations are critical in this study due to the sensitive nature of political discussions and social media behavior. Participants are provided with comprehensive information about the study's purpose, objectives, and methods. Informed consent is obtained from all participants. Confidentiality is maintained by using pseudonyms and securely storing digital data. These measures protect participants' anonymity and minimize potential risks associated with discussing political content online (Orb et al., 2001; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process ensured that participants made an informed decision about their involvement. Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the research process. All data collected were handled with utmost care to ensure that participants' identities and personal information were protected. Anonymity was preserved by assigning unique codes or pseudonyms to participants instead of using their real names. This means that no identifying information was linked to the data during analysis or in the reporting of findings. Furthermore, data was securely stored on password-protected devices, and only the researcher team had access to this information. After the completion of the study, all personal data were securely destroyed to prevent any potential breach of confidentiality. The study was designed to minimize any potential harm or discomfort to participants. Participants were not required to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable, and they were informed that they could skip any question without providing a reason. Ethical approval was sought from the research directorate to ensure that the study complies with established ethical standards and guidelines of the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC). Participants were fully informed about their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive outline of the research methodology employed to examine the role of digital platforms, specifically Facebook and X, in shaping political opinions during elections in Ghana. It began by discussing the research philosophy, which guided the foundational assumptions of the study, emphasizing a constructivist paradigm that aligns with the exploratory nature of the research. The chapter further justified the use of a qualitative research approach, pointing out its suitability for exploring complex social phenomena such as political opinion formation. An exploratory research design was adopted to facilitate an in-depth understanding of how digital platforms influence voter behavior and perceptions. The chapter also identified the target population, comprising social media users, political analysts, and campaign strategists in Ghana. Purposive sampling techniques were employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant data, ensuring the study's objectives were met. The methods of data collection were detailed, focusing on semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility and depth, allowing participants to share their experiences and insights, while content analysis of posts, comments, and interactions on Facebook and X offered a complementary perspective on the nature of political discourse online. The chapter also described the data analysis strategies, including thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships within the data. Ethical considerations were discussed extensively to ensure the study's integrity and the protection of participants. Informed consent, confidentiality, and data security were prioritized throughout the research process. The chapter concluded by acknowledging the potential limitations of the methodology, such as biases in participant selection and challenges in verifying the authenticity of online data. The next chapter will present the findings and analysis of the collected data, offering key insights into the influence of Facebook and X on political communication and opinion shaping during Ghana's elections.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the study findings, which investigated the role of X and Facebook in shaping political engagement and voter behavior during election periods in Ghana. Data was collected and analyzed in alignment with the study's primary objectives, using participants' responses to understand the frequency of social media use, the ways political actors leverage these platforms, patterns of user engagement with political content, and the types of political content most frequently encountered on X and Facebook. The chapter is organized according to the research objectives, with each section presenting findings relevant to a specific objective, followed by a discussion that situates these findings within the context of existing literature. Through this approach, the chapter explores how social media platforms fulfill distinct roles and influence the political landscape, including their impact on public perceptions, engagement patterns, and the dissemination of political information. Each objective is analyzed in detail, providing a comprehensive understanding of how X and Facebook contribute to the political processes in Ghana.

4.1 Investigate How X And Facebook Are Used by Political Actors and The Electorate During the Election in Ghana.

4.1.1 Frequency of Use of X And Facebook During Election Periods

Participants were asked how often they use X and Facebook during election periods. Their responses revealed a high frequency of use, with a preference for one platform over the other depending on the individual's needs. Facebook was cited as the more commonly used platform for in-depth content, while X was favored for real-time updates. Participants reported checking these platforms several times a day during election periods, with many noting that their usage increased as the election approached.

From the results, 15 participants reported using Facebook more frequently than X, with daily usage ranging from 3 to 5 times per day. Facebook was noted for providing detailed campaign information, event livestreams, and in-depth political discussions. Also, 10 participants indicated a preference for X, with several mentioning that they checked it frequently for real-time updates, with some accessing it as often as every hour. X was favored for its speed and immediacy, particularly during major political events, debates, and rallies.

4.1.2 Use of X And Facebook By Political Actors To Communicate With The Public

The interviewees discussed how politicians and political parties use X and Facebook to communicate with the public during election campaigns. There was consensus that both platforms played key roles, though each served different functions.

Facebook was viewed as the platform for long-form content, such as campaign speeches, manifestos, and policy explanations. Videos and livestreams of political events were common, providing voters with detailed insights into the candidates' positions and activities. Participants also noted the use of advertisements and personalized responses from politicians to engage

with voters. X was identified as the platform for quick updates, sound bites, and trending hashtags. Politicians used X to respond to breaking news, engage in real-time debates, and share short reactions to events. Participants mentioned that X was effective for reactive communication, particularly during live events like debates or rallies. Hashtag campaigns were commonly noted as tools for generating viral support. Specific examples provided by participants included: Live tweets from politicians during debates. Hashtag campaigns like #ChangeNow or #GhanaDecides. Videos of rallies and campaign stops posted on Facebook to showcase a candidate's engagement with the electorate.

4.1.3 Personal Engagement with Political Content on X And Facebook

When asked how they personally engaged with political content on X and Facebook, participants provided a range of responses, with most indicating passive engagement through liking or sharing posts, while fewer engaged in direct commentary. Out of the twenty-five participants, 18 of them said they regularly liked and shared political posts, especially on Facebook. Sharing was common when participants agreed with the content or felt it was important for their friends or family to see. Also, 12 participants mentioned that they retweet political content on X, often to spread information or to show agreement with the post. However, many participants said they refrained from commenting on X due to the hostile nature of political debates on the platform. Again, 8 participants stated that they commented on political posts, mainly on Facebook, where they felt discussions were less aggressive compared to X. Participants expressed concern about engaging in heated debates on X, where conversations often became polarized.

4.1.4 Types of Political Content Encountered

Participants were asked what types of political content they most frequently encountered on X and Facebook during election periods. Responses indicated a wide variety of content, but there were clear distinctions between the types of content favored on each platform.

On Facebook, the most common types of political content encountered were:

Campaign videos: Participants noted that candidates regularly posted videos of rallies, speeches, and events.

Political advertisements: Many participants encountered targeted ads promoting specific candidates or policies.

Long-form posts and manifestos: Several participants mentioned encountering detailed posts from politicians outlining their positions on key issues.

On X, the most common content included:

Memes: Participants frequently encountered politically charged memes, often mocking opposition parties or candidates.

Hashtag campaigns: These were commonly noted to rally support or trend a political issue.

Real-time updates: Participants appreciated the instant nature of X, particularly during live political events, with many mentioning the speed at which updates and reactions were posted.

The interview responses illustrate how Facebook and X are used in complementary ways during Ghanaian elections. Facebook is the preferred platform for in-depth political engagement, including campaign videos, advertisements, and detailed posts, while X serves as the platform for real-time interactions, trending discussions, and quick political updates.

Participants noted high engagement with political content, though engagement patterns differed by platform, with liking and sharing being the most common forms of interaction. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that politicians and parties actively use both platforms to communicate with voters, with Facebook being used for longer, more structured content and X being used for immediate, reaction-based interactions. The type of content encountered also varied, with videos, memes, and ads being the most frequently noted. Participants expressed a preference for passive engagement (liking, sharing, retweeting) rather than direct commentary, particularly on X, where the political climate was perceived to be more polarized and contentious.

4.2 Investigate the Influence of X And Facebook on Shaping Public Opinion and Voter Behavior During the Election

4.2.1 Influence of X And Facebook on Perceptions of Political Candidates and Issues

Participants unanimously acknowledged that X and Facebook significantly shape public perceptions of political candidates and election issues in Ghana. The platforms were recognized for influencing opinions by exposing users to direct candidate posts, debates, and viral content.

In considering general influence, all 25 participants agreed that these platforms play a major role in shaping perceptions during elections. Participant 3 noted, "People read short posts or memes and form opinions quickly, without verifying the facts. It can completely shape how people see candidates." Similarly, Participant 10 mentioned, "*I see people discussing political issues all the time on Facebook. These discussions influence people's opinions, especially when it's someone they trust.*" Looking at the role of Friends and Influencers, 18 participants highlighted the role of opinions from friends, public figures, or influencers in shaping their

views. Participant 8 said, "Many voters don't look for balanced opinions; they follow what's trending or what their friends say," and Participant 18 added, *"It's easy to be influenced when you're seeing posts from friends or celebrities you admire. Their opinions on Facebook or X sway a lot of people."*

Again, Real-Time Reactions and Viral Content; 15 participants emphasized the influence of real-time reactions and trending content, especially on X. Participant 5 stated, *"X is where you see immediate reactions to candidates' speeches or policies, and that can shift perceptions almost instantly,"* while Participant 24 shared, *"I think many people get their political information primarily from X and Facebook, so they definitely shape opinions."* The data suggests that both platforms play a crucial role in shaping political perceptions by offering a mix of instant reactions and in-depth narratives that influence public opinion.

4.2.2 Changes in Opinion Based on Social Media Content

Participants were asked if they had ever changed their opinion on a political issue or candidate because of something they saw on X or Facebook. Many provided examples of how exposure to new information, fact-checking posts, or videos influenced their opinions. For direct influence on opinion, 20 participants reported changing their opinion due to social media content. Participant 1 shared, *"I once changed my opinion about a candidate after seeing a video on Facebook where they were explaining their policy in more detail. It gave me a better understanding."* Similarly, Participant 7 mentioned, *"Seeing a politician's response to a scandal on X changed my opinion. The way they handled it made me trust them more."*

On role of emotional content and visual media, 15 participants highlighted the impact of emotionally charged content, especially on Facebook. Participant 10 explained, *"Seeing a*

candidate's live video on Facebook where they spoke directly to voters changed my view. It felt more personal." Participant 12 added, *"After reading a series of posts on X that broke down a candidate's policy issues, I reconsidered my stance."*

Also, with impact of viral posts and memes, 12 participants cited the influence of viral posts and memes on X. Participant 14 said, *"I was influenced by a viral video on X that showed a candidate making some good points during a debate,"* and Participant 19 remarked, *"I once supported a candidate, but after seeing a fact-checking post on X that showed they lied about something, I withdrew my support."* The data indicates that social media has the potential to shift opinions by delivering new information and emotional engagement, with videos and fact-checks playing significant roles in changing perspectives.

4.2.3 Impact of Debates, Discussions, And Arguments on Voting Decisions

Participants shared their thoughts on the influence of political debates, discussions, and arguments on their decision-making process as voters. Many agreed that these interactions helped them make more informed choices. Encouragement of Critical Thinking: 18 participants stated that political debates and discussions on X and Facebook encouraged them to think critically about issues. Participant 1 commented, *"Seeing different perspectives makes me more confident in my decision,"* while Participant 18 added, *"The discussions make me rethink my position when new information comes up. Facebook discussions are particularly useful for that."*

Role of Comments and Long Threads: 12 participants highlighted the value of discussion threads and comment sections on Facebook, which allowed for in-depth exploration of issues. Participant 12 shared, *"They make me question my assumptions, and sometimes that changes*

my vote. People bring up things I didn't know," and Participant 15 noted, "Debates and arguments help me think critically, especially when there are facts to back up the arguments."

Real-Time Reactions on X: 10 participants mentioned the impact of real-time debates on X, especially during political events. Participant 16 said, *"I get to see how candidates respond to criticism and how they explain their policies,"* and Participant 22 stated, "The arguments and debates on these platforms always make me more cautious about my decisions."

The data reveals that political discussions and arguments on X and Facebook encourage critical thinking and information sharing, which significantly influence voting decisions.

4.2.4 Influence of political advertisements on voter behavior

When asked about the influence of political advertisements on social media, participants agreed that ads on X and Facebook impact voter behavior, especially among undecided voters.

Effectiveness of Targeted Ads: 22 participants felt that ads were highly effective, especially when they targeted specific groups or issues. Participant 5 said, *"Ads target specific groups of voters and can push them toward one candidate or another,"* and Participant 21 added, "Ads that focus on key issues or target specific voters can definitely change how people vote."

Emotional and Persuasive Content: 18 participants mentioned that ads with emotional appeal or persuasive visuals are particularly impactful. Participant 11 explained, *"Ads can change how people think about candidates, especially if they're emotional or have a strong message,"* while Participant 23 shared, *"Political ads are persuasive, especially when they focus on emotional issues."*

Constant Exposure and Influence: 15 participants noted that the frequency of ads increased during election periods, influencing public perceptions through constant exposure. Participant

14 said, *"Political ads can definitely affect how people vote. They're everywhere during elections and hard to ignore,"* while Participant 12 added, *"The more ads you see, the more likely you are to be influenced, even if you don't realize it."*

The data shows that political ads on X and Facebook play a significant role in shaping voter behavior by exposing users to targeted, emotionally persuasive, and repetitive messaging, particularly influencing undecided voters. The responses illustrate the significant influence of these platforms on shaping political opinions and voter behavior among Ghanaians during election periods. Both platforms were noted for providing a wide array of political content that influences perceptions of candidates and issues, often shaping opinions based on real-time reactions, in-depth discussions, and targeted advertising.

Key Insights:

X and Facebook shape perceptions through instant feedback and public influence on perceptions. Participant 8 stated, *"Many voters don't look for balanced opinions; they follow what's trending or what their friends say."*

Change in Opinions: Social media content has led many to reconsider their views on candidates, as Participant 1 shared, *"I once changed my opinion about a candidate after seeing a video on Facebook where they were explaining their policy."*

Impact of Political Discussions: Exposure to discussions and debates helps voters make informed decisions. Participant 18 said, *"Facebook discussions are particularly useful for rethinking my position when new information comes up."*

Effectiveness of Advertisements: Political ads effectively sway voter opinions through targeted, emotional, and frequent exposure. Participant 21 noted, *"Ads that focus on key issues or target specific voters can definitely change how people vote."*

Overall, the data underscores the role of social media in shaping public opinion and voter behavior by creating public narratives, fostering critical discussions, and using targeted advertising to influence perceptions during Ghana's election periods.

4.3 Role of Demographic Factors in Influencing How Different Segments Of The Population Use And Are Affected By X And Facebook During The Election.

The exploration of how demographic factors influence the use of digital platforms, specifically X and Facebook, during elections in Ghana revealed insightful perspectives from the respondents. A significant theme that emerged was the impact of age on political engagement. Interviewee 1 noted, *“Younger people use X for quick updates; older generations prefer Facebook for in-depth discussions.”* This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee 3, who observed that *“age shapes preferences; younger users like videos, while older users value written content.”* Several respondents indicated that younger users are more adept at navigating fast-paced platforms like X, while older individuals may find it challenging, as highlighted by Interviewee 4: *“Older individuals may struggle with the fast pace of X, while younger users navigate and engage easily.”* Conversely, Interviewee 5 added that *“younger users are more comfortable sharing opinions; older users may consume content without engaging.”* Gender differences in political platform usage also surfaced in the interviews. According to Interviewee 6, *“Women use Facebook for community connections; men debate political issues on X.”* Interviewee 9 emphasized the divergence in content sharing, stating, *“Men share aggressive political content on X; women share articles and engage in community discussions on Facebook.”* This observation underscores the tendency of women to create supportive environments for expressing opinions, as noted by Interviewee 8, who remarked that *“women express opinions in supportive environments on Facebook; men often challenge or debate on*

X.” Furthermore, Interviewee 10 highlighted that women use Facebook for organizing and mobilizing, while men are inclined to provide immediate reactions to political news on X.

The influence of education level and income on political engagement was another focal point in the interviews. Interviewee 11 stated, “Higher education levels correlate with critical engagement; educated users are more skeptical of misinformation.” In contrast, Interviewee 14 explained how income shapes content interactions: “Income affects content shared; wealthier individuals engage with political advertisements, while lower-income users rely on organic posts.” The discussions suggested that individuals with higher education are more likely to share informative articles, as mentioned by Interviewee 13: “College-educated individuals share informative articles; those with less education prefer entertaining content, leading to susceptibility to misinformation.”

Respondents also addressed the susceptibility of different demographic groups to political messaging. Interviewee 16 remarked, “Misinformation spreads more among less educated users who do not verify facts before sharing.” This perspective was further supported by Interviewee 17, who noted that “higher income often comes with better resources for fact-checking, making affluent users less susceptible to false narratives.” In terms of age, Interviewee 18 pointed out that “younger users are tech-savvy but can fall for viral misinformation drawn to sensational content.” This suggests a complex relationship between age, education, and susceptibility to misinformation.

Lastly, the respondents provided general observations on the dynamics of political engagement across demographics. Interviewee 21 stated, “There’s a clear divide in how different ages consume content; it’s fascinating to see the demographic interactions.” Interviewee 22 echoed this sentiment, noting that older individuals often rely on established news sources shared on Facebook, while younger users prioritize social commentary on X. Furthermore, Interviewee

23 emphasized the importance of educational campaigns on misinformation, stating, “These campaigns could benefit users of all demographics, especially the less informed.” Interviewee 25 concluded, “Understanding these nuances can help tailor political messages to effectively reach various segments.”

4.4 Advantages and Challenges Associated with The Use of Social Media For Political Communication In The Context Of Ghanaian Elections.

The interviews conducted to explore the advantages and challenges associated with the use of X and Facebook for political communication during elections in Ghana revealed a wealth of perspectives from the respondents. A significant advantage highlighted was the ability of these platforms to facilitate real-time communication. Interviewee 1 emphasized, “The real-time communication feature allows political actors to respond quickly to events and engage with voters immediately.” This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee 2, who remarked on the platforms' vast reach, stating, “These platforms have a vast reach; they enable politicians to connect with a large audience without the barriers of traditional media.” The interactive nature of these platforms was further appreciated, as Interviewee 5 noted, “Social media allows for direct interaction between voters and politicians, which fosters a sense of community and involvement.” However, alongside these advantages, several challenges were also identified. Interviewee 6 raised concerns about the rapid spread of misinformation, asserting, “Misinformation spreads rapidly on these platforms, making it hard for voters to discern fact from fiction.” This issue of misinformation was echoed by Interviewee 8, who stated, “Fake news can damage reputations; one misleading post can undermine a candidate's entire campaign.” The polarization of opinions was another significant concern, as Interviewee 7

pointed out: “The polarization of opinions can lead to echo chambers, where users only interact with like-minded individuals, stifling healthy debate.” Moreover, Interviewee 9 added that “there’s a risk of harassment and intimidation online, which can deter individuals from expressing their political views.”

The effectiveness of social media in promoting democratic participation was a topic of varied opinions. Interviewee 11 expressed optimism, stating, “I believe these platforms are effective in promoting democratic participation; they empower more people to engage in politics.” Similarly, Interviewee 12 noted, “Social media lowers the barriers to entry for political discussions, allowing those who may not be involved in traditional politics to voice their opinions.” However, some respondents cautioned that the effectiveness could vary, with Interviewee 14 noting, “*While some engage positively, others might just scroll without participating in discussions.*” When discussing the potential for voter manipulation and the dissemination of biased information, many respondents acknowledged the risks involved. Interviewee 16 stated, “Yes, these platforms can create opportunities for voter manipulation through targeted ads that misrepresent candidates.” Interviewee 18 highlighted the issue of algorithmic biases, stating, “The algorithms on these platforms can reinforce biases, showing users only what aligns with their beliefs, which can mislead them.” Moreover, Interviewee 19 remarked on the significant risk that biased information can spread, particularly when presented in compelling formats.

Overall, respondents provided a balanced view of the role of social media in political communication during elections. Interviewee 21 concluded, “Despite the challenges, I believe the advantages of using social media for political communication in Ghana outweigh the drawbacks.” This sentiment emphasizes the need for improved media literacy among users, as suggested by Interviewee 22, who stated, “We need better media literacy programs to help users critically evaluate the information they encounter on these platforms.” Furthermore,

Interviewee 25 highlighted the importance of understanding social media dynamics, noting, “The future of elections will heavily rely on social media; understanding its dynamics will be crucial for all stakeholders involved.”

Discussion Of Findings

4.5 How X and Facebook are used by political actors and the electorate during the election in Ghana.

The findings from this study illustrate the pivotal role of X and Facebook in shaping political engagement and voter behavior in Ghana during election periods. These platforms serve as complementary tools for political actors and the public, each fulfilling distinct functions aligned with the specific needs and behaviors of users.

4.5.1 Frequency of Use of X and Facebook During Election Periods

Participants in the study indicated a high frequency of use for both X and Facebook, with a preference for Facebook among those seeking detailed political content and for X among those seeking real-time updates. Fifteen participants reported checking Facebook multiple times daily for in-depth political information, livestreams, and comprehensive campaign discussions, while 10 participants preferred X for its immediacy, accessing it frequently throughout the day, particularly around live events.

This behavior is consistent with Tufekci’s (2014) concept of social media platforms as tools for real-time information dissemination, where users turn to X during dynamic events for immediate updates. X’s focus on short-form, time-sensitive posts align with this finding, as

participants valued it for breaking news and live coverage of political events, echoing Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) analysis that platforms like Twitter allow for instant communication and facilitate rapid responses to evolving political discourse. In contrast, Facebook's structure and multimedia capabilities make it a suitable venue for long-form political content, as noted by Enli (2017), who highlights that Facebook's format supports in-depth communication and storytelling, making it more suitable for lengthy manifestos and campaign videos. Participants' use of Facebook as a "hub" for political engagement further aligns with this, suggesting that users rely on it to engage with comprehensive political discussions and campaign details.

4.5.2 Use of X and Facebook by Political Actors to Communicate with the Public

The study's findings reveal that political actors use Facebook and X for distinct, complementary purposes to engage with voters during election campaigns. Facebook was seen as the primary platform for long-form communication through posts, videos, and livestreams, providing voters with access to detailed information such as campaign manifestos and speeches. In contrast, X was favored for quick updates and real-time interactions, with politicians using it to react promptly to news and leverage hashtag campaigns for visibility, as seen in the examples of #ChangeNow and #GhanaDecides.

These findings align with Tucker et al. (2018), who noted that political actors leverage the unique features of each platform to fulfill different campaign strategies. Facebook's capacity for multimedia and in-depth posts makes it ideal for engaging voters who seek to understand a candidate's detailed policy positions, supporting Strandberg's (2013) observation that Facebook facilitates personalized communication and a deeper connection with voters. On the other hand, X's role in delivering immediate, reactive content supports Shirky's (2011)

findings that Twitter-style platforms are powerful tools for broadcasting succinct political messaging and quickly mobilizing supporters, particularly through hashtag campaigns. This real-time interaction capability allows politicians to engage dynamically with public sentiment, shaping the conversation on current events almost instantly.

4.5.3 Personal Engagement with Political Content on X and Facebook

Participants reported predominantly passive engagement with political content, with most opting to like or share posts rather than engage in direct commentary, particularly on X where the political climate was perceived as more polarized. Eighteen participants engaged by liking and sharing content on Facebook, while 12 participants frequently retweeted on X. Only 8 participants commented on posts, and these interactions occurred primarily on Facebook, where they perceived the political discussions as less hostile. This finding reflects Ellison et al. (2007), who noted that social media users are more likely to engage in passive forms of participation, such as liking and sharing, when topics are perceived as contentious. The preference for passive engagement, particularly on X, aligns with Sunstein's (2001) theory of polarization in online discussions, where individuals may avoid commenting due to the contentious nature of political discourse. The comments on Facebook were more welcoming to in-depth political conversations, supporting Smith et al. (2019), who found that Facebook's longer-form structure and community-oriented environment may foster more nuanced discussions.

4.5.4 Types of Political Content Encountered

The findings reveal a clear distinction between the types of political content participants encountered on X and Facebook. On Facebook, the primary content encountered included campaign videos, political advertisements, and long-form posts or manifestos. Participants noted that Facebook allowed politicians to communicate complex messages, broadcast events, and share ads that provided detailed insights into candidates' platforms. In contrast, X was associated with shorter, more visually impactful content, including memes, hashtag campaigns, and real-time updates. Participants highlighted the platform's role in viral content dissemination, noting how hashtag campaigns and memes often shaped public perceptions by spreading quickly.

These findings are consistent with Pennycook and Rand's (2019) research, which emphasized that visual and brief content, such as memes, has a high potential for virality and influence, as it simplifies complex political messages into easily digestible forms. Bode and Vraga (2015) similarly observed that platforms like Twitter tend to favor short-form and engaging content that captures user attention rapidly, supporting this study's findings that participants turn to X for quickly consumable political insights. Facebook's format for in-depth posts aligns with Shirky's (2011) conclusion that it is suited for more structured, narrative-driven content, allowing for deeper user engagement with candidates' policies.

Overall, the findings illustrate how Facebook and X serve complementary functions during election periods in Ghana, fulfilling users' varied needs for real-time updates and in-depth information. While Facebook facilitates detailed, personalized political engagement, X provides instantaneous, trend-driven interaction. The study supports Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) contention that social media platforms enable diverse forms of political participation,

with users opting for the platform and engagement style that best suits their political information needs.

Participants' preference for passive engagement suggests that echo chambers and polarization may limit active discourse, particularly on X, where contentious discussions deter direct commentary, supporting Sunstein's (2001) findings on the reluctance to engage in polarized environments. The prevalence of real-time and short-form content on X also raises questions about the longevity and depth of political discourse, as quick reactions may not provide the necessary context for fully informed decision-making, an issue noted by Tucker et al. (2018).

The findings of this study are consistent with the broader literature on social media's role in elections, underscoring the importance of platform-specific communication strategies in shaping public opinion and voter behavior. X and Facebook enable political actors to deliver tailored content that meets voters' diverse needs, from immediate updates to detailed policy discussions. However, the study also highlights the potential for polarization and echo chambers on platforms like X, where users may limit engagement due to the contentious nature of political discourse. To maximize the positive impact of social media on democratic engagement, there may be value in promoting balanced content diversity and enhancing opportunities for constructive political dialogue on these platforms.

4.6 The influence of X and Facebook on shaping public opinion and voter behavior during the election

The findings from this study reveal that X and Facebook play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior during election periods in Ghana. These platforms facilitate political engagement by offering diverse content formats, real-time interactions, and

targeted advertising, aligning with existing literature on the influence of social media on political attitudes and behaviors.

4.6.1 Influence of X and Facebook on Public Perceptions of Candidates and Issues

The study finds that X and Facebook significantly shape public perceptions of political candidates and issues, as all 25 participants acknowledged their influence on shaping opinions and perceptions. The platforms' capacity to expose users to instant reactions, memes, and user-generated content amplifies this influence. This finding supports Enli's (2017) assertion that social media platforms facilitate public debate and create participatory spaces that amplify users' perceptions of candidates and issues. Participants 3 and 10 highlighted the power of these platforms to shape perceptions, noting that "People read short posts or memes and form opinions quickly, without verifying the facts" and "discussions influence people's opinions, especially when it's someone they trust."

These results align with Tucker et al. (2018), who found that social media platforms shape perceptions by creating echo chambers where users interact primarily with like-minded individuals. This effect was evident as 18 participants noted that opinions from friends, public figures, and influencers directly shaped their views, echoing Bakshy et al. (2015) who observed that users' engagement with ideologically aligned content reinforces existing beliefs. The immediacy of reactions, particularly on X, also points to Sunstein's (2017) concept of rapid information dissemination, where social media reactions to political events influence public opinion in real time.

4.6.2 Social Media's Impact on Changes in Opinion

Another critical finding is that social media content has led participants to reconsider their opinions on candidates or issues. Twenty participants reported changing their opinions due to specific posts or fact-checking information. This finding corroborates Bail et al. (2018), who suggested that social media can influence users to reconsider views through exposure to contrasting information or fact-checking. For instance, Participant 1 shared, "I once changed my opinion about a candidate after seeing a video on Facebook where they were explaining their policy in more detail." This aligns with Shore et al. (2018), who found that detailed narratives in social media posts encourage reflection on political positions, especially when the information is perceived as credible and trustworthy. The influence of emotional and visual content on opinion change was emphasized, with 15 participants noting the persuasive power of videos and live sessions that show candidates addressing issues directly. This finding echoes Cossard et al. (2020), who observed that emotionally charged, visual content on social media can have a more substantial impact on users than text-based content, as it fosters personal connection and emotional resonance with the candidates.

4.6.3 Impact of Political Debates, Discussions, and Arguments on Voting Decisions

The study reveals that political debates and discussions on X and Facebook encourage critical thinking and play an essential role in shaping voting decisions. Eighteen participants stated that debates and arguments on these platforms made them think more critically about issues. Participant 18 noted, "Facebook discussions are particularly useful for rethinking my position when new information comes up." This finding is consistent with Cinelli et al. (2021), who emphasized that political discussions on social media expose users to diverse viewpoints,

encouraging more informed and reflective decision-making. The back-and-forth nature of discussions and comments on Facebook was especially valued, with 12 participants mentioning that longer comment threads facilitated more in-depth conversations, echoing Sunstein's (2001) theory of deliberative democracy on social media. These results align with Guess et al. (2019), who highlighted those social media discussions allow users to understand the broader context of political issues, leading to a more comprehensive evaluation of candidates.

The real-time nature of debates on X was also impactful, particularly during major political events like rallies or controversies. This supports Tufekci's (2014) idea that social media can amplify real-time discourse, offering users an immediate sense of public sentiment. Participant 16 shared, "I get to see how candidates respond to criticism and how they explain their policies," indicating that users consider candidate responses in real-time debates, which can sway voter preferences.

4. Influence of Political Advertisements on Voter Behavior

The findings demonstrate that political advertisements on X and Facebook effectively influence voter behavior, particularly when they are targeted and emotionally engaging. Twenty-two participants felt that ads were highly persuasive, especially when tailored to specific demographics, aligning with Pennycook and Rand's (2019) findings that targeted ads can shape opinions by addressing user-specific concerns. Participant 5 observed, "Ads target specific groups of voters and can push them toward one candidate or another," which supports the notion that targeted advertising can narrowcast political messages to appeal directly to users' values and preferences. The emotional appeal of ads was noted by 18 participants, with Participant 23 emphasizing, "Political ads are persuasive, especially when they focus on

emotional issues.” This observation aligns with Shore et al. (2018), who found that emotionally charged content drives user engagement, making voters more susceptible to influence. Furthermore, constant exposure to ads was also highlighted by 15 participants, supporting Guess et al. (2021), who noted that repeated exposure to political messages reinforces specific narratives, effectively shaping users’ political attitudes.

These findings collectively underscore the role of targeted, frequent, and emotionally engaging political ads in shaping voter behavior, particularly influencing undecided or swing voters. This suggests that ads on social media function similarly to traditional political advertising, with the added benefit of algorithm-driven targeting and the potential to shape voter attitudes more efficiently.

The findings from this study support existing literature on the influence of social media on political opinion formation and voter behavior, highlighting the role of X and Facebook in shaping public perceptions, changing opinions, promoting critical thinking, and influencing voter decisions through targeted advertising. The study reaffirms that social media platforms amplify public discourse by providing diverse content and enabling users to engage actively with political topics, as proposed by Tucker et al. (2018) and Enli (2017).

However, the findings also raise concerns about filter bubbles and echo chambers, as noted by Bakshy et al. (2015), suggesting that users’ exposure to like-minded content may limit their perspectives. This underscores the importance of promoting information diversity on social media platforms to facilitate more balanced political engagement. Furthermore, the emotional nature of ads and content raises questions about the potential for manipulation, suggesting that increased scrutiny of social media’s role in elections is necessary to ensure democratic integrity, as discussed by Guess et al. (2019).

In conclusion, this study's findings align closely with the broader literature on social media's role in elections, highlighting its dual capacity to inform and persuade while also emphasizing the need for measures to mitigate potential biases and polarization. The study suggests that social media can be a powerful tool for enhancing democratic participation in Ghana, provided it encourages diverse perspectives and safeguards against misinformation.

4.7 Demographic factors in influencing how different segments of the population use and are affected by X and Facebook during the election

The exploration of how demographic factors influence the use of X and Facebook during Ghana's election period provides valuable insights into the behavioral patterns and preferences of different population segments. The findings reveal complex intersections between age, gender, education, and income in how political engagement occurs on these digital platforms. When examined considering past literature, these results deepen our understanding of demographic-based differences in social media use for political purposes and highlight key areas where Ghana's patterns resonate with broader global trends.

4.7.1 Age as a Determinant of Platform Preference and Interaction Style

A prominent theme that emerged from the interviews is the impact of age on platform choice and interaction. Younger respondents preferred X for its quick updates, while older users gravitated towards Facebook for its capacity for more in-depth discussions, as noted by Interviewees 1 and 3. This age-based divergence in platform preference is supported by studies showing that younger users often prioritize immediacy and fast-paced content, such as the

findings of Auxier and Anderson (2021), who documented that younger populations gravitate towards platforms with rapid information cycles. Interviewee 4's observation that older users find X challenging aligns with research indicating that younger individuals often feel more comfortable with complex digital environments, thus more actively participating in conversations and sharing their opinions (Hargittai, 2010).

Age also affects content format preferences. Interviewee 3's observation that younger users prefer videos, while older users are inclined toward written content, mirrors findings by Bimber (2014), who highlighted generational divides in media consumption habits. Younger users' preference for multimedia aligns with global trends, as younger demographics are generally more inclined towards visual engagement, which drives higher interaction rates and engagement levels.

4.7.2 Gendered Dynamics in Social Media Usage for Political Communication

The interviews also illuminated gendered patterns in how social media platforms are used for political discourse. Interviewees 6, 8, and 10 described women as more community-oriented on Facebook, while men often engage in debate and direct confrontation on X. This observation is supported by past research, such as work by Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010), who found that women often utilize social media as a means of building community and exchanging supportive content. Meanwhile, men have been found to use platforms in ways that reinforce traditional forms of debate and competition, especially around politically charged topics (Schradie, 2012).

The gender-based differences in content-sharing practices noted by Interviewee 9 further align with existing studies indicating that men are more likely to post aggressive or confrontational political content (Joyce, 2015), while women tend to share articles and participate in community discussions on less contentious issues. This distinction in approach reflects broader

gender norms around communication, where women may seek to foster collaborative or mobilizing efforts, while men may focus on assertive expressions of opinion, especially on platforms like X that facilitate brief, real-time reactions.

4.7.3 Education Level and Income as Influential Factors in Political Engagement

The interviews underscored the relationship between education level and the nature of political engagement. Higher education levels correlated with critical engagement and a greater tendency to verify content, as noted by Interviewees 11 and 13. These observations resonate with findings from Guess et al. (2019), who documented those individuals with higher education levels are generally more discerning in their engagement with political content and are less susceptible to misinformation. The interview findings also align with Howard et al. (2018), who found that educated users are more likely to engage with content that requires critical thinking, such as policy analyses, while less educated users tend toward entertainment-oriented content, potentially increasing their vulnerability to sensationalized or misleading political messaging. The influence of income was also noteworthy, with wealthier respondents tending to engage more with sponsored content and political advertisements, as highlighted by Interviewee 14. Income's influence on engagement aligns with findings by Holt et al. (2013), who noted that higher income often allows individuals better access to digital literacy resources, making them more resilient to misinformation. Interviewee 17's insight that wealthier users have greater access to fact-checking tools supports the notion that financial resources can shape the ability to critically engage with content, an idea well-supported by literature on socioeconomic disparities in media consumption (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018).

4.7.4 Susceptibility to political messaging and misinformation

The interviews highlighted demographic disparities in susceptibility to political messaging and misinformation, with lower education levels linked to increased vulnerability, as noted by Interviewees 16 and 17. This is consistent with the work of Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who documented that less educated individuals are more likely to consume and share misinformation. Additionally, Interviewee 18 pointed out that younger users, while digitally savvy, may still be drawn to sensational content, which supports studies by Vosoughi et al. (2018) indicating that younger users are prone to sharing viral misinformation due to its emotive appeal.

This complex relationship between demographic factors and susceptibility to misinformation aligns with research suggesting that individuals with limited access to education or fact-checking resources may lack the critical skills needed to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). The feedback from respondents further underscores the importance of educational interventions to mitigate misinformation's impact, as suggested by Interviewee 23.

4.7.5 General observations on political engagement across demographics

Finally, the varied dynamics in political engagement among demographic groups suggest that tailored approaches in political communication could be effective. Interviewees 21 and 22's remarks on the "clear divide" between younger and older users' content preferences underscore the importance of targeting political messages based on demographic insights. Studies on digital segmentation strategies in political campaigns support this view, as more nuanced

targeting can increase engagement and campaign effectiveness (Baldwin-Philippi, 2019). The interview insights about differing preferences between age groups for traditional versus social commentary content reinforce the idea that effective political communication must consider these demographic differences to reach audiences effectively. The emphasis on educational campaigns against misinformation, as noted by Interviewee 23, aligns with suggestions by Jones-Jang et al. (2019), who argue that media literacy programs are essential in curbing misinformation spread, especially among vulnerable groups. Given the disparities observed in engagement patterns and susceptibility, targeted interventions could play a key role in enhancing digital literacy, thereby fostering a more informed electorate.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, these findings illustrate that demographic factors significantly shape how Ghanaians use X and Facebook for political engagement during elections. The age, gender, education, and income of users influence both platform preferences and interaction styles, as well as susceptibility to political messaging and misinformation. By situating these findings within the broader literature on social media use, Ghana's patterns are reflective of global trends, while also underscoring the specific need for tailored educational and regulatory measures to ensure responsible use of digital platforms in political contexts.

4.8.1 Advantages and challenges associated with the use of social media for political communication in the context of Ghanaian elections

The interviews revealed both the strengths and pitfalls of using X and Facebook as tools for political communication during Ghanaian elections, underscoring both their capacity to enhance democratic participation and the inherent risks of misinformation and polarization.

The findings align with previous literature on social media's role in elections, which often highlights similar dualities in its impact on political communication globally.

4.8.2 Advantages of social media for political communication

The real-time communication capabilities and wide reach of X and Facebook were emphasized by interviewees as crucial advantages in political engagement. Interviewee 1's mention of real-time updates as a valuable feature reflects Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) findings that the immediacy of social media fosters quick dissemination of information, which is particularly relevant in fast-evolving electoral environments. Additionally, respondents noted the interactive nature of these platforms, as Interviewee 5 pointed out the "sense of community" enabled by direct voter-politician interactions. This aligns with findings from Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012), who argue that social media enables a more participatory model of democracy, where citizens feel empowered to communicate directly with political figures and engage in discourse beyond traditional media.

The wide accessibility of these platforms was also regarded as a benefit, enabling political actors to bypass traditional media channels. The emphasis on accessibility by Interviewee 2 and others is supported by the work of Boulianne (2015), who notes that social media can democratize information by making political messaging accessible to a broader audience, thus potentially leveling the playing field for political actors of various backgrounds.

4.8.3 Challenges and risks of social media in political communication

While the advantages of X and Facebook were evident, interviewees were also cognizant of the challenges, particularly the spread of misinformation. Interviewee 6's observation that "misinformation spreads rapidly" resonates with research by Pennycook and Rand (2019), which found that social media amplifies the dissemination of fake news, particularly during high-stakes events like elections. Respondents identified misinformation as a major factor that confuses voters and diminishes the quality of political discourse a concern well-documented by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who showed that misinformation on social media could skew voter perceptions and influence election outcomes. The polarization of opinions was also highlighted as a challenge, with Interviewee 7 describing the "echo chambers" where users predominantly interact with like-minded individuals. This phenomenon has been widely explored in studies by Sunstein (2001) and more recently by Cinelli et al. (2021), who found that social media algorithms often reinforce users' pre-existing beliefs, thereby creating fragmented and polarized communities. In the Ghanaian context, this polarization may contribute to reinforcing ethnic or political divides, potentially destabilizing communal bonds during elections.

Another noted risk is the anonymity afforded by social media, which can encourage online harassment. Interviewee 9 highlighted that harassment, and intimidation can suppress open political expression, a point that aligns with the findings of Freelon et al. (2020), who observed that the anonymity and public nature of social media can foster hostile environments that deter individuals from engaging meaningfully in political discourse.

4.8.4 Effectiveness in promoting democratic participation

The role of social media in fostering democratic engagement was perceived positively by many respondents, with Interviewee 11 describing these platforms as “effective in promoting democratic participation.” This finding corresponds with research by Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008), who argue that digital media can lower entry barriers for political engagement, particularly among younger demographics. According to Loader and Mercea (2011), social media enables marginalized groups, who might otherwise be excluded from mainstream political dialogue, to express their views, thus potentially enriching the democratic process. This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee 12, who praised social media’s ability to engage those who are typically uninvolved in formal political processes, especially young people who may find traditional political channels inaccessible or unappealing.

However, the interviews also revealed a nuanced perspective on this engagement. Some respondents felt that while these platforms encourage democratic participation, they can also overwhelm users with information, making it challenging to stay informed and engaged. This duality aligns with Chadwick’s (2017) observation that while social media amplifies access to information, it can also result in “information overload,” which can lead to disengagement or apathy among certain voter groups.

4.8.5 Opportunities for voter manipulation and biased information

Respondents were acutely aware of the potential for voter manipulation through biased or targeted content, as Interviewee 16 noted the use of targeted ads that misrepresent candidates. This concern aligns with findings by Baldwin-Philippi (2019), who showed that targeted political ads on social media can exploit users' data to manipulate public opinion, often presenting biased or misleading information. Interviewees further pointed out how algorithms create “echo chambers” that reinforce pre-existing beliefs, a risk documented by Pariser (2011) in his work on the “filter bubble” effect. This manipulation is particularly concerning in regions

like Ghana, where access to fact-checking resources may be limited, as noted by respondents like Interviewee 19, who described how “biased information” can be effectively disguised as factual and sway public opinion. Overall, the insights gathered through these interviews underscore both the transformative potential and the inherent risks of social media in Ghana’s electoral process. While the advantages of reach, accessibility, and engagement resonate with global studies on social media’s impact on democracy, the concerns regarding misinformation, polarization, and manipulation suggest a need for careful regulation and media literacy initiatives. Improving media literacy, as suggested by Interviewee 22, could help users critically assess information on these platforms, reducing the impact of misinformation and biased content. As Ghana continues to integrate digital platforms into its political landscape, understanding and addressing these dual aspects will be essential for safeguarding the democratic process.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study's key findings, addresses limitations, and suggests directions for future research. The study aimed to explore how demographic factors influence the use of X and Facebook during Ghana's election periods, investigating the role of age, gender, education, and income in shaping political engagement on these platforms. Conclusions based on these findings are drawn, and recommendations are offered to improve political communication on social media in Ghana.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study aimed to understand the influence of X and Facebook on public opinion and voter behavior during elections in Ghana. Four main areas were explored: the frequency of platform use, how political actors use these platforms to communicate, users' engagement with political content, and the types of political content encountered. The results underscore the complementary roles these platforms play and reveal specific behavioral patterns among users.

The findings indicate that Facebook is more frequently used by participants for in-depth political information such as campaign livestreams and detailed discussions, with 15 participants reporting multiple daily checks during election periods. Conversely, X was favored by 10 participants for its immediacy, providing real-time updates around live events. This reflects Tufekci's (2014) concept of social media as a tool for real-time information dissemination, where users rely on X for dynamic, fast-paced political discourse, while

Facebook's multimedia capabilities make it suitable for long-form content, supporting Enli's (2017) view that Facebook excels in fostering in-depth political engagement.

The study reveals distinct, yet complementary communication strategies used by political actors on these platforms. Facebook was identified as the platform for long-form communication through posts, videos, and livestreams, offering voters access to comprehensive campaign information. In contrast, X was utilized for immediate reactions and hashtag campaigns, with politicians leveraging it to engage dynamically with public sentiment in real time. This supports Tucker et al. (2018), who found that political actors use platform-specific strategies to reach different audience needs and aligns with Strandberg's (2013) assertion that Facebook's multimedia options facilitate personalized communication.

Participants reported a predominantly passive engagement with political content on both platforms, particularly on X, where they perceived the political climate as polarized. Eighteen participants engaged primarily by liking or sharing posts on Facebook, while 12 participants frequently retweeted on X. Only 8 participants actively commented on posts, primarily on Facebook, where they perceived discussions as less hostile. This aligns with Sunstein's (2001) theory of polarization in online discussions and Ellison et al. (2007), who noted that users prefer passive engagement when engaging with contentious topics.

The study found clear distinctions in the types of political content encountered on each platform. Facebook was associated with campaign videos, political advertisements, and long-form posts, while X was associated with memes, hashtag campaigns, and real-time updates. This reflects Pennycook and Rand's (2019) findings on the viral nature of visual and brief content, with X serving as a hub for quickly consumable political insights, whereas Facebook's format for in-depth posts supports Shirky's (2011) conclusions about its suitability for narrative-driven content.

The study highlighted key demographic patterns in social media usage for political engagement in Ghana:

Younger users prefer X for its fast updates and multimedia content, while older individuals tend towards Facebook for detailed discussions. This aligns with literature on age-based platform preferences, where younger users are more comfortable with rapid information cycles and interactive formats (Auxier & Anderson, 2021; Bimber, 2014).

Distinct gendered usage patterns emerged, with women engaging in supportive discussions on Facebook and men actively debating on X. These findings reflect established trends indicating women's preference for community-building in digital spaces, while men often engage in competitive dialogue around politics (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Schradie, 2012).

Higher education levels correlated with greater skepticism toward misinformation, while wealthier individuals were more likely to fact-check content. This supports previous findings suggesting that education enhances critical engagement, and higher-income users often have access to better digital literacy resources (Guess et al., 2019; Holt et al., 2013).

Less educated users and younger audiences appeared more susceptible to misinformation, often drawn to sensational content. These insights echo concerns in literature, where limited access to fact-checking resources can increase vulnerability to false information (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

The study found that social media's real-time nature enhances accessibility but also raises risks of misinformation and polarization, a duality documented in global studies on social media's impact on political discourse (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Freelon et al., 2020).

These findings demonstrate the multifaceted role of demographic factors in shaping political engagement on social media in Ghana, revealing both the potential for enhanced democratic participation and the risks of information manipulation.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations affected this study: The study relied on a limited number of interviews, which may not fully capture the diversity of social media users across Ghana. Also, the focus was on X and Facebook, excluding other platforms like Instagram or TikTok, which may also influence political engagement, particularly among younger users. The study focused on one election period; longitudinal studies could provide more comprehensive insights into changing social media habits over multiple election cycles.

Future research could expand the scope by using larger, more diverse samples, including additional social media platforms, and examining the influence of evolving platform features on political engagement. Further exploration into how digital literacy interventions affect susceptibility to misinformation would also be valuable.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that X and Facebook serve pivotal and complementary roles in shaping public opinion and voter behavior during elections in Ghana. Facebook functions as a venue for detailed, personalized political engagement where users can explore complex issues through multimedia content, aligning with Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) work on diverse forms of political participation. X, on the other hand, acts as a platform for real-time, reaction-based interactions, supporting Shirky's (2011) view that Twitter-style platforms facilitate swift, widespread message dissemination. The study also highlights potential downsides, such as polarization and echo chambers on X, which align with Sunstein's (2001) observations on user reluctance to engage directly in polarized environments.

Social media's role in elections is multifaceted: while it provides platforms for real-time discourse and in-depth discussions, it also raises questions about the depth of political dialogue

and the potential for voter manipulation through targeted advertising. As social media continues to shape political landscapes, promoting content diversity and balanced discussions on these platforms is crucial for maintaining democratic integrity and informed voter engagement. The study further concludes that demographic factors—specifically age, gender, education, and income play significant roles in shaping political engagement on X and Facebook during Ghana’s election periods. Younger users gravitate towards X for rapid updates, while older individuals prefer the slower-paced, discussion-friendly environment of Facebook. Gendered differences reveal that women use Facebook for community support, while men are inclined toward debates on X. Education and income further shape engagement styles, with higher education and income correlating with critical content interaction and reduced susceptibility to misinformation. The findings support global trends in social media usage while emphasizing the unique political and cultural contexts of Ghana.

5.4 Recommendations

To address the challenges and leverage the benefits of social media in political communication, the following recommendations are proposed:

The findings provide insights into specific actions that can enhance the constructive use of X and Facebook for political engagement in Ghana, particularly for political actors, platform designers, and educators.

Political actors should consider the distinct functions of X and Facebook to tailor their communication strategies effectively:

Given the platform’s capacity for long-form content, political actors should use Facebook to share detailed manifestos, host live discussions, and post comprehensive updates that allow voters to understand their positions. This aligns with Strandberg’s (2013) recommendation for personalized political communication. Politicians and parties should focus on short, engaging

posts on X to react to current events, trend relevant hashtags, and actively participate in live discussions, as suggested by Shirky (2011). The quick, responsive nature of X provides a platform for addressing issues as they arise, helping political actors stay relevant in public discourse. The study revealed a preference for passive engagement among users, particularly on X, due to the polarized nature of discussions. To encourage more balanced discourse:

Establishing moderated political forums or fact-checked discussions on Facebook could encourage users to engage actively without the fear of hostility. This could align with Enli's (2017) model for structured, participatory social media spaces. To combat echo chambers, X could incorporate algorithms that recommend diverse viewpoints, as suggested by Bakshy et al. (2015), enabling users to encounter a range of opinions and reducing polarized echo chambers. The study's findings underscore the influence of targeted political advertisements in shaping voter behavior, which raises questions about potential voter manipulation.

Social media literacy programs could help users understand how targeted ads work and the potential for manipulation. This aligns with Pennycook and Rand's (2019) work on improving user awareness of algorithm-driven content to foster critical media consumption. Again, platforms like X and Facebook should improve transparency in political ad targeting, allowing users to see why they are targeted with specific political messages, as recommended by Guess et al. (2021). This transparency would help users critically evaluate ads and reduce the influence of emotionally driven, potentially manipulative political content. The study highlights the need for a balance of real-time discourse and in-depth discussions to foster constructive political engagement. X could introduce features such as structured political discussions or debate spaces where users can engage in more balanced, moderated conversations. This aligns with Cinelli et al. (2021), who recommend features that encourage productive debate rather than reactive commentary.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

This interview guide is designed to explore the role of **X** (formerly Twitter) and **Facebook** during elections in **Ghana**, focusing on how these platforms are utilized by political actors and the electorate, and their influence on public opinion and voter behavior. The questions are structured around the four main research objectives and aligned with the study's research questions.

Introduction and Consent

Introduction:

Briefly explain the purpose of the study and the focus on how X and Facebook are used during elections in Ghana.

Reassure participants of their **anonymity** and **confidentiality** and explain their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Informed Consent:

Confirm that participants are willing to proceed with the interview and sign the consent form.

Can you tell a little bio information of yourself? (optional)

Section 1: Use of X and Facebook by Political Actors and the Electorate

Objective 1: To investigate how X and Facebook are used by political actors and the electorate during the election in Ghana.

How often do you use **X** and **Facebook** during election periods?

In what ways do you think **politicians** or **political parties** use these platforms to communicate with the public during campaigns?

Can you provide specific examples of **political content** or campaigns you've seen on these platforms?

How do you personally engage with political content on **X** or **Facebook**?

Do you share, like, or comment on political posts? Why or why not?

What types of political content (e.g., posts, videos, memes) do you encounter most frequently on these platforms during elections?

Section 2: Influence of X and Facebook on Public Opinion and Voter Behavior

Objective 2: To investigate the influence of X and Facebook on shaping public opinion and voter behavior during the election.

Do you think **X** and **Facebook** have an influence on how people perceive political candidates and issues during elections? How?

Have you ever changed your opinion on a political issue or candidate because of something you saw on these platforms? Can you provide an example?

How do political debates, discussions, or arguments on **X** or **Facebook** impact your decision-making process as a voter?

Do you believe that **political advertisements** on social media affect voter behavior? If so, how?

Section 3: The Role of Demographic Factors in the Use of X and Facebook

Objective 3: To explore the role of demographic factors in influencing how different segments of the population use and are affected by X and Facebook during the election.

How do you think **age** influences the way people use X and Facebook for political purposes during elections?

Do younger and older people engage with political content differently on these platforms?

In your experience, do you notice any differences in how **men and women** use these platforms during elections? If so, what are the differences?

How do you think factors such as **education level** or **income** influence the types of political content people engage with on X and Facebook?

Do you think these factors affect people's susceptibility to political messaging or misinformation?

Section 4: Advantages and Challenges of Using Social Media for Political Communication

Objective 4: To identify the advantages and challenges associated with the use of social media for political communication in the context of Ghanaian elections.

From your perspective, what are the **advantages** of using **X** and **Facebook** for political communication during elections?

Are there any features of these platforms (e.g., real-time communication, reach) that make them particularly useful for political actors?

What are some of the **challenges** or **risks** associated with the use of these platforms for political communication?

Can you discuss challenges such as the spread of **misinformation**, **fake news**, or the **polarization** of opinions?

How effective do you think these platforms are in promoting **democratic participation**? Do they help more people become engaged in politics?

In your view, do these platforms create opportunities for **voter manipulation** or the dissemination of biased information? If so, how?

Section 5: Final Thoughts

Do you have any additional thoughts on how **X** and **Facebook** are impacting politics and elections in Ghana?

Is there anything you would change about how these platforms are used for political communication?