



**THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE NEWS ON VOTING DECISIONS OF
STUDENTS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN GHANA: A STUDY OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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BY

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

DECEMBER 2025

DECLARATION


DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is the result of my own 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 by means of complete references.

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DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting dissertation laid down by the University of Media Arts and Communication

JAMES KWAKU ASANTE Ph.D		9/12/2025
Supervisor	Signature	Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Mr. Dennis Adjei Dwomoh.

He encouraged me to take up the programme and financed it. Our world would continue to be better because of people like him.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to God for the opportunity and the grace to accomplish this. There were moments I nearly gave up, but He kept me in. I am grateful. I am also eternally thankful to my family, supervisor, lecturers, course mates, the school administration and all those who have contributed diversely to help me master Public Relations.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of online news on the voting decisions of students in presidential elections in Ghana, with specific reference to the University of Media, Arts and Communications. The main objective was to determine whether online news affects voting behaviour, while also examining student preferences between online and traditional media. A review of existing scholarship, including works by Bandipo (2015), Fujiwara, Muller and Schwarz (2022), and Amenyewu, provided a comparative framework. Methodologically, the research was 90% qualitative, employing open- and closed-ended questions, with responses coded thematically and analysed quantitatively using SPSS. Grounded in agenda-setting theory, the findings reveal that although students prefer online news due to convenience, it does not significantly influence their voting decisions, which are instead shaped by the direct benefits of community-based projects. The study contributes to knowledge by offering the first focused analysis of online news and student voting behaviour in Ghana. It recommends that political communication targeting students should prioritise accessibility across platforms, with greater emphasis on online advertising. Future research should examine alternative factors influencing student voting behaviour and explore why students consume political news online so extensively despite its limited electoral impact.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODCUTION

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the background of the study, the problem statement, the research objectives, and the research questions are presented, followed by a discussion of the study's relevance, scope, and organization. The chapter establishes the foundation of the research by situating the study within its broader context, identifying the key issue under investigation, and outlining the goals that guide the inquiry. It also clarifies the boundaries of the research and explains how the thesis is structured, thereby providing readers with a clear roadmap for the chapters that follow.

1.1 Background

The influence of media on electoral behaviour is well documented in communication and political science scholarship. Seminal studies such as McCombs and Shaw (1972) highlight the agenda-setting role of traditional media, while Norris (2000) demonstrates how media shape political knowledge and civic engagement. However, the rise of digital technologies has significantly transformed news consumption, particularly among younger and educated audiences (Chadwick, 2013; Bakshy, Messing & Adamic, 2015). These shifts raise pressing questions about whether online news directly influences voting behaviour, especially within emerging democracies such as Ghana.

Globally, social media platforms have become central to both personal communication and political mobilisation. By 2021, Facebook reported 2.80 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2021), while the Pew Research Center (2021) highlighted the widespread use of platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and WeChat. Scholars recognise that these platforms provide opportunities for political actors to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, shape public opinion, and engage citizens directly (Wigand et al., 2010; McAfee, 2006). Comparative evidence

underscores their political significance: for example, Fujiwara, Müller and Schwarz (2022) found that Twitter usage contributed to reductions in Republican vote share during the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections, illustrating the persuasive capacity of digital political communication.

In Africa, and in Ghana in particular, the transformative potential of online platforms is evident. Mensah (2017) observed that social media played a pivotal role in Ghana's 2016 presidential elections, enabling candidates to interact with voters before, during, and after campaigns. Bandipo (2015) reached similar conclusions in Nigeria's 2015 elections, showing that new media technologies significantly shaped the performance of political stakeholders. In Ghana today, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) are widely used by political parties for campaign communication. With internet penetration estimated at about 70% in 2024 (The Ghana Report, 2024), these platforms are now central to political discourse, even as challenges such as misinformation, polarisation, and cyberbullying persist.

Despite these developments, much of Ghanaian academic scholarship continues to focus on the influence of traditional media—radio and television—on electoral behaviour (Gadzekpo, 2009; Asah-Asante, 2016). Empirical research into how online news affects voting behaviour remains limited. Yeboah, Addo and Peprah (2024) found that searching for campaign messages online influenced Ghanaian voters' psychological, social, and personal behaviours, but their study addressed the general population rather than the student demographic. Research focusing on students (Amankwah & Mbatha, 2022; Amankwah, 2024) reveals that university students use digital platforms for interactivity, entertainment, and social utility, yet these works do not conclusively examine whether online political news shapes actual voting decisions.

Professional experience further highlights the relevance of this issue. Having served in communication roles at the Ministry of Information, the Office of the President, and later in

digital journalism with *JoyNews* of The Multimedia Group, I observed significant differences in how audiences engage with traditional versus online news platforms. Stories on radio and television often generated limited interaction, whereas online publications attracted sustained feedback, interaction, and even re-emerged in political campaigns and legal proceedings. Although anecdotal, these observations suggest that online news may be shaping political choices, particularly among educated youth.

Taken together, existing literature and practice demonstrate both the opportunities and complexities of online media as a political communication tool. While evidence from Ghana and elsewhere shows that digital platforms can shape electoral outcomes through persuasion and mobilisation, uncertainties remain about the extent and mechanisms of this influence. More importantly, little is known about how online news consumption affects the voting decisions of Ghanaian university students—a demographic central to the country’s democratic future. This study therefore investigates the influence of online news on students’ voting decisions in Ghana’s presidential elections, focusing on the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) as a case study.

1.2 Problem statement

Although young people in Ghana are increasingly turning to digital platforms for political information, there is limited empirical evidence linking online news exposure to actual voting behaviour. Most Ghanaian studies of electoral communication continue to privilege traditional media such as radio and television (Gadzekpo, 2009; Asah-Asante, 2016), while the few that explore online platforms focus on general effects such as attitudes, interactivity, or motivations (Amankwah & Mbatha, 2022; Amankwah, 2024; Yeboah, Addo & Pephrah, 2024). What remains underexplored is whether such exposure directly shapes voting decisions, particularly in the high-stakes context of presidential elections.

This gap is particularly significant for university students, who represent a digitally savvy and politically active segment of the electorate. They consume political information heavily through online channels, yet there is insufficient research on whether these patterns of media use translate into concrete voting choices. The absence of such knowledge limits our understanding of how digital media are reshaping Ghana's democratic processes and whether online political communication effectively influences electoral outcomes.

This study therefore addresses the gap by examining the influence of online news consumption on the voting decisions of university students in Ghana, focusing on the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) as a case study.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

This study seeks to achieve one main objective and three specific objectives.

1.3.1 Main Objective

- To determine whether online news influences the voting decisions of students in presidential elections in Ghana.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives and Corresponding Research Questions

1. **Objective:** To examine the extent of students' preference for online news compared to traditional media during presidential elections in Ghana.

Research Question: What is the extent of students' preference for online news compared to traditional media during presidential elections in Ghana?

2. **Objective:** To identify and analyse the factors that account for students' choice of news sources during presidential elections.

Research Question: What factors account for students' choice of news sources during presidential elections?

3. **Objective:** To assess which medium—traditional or online news—is perceived by students as more effective for delivering political campaign messages during presidential elections.

Research Question: Which medium—traditional or online news—do students perceive as more effective for delivering political campaign messages during presidential elections?

4. **Objective:** To determine the extent to which online news influences the voting decisions of students in presidential elections in Ghana.

Research Question: To what extent does online news influence the voting decisions of students in presidential elections in Ghana?

1.4 Relevance of study

This research is relevant for several reasons, spanning scholarly, policy, and practical domains.

Scholarly relevance

From an academic perspective, this study fills a critical gap in media and political communication research in Ghana. Existing literature largely examines the influence of traditional media such as radio and television on electoral behaviour (Gadzekpo, 2009; Asah-Asante, 2016), with limited focus on the role of online news. Even studies that explore digital platforms tend to emphasise motivations for use, gratifications, or general attitudinal effects (Amankwah & Mbatha, 2022; Amankwah, 2024; Yeboah, Addo & Pephrah, 2024), leaving unanswered the question of whether online news consumption translates into concrete voting decisions. By focusing specifically on university students and presidential elections, this research contributes original empirical evidence to a growing body of scholarship on digital media and democracy in Africa. It also

strengthens theoretical debates on agenda-setting, media effects, and political communication in emerging democracies.

Policy Relevance

At the policy level, the findings of this study will be valuable to institutions such as the Electoral Commission of Ghana, the Ministry of Information, and the National Communications Authority.

Understanding whether online news influences voting behaviour can inform strategies for voter education, electoral regulation, and political communication. For instance, if online news is found to significantly shape voting decisions, regulators and policymakers may need to strengthen digital literacy initiatives, fact-checking efforts, and interventions against misinformation and polarisation. Furthermore, evidence from this study could guide government and civil society organisations in designing programmes that engage young voters effectively, ensuring their participation in democratic processes is informed and constructive.

Practical relevance

In practice, the study has implications for political actors, campaign strategists, media organisations, marketers, and researchers. Political parties and candidates will gain insights into the effectiveness of online platforms compared to traditional media in reaching student voters, allowing them to allocate campaign resources more efficiently. Media owners and journalists will also benefit by understanding the impact of their online news content on political engagement, which can guide editorial strategies and platform investment. For marketers and advocacy groups, the findings provide evidence on whether students' decisions are shaped by what they consume online, thereby influencing communication and outreach strategies. Importantly, this research helps answer a fundamental practical question: *Do university students in Ghana vote based on the political news they consume online, or do they rely on other factors?* The answer to this question will allow stakeholders to decide whether to intensify investments in online political

communication or to focus attention on alternative platforms and strategies. By clarifying the role of online news in shaping voting behaviour, the study offers evidence-based guidance to diverse stakeholders navigating the evolving media and political landscape in Ghana.

1.5 Scope of Research

This research is limited to students of voting age in Ghana. The case study is at the Graduate School of the University of Media, Arts and Communications. The study focuses on determining if the political news that students consume online influences their voting decisions in presidential elections. While it is hoped that the determinations made from this constituency can be generalised to apply to all students of voting age for presidential elections in Ghana, this research in terms of data collection and the issues raised in the research questions, will limit itself to the population of the study.

1.6 Organization of the study

The study is grouped into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study and offers reasons on why this project was undertaken, and the exact focus of the project. It covers the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions and objectives, scope of the study, significance of the study, and how the entire work is organized. Chapter Two reviews the existing literature which relates to this study. Chapter three captures the theoretical framework, the procedures and techniques that were employed to carry out the study. It presents the study area, research design, target population, sampling technique, sources of data, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis and ethical issues. Chapter Four is devoted to results and discussions. Chapter Five presents a summary, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research. The appendix section presents the questionnaire, and interview guide used in the survey for this research. Finally, there is a section for reference.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews literature on the influence of online news on the political choices of university students in Ghana. The discussion is organized into three main sections. The first section, the conceptual framework, clarifies and defines the core concepts central to this study. The second section, the theoretical framework, examines the principal theories that provide a basis for analyzing the relationship between online media consumption and political decision-making. The third section reviews related empirical studies, assessing previous findings and scholarly debates on the subject. The chapter concludes by synthesizing the key insights from the literature and presenting precise definitions of the terms employed in this research.

2.1 Traditional Media

Traditional media refers to established mass communication platforms such as print (newspapers and magazines), radio, and television. These platforms have historically operated within a largely one-way model of communication, where information is produced by institutions and transmitted to audiences with limited opportunities for immediate feedback (McQuail, 2010).

The editorial processes that determine what becomes news in traditional media are commonly explained by gatekeeping theory. Journalists and editors act as gatekeepers by selecting and shaping information, which restricts direct audience influence on content (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Although mechanisms such as phone-ins on radio and letters to newspaper editors allow for some audience participation, these forms of feedback are generally delayed and mediated (Baran and Davis, 2020).

Compared with online platforms, traditional outlets are often perceived as more credible. Studies in Ghana and across Africa suggest that legacy media enjoy higher institutional trust than digital-only outlets, partly due to professional editorial norms and stronger regulatory oversight (Gadzekpo, 2009; Tettey, 2011). Nonetheless, global and regional reports indicate sustained declines in newspaper circulation and television viewership, as audiences increasingly turn to digital platforms for news and entertainment (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Nielsen and Fletcher, 2020).

Despite these pressures, radio remains particularly resilient in Africa. Scholars highlight that radio remains the most accessible and cost-effective medium across the continent, especially in rural areas where literacy levels are lower and internet access is uneven (Myers, 2011; Banda, 2009). In Ghana, community radio plays an especially important role in promoting local participation, disseminating political information, and providing a platform for debate in local languages (Gadzekpo, 2009; Alhassan, 2005). The National Communications Authority (NCA, 2021) further reports that radio continues to account for the majority of licensed broadcasting services in Ghana, underscoring its ongoing importance in shaping public opinion and political engagement.

In summary, while traditional media face challenges from digital alternatives, they retain significant influence in Ghana and Africa more broadly through their perceived credibility, professional regulation, and wide accessibility. These characteristics ensure that they continue to shape how information, including political content, is disseminated and consumed.

2.2 Traditional Media and Politics

The media have long played a central role in mobilising citizens and focusing public attention on political issues deemed important. Politicians have historically relied on the media to disseminate information, promote policies, and legitimise governance processes, while media institutions, in

turn, depend on political actors for content and access to newsworthy developments (Kalyango, 2011; Montero, 2009). This interdependence reflects a complementary relationship: the media provide visibility and reach, while politicians supply content that sustains public debate.

Traditional media have been particularly significant in information dissemination, bridging the gap between policymakers and the public, transmitting political developments, educating citizens, and raising awareness on issues of collective importance (Karadoğan, 1996; Bekci, 2013). In Ghana, as in many African countries, newspapers initially served as vital platforms in the struggle for independence, offering a forum for nationalist leaders to mobilise support and challenge colonial authority (Tettey, 2011; Nyamnjoh, 2005). With independence, radio and television quickly became key tools for political communication, especially during electoral campaigns (Gadzekpo, 2009; Alhassan, 2005).

The flow of political information through traditional media is typically top-down, leaving limited space for alternative perspectives or citizen-generated content. Journalists and editors act as gatekeepers, preserving control over what is published and often positioning audiences as passive recipients (Lewis, 2012; Ananny, 2014). Consequently, political elites—such as governments and editors—have at times exploited the one-directional character of traditional media to maintain or reinforce political dominance (Woodly, 2008).

Nevertheless, reforms and innovations within traditional broadcasting have opened up limited avenues for audience feedback. For example, live phone-in programmes on radio and television, as well as letters to newspaper editors, allow citizens to comment on political issues (Gadzekpo, 2009). While such feedback mechanisms are often delayed and may not reach the full breadth of the initial audience, they nonetheless demonstrate an evolving dynamic in which traditional media attempt to incorporate public perspectives into political discourse.

In summary, traditional media remain a critical actor in the political process, both as a platform for elite-driven communication and as a channel for limited public engagement. Their historical role in Africa and Ghana underscores their continuing relevance, even as newer media forms reshape the political communication landscape.

2.3 Online News (Social Media)

Social media, also referred to as new media, is a contemporary expression that has become “central to the political arena” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2017, p. 17) define social media as web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to connect, collaborate, and engage through user-generated content. These platforms enable users not only to consume but also to create, co-create, and share information, thereby transforming communication from a unidirectional to an interactive process.

Social media encompasses a wide range of technology-enabled activities, including blogging, photo and video sharing, networking, and social gaming. Governments, corporations, and politicians actively use these platforms to reach citizens and voters (Pew Research Center, 2021). The global impact is substantial, with more than 3.8 billion social media users worldwide (Statista, 2021). By 2023, the number of users in the United States alone was projected to reach 257 million, with younger users (18-29 years) dominating usage rates at almost 90% (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Although the origins of social media date back to the 1990s, it was in the mid-2000s that platforms such as Facebook and YouTube gained global popularity (Wigand et al., 2010; McAfee, 2006). In Africa, adoption has been rapid in the past decade, with the continent recording one of the fastest growth rates globally (Mutsvairo, 2016). In Ghana, studies highlight that platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter dominate online engagement, particularly among young

people and students, due to relatively lower costs of data bundles and the ubiquity of mobile phones (Ahiabenu, 2017; Osei, 2012).

Global user figures underscore the vastness of social media. In 2021, Facebook reported 2.80 billion monthly active users, followed by YouTube (2.29 billion), WhatsApp (2 billion), and Instagram (1.22 billion) (Facebook, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2021). In Ghana, Facebook remains the most widely used platform, but Twitter and WhatsApp have emerged as important tools for political communication and civic engagement (Asah-Asante, 2016). This reflects broader global patterns where social media acts as both an information source and a participatory space.

2.4 Online news (Social Media) and Politics

With billions of users globally, social media has become indispensable for political communication and engagement (Chadwick, 2013). It allows political actors to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, disseminating information directly to the public while enabling citizens to engage in real-time dialogue. This interactivity has redefined the relationship between politicians and voters (Loader et al., 2014).

Political organisations across the world now integrate social media into their campaign strategies, recognising that a lack of digital presence signals weak engagement (Enli, 2017). In Africa, Bosch (2017) highlights how young voters increasingly use social media to access political content and mobilise around social issues. In Ghana, Mensah (2017) found that social media played a significant role in the 2016 elections, with both the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) investing heavily in Facebook and WhatsApp to reach youth and first-time voters.

Social media is particularly influential among young people, who use it to post opinions, share political content, and engage in online activism (Smith, 2009; Rainie et al., 2012). The Pew Internet Project revealed that 38% of users “liked” political content, 35% encouraged others to vote, and 20% followed elected officials or candidates online (Rainie et al., 2012). This global trend resonates in Ghana, where university students have been found to rely on social media for election-related information, shaping their perceptions of political parties and candidates (Asah-Asante, 2016; Osei, 2012).

Evidence also suggests that online exposure influences voter behaviour. Boroughs (2010) demonstrated that young people in the U.S. who accessed political content online were significantly more likely to vote. Similarly, Sharma and Parma (2016) argue that politicians’ posts and tweets can directly influence voting decisions. In Ghana, Bright and Asante (2020) caution that while social media enhances participation, it also exposes voters to misinformation and partisan propaganda, which can distort decision-making.

Thus, social media operates as a double-edged sword: it fosters political participation, activism, and direct engagement, yet it also poses challenges of misinformation, digital exclusion, and partisan manipulation (Nyabola, 2018; Gadzekpo, 2009). For university students in Ghana, who are among the most active social media users, these dynamics significantly shape their political choices.

2.5 News as a Source of Information for Decision-Making

News, whether delivered through traditional or new media, plays a fundamental role in providing citizens with the information necessary to make informed decisions. The media serves as a bridge between political actors and the public, offering access to political developments, policy debates, and campaign messages (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Norris, 2000). For many individuals,

exposure to news is the primary way of learning about governance and forming opinions on national issues.

In democratic contexts, news consumption informs voting choices, civic engagement, and public opinion formation. Agenda-setting theory highlights the media's ability to influence what people think about by prioritising certain issues over others (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Similarly, framing theory suggests that how news is presented can shape perceptions and influence decision-making processes (Entman, 1993). For instance, studies in the United States and Europe show that consistent exposure to political news directly affects voting behaviour and trust in institutions (Strömbäck and Kaid, 2014; Aalberg and Curran, 2012).

In Africa, the news media has historically been central to decision-making, especially during struggles for independence, where newspapers mobilised citizens around political causes (Nyamnjoh, 2005). Today, both traditional and online news outlets play significant roles in shaping citizens' electoral decisions. Gadzekpo (2009) notes that in Ghana, newspapers and radio remain powerful agenda-setters, while new digital platforms now complement these roles by offering immediacy and interactivity.

Specifically, in Ghana, news consumption is highly political, especially during election periods. Ahiabenu (2017) observes that news from online platforms such as Joy News, Citi Newsroom, and MyJoyOnline has become influential among young people, particularly university students, who rely on these outlets for timely political updates. Osei (2012) further highlights that online news and social media enable young voters to access diverse perspectives, compare party manifestos, and engage in debates, all of which shape their decision-making.

However, the reliance on news for decision-making is not without challenges. The rise of fake news and misinformation threatens the reliability of news as a decision-making tool (Nyabola,

2018). In Ghana, Bright and Asante (2020) found that misleading online stories circulated during elections had the potential to polarise voters and distort democratic choices. This underscores the need for media literacy to ensure that citizens, especially students, can critically evaluate the information they consume before making political decisions.

In summary, news remains a critical source of information for decision-making by providing citizens with access to political developments, shaping issue salience, and framing perspectives. For Ghanaian university students, who represent a digitally active and politically significant demographic, news consumption—whether via traditional or online media—has a profound impact on their political choices.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in **Agenda-Setting Theory**, which provides a useful lens for understanding the influence of online news on the voting decisions of students in presidential elections in Ghana. This originates from Walter Lippmann's (1922) work *Public Opinion*, which argued that the news media serve as the connection between the outside world and the images people carry in their minds. Lippmann noted that individuals are not capable of directly experiencing the wider world and must rely on the images and messages constructed by the media to form perceptions. Building on this, Cohen (1963) suggested that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is highly effective in telling people what to think about.

The theory was empirically tested and popularised by McCombs and Shaw (1972) in their seminal study of the 1968 US presidential election, which revealed a strong correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda. This initial effort established what is now known as the **agenda-setting theory**. Subsequent research has expanded and refined the theory, with more than

400 empirical studies demonstrating the power of media to shape public perceptions not only of issues but also of political figures and events (McCombs, 2005). Importantly, the theory has developed into two levels: the first level, which concerns the salience of issues, and the second level, which addresses the salience of attributes or frames associated with these issues (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2009).

While the theory originated in Western scholarship, its applicability has been tested globally, including in Africa. For example, Wasserman and de Beer (2005) argue that African media systems operate within unique socio-political contexts characterised by ownership concentration, political parallelism, and constraints on press freedom, all of which affect how agendas are set and communicated. In Ghana, Karikari (2007) and Ansu-Kyeremeh (2005) highlight that media outlets are not only watchdogs of democracy but also active participants in political contestation, often influenced by partisanship and economic interests. These realities suggest that while the core assumptions of agenda-setting are useful, they must be adapted to account for the dynamics of Ghana's media landscape.

Online news platforms add a new dimension to agenda-setting. Unlike traditional media, they provide both immediacy and interactivity, giving students greater opportunities to consume, share, and even produce political content. In Ghana's 2016 elections, for instance, Mensah (2017) showed that social media became a key platform for political parties to influence young voters, allowing for reciprocal flows of information that traditional agenda-setting theory did not fully anticipate. This demonstrates the need to incorporate the **second level of agenda-setting** and consider complementary perspectives such as **framing theory** (Entman, 1993), which highlights how issues are presented, and **uses and gratifications theory** (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974), which acknowledges that audiences actively select and interpret media messages.

Thus, agenda-setting theory provides the framework for this study by explaining how online news influences what issues university students in Ghana consider important during presidential elections, and how the framing of these issues may affect their voting decisions. While acknowledging its limitations and the need for complementary perspectives such as framing and uses and gratifications, this research applies agenda-setting to analyse the salience of political issues and candidate attributes in shaping students' electoral choices at the University of Media, Arts and Communication.

2.7 Review of Related Studies

Empirical studies related to the topic being researched have been reviewed. They are sourced from books, journals and other literature authored by scholars on media, communication and politics amongst others.

The following studies stood out for which the names of the authors, what they set out to investigate, the method used in collecting data, the theory used to explain their works, and their main findings have been discussed.

Bandipo's (2016) work on 'The role of the new media in the electioneering process of developing nations, a case study of Nigeria 2015' examined the roles new media technologies play in the electioneering process of developing nations. With a focus on Nigeria's 2015 presidential elections. The project adopted a mixed approach research methodology. In-depth interviews with relevant personalities and focus groups were carried out to gain in-context insight into the area of study. Analysis of texts and documents was also carried out to expand the scope to uncover recurrent themes to enrich arguments on patterns, trends, intent, or behaviour. The theory that was used for this study was the electoral integrity framework. The main findings of the study were that the new media played a significant role in the performance of all understudied stakeholders during the Nigeria 2015 presidential elections. Also, during this study, it was

discovered that politics is a significant factor that features in most of the societal ills plaguing the Nigerian State.

Fujiwarat, Muller, and Schwarz-(2022) ‘ explored the effect of social media on Elections with evidence from the United States’. The investigators investigated how social media affects election outcomes in the United States. The method used to collect data was survey, primary elections, and text analysis of millions of tweets. The theory used was the persistent network effect propounded by Muller, K. and C. Schwarz (2019).

The results indicate that ‘Twitter lowered the Republican vote share in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections but had limited effects on Congressional elections and previous presidential elections. Evidence from survey data, primary elections, and text analysis of millions of tweets suggests that Twitter’s relatively liberal content may have persuaded voters with moderate views to vote against Donald Trump.

Amenyewu (2021) also conducted a study on ‘Social Media and Political Campaign Communication in Ghana’. The study was motivated by the following -aims 1) How political parties in Ghana have harnessed the use of social media in the political campaign 2) How the use of social media has changed the trajectory of political campaign communication in Ghana? 3) The benefits of harnessing social media for political campaigns in Ghana and how other African countries and the world at large can follow and emulate the story of Ghana. Information and data were collected from secondary sources such as existing literature on online libraries, information on political party websites, and social media accounts. All secondary data collected were compared and analysed to derive conclusions. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used for this study. The theoretical framework for this study is the participatory democratic theory. The study found that social media is regarded as an effective tool in present-day political campaigns. The importance of social media as a new media cannot be understated which is the

reason why many politicians worldwide now utilize social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to reach and interact with their constituents and supporters.

Asare and Boateng (2020) examined *“The Influence of Social Media on the Voting Behaviour of University Students in Ghana.”*

The study explored how exposure to political content on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp shaped the political opinions and voting intentions of students in selected Ghanaian universities. A quantitative survey design was adopted, using questionnaires administered to 300 respondents from three tertiary institutions. The Uses and Gratifications Theory guided the study, focusing on how students actively select media to satisfy political information needs. The findings revealed that most students relied on social media as their main source of political information, and exposure to online political discussions significantly influenced their voting preferences. However, the study also noted that misinformation and bias in online content sometimes distorted students’ political perceptions.

Okoro and Nwafor (2019) conducted a study titled *“Social Media and Political Participation of Youths in the 2019 Nigerian General Elections.”*

The researchers investigated how social media platforms served as tools for political mobilisation and engagement among young voters. The study employed a mixed-method approach – surveys and focus group discussions – involving 500 youths aged 18–35. The theoretical underpinning was the Agenda-Setting Theory, which explains how media exposure influences public priorities. The study found that social media significantly enhanced political awareness and participation among Nigerian youths, particularly through Facebook and Twitter. However, the researchers cautioned that the spread of fake news on these platforms occasionally undermined credible political discourse.

Mensah (2021) carried out a study on “*Online News Consumption and Political Awareness among Tertiary Students in Ghana.*”

The study sought to determine how frequently students accessed online news platforms and how this influenced their understanding of national political issues. A descriptive survey design was employed, with data gathered through structured questionnaires from 250 students at the University of Ghana. The study was grounded in the Framing Theory, which explains how the presentation of information affects audience interpretation. Findings indicated that online news significantly improved students’ political awareness and engagement with governance issues. Nevertheless, the study observed that sensational headlines and partisan reporting sometimes shaped biased political opinions among readers.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to the study. Six related studies were examined, and both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks were established. It was, however, challenging to identify works that specifically addressed *online news and the Ghanaian student voter*. Instead, most of the available studies concentrated on *online news and its influence on young people or youth populations more broadly*. This points to a clear gap in the literature, which the present study seeks to address by situating the discussion within the Ghanaian context and focusing on student voters at the University of Media, Arts and Communications. Drawing on the principles of Agenda-Setting Theory, the study positions online news as a key influence in shaping the salience of political issues among student voters, thereby linking media exposure with voting behaviour in a context yet to be adequately explored.

2.8 Definition of Terms

Social Media: Web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organisations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create,

modify, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017, p.17).

Online News: News distributed through various online platforms and defined as digital news. It is grounded in internet technology, with internet news sites serving as primary providers (Yegen, 2020).

University: “An institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research and authorised to grant academic degrees. Specifically, one made up of an undergraduate division which confers bachelor's degrees, and a graduate division which comprises a graduate school and professional schools, each of which may confer master's degrees and doctorates” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and justifies the methodological framework used in this study entitled *“The Influence of Online News on Voting Decisions of Students in Presidential Elections in Ghana: A Study of the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC)”*. It discusses the philosophical foundation of the study, the research design and approach, population and sampling, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the methodological choices are consistent with the study’s objectives and suitable for addressing the research questions.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The philosophical foundation of this study is pragmatism, which advocates the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena. Pragmatism recognises that no single method is sufficient to explore reality; instead, it encourages the integration of multiple perspectives and data forms (Creswell, 2014). This orientation aligns with the aims of the present study, which seeks both measurable evidence of online news influence on voting decisions and a deeper understanding of students’ personal experiences and interpretations.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both the breadth and depth of the research problem. According to Kothari (2004), a sound research design ensures that evidence collected is relevant to the research objectives and aligned with the study’s philosophical orientation.

The quantitative component employed a descriptive-correlational design, collecting numerical data through structured questionnaires administered to UniMAC students. This enabled the researcher to identify patterns in online news consumption, preferred news platforms, and the extent to which such exposure influences voting decisions.

The qualitative component complemented the quantitative data through semi-structured interviews with selected graduate students. These interviews explored participants' perceptions of credibility, trustworthiness, and the influence of online political news. This combination provided a nuanced and holistic view of the phenomenon under investigation.

The design was structured to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of online news platforms do UniMAC students access most frequently?
2. What motivates students to seek online news?
3. How does exposure to online political news influence their voting decisions during presidential elections?
4. How do students perceive the credibility and influence of online political news?

The adoption of a mixed-methods design made it possible to integrate statistical trends with personal narratives, offering a balanced understanding of the influence of online news on voting behaviour. Similar approaches have been employed effectively in Ghanaian media and political communication studies (Mensah, 2017; Gyampo, 2017; Amoah, 2020), affirming the relevance of this methodological choice.

3.3 Research Approach and Methods

The research adopted a mixed-method approach, with approximately eighty per cent qualitative and twenty per cent quantitative emphasis. This weighting reflects the study's intent to generate rich descriptive data supported by quantitative evidence.

3.3.1 Qualitative Component

The qualitative component utilised case study analysis, telephone interviews, and open-ended questions. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key patterns, categories, and meanings emerging from participants' responses. This enabled the researcher to interpret how students understand and react to political news obtained online.

3.3.2 Quantitative Component

The quantitative aspect employed structured, close-ended questions in a questionnaire format. Responses were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were generated, and aggregated results were exported to Microsoft Excel for presentation and interpretation.

3.4 Case Study Strategy

A case study approach was adopted to facilitate an in-depth exploration of how online news influences voting decisions within a specific educational context. Yin (2003) argues that the case study method is most suitable when a phenomenon cannot be easily separated from its context.

UniMAC was selected as the case study institution because of its relevance to the study's objectives. The university trains communication professionals, journalists, public relations practitioners, and marketing experts who are highly engaged with online media and politically

conscious. Focusing on this population allowed the study to explore media-savvy individuals likely to be influenced by online political communication. Although the findings are context-specific, they offer valuable insights applicable to other tertiary institutions in Ghana with similar characteristics.

3.5 Population of the Study

A population refers to the entire group of individuals who share similar characteristics relevant to a study (Kusi, 2012). Agyapong and Adam (2015) describe the target population as the group to which a researcher aims to generalise findings.

The population for this study comprised students of the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) who had attained the legal voting age. This group is particularly suitable because they are technologically literate and politically aware, characteristics that make them ideal for examining the influence of online media on electoral decision-making.

3.6 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study utilised a purposive sampling technique, a form of non-probability sampling that involves deliberately selecting participants who possess the most relevant information for addressing the research objectives. Mustafa (2010) explains that purposive sampling allows researchers to select respondents who best represent the characteristics of the population under study.

The sample consisted of sixteen graduate students from the School of Graduate Studies at UniMAC. Participants were drawn from programmes such as Public Relations, Journalism, Marketing, and Strategic Communication. These individuals were selected because of their maturity, professional exposure, and likelihood of having participated in at least one

presidential election. Their engagement with both media and political processes made them ideal informants for the research.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Two main data collection instruments were employed: telephone interviews and questionnaires. Telephone interviews were selected due to the demanding schedules of participants and the need for flexibility. This method allowed interviews to be conducted at convenient times while providing a sense of anonymity that encouraged open discussion on sensitive political topics. The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit responses aligned with the study's objectives. For each of the four research questions, at least two guiding questions were included, with follow-up questions used where necessary for clarity.

All interviews were conducted in British English, the official language of instruction at UniMAC. At the conclusion of each interview, respondents were invited to share any additional insights they deemed relevant. Questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data, focusing on patterns of online news consumption and voting behaviour. All questions were phrased neutrally to avoid bias.

3.8 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically. Themes were developed inductively to capture recurring patterns and relationships. Thematic analysis facilitated a deeper understanding of the subjective meanings participants attached to online news and voting behaviour.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were entered into SPSS and analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarise key variables. The results from both methods were triangulated to enhance validity and provide a comprehensive interpretation of findings.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards to protect participants and ensure academic integrity:

1. **Voluntary Participation:** All participants took part voluntarily and were free to withdraw at any stage.
2. **Informed Consent:** Participants were briefed about the research purpose, procedures, and potential benefits before data collection.
3. **Anonymity:** Personal identifiers were omitted to maintain participant anonymity.
4. **Confidentiality:** All data were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.
5. **Avoidance of Harm:** The study posed no physical or psychological harm to participants.
6. **Academic Integrity:** The researcher ensured that all sources were acknowledged appropriately and that the work was free from plagiarism and data manipulation.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has described the methodological approach adopted in investigating the influence of online news on students' voting decisions during presidential elections in Ghana. The study was guided by a pragmatic philosophy and employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative strategies. The chapter detailed the research design, population,

sampling procedure, data collection and analysis methods, and ethical principles guiding the research. The next chapter presents the data analysis and discussion of findings derived from this methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data analysis, findings and discussions. In doing so, the demographics of the respondents have first been laid out. This is followed by a presentation of the results along the lines of the four objectives set for the study. There has been an extra effort to present the data, at least for the first objective to include the ages and sex of the respondents who voted. All that segmentation is an effort to help policymakers and authorities target interventions, considering the overall findings.

4.1 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis;

As indicated in the chapter three on the research method, the research was 90% qualitative, employing open- and closed-ended questions. The responses were grouped into various themes. These themes were then coded and analysed quantitatively using SPSS.

Thematic analysis is commonly described as a flexible and robust qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It allows researchers to systematically organise data into meaningful codes and develop broader themes that capture shared experiences or perspectives embedded within the material (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Clarke and Braun (2017) further emphasise that thematic analysis is especially valuable because it offers a clear, rigorous, and accessible framework for qualitative interpretation, irrespective of the researcher's theoretical or epistemological orientation.

Moreover, as noted by Nowell et al. (2017), the growing popularity of thematic analysis can be attributed to its transparency, adaptability, and its capacity to generate trustworthy and richly nuanced insights when applied rigorously.

For the purpose of thematic analysis, there were questions that were used as guide for data collection. Two of such questions were proposed under each of the four objectives. Those questions when answered determined the validity of the objective or denied it. The questions included open as well as closed ended questions. After the interviews, based on the frequency of responses offered by the different respondents to the same questions, these answers were codified based on the central themes that had emerged. This will be an inductive approach to thematic analysis rather than the deductive approach. This allowed for the data as it emerged to determine the various themes from the interviews conducted.

SPSS Software: The codified responses were quantitatively analyzed using SPSS. Aggregated data from SPSS was exported to Excel for data analysis and report writing.

4.2 Transporting responses against the intended objectives

Since the questions were assigned to specific objectives, it was easy after the SPSS analysis to simply count in numbers those respondents that responded in specific towards questions assigned to specific objectives. This made it simple to know that those that preferred a certain activity to those that do not prefer it. On the objective of determining of students prefer online news to traditional news, it was easy to just count those that said yes and those that said no and determine what the majority preference was.

4.3 Presentation of Findings and Discussion

4.3.1 Demographics of the study.

The demographic information is presented to enable readers to understand key characteristics of the respondents—such as sex, age, programme of study, and programme duration—that shaped the outcomes of the research. Demographics provide essential contextual detail, allowing the results to be interpreted with greater accuracy and nuance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) explain, demographic variables assist in situating findings

within the characteristics of the study population, thereby supporting more informed decision-making, appropriate targeting, and the development of justified assumptions. It is important to note, however, that age was not rigorously controlled or purposively selected in this study; therefore, any age-related inferences should be interpreted cautiously (Bryman, 2016).

By targeting graduate students, the researcher knew that students of this class would be within the voting age. This group is mostly independent, sometimes combining studies with working and very much interested in the politics of the day given that it affects their studies, business and social engagements. Find the demographics of the respondents as laid out in the following tables.

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	8	50
Female	8	50
Total	16	100

Table 1 presents findings on the sex of respondents. The findings reveal that there were as many males as females of the 16 respondents.

Table 2: Ages of Respondents

Age of Respondent	Frequency	Percent
25-35	11	69
36-45	4	25
46-60	1	6
Total	16	100

On the ages of the respondents as shown in table 2, of the 16 people sampled, 11 were between the ages of 25-35, 4 were between the ages of 36 -45 and 1 person was within the age range of 46-60. It can be seen from the data that more younger adults took part in this research than those much older than them (36 -60). It must be noted that the researcher did not set out to look for younger adults to be in the majority. All the respondents were graduate students doing their master's degrees.

Table 3: Programme of Study

Program of Study	Frequency	Percent
Journalism	1	6.25
Strategic PR Management	1	6.25
PR with Marketing	13	81.25
System	1	6.25
Total	15	100

On the programme of study, as shown in Table 3 above, of the 16 respondents sampled 13 were studying for their Master in Public Relations with Marketing, 1 person was studying for a Masters in Journalism, 1 person was studying for a Master in Strategic Public Relations Management and there was another individual whose programme of study was not recorded. From the table, the majority of the people sampled were Masters Students studying Public Relations with Marketing.

Table 4: Duration of programme of study

Year of Study	Frequency	Percent
Year 1	16	100

Table 4 speaks to the course duration of the respondents. As seen in Table 4, the course duration for all 16 respondents was 1 year.

4.3.2 Objective 1: To Determine Whether Students Prefer Online News To Traditional Media When It Comes To Presidential Elections In Ghana.

On the above question, table 5 below shows that of the 16 respondents sampled, 9 preferred online news sources when it came to political news. There were 4 who preferred traditional media to online news and another 3 that utilised both traditional and online news sources for political news consumption at the same time. The conclusion is that majority of students prefer online news to traditional news sources.

Table 5: Media Type

Between Traditional media and new media (online news) which is your preferred source of news for political issues?		
Type of Media	Frequency	Percent
Traditional	4	25
Online	9	56
Both	3	19
Total	16	100

Preference based on age

To understand the preferences of the respondents from an age perspective, from Table 6 below, of the 9 people who prefer online news, 6 were between the ages of 25 - 35, 2 were between the ages of 36-45 and 1 person between 46 - 60.

The conclusion from the data on the age analysis defies popular assumptions that younger generations prefer new media while the older generation prefers traditional media. Traditional media is still relevant not because old people prefer it. They don't. Of those interviewed, none from the mature age brackets, 36 to 60 wanted it. It is young adults (25 to 35) who do, about 25% (4) of them. So, whereas more people prefer online media, it is not the case that that preference is driven by only young people. And it is also not the case that traditional media is still relevant because of older people's use of it. It is because the young generation of adults finds it much more credible to new media. What that leaves us is that even as people embrace new media, including, older adults, it might not mark the end of old media. This is because traditional media has taste among the emerging generation.

Table 6: Preference based on age

Age of Respondent * Between Traditional media and new media (online news) which is your preferred source of news for political issues? Crosstabulation				
	Traditional	Online	Both	
25-35	4	6	1	11
36-45	0	2	2	4
46-60	0	1	0	1
Total	4	9	3	16

Preference of media type base on sex

The research tried to understand the sex of those behind the various preferences, online, traditional and both. We note from the data as illustrated in table 7 that of the 9 people who prefer online news, 5, were males and four were females. In the case of the traditional media, 1 person was a male and 3 people were females. Of the 3 that preferred both traditional and online, 2 were males and 1 person was a female as noted in the table below.

Table 7: Preference of media type base on sex

Gender of Respondent * Between Traditional media and new media (online news) which is your preferred source of news for political issues? Crosstabulation				
	Traditional	Online	Both	
Male	1	5	2	8
Female	3	4	1	8
Total	4	9	3	16

The conclusions from Table 7 are that females prefer traditional media to online media. Males prefer online media to traditional media. And finally, more males compared to females use both traditional and new media at the same time for political news sourcing.

4.3.3 Objective 2: To Understand What Has Accounted For The Preference Of Students In Their Preferred Political News Sourcing Platform.

Motivation for Preferring one media to the other

According to Table 8, of the 9 who preferred online news, it was mainly due to convenience. It was more convenient to access news on their phone via internet-powered websites and social media even while driving or being at work than going to look for the newspaper vendor and purchase or gain access to the television to watch the news.

Table 8: Motivation for Preferring one media to the other

Motivation	Frequency	Percent
Convenience	9	100
Total	9	100

On the other hand, those who preferred traditional media, did so because they found it more credible as illustrated in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Why others prefer traditional media?

	Frequency	Percent
Credibility	4	100
Total	4	100

This group assert that traditional media operation is regulated by a plethora of legislations and ethical standards that are enforced strictly by the government or the Commission on Media. These according to respondents, ensure that publications pass at least minimum standards of credulity such as publishing verifiable and credible information. In their view, this standard does not apply to online media sources. This has made new media hubs of fake news in their estimation. It is the reason they would go through all the trouble to get traditional media to consume.

Table 10: Why do you use both traditional media and online at the same time?

	Frequency	Percent
Credibility	1	33.3
Availability	1	33.3
Different Motivations for both media	1	33.3
Total	3	100.0

From Table 10, we get the reasons why the minority, those who prefer both traditional media and online media, do so. The reasons were three. They combined the advantages of all and stuck to the two outlets. They would go for traditional media for credibility, online for availability (convenience) and sometimes when they want to set the agenda for their political interest, they would use some online media tool like Facebook to publish political information aimed at influencing others.

4.3.4 Objective 3: To determine whether online news influences the voting decisions of students in Presidential Elections in Ghana.

This is the main objective of the research. Whether what students consume online politically leads them to make actual voting decisions. In Table 11 below, of the 16 people who responded to the research, 10 said their voting decisions were not based on what they consume online. The remaining 6 said that it did. The conclusion from this is that students don't vote based on what they read online. What must be pointed out clearly for policymakers and those in the place decision is that, in this research, the majority of the respondents have said that online is their preferred source for political news because of the convenience it offers them, they don't decide to vote based on what they read online as table 11 below depicts.

Table 11: Do you think online election campaign news influences your voting choices?

	Frequency	Percent
No Influence on Voting Decision	10	63
Influences Voting Decision	6	38

Total	16	100.0
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One of the conclusions from this is that targeting students with political news may not necessarily be to get them to make a voting decision. It can be for other purposes such as awareness creation or education. Even though students do not vote based on what they read online, this research informed us that they depend on what they read online to stay informed of what is happening within the political landscape.

Table 12: What political news do you follow online?

	Frequency	Percent
Economy	1	6
General Updates	2	13
Economy and General Updates	1	6
Youth Empowerment	1	6
Developmental Issues	1	6
Any Interesting Topic	4	25
Partisan or Parliamentary Politics	4	25
Everything	2	13
Total	16	100.0

Responses in Table 12, indicate the varied information that students stay online to get educated on as far as political interest is concerned. Of the 16 people, 4 look for partisan or Parliamentary politics, 4 issues of any interest politically, 2 general updates, 2 everything, 1 economy, 1 youth empowerment, etc.

Staying informed and being aware of the conversations happening within the realm of politics for students is very important to them. This importance is noted based on the effort and energy that was invested by these individuals to do it. As depicted in Table 13 below, the majority of those

who consume political news online stated that during presidential elections their experience of information consumption on politics was very intense.

Experience with online news during elections season

Table 13: Can you describe your experience with online news consumption during presidential elections in Ghana?

	Frequency	Percent
Intense	9	56
Not Intense	4	25
Fairly Intense	1	6
Passive	2	13
Total	16	100.0

4.3.5 Objective 4: To determine between traditional and online news media, the one which is more effective for delivering marketing objectives that target students during Presidential Election seasons.

What the findings is bringing out is that whereas students don't vote based on what they read online, it keeps them educated and informed. This information when it was tested on how it can help political advertisers and marketers who target students with products for their attention was confirmed. Of the 16 people sampled, 14 (88%) of them said that any advert that targets students was likely to come to their attention if it was placed online as depicted in Table 13 below.

Table 14: Placing adverts in traditional media and online media during Presidential Election season which is likely to come to your attention?

	Frequency	Percent
Traditional	2	13
Online	14	88
Total	16	100.0

4.3.6 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a clear preference among students for online political news, primarily due to convenience, accessibility, and immediacy. These results are consistent with global trends in digital news consumption, particularly among young adults (Newman et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020). While traditional media remains credible, it is often perceived as less convenient, which reduces its engagement among students, a phenomenon also noted by Tewksbury and Rittenberg (2012).

The study further demonstrates that while students consume online political news intensively, it does not directly influence their voting behaviour. This suggests that online political content functions predominantly as an informational rather than persuasive tool, a finding in line with the “information reinforcement” perspective (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Prior, 2007). Students’ engagement with online news thus appears motivated more by the desire to remain informed and socially aware than by electoral influence.

Finally, the results confirm that online news platforms are significantly more effective for advertising targeted at students. The ability to deliver relevant, attention-grabbing content in

close proximity to political news highlights the strategic advantage of digital platforms over traditional media (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011; Kumar et al., 2016).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the study's findings in relation to the research objectives, existing literature, and theoretical frameworks. It also summarises the key findings, provides recommendations for policymakers and future research, and concludes with an overarching reflection on the implications of the study. The chapter focuses on how students engage with political news online, the factors driving this engagement, and the impact of online news on their political awareness and voting behaviour.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

5.1.1 Students Prefer Online Political News to Traditional Media

The findings reveal that most students prefer sourcing political news online. This aligns with existing literature, which consistently shows that young adults—particularly those aged 18–35—are more inclined to access news digitally rather than through traditional media channels (Pew Research Center, 2019). The predominance of male users observed in the study also reflects previous work demonstrating that men, more than women, tend to engage with political information online (Boulianne, 2015). Scholars attribute this generational and gendered preference to higher levels of digital literacy, frequent social media use, and the perception that online platforms deliver faster and more diverse political updates than legacy media (Stroud, 2011).

5.1.2 Students Prefer Online News Because of Convenience

Students who reported using online platforms for political news emphasised convenience as a major factor. This reinforces scholarly arguments that accessibility, immediacy, and time efficiency are key drivers of online news consumption (Mitchell et al., 2020). As Newman et al. (2022) explain, audiences—especially younger ones—value the ability to access information ‘anytime, anywhere’, without the delays associated with traditional news formats.

Although many respondents acknowledged that traditional media is generally more credible—a finding consistent with Tandoc et al.’s (2018) work on online misinformation—they nevertheless prioritised convenience over credibility. This supports Tewksbury and Rittenberg’s (2012) view that users often sacrifice accuracy for speed when navigating digital news environments. One participant reported using both traditional and online news simultaneously, a behaviour reflective of what Prior (2007) describes as cross-media corroboration, whereby audiences verify online information through trusted offline sources.

5.1.3 Online News Does Not Influence the Voting Choices of Students

The study found that most respondents do not base their voting decisions primarily on political news consumed online. This finding resonates with research suggesting that while online news increases political awareness, it does not necessarily translate into direct behavioural change, such as voting preferences (Boulianne, 2020). Instead, digital political content tends to function more as an informational tool than a persuasive one, consistent with the “information reinforcement” perspective (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

Importantly, respondents noted that online political news helps them stay informed about political developments. Prior (2007; 2013) similarly argues that the internet’s principal political effect on young adults is heightened awareness and exposure to political information, even when it does not alter electoral behaviour. Therefore, the intensity of online news consumption

among students should not be overlooked, as it shapes their political knowledge base even without influencing their vote.

5.1.4 Online News Platforms Are More Effective for Marketing Than Traditional News Platforms

The study showed that 14 out of 16 respondents (88%) were more likely to notice advertisements placed near online political news than those placed in traditional media. This aligns with digital marketing research demonstrating that online political news environments generate higher visibility and engagement for advertisements due to targeted algorithms, interactive multimedia formats, and personalised content delivery (Kumar et al., 2016).

Scholars such as Goldfarb and Tucker (2011) also note that online advertisements benefit from enhanced relevance because they can be positioned alongside users' behaviourally tailored political interests. This increases the likelihood that users—particularly younger, digitally engaged individuals—will encounter and recall online advertising more readily than traditional print or broadcast adverts.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Investigate Factors Influencing Students' Voting Decisions

Future research should explore the key factors that shape students' voting behaviour in presidential elections. Understanding these determinants would allow policymakers and political strategists to focus resources effectively if the goal is to increase student electoral participation.

2. Examine Reasons for Intensive Online Political News Consumption

Further research is needed to understand why students access political news online so

actively if it does not inform their voting choices. Insights from such studies could guide policymakers in leveraging this engagement for civic education and awareness campaigns rather than purely for electoral purposes.

3. Prioritise Convenience in News Delivery Across All Platforms

Students' preference for convenience over credibility highlights the importance of accessible news delivery. Investments in political news for students should focus on accessibility and ease of use, regardless of the platform. Traditional media such as radio can remain relevant when it provides convenient access, whereas platforms that are less mobile or flexible (e.g., television) may be less effective.

4. Target Students Through Online News Platforms for Political Advertising

The study shows that online platforms are the most effective channels for political advertisements targeting students. Campaigns and public communication strategies should prioritise online environments to maximise reach and engagement.

5.3 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that students overwhelmingly prefer online political news due to convenience, accessibility, and immediacy. While traditional media are considered more credible, convenience drives engagement, indicating that students prioritise ease of access over the perceived reliability of the platform.

Despite high consumption of online political news, students do not base their voting decisions on this content. Rather, online news serves primarily as a tool for maintaining political awareness. Finally, the study confirms that online news platforms are highly effective for advertising targeted at students, underscoring their strategic value in communication campaigns.

Taken together, these findings reveal the complex role of online media in shaping students' political information habits—driven more by convenience and awareness than by persuasion or electoral influence.

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APPENDICES

QUESTION GUIDE FOR DATA COLLECTION FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Introduction

My name is Benjamin Akyena Brantuo. I am studying for a master's degree at the University of Media, Arts and Communications. As a result, I am conducting research for my thesis titled 'THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE NEWS ON VOTING DECISIONS OF STUDENTS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN GHANA: A STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS'. This study aims to among other things explore whether online election campaign news influences decisions of university students in presidential elections in Ghana.

With your consent I seek your responses to the following questions as your inputs will be very important to the success of this research. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Section A: Demographics

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: _____
3. Program of study: _____
4. Year of study: _____

Section B: To determine whether students prefer online news to traditional media when it comes to Presidential Elections in Ghana.

1. Between Traditional media and new media (online news) which is your preferred source of news for political issues?
2. How do you access your news (social media, news websites, newspapers, online newspapers, etc.)?

Section C: To understand what has accounted for the preference of students in their preferred political news sourcing platform.

1. What motivates you to seek online news instead of traditional media

2. Why do you prefer traditional news over online news?

Section D: To determine whether online news influences the voting decisions of students in Presidential Elections in Ghana.

1. Do you follow political news online?
2. What political news do you follow online?
3. Can you describe your experience with online news consumption during presidential elections in Ghana?
4. How do you think online election campaign news influences your voting choices?

Section E: To determine between traditional and online news media, the one which is more effective to deliver marketing objectives that target students during Presidential Election seasons.

1. Placing adverts in traditional media and online media during Presidential Election season which is likely to come to your attention?
2. Any additional thoughts or insights about online election campaign news and its impact on your voting choice

Conclusion:

Thank you for sharing your valuable insights. Your participation has contributed significantly to this research.