

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM**

**THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A STRATEGIC CAMPAIGN TOOL  
FOR THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN GHANA.**

**BY**

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**THIS LONG ESSAY IS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF  
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**CANDIDATE DECLARATION**

I declare that, except for references to other people's work which have been duly acknowledged, this long essay is as a result of my own research conducted at the Graduate School and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism.

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**Date**

## SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

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

.....

**DR CHARLES BAMFO**  
**(Supervisor)**

.....

**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This piece of work is dedicated to the glory of God Almighty, my family and to the wonderful people of Lebanon resident in Ghana who have supported me all through this course.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Candidate Declaration.....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>Supervisor Declaration.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Dedication.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Acknowledgement.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>List of Acronyms.....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Background.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Statement of the Research Problem.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 Research Objectives.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.3.1 Specific Objectives.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.4 Research Questions.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.5 Significance of the Study.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.6 Operational Definitions.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.2 Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.3 Concept of Social Media as a Communication Tool.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>16</b>

<b>3.2. Social Media Use 2012 and 2016 Presidential Election Campaigns in Ghana.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.3. Social Media Use in the USA Elections.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>3.4. Use of Social Media In Nigeria Elections.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>3.5. Growing Role of Social Media In Political Campaigns.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.6. Use of Social Media in 2020 Ghana Elections.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>3.6 Challenges With The Use of Social Media.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.7. Lessons learned .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4.1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4.2. Research Design and Approach.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4.3 Sample and Sampling Technique.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.4 Data Collection Procedure.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.5 Data Analysis and Presentation.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>5.2 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>5.3. Recommendation.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>41</b>

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

- EC- Electoral Commission
- NDC- National Democratic Congress
- NPP- New Patriotic Party
- SNS- Social Networking Sites
- TVET- Technical Vocational Education and Training
- USA - United States of America

## ABSTRACT

Political Parties across the world have in recent time's integrated social media as part of their campaign communication strategy to woo voters online. This is because social media has proven to be an effective medium for electoral communication given its several features like photo sharing, status update, likes, live videos, among others. The upcoming 2020 general elections is a unique one as it will take place amid a covid-19 pandemic. Restrictions that have been imposed have made rallies and large public meetings prohibited making social media use inevitable. Yet the potential in using social media has not been fully exploited by political parties and other stakeholders in an election. The study therefore sought to explore the critical role of social media in the upcoming 2020 presidential and parliamentary election campaigns. Specifically, it examined the various social media platforms used, the contents of the messages, the appeal and the perceived or real. impact on voters. The study employed the qualitative research method making use of in-depth interviews to gather data and analyse same. The two main political parties in Ghana, the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress who have been in government were the focus of this study. The social media campaign team members of these parties and public were interviewed online for this study. Thematic and content analysis were used to process the data and key recommendations made to maximise the use of social media in political communication and campaign. The study concludes that the use of social media should not only be limited to political parties only but to all stakeholders in an election.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background

In past times, in order to mobilize political party members and voters alike, face-to-face interaction and massive rallies were the main medium for communication and campaigns. (Norris, 2000). Fast forward into the “modern” era, campaigns became characterized by a more impersonal channel as result of the advent of the mass media, especially the Television (Norris, 2000). However, electoral campaigns over the last two decades has taken a new turn due to the introduction of the internet and the expansive growth of information and telecommunication tools, more particularly the emergence of social media (Rommele, 2003).

With the transformation and increasing importance of social media, many political parties, organizations and groups have taken advantage of the platform. It has become an indispensable tool for marshaling and encouraging social media users to participate in political activities. Activities ranging from joining political groups online to volunteering, donating, sharing status, tweeting and retweeting political news, watching live videos on Facebook and YouTube as well as forwarding messages on WhatsApp.

In Ghana, the past general elections of 2012 and 2016 saw an increased use of these media platforms for campaigns as the elections were fiercely

contested on social media. (Dzisah, 2018). Presidential candidates of the various parties were visibly seen on various social media platforms campaigning and reaching out to their voters. Studies have shown the growing importance of social media as an essential part of civic discourse and communication in the contemporary society (Bohler-Muller & Merwe, 2011; Gyampo, 2017; Muntean, 2015; O'Morain, 2016; Owen, 2014; Smith, 2011). Its effects on advertising, e-governance and electoral communication is telling (Bastion, Stilz, & Herlitz, 2012).

Lately, the importance of social media has been stressed for the most part in politics, especially its possibility of having positive outcome on political participation and mobilization given the growing number of social media usage in Ghana. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have in recent times become the number one internet activity online (Valenzuela, Jung, & Zu'niga, 2012). As of July, 28 2020, there were 4,630,672,300 internet users in the world according to the Internet Live Stat (InternetLiveStats.com, 2020). According to Statista.com almost 4.57 billion people were active internet users as of July 2020, encompassing 59 percent of the global population. The global online penetration rate is 59 percent and the active global active internet users is estimated at about 5 billion in 2023.

Internetworldstats.com reports that there are 526,710,313 internet users in Africa (making 10.0% of the total world internet users) as at March, 2020 with 39.3% penetration rate and of this, 212,911,701 are Facebook users. In Ghana, internet users as at December 2010 were 1,896,783 but as at July 2020 the

number has increased 11,737,818 with a penetration rate of 37.8% and a total of 4,900,000 Facebook users (InternetworldStats.com, 2020). Also, according to a graphic.com.gh news report on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018, there was 5.6 million active social media users in Ghana representing 19% of the total population. In recent years, considering the ever - growing popularity of the internet and social media, political parties and their presidential and parliamentary candidates have turned to its use for their political campaigns (Smith, 2011).

To garner for support online, candidates combine the ever-changing social media innovations using varied media tactics together with traditional media management techniques. Even reporting on campaign is no longer exclusive to professional journalists as bloggers and ordinary citizens have taken up the task. Voters now increasingly source for information and participate actively in campaigns on social media (Owen, 2014). Even so, in the 2020 general elections, social media have become indispensable as large gatherings and rallies are prohibited as part of health measures. Presidential candidates are compelled to harness the full potential of social media for their electoral campaign. Therefore, research on the role of social media in the upcoming 2020 presidential election campaign of Ghana is significant as it explains important changes in electoral campaigns and the effects of social media campaign on voters' choices and preferences.

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

The importance of social media cannot be understated which is the reason why many politicians worldwide now utilize social media sites like Facebook,

Instagram and Twitter to reach out and interact with their constituents and supporters. Studies conducted by (Baker, 2009; Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010) suggest that although direct links have not been drawn between a candidate's presence on social media and victory in an election, there is a positive trend that these social media sites have influence on voters online.

In Ghana, the use of social media for political purposes particularly for electoral campaign purposes has seen a remarkable increase from previous electioneering periods. For instance, as of December 2012, statistics from socialbakers.com showed that the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) presidential candidate had 100,000 likes on Facebook while the National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate had 25,000 likes on Facebook. However, in 2016, the presidential hopefuls for the NPP and NDC had a significant increase in the number of their following on social media. According to statistics from the 2nd Governance Social Media Index Report as of September 30, 2016 John Mahama, the presidential candidate of the NDC had the most likes on Facebook with 1,007, 595. The presidential candidate for the NPP followed closely with 981, 057 likes on Facebook.

Even though the NDC presidential candidate had over one million followers on Facebook, the report further indicates that the NPP candidate increased his following 265,341 as compared to NDC's 125, 175 three months prior to the publication of the latest report in September. This report shows

that political parties in Ghana utilized social media to engage the electorate ahead of the elections in December 2012 and 2016.

However, the outbreak of Covid-19 have changed the dynamics of campaign in the 2020 elections. It has placed limitations on mass gathering hence restricting large rallies and campaigns. Political parties are therefore compelled to adopt social media as tool to reach the populace with their message. Yet full advantage presented by this is not fully being utilized. Evidence of the use of social media in the 2012 and 2016 exist, but there is no empirical study to exploring the use of social media in the 2020 elections.

There is therefore the need to fully examine how social media is being used by the presidential candidates for their 2020 election campaign with less than 90 days to go. It is for this that this research exist, to critically examine the use of social media as a strategic tool for campaigns the 2020 presidential campaign and election in Ghana. Social media campaigns of the presidential candidates of the NPP and the NDC shall be the focus of the study.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to examine the use of social media as a strategic tool for presidential campaign and elections in the upcoming 2020 general elections in Ghana.

### **1.3.1. Specific Objectives**

1. To identify which social media platforms is being used by the presidential candidates of the NPP and NDC for the 2020 presidential election campaigns.

2. To examine why these social media platforms are being used by the candidates for the campaigns.

3. To explore how these social media platforms is being used to campaign in the 2020 presidential election campaign

### **1.4. Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the studies

1. What social media platforms is being used by the NPP and the NDC presidential candidates for campaign in the 2020 presidential election campaigns?

2. Why are these social media platforms being used by the candidates for campaign?

3. How are these social media being platforms being by the NPP and the NDC presidential candidates for campaign in 2020 presidential election campaign?

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study will improve the discourse on the use of social media for political communication and it shall present a Ghanaian perspective on this emerging topic. It will also contribute to the literature on social media and political communication in Ghana. Also, the research will help the political parties to explore effective ways of utilizing social media for electoral campaigns in order to get the optimum benefits. The findings will also be useful to scholars, especially those who have interest in new media and electoral campaigns.

## **1.6 Operational Definitions**

**Political Parties:** An organized group of people connected by an ideology and with the aim of capturing political power through elections. For purpose of this study, NPP and NDC shall be considered. These two happen to be the only ones to have governed the country in recent times.

**Party Members:** These are the registered and card bearing members of the party. These ones actively engage in party activities and pay dues to the party.

**Political Campaign:** The series of activities undertaken by political actors with aim of convincing voters to opt for them in an election

**Social media:** Online platforms/communities that promotes user-to-user interactivity. This study focuses on facebook, twitter and instagram.

**Facebook:** This is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.

**Twitter:** This is a free social networking microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other users' tweets by using multiple platforms and devices.

**Instagram:** A social networking site dedicated to the sharing of photos and videos.

**Web 2.0:** The second stage of internet development that is characterised by the transformation of web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

This research points to an examination of the use of social media as a strategic tool for campaigns in the 2020 presidential campaign and elections in Ghana. The literature review focused on the theoretical framework for the study. Then an examination into the concept of social media as a communication tool.

#### 2.2. Theoretical Framework

The current study is informed by the functional theory. The functional theory of political campaign discourse was propounded in the USA by William Benoit and a team of researchers in the 1990s. It has widely been used to analyse the contents of presidential debates, television news, campaign ads, news coverage, contents of newspapers, emails etc (Wen, 2014). These studies have been conducted in the USA, Taiwan, South Korea and other Western countries.

The functional theory is based on some theoretical assumptions. Benoit (2006) posits that the functional theory of political campaign discourse has six main assumptions and these are:

- ◆ **Voting is a comparative act:** This is because before an electorate makes a choice on whom to vote for, they have to decide between two or more

candidates and this is done through comparative judgment. There is a likelihood that the electorate may not be in total agreement with a candidate or party but agrees with them to a large extent and this is because political parties and candidates may have both good and bad points. Eventually, an electorate chooses a preferable candidate or party based on factors that are of most importance to the electorate in question (Benoit, 2006).

- ◆ **Candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents:** As a result of the first assumption of the functional theory, that voting is a comparative act, candidates must tell voters what differentiates them from other candidates. If voters see no distinction between candidates, they have no reason to choose one over the other. This means that political candidates must come out with messages that will make them stand out from their opponents in an election. This does not also mean that candidates will not agree on some grounds or policies with their opponents, for instance issues pertaining to employment, inflation etc (Benoit, 2006).
  
- ◆ **Political campaign messages are important vehicles for distinguishing between candidates:** The third assumption also comes from the first two. Campaign messages are what candidates use to draw a distinction amongst their opponent(s) and highlight to voters. These messages are sometimes channeled to voters via candidates' speeches, political manifestoes, televised debates, viewing the candidate's website,

information from Journalists covering candidates' campaign, press releases, political ads etc. The media through which voters seek campaign messages varies from one individual to the other. Finally, some voters hardly seek information about candidates. All they do is vote based on any little information they encounter during the campaign and before they cast their vote (Benoit, 2006).

- ◆ **Candidates establish likeability through acclaiming, attacking and defending:** This is because candidates must do their best to look different from their opponents and attractive to voters. Benoit *et al.* (2003) claim that differentiating between candidates alone does not guarantee electoral victory and political campaigns must employ the three functions namely acclaims, attacks and defences, to establish voter preference. Acclaim messages portray a candidate or political party in a positive light to voters. The functional theory posits that campaign messages should mostly contain acclaims because they have no negative repercussions. On the other hand, attacks are campaign messages that speak negatively about an opposing candidate or ridicule an opponent in the eyes of voters. Attacks are expected to be minimal because some scholars have noted that voters dislike character assassination (Jasperson & Fan, 2002). Lastly, defences are rebuttals to attacks from other candidates, individuals or political parties. Lee and Benoit (2004) argue that defences should be minimal because it can have three ramifications. Firstly, defenses can make a candidate look not proactive to voters. Also, they can make a candidate lose focus by concentrating on attacks levelled against them rather than

the campaign. Lastly, defenses can remind voters of an attack they may have forgotten or inform voters who are not aware of an attack message (Benoit, 2006).

- ◆ **Campaign discourse occurs on two topics: Policy and Character:** The theory postulates that it is policy and character topics that help political candidates distinguish themselves from others. Policy messages deal with government plans or actions whether past, current or future that falls within the ambit of governance, for instance, education, employment and inflation. Character on the other hand deals with the candidate's personality or image. Statements that centre on a candidate's ability, competence, traits and qualification are character messages. Benoit (2003) observed after analysing several political debates and ads that, candidates who churned out more policy messages than their opponents, mostly won (as cited in Lee and Benoit, (2004).
  
- ◆ **A candidate must win majority of votes in an election:** Even though this assumption looks generic, it is very germane to Presidential campaigns especially. The theory argues that a candidate's campaign messages, should not target everyone but majority. This is because policies favourable to some voters may not be favourable to others. Secondly, the theory posits that the citizens who matter are the ones who actually vote.

In general all these assumptions apply to the Ghanaian political campaigns however, the current study concentrated on the fourth and fifth assumptions to examine messages of the candidates on social media wall posts of the two leading presidential candidates in the 2020 Ghanaian elections campaign. The functional theory is appropriate for this study because it helps the researcher to make predictions about the nature of political messages (Benoit, 2006). Also, it is well suited to simplifying the forms of campaign discourse and has proven an outstanding analytical tool.

The functional theory has been applied successfully to various studies to study the nature of political messages (e.g., Wen 2014; Mosier 2013; Blomberg *et al.*2012). It can also be applied to diverse political messages such as debates, web pages, televised political ads and campaign speeches. Even though the functional theory of political campaign discourse has several advantages, there are some limitations to its application. The theory seems to be more suitable in two-party systems and seems to have a limited applicability in multi-party jurisdictions, because the discourse in these debates is more all-embracing. The main principle of the theory about winning the elections reveals that it is better suited to a twoparty system, where the winner is always definite, but in a multi-party system, it may sometimes be difficult a one clear cut winner.

In addition, Isotalus and Aarnio (2006) and Isotalus (2011) argue that functional theory is not equally suitable to analysing political campaign discourses in all cultures and not suitable for analysing non-presidential

campaigns. The researcher observed that the functional theory has been developed to purposely analyse presidential campaigns, where a candidate's personality is critical. However, in parliamentary debates, the character of a parliamentary candidate is not as crucial as the character of a presidential candidate.

### **2.3. Concept of Social Media as Communication Tool**

Social media can be explained in terms of the easy use of internet by anyone to publish and access information, get together on a common effort, or build relationships (Murthy, 2013). Social media differ from traditional media in many ways, including quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence (Agichtein et. al., 2008; Graham, 2011). It operates in a dialogic transmission system with many sources to many receivers in direct contrast to traditional media that functions under a monologist transmission model with one source to many receivers. Social media takes the form of Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp, blogs, linked In, instagram, etc (Aichner and Jacob, 2015). It can be used to stand for the extent to which people can know if other users are reachable including knowing where others are, in the virtual world and/or in the real world, and whether they are available. It can be used to represent the extent to which users disclose their identities; and communicate with others; share, receive, exchange and send information.

Again, it can be used to indicate the extent to which users can be affiliated to other users as well as the extent to which users can identify the status and reputation of others (Kietzmann and Kristopher, 2011). The inherent characteristic of the defining framework of social media is communication.

Although internet penetration across the world differs in terms of rate and degree the use of social media as a communication tool, is a common phenomenon across the globe in contemporary times because of its probability that users will re-share content received or posted as a way of getting messages broadly circulated quickly. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The use of social media as a preferable form of communication is also supported by the number of the citizenry, particularly in the developed world that have access to smart-phones with active 3-G and 4-G mobile connections. Although the global average of access to smart-phones with access to internet connection is 57.14%, many regions of the world have access to mobile phones with internet connection.

In spite of the fact that only 26.5% of the population in Africa have access to smart-phones with internet connection, the use of social media in many African countries in communication is seen as a growing and new activity that must be recognized. This is because it assists open communication, resulting in enhanced information discovery and delivery; captures views on issues in short time; allows people different to discuss ideas, post news, ask questions and share links; provides a chance for users to expand business links and socio-political networks; targets a large audience, making it a useful and effective outreach tool for political mobilization and others; improves business reputation and client base with little use of advertising; and expands political surveys, opinion polls, market research, delivers communications and directs interested people to specific web sites (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Notwithstanding its essence, the use of social media has been critiqued on several grounds. It can be used as a forum to spread falsehood and misinformation. This ends up damaging hard-won honour and reputation (Flanigin and Metzger, 2007; Spears et al., 2015). It also opens up the prospect of hackers to engage in fraud and launch spam and virus attacks; increases the chances of people being victims of online scams that may look real, leading to data or identity theft; and possibly results in lost productivity, especially if the citizenry or employees are always busy updating profiles and using their social media devices (Flanigin and Metzger, 2007). Again, access and use of social media is limited especially in developing countries as a result of constricted internet connections and poor supply of power (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Zhou et al., 2015). For this, where internet connection exists, poverty, ignorance irregular power supply, and lack of well-informed awareness about the use of social media devices such as smartphones etc inhibits the efficiency and effectiveness of social media.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Introduction

This section of the study shall point to empirical issues on the use of social media for campaign in Ghana, then in the USA and developing country, Nigeria. The general role of social media in political and challenges associated with its use will be highlighted. Then the lessons learned from the review.

#### 3.2. Social Media Use 2012 and 2016 Presidential Election Campaigns in Ghana.

Prior to the onset of social media, election campaigns in Ghana were uniquely characterized by traditional strategies of door to door, mass rallies, use of posters, billboards and the mass media, i.e. radio and television etc.

According to the 2004 election report by the Electoral Commission of Ghana, most political parties in 2004 introduced new strategies to communicate to the masses (E. C, 2005). For example, some of the political parties mounted billboards designed with the images of their candidate with the party colors as background. As well, public address systems were mounted on party propaganda vans for use in making announcement in the various towns and villages. In both the towns and villages, these party vans went from street to street preaching the party's message in the local dialect with some party volunteers sharing fliers of their candidate. Their first approach in capturing

the attention of the public was by playing songs specially composed for their presidential candidate.

The two major parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) were mostly noted for that. Although the use of the party vans and the public address system was not new in Ghana so far as electoral campaign was concerned, political parties modified their approach by incorporating newly available technology to improve their public address system's sounds and the design on the party fliers to attract more people. Furthermore, political parties designed most Principal Street in the cities with their party flags and colors and organized town, constituency, regional and national rallies thronged with enthusiastic party supporters in their colorful party paraphernalia. Again, the electoral commission of Ghana reported that, political parties adopted a new strategy by forming keep fits clubs in the various party branches at the constituency level (E, C, 2005). These keep fits clubs essentially became another tool of communicating to the people. Members of the keep fits club wore party t-shirts and adorned themselves with other party paraphernalia and walked through the various street in the towns amid drumming and dancing.

The elections of 2012 is often recorded as the first time social media was deployed for campaign by political actors in Ghana. Until then, social media has not been popular in Ghana or widely used as it is currently being used. As a result, presidential campaigns were limited to the traditional means of campaigning such rallies, posters, banners, door to door and the mass media.

For instance as of December 2012, statistics from socialbakers.com showed that the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) presidential candidate had created a page on facebook with some 100,000 likes or followers on Facebook. Also the National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate had created a page on Facebook with some 25,000 likes or followers. This demonstrates that the political actors had indeed resorted to the use of social media, especially, Facebook for their campaign. Boker (2012) argued asserted that relative to the 2012 elections, that social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and Twitter were used extensively by both the NDC and NPP in their campaigns. According to him, both parties used the social media platforms to highlight their policies and plans, engage in smear campaign, mobilize their base and to educate the electorate on how to vote as the elections drew closer.

In particular instance, the NDC candidate, John Mahama who had just assumed office as president following the death of President, Prof John Evans Atta Mills, used the social media platforms to champion the achievements of his government. Highlighting various infrastructure developments and government interventions as reasons to be voted for. Likewise, the NPP in their campaign on social media touted their Free SHS policy. They also, spent time highlighting the weaknesses and perceived failures of the NDC government at the time. This is further confirmed by Fordjuor (2015) who indicated that in the 2012 presidential campaigns, candidate John Mahama used facebook largely to acclaim himself and his party's achievements while candidate Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo of the NPP used also used Facebook largely to share his policies and attack the government of the day.

Also other stakeholders of the elections did make use of social during the electioneering period in 2012. For instance the Institute of Economic Affairs devoted a YouTube channel to air live a presidential debate organized by them so that Ghanaians and other internationals outside the country can follow the debate online (Wasswa, 2013). Also, some Ghanaian citizens sourced for information on social media before, during and after the 2012 elections by following the hashtag #ghanadecides on twitter (Bastion et al., 2012). This eventually became a worldwide movement with several other hashtags like the ‘iRegistered’, ‘speak Ghana’, ‘get out and vote’ among others (Bastion et al., 2012). The iRegistered campaign for instance aimed at encouraging Ghanaians who are eligible to vote to register and post images of themselves with their voters’ identification cards as a way of sharing their experience and encouraging others to go out and register. Others posted videos of themselves in queues waiting for their turn to register.

The situation was not any different in the 2016 elections as presidential candidates again made use of social media in their campaigns. The NPP and the NDC had increased their followers on, especially Facebook. According to statistics from the 2nd Governance Social Media Index Report as of September 30, 2016 John Mahama, the presidential candidate of the NDC had the most likes on Facebook with 1,007, 595. The presidential candidate for the NPP followed closely with 981, 057 likes on Facebook. Even though the NDC presidential candidate had over one million followers on Facebook, the report further indicates that the NPP candidate increased his following 265,341 as

compared to NDC's 125, 175 three months prior to the publication of the latest report in September. Aidoo (2018) confirmed that presidential candidate of the NDC, who was an incumbent, used his social media pages to highlight projects completed by his government and by extension his achievement. The NPP candidate also used his to attack the incumbent on issues such as the economy and corruption. Also, he used same to tout his Free SHS policy while calling on the electorate to vote for change.

### **3.3. Social Media Use in the USA Elections**

In the early 2000s, presidential candidates in the USA capitalized on the introduction of the web 1.0 to launch campaign websites (Owen, 2014). The website housed basic information about the presidential candidate, the party's ideology and the key issues in the manifesto (Owen, 2014). These websites were basic and lacked interactive features and were heavily texted with little graphic designs, nonetheless, they served a useful purpose as an electoral communication tool (Owen, 2014). By 2004, certain features have been incorporated into the building of the websites. These features allowed to a certain level some sort of interaction between users who frequented the website, supporters were also able to donate to candidates and volunteers also signed up on these websites to assist with the campaign (Owen, 2014). Internet blogs also bloomed and served as alternative news source (Owen, 2014).

The 2008 USA Presidential elections marked another significant turn to the evolution of political communication prompted by the introduction of web 2.0. (Baker, 2009; BernersLee, Fischetti, & Dertouzos, 2000; Owen, 2014). The

web 2.0. is distinctively different from the web 1.0. in terms of its interactive nature and the multimedia platforms incorporated in it (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Owen, 2014; Wasswa, 2013). This was further explored by candidates in the 2012 and 2016 elections respectively. For instance in the 2016 elections, Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump used these tools to effectively reach their base and to promote their policies while smearing each other with some propaganda. This new media also known as the social media has since become the new approach to enhance electoral communication. Its nature of reachability made it easy for politicians to quickly broadcast messages to large number of people within some few seconds. More importantly, social media gives people the opportunity to develop their own political content, share it online, and exchange comment with other people on content created by them or others. Each social media tool is unique in the way it operates.

For example, YouTube is basically a video-sharing site that affords it users both the opportunity to view and upload video content and comment as well. Conversely, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are more textual although Twitter allows only one hundred and forty characters in a post at a time; their nature foster a direct social interaction. Nevertheless, these social media tools have some defining similarity in terms of its user centeredness, highlighting its distinctiveness from the older media counterparts. These tools have since become indispensable in all USA elections as they have been accepted by candidates as critical tools for campaign.

### **3.4. Use of Social Media In Nigeria Elections**

In Nigeria in particular, social networking and most especially some specific social media platforms such as Facebooks and twitter have proved to have impacted general elections as well as political activities of various kinds in recent years. Studies on social media impact on Nigerian elections began to become popular after the 2011 general elections (Hadiza, 2015). Its impact at the most recent elections, 2015, became however more visible. Various institutions burdened with voter registration, provision of voting cards, as well as the Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission used web blogs, applications, and social media for mobilization, for information dissemination, and posting of results. Oseni, (2015) states that social media has emerged as an important means of electioneering and the policing (defending) of election results. According to him, during elections in Nigeria, accredited election and citizen observers, the civil society situation room, and the various political parties and stakeholders deployed observers to the field who relied mainly on WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, for the report of incidents.

Presidential candidates, Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent, and Mohammed Buhari were noted to have extensively used social media platforms to promote their policies to the Nigerian electorate. Opeiba (2019) asserts that the 2015 elections witnessed the rapid deployment of social media (Twitter) by the two main political parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the main opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and their key candidates. Apart from using Twitter for campaign purposes,

political office holders also use the platform to interact with their supporters and to communicate with the general public.

The 2019 election also saw a momentous increase in the use of Twitter for campaigning (Opeibi 2019). With about 2.4 and 2.3 million followers each (Twitter 2019a; Twitter 2019b), Muhammadu Buhari of the ruling APC and Atiku Abubakar of the opposition PDP became the two most influential out of 73 candidates (INEC 2019) who employed Twitter to campaign and mobilize voters (Opeibi 2019) in the 2019 presidential elections. The use of social media in Nigerian elections is a phenomenon which has come to stay. Despite the limitations of social media, candidates who are able to fully harness the potential of social media to reach voters have a chance of securing electoral victory.

### **3.5. Growing Role of Social Media In Political Campaigns**

Social media has since become an integral part of every election campaign across all countries. It continues to be deployed for various roles in an election campaign among which include, for advertising, for mobilization, for propaganda, and to encourage political participation.

#### **◆ For Propaganda**

Political parties have been noted to deploy social media for the propagation of propaganda. Bone (1965) as cited in (Aidoo, 2018) defines propaganda as a process of communication which seeks acceptance for an idea, cause or position without encouraging the respondent to analyze or to examine in

support of it. He considers propaganda as an age old tool of communication which has been used by government, private interest groups and political organizations to achieve their objectives. Considering the number of active users on social media, and the potential it presents to its users to reach millions of people within a short period, political parties have leveraged the opportunity to spread political propaganda taking advantage of a key distinct feature of social media which is the spread of information by users themselves, through sharing and tagging (Chaffey, 2017; Kizina, 2015).

Political parties have adopted several mechanisms like political trolls, polibot, circulation of biased articles and fake pages to spread propaganda on social media (Kizina, 2015). This is intended to cause damage to the character of political opponents and to make them unattractive to the electorates. Fake pages are often created dedicated to spreading false information about a candidate with the sole aim of undermining the integrity and attractiveness of the candidate. Sometimes these propaganda are designed in a form of threads of opinion against the opponent but made to appear as if it is coming from the quarters of their opponent with the aim of inciting the readers against their opponent (Kizina, 2015).

Albeit, these acts of propaganda against opponents sometimes end up backfiring and inuring to the benefit of the opponent. For instance, intended to mock the 72-year-old NPP presidential candidate of the NPP on social media for drinking kalypo did not materialize as many sympathizers across the country took selfie pictures of themselves drinking kalypo and posted them on

Facebook as a way of showing solidarity to the NPP presidential candidate. In effect, aiding in mobilizing his base with what was termed as the "kalypo challenge".

#### ◆ **For Mobilization**

Political parties also deploy social media for purposes of mobilizing their followers for political activities. As reported by Lopes (2014), group meetings held at places like the university, coffee shops and other independent news sources are the traditional means by which people are organized and mobilized for social movement and to spread information. But, the growth of the internet in the 1990's brought a change in communication in the world (Lopes, 2014). Facebook and Twitter for instance can be used to reach out to several millions of people across the globe in real time as events are ongoing. Its mobilizing capabilities became more apparent following its novel use by the Obama campaign team in the 2008 U.S. presidential elections to mobilize supporters and other potential voters' especially young voters (Baker, 2009). Social media has since become a vital tool for mobilizing and reaching out to voters (Meti, Khandoba, & Guru, 2015). Facebook for example can be used in exceptional ways to rally voters to join political groups online, like political pages for news and other important update.

Again social media users can be easily mobilized online to support parties and candidate by commenting, sharing and re-sharing political video ads from YouTube and other news items from political parties' websites and their affiliated blogs (Meti et al., 2015). In essence, although social media has

not completely revolutionized political mobilization, it has introduced some significant changes like allowing common individuals who do not hold any party position to organize and mobilize people online for campaign and other political purposes as cited in Lopes (2014).

#### ◆ **For Political Participation**

Stroud (2006) defined political participation as any political activity an individual undertakes like volunteering as a campaigner for a political group or donating among others. Ekman & Amna,( 2012) and (Scaff, 1975) stretches the above definitions by including other forms of political activities like demonstrations, strikes, boyco2ts and other forms of protest behavior.

The use of social media by political actors for various political communication aids in enhancing the political knowledge of the electorates on pertinent issues. Thus, the electorates get informed and educated on major current affairs through the social media pages of the political actors. This according to Boulianne(2015), the more people get exposed to news on current affairs, the more they become knowledgeable which in effect facilitates their participation in political life. In essence, the more people get access to variety of sources of information online, the more chance they stand to participate in politics because political information may enhance one's knowledge which in turn may stimulate efficacy and thus participation (Tolbert & Mcneal, 2003).

Individuals who are disgruntled by government's actions or general happenings could use social media to express their grievances and to call for

action. In some instances, it is used to mobilize protests and demonstrations on issues of concern. In effect, social media provides a good avenue for individuals who otherwise wouldn't have engaged in politics to do so. Likewise to participate in campaigns for their preferred candidates in an election with ease from any part of the world.

### **3.6. Use of Social Media in 2020 Ghana Elections**

Evidence have shown that social media was used in the past elections of Ghana, particularly, 2012 and 2016 election campaigns. Campaign for the 2020 elections is already underway and evidence have shown that social media remains an important tool in the campaign process. Particular attention was paid to facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages of the NPP and NDC.

It was observed that presidential candidates of the NDC and NPP had active pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For instance on Facebook, the NDC presidential candidate, John Dramani Mahama had a Facebook page with the username, “John Dramani Mahama” with 1.2 million likes/followers as at 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2020. At the time of writing, the last update on the page was 2 hours ago. It stated he was live with the caption “John Mahama on the move|Courtesy call on Berekum Traditional Council”. The NPP candidate, the incumbent, Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo also had a Facebook page with the username “Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo” with 1.8 million likes/followers as at 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2020. At the time of writing, the last update on the page was 3 hours ago with a live video stream captioned

“Courtesy Call on Otumfuor Osei Tutu II, Asantehene, and Asanteman Council”.

On Twitter, as at 28<sup>th</sup> September 28, 2020, the NDC presidential candidate also had a page with the username, “John Dramani Mahama, @JDMahama” with 1.7million followers. The last update at the time of writing was 2hours ago with a live video stream captioned “John Mahama on the move|Courtesy call on Berekum Traditional Council”. The NPP candidate also had an account on twitter with the username, “Nana AKufo-Addo, @NAkufoAddo” and with 1.6 million followers. The last update at the time of writing was 2 hours ago of an image with a message touting his initiatives in the health sector. This was accompanied by the text “#GoodHealthForAll, #LeadershipofService, #4moreForNana”.

Finally on Instagram, as at 28<sup>th</sup> September 28, 2020, John Mahama again had page with the username “officialjdmahama”. There were 127,000 followers of the page and the last update at the time of writing was 16 hours ago of an image with the inscription, “Back to BONO REGION, John MAHAMA 2020 ON THE MOVE”. Nana Akufo-Addo also had a page with 1.2 million followers with the last update at the time of writing being 3 hours ago of an image with a message touting his initiatives in the health sector. This was accompanied by the text “#GoodHealthForAll, #LeadershipofService, #4moreForNana”. Evidently, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were identified as the social media platforms being used for the 2020 presidential election campaign by the NDC and the NPP presidential candidates.

On how social media is being used by the candidates in the 2020 presidential election campaign, this was observed on the pages of the candidates. Candidate of the NDC, John Mahama had on his social media pages information on major policies for the election. For instance, images with inscription such as “FREE TVET, FREE PRIMARY HEALTHCARE, 4 MONTH MATERNITY LEAVE, 10 BILLION BIG PUSH, LEGALIZE OKADA” stood out as key campaign promises. As such, the social media pages is being used to promote his policies for the people. Also, short videos telling story the of his achievements are occasionally posted on the pages intended to remind the electorate of what he is capable of doing.

Also, there is a live video streaming session tagged, “John Mahama on The Move” where his various community engagement activities are broadcasted on his social media pages from wherever it is happening. Likewise, his official press conferences and media interviews are broadcasted on the pages. His major press releases and other announcements are also made on these pages. John Mahama is using his social media platforms to effectively reach out to the electorate and to keep them informed on every one of his campaign moves.

Similarly, candidate Nana Akufo-Addo is using his social media pages, largely, to promote the projects of his government. Thus, documentaries of various flagship policies are broadcasted on the page. Documentaries on the Free SHS policy, One District One Factory, Planting for Food and Jobs, Nation Builders Corps(NABCO), One Village One Dam among others are

occasionally posted on the page. Likewise, information on various government projects is regularly posted on the pages. Also, the pages are used to stream the various community engagements by the candidate who doubles as the president. Other events like commissioning of projects, sod cutting of projects and inspection of projects by the president and candidate are streamed live on the pages. The page is also used for major announcements by the candidate and for the regular update on the country's fight against the pandemic. Just like the NDC candidate, he also uses his page to promote his major new policies such as the Unemployment Insurance Scheme, Vehicle Recapitalization Program among others.

All of this points to the fact that political parties in Ghana have embraced the strategic role of social media in election campaigns. And for this have, they have resolved to effectively take advantage of these platforms to promote their policies, achievements and broadcast all of their campaign activities for the 2020 elections.

### **3.6 Challenges With The Use of Social Media**

Despite the potential that social media presents for political campaign, it has its limitations for which political actors must not fully rely on it for campaign. Among these include;

**Fake News;** The term “fake news” is not new. Contemporary discourse, particularly media coverage, seems to define fake news as referring to viral posts based on fictitious accounts made to look like news reports. A recent

study defined fake news “to be news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers” (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). Now that online platforms, particularly social media, are becoming the main sources of news for a growing number of individuals, misinformation seems to have found a new channel (Tandoc et al, 2017). Social media has since become a forum for the spread of false information largely by unknown individuals. This is often done with the intent of causing damage to the character of political opponents and in effect causing public disaffection for the candidate. Users of social media, like political actors, are constantly confronted with this challenge and compelled to issue rejoinders to either provide clarity or denounce such false information. Users of social media are therefore required to be extra careful about what they read on social media as news and to verify with major news portals to know their authenticity.

**Spams and Fraud:** Another issue of concern is the increasing use of social media to dupe unsuspecting victims. Fake accounts or pages have been created to impersonate prominent people in society and being used to perpetuate fraud. Users of social media are thereby required to not easily give in to exciting offers they may see on social media as these maybe an act of fraud. Likewise to avoid clicking strange links they come across on social media as they may be spams which could be used to destroy them.

**Hacking:** Most of the users of social media sites are not fully aware of the security measures they need to take care of while using social media platforms. People share thoughts, personal experience, photos, etc on social media sites.

Such information can be helpful for hackers to hack your accounts in social media, emails, or even your mobile phone. Several personal twitter and Facebook accounts have been hacked in the past that have affected the individuals' personal lives.

### **3.7. Lessons learned**

The electoral campaigns have evolved over the years from the traditional personal campaigns to the era of mass media campaigns and the eventual use of internet based technologies like social media. It has also been revealed that the use of social media for electoral campaigns have become indispensable in this age and time. Social media use by political parties is for multi purpose. It is deployed as an important tool for mobilization and participation in political campaigns. Parties use to mobilize their base and rally them for various electoral activities. Also, it serves avenue for promoting policies and programs of a party. Likewise, it is used for propaganda and other campaign activities. An efficient and effective use of social media for campaign has the potential to contribute immensely to electoral victory.

Despite the opportunities social media presents, it comes with its challenges. These include the spread of fake news to mislead and deceive the public. The activities of fraudsters to dupe unsuspecting victims of their hard earned money and reputation. The likelihood of hacks which could lead to the loss of private data and other vital personal information. In view of this, users are required to exercise extra caution in their use of social media and be quick to verify information they see on social media before believing.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter focused on the various means by which data was collected and analysed for this study. Thus, the research design, research approach, sampling techniques and tools for analysis of the data gathered are discussed.

#### **4.2. Research Design and Approach**

Research design basically refers to a systematic plan that is used to answer the research problem (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) argues that, a research design may include the whole process of research right from the conceptualization of the research problem to the final report writing. The exploratory research design was used for this paper. Because of the scanty nature of research in this area, it become necessary to adopt the exploratory design for a critical look into the role social media will play in the upcoming election relative to electoral campaign purposes.

The qualitative methods of research were preferred for this study. The benefit of using qualitative approach is that, it helps to understand research problem from the view point of the population it involves (Neuman, 2014). In addition, the open nature of qualitative methods exposes the researcher to plenty of opportunities to obtain unexpected data (Becker, 1996). For instance researchers who adopt focus group discussion and in-depth qualitative

interview methods often offer the participants they engage the chance to respond to interview questions in their own words rather than limiting them to choose from some fixed answers thus increasing the chances of the researcher getting rich and culturally salient explanations. It is however questioned on the basis that, researchers may wrongly impute a meaning to something a participant may not intend. Qualitative methods was adopted for this study because the examine how social media is being used by the NPP and NDC presidential candidates in the 2020 presidential election campaign.

### **4.3. Sample and Sampling Technique**

Data collection is essential to the general understanding of a theoretical framework of a research. It is therefore essential that the method used for data collection and whom the data is collected from is done in good order given the fact that poorly collected data can invalidate the study (Tongco, 2007). However, it is not necessary to gather data from the entire community to obtain a valid research finding (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Mack et al. (2005) further posit that, in qualitative research, only a sample or a subset of the population are chosen for a research. Choosing the sample (which and how many people) is informed by objectives of the research as well as certain characteristics like size and diversity of the population for the study (Mack et al., 2005). Given this therefore, purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study. Purposive sampling separate research participants according to some preselected measures that are significant to the research questions (Mack et al., 2005).

Thus, the participants can be handpicked provided they satisfy the required characteristics for selection based on the objectives of the study. This research used the purposive sampling technique to select participants from the social campaign team of the NDC and NPP presidential campaign team. The selection of the candidates of these two parties is because they are the leading political parties in the country. Also, they are the only parties to have governed the nation since the inception of the 1992 constitution.

#### **4.4. Data Collection Procedures**

Data can be collected either through primary or secondary means (Bhattacharjee,2012). According to Bhattacharjee (2012), Primary Data are collected by researchers for a particular research study through the use of appropriate data collection procedures. Each time new primary data is obtained, analyzed and documented, new knowledge is added to the existing literature on the issue under study. It is this store of knowledge which later becomes secondary source of data. The data collection method used for this study were in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews affords the researcher the chance to interact with participants on the personal level as such giving them a rich appreciation of the participants understanding and views relative to the study (Mack et al., 2005). This is possible because of the open-ended nature of in-depth interview questions which enables the researcher to probe and delve deep to ask people what they really think about a research topic, share their experiences and express their personal feelings and opinions (Mack et al., 2005; O’Leary, 2014).

Administrating in-depth interviews has its challenges like gaining access and the consent of the participants, developing the right interview techniques in order to avoid leading questions and creating the necessary rapport to keep the doors opened for interaction (O’Leary, 2014). In-depth interviews may be structured, semistructured and unstructured (O’Leary, 2014). The researcher adopted semi-structured interviews for this work. That is, the nature of the questions were more flexible in order to encourage the participants to give detailed responses as well cover areas that were not necessarily covered in the question guide.

The researcher conducted a one-on-one semi-structured interview with three representatives of their political parties’ social media campaign team. Thus, three social media campaign team members of the NPP and the NDC 2020 presidential candidates were interviewed.

#### **4.5. Data Analysis and Presentation**

The data that was gathered were analyzed using the thematic content analysis method. This is a method of analyzing data by grouping the data into categories based on themes, concept and other similar features (O’Leary, 2014). This method enabled the researcher to categorize and decrease large quantities of data into more comprehensible unit for interpretation. Data gathered from the interview were coded into themes closely aligned to the research objectives.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on conclusion of the study based on evidence gathered relative to the specific objectives along with some recommendations for government, political parties and future study.

#### **4.2. Conclusion**

The overall aim of the study was to examine the use of social media as a strategic campaign tool for the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana. Specific objectives of the study included, 1) To identify which social media platforms is being used by the presidential candidates of the NPP and NDC for the 2020 presidential election campaigns. 2) To examine why these social media platforms are being used by the candidates for the campaigns. 3) To explore how these social media platforms is being used to campaign in the 2020 presidential election campaign.

In view of this, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were identified as among the key social media platforms being used by the presidential candidates for their elections campaigns. John Dramani Mahama of the NDC was identified to have official pages on all of these platforms with huge following. For instance on Facebook, he had 1.2 million followers and 1.8 million followers on Twitter. Likewise, Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP had official pages on all

three platforms with equally huge following. For instance, on facebook he had 1.8 million followers and 1.6 million followers on Twitter.

It was further observed that the reason for the use of social media stems from the unique nature of social media. The nature of social media is such that it allows for the dissemination of multimedia messages as text, video, audio and images. More so, its feature of allowing for instant feedback which makes it interactive makes it ideal for voter engagements. ((Kaid& Holtz-Bacha, 2008). As such, candidates are able to engage the electorates directly likewise the electorates with the candidates. For instance, candidate John Mahama at a time when parts of the country was under lockdown, begun a social media interaction dubbed “John Mahama Live” where he went live on Facebook and Twitter to engage the Ghanaian electorates while receiving and responding to their feedback. It is also less costly compared to traditional media and is able to reach people at grater speed and distance.

Candidates of the NPP and NDC were noticed to use social media for promoting their policies and programs. John Mahama on his facebook and Twitter pages had messages on his key policies such as “FREE TVET, FREE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE and the like. Also, Nana Akufo-Addo used his pages largely to promote his achievements as the sitting president. Documentaries on this success of his key policies such as “Free SHS, Planting For Food and Jobs, One Village One Dam, One District One Factory” were all on the pages. Also, the pages were being used to mobilize the loyalists of both candidate and remind them of the need to go out and vote. Moreover, the live

video feature of the pages were being used to broadcast the campaign activities of both candidates. Beneath all of these posts were provided feedback from the public on each of the messages that were published on these platforms.

#### **4.4. Recommendations**

Following this study, it is evident that social media has become a part and parcel of the life of every Ghanaian and the years go by the number of users will increase. It is therefore important for governments to maintain and improve upon laws governing use of social media to ensure that its potential is fully harnessed.

Furthermore, this study recommends that political parties in Ghana adopt new digital strategies to actively engage their followers on social media like raising funds so that like political parties elsewhere, they can go beyond just reporting their online and offline activities to their followers online.

As well political parties in Ghana must invest in cyber security technologies in order to combat social media propaganda to have a sanitized engagement with their followers online to foster a safer digital online political life. Future studies may also explore the use of social media by parliamentary candidates for campaign and its impact on voter choice.

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