

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)**

**SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN A PANDEMIC:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF GHANA'S 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

**BY**

**PHILIP KWAME SABAH**

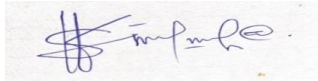
**MAPR 20101**

**A DESERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND  
RESEARCH (SoGSaR), GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIEMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF  
ARTS (MA) DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS.**

**NOVEMBER 2021**

## **CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my original research, and that no part of it has been presented for another (degree or diploma) in this institute or elsewhere. I am solely responsible for any shortcomings.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Philip Kwame Sabah', is written on a light-colored rectangular piece of paper.

**30TH NOVEMBER, 2021**

**PHILIP KWAME SABAH**

**DATE**

**MAPR 20101**

### **SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify 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.



**November 30, 2021**

**DR. COLLINS ADU-BEMPAH BROBBEY**

**DATE**

**(SUPERVISOR)**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to my parents, Mr. Simon Kwame Hatekah and Comfort Ami Kukpenudzi.

Both of blessed memory.

My Siblings Emefa, Dzigbordi, Morkporkpor, Silas and Francis. And my supervisor Dr Collins

Adu-Bempah Brobbey.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of everyone that have played diverse roles to make this study a success. First, I would like to thank the Almighty God for guiding me and giving me the needed strength to finish this dissertation within the stipulated time.

Secondly, I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor. Dr. Collins Adu-Bempah Brobbey is a Senior lecturer, Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Research (SoGSaR), Campus Director- Ringway Campus, Ghana Institute of Journalism, a Visiting Assistant Professor, United Nations University for Peace, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and an Adjunct lecturer at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana Legon who provided me with an excellent atmosphere to supervise my dissertation. God richly bless you for taking time off your busy schedules to painstakingly assess and addressed any shortcomings for my dissertation to become exceptional. His constructive criticisms and input and selfless attention went a long way to shape this work. To Mumuni Hamdalah Alale, when I count my blessings, I count you twice.

## **ABSTRACT**

The study assessed the role of social networking sites in political campaigns in a pandemic era. The focus was on the 2020 general elections in Ghana. This study had as its main objectives, an assessment of the motivation for the use of social networking sites in political campaigns by political parties, assessing the strategies of the political parties in their use of social networking sites in political campaigns, an examination of the political uses of social networking sites by the electorates, and finally, an assessment of the role of social networking sites in the voting decisions of the electorates in the 2020 elections. This study employed the mixed method approach, where a survey was conducted involving 150 respondents and a semi-structured interview was done using two representatives of the political campaign teams of the NPP and NDC. The findings of the study showed that the elections which was during the time of a world pandemic saw the increased prioritization of social networking sites by the political parties who strategized various ways of using it since physical political campaigns had been affected by the pandemic. The findings also showed that social networking sites was highly used by the electorates during the 2020 elections as a medium of political participation. The role played by social networking sites in the 2020 election was that it served as a tool for political information, participation, and political voice.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Social Networking Sites

Political Campaigns

Covid-19 Pandemic

2020 General Elections

Ghana

Assessment

Motivation

Strategies

Decisions.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>SUPERVISOR’S CERTIFICATION</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>ACRONYMS</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>GENERAL OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.0 Introduction .....	1
1.2. Statement of Problem.....	4
1.3. Research Questions .....	8
1.4. Research Objectives .....	8
1.5. Scope of the Study .....	9
1.6. Justification of the Study.....	9
1.7. Organization of the Study .....	10
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.0 Introduction .....	11
2.1. Theoretical Foundation .....	11
2.1.1 Democratic Participant Media Theory .....	11
2.1.2 The Two-way Symmetric Model by Grunig and Hunt .....	13
2.1.2. Basic Assumption .....	14
2.2. Review of Related and Relevant Empirical Literature .....	15
2.2.1 Nature of Social Networking Sites Used in Political Campaigns .....	15
2.2.2 Social Networking Sites and Political Campaign Strategies .....	16
2.2.2.1 Social Networking Sites as a Relationship Management Tool between Political Actors and Citizens .....	19

2.2.3 Influence of social networking sites on Political Campaigning.....	20
2.3 Conceptual Framework .....	26
2.3.1 Social Networking Sites.....	26
2.3.2 Political Participation in Ghana. ....	26
2.3.3 Political Campaigning.....	28
2.3.4 COVID-19 and the Use of Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigns .....	29
2.4. Operational Definition of Terms.....	33
2.4.1 Social Networking Sites.....	33
2.4.2 Political Campaigns .....	33
2.5. Relevance of the Study .....	34
2.6. Conclusion .....	34
<b>CHAPTER THREE.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>35</b>
3.0. Introduction.....	35
3.1. Methods.....	35
3.3 Population .....	36
3.4 Sample.....	37
3.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments.....	38
3.6 Quantitative Surveys .....	38
3.6.1. Quantitative Data instruments.....	38
3.6.2. Collection and Analysis of Quantitative Data.....	39
3.6.3 Qualitative data instruments.....	39
3.6.4 Collection and Analysis of Qualitative Data.....	40
3.7 Ethical Consideration.....	40
3.8. Limitations and Delimitations.....	41
3.9 Chapter Summary .....	41
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.0 Introduction.....	42
4.1 Presentation and Discussion of Qualitative Findings .....	42
4.1.1 Understanding the Motivations for the Use of social networking sites by the Political Parties.....	42

4.1.2 Strategies Used in Social Media Political Campaigns by the Political Parties .....	46
4.2 Presentation and Discussion of Quantitative Data .....	49
4.2.1 Demographic Profile and Social Media Usage Information .....	49
4.2.2 Social Network Site Usage for Political Participation .....	51
4.2.3 Electorates' Perceptions of Political Uses of Social Networking Sites by Political Parties.....	53
4.2.4 Role of Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigning and Voter Decisions .....	56
4.4 Conclusion .....	59
<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>60</b>
5.0 Introduction .....	60
5.1 Summary of the Study.....	60
5.2. Conclusion of the Study .....	61
5.2.1 Understanding the Motivations for the Use of Social Networking sites by the Political Parties.....	61
5.2.2 The Strategies Used by the Political Parties in their Social Networking Site Political Campaigns.....	62
5.2.3 Social Networking site Usage Among Electorates During the 2020 General Elections .....	62
5.2.4 Role of Social Networking Site in Political Campaigns and Electorate Decisions ....	63
5.3 Limitations of the Study.....	63
5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies.....	63
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>72</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Demographic Profile and Social Media Usage Information.....	50
Table 2 Social Network Sites Usage for Political Participation .....	52
Table 3: Electorates' Perceptions of Social Media Usage by Political Parties I.....	53
Table 4: Electorates' Perceptions of Social Media Usage by Political Parties II .....	55
Table 5 Role of Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigning and Voter Decisions .....	57

## **ACRONYMS**

NDC

National Democratic Congress

NPP

New Patriotic Party

## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.0 Introduction

Social networking sites have gained and continue to gain so much prominence in information age as well as in several human endeavours globally of which Africa in general and Ghana is no exception (Zhang, 2013; Mergel, 2013). This is exemplified by the spread of social networking sites from businesses, through social movements to organizations to the extent that the efficacy of these social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram among others cannot be grossed over (Zhang, 2013; Mergel, 2013).

Accordingly, just like other facets of life, the world of politics has not been left out in the transformation brought in by the surge in the use of social networking sites. Political parties around the world and in Ghana specifically, recognizing the utility in the use of social networking sites as evidenced in the 2008 and 2012 United States Presidential elections, have been intensifying the use of social networking sites (Zhang, 2013; Mergel, 2013).

Accordingly, electioneering activities such as political campaigns, where political parties tend to adopt persuasive strategies to amass electoral supports have seen a tremendous use of social networking sites. Zhang (2013) and Mergel (2013) have argued that, these networking sites have questioned the relevance of traditional media as it gives political parties and actors direct actors to their electorates. Similarly, Dzisah (2018) reaffirms the position that, social networking sites have been seen to augment other communication strategies. Regardless of the debates, there is no denying the changes that social networking sites has brought in its wake to political campaign activities and how this has changed the nature of the engagement between political actors and the electoral base.

This study complements the plethora of debates on the motion to ensure effectiveness of these sites on political campaigns. This study will particularly examine the influence of social networking sites on the voter behaviour, particularly candidate choice by focusing her lenses on the 2020 Ghanaian presidential elections. This will particularly be advantageous since the world was struck and brought to a standstill through the spread of the novel Corona Virus pandemic, restricting activities that were once upon a time done physically, to virtual means. The prominence of these social networking sites increased exponentially during this period and this very much affected election campaigns all over the world.

It is in light of this that this study posits that the use of social networking sites for political campaigns turns to increase social networking sites engagement as attested to by earlier scholars and hence also affected the political realm. This study maintains that there are significant motivations behind the increased use of social networking sites by political parties in a pandemic affected electioneering year and, influenced voter turnout as well as voter preferences.

As already indicated, the advent of social networking sites has resulted in the most substantial and pervasive change to political communication, political engagement and campaign effectiveness in modern times. social networking sites still remain the greatest impetus for information dissemination in the 21st Century with its opportunities, particularly, evidenced in the spontaneity of political events more than ever. The advent of social networking sites has therefore been touted as revolutionary in all spheres of human endeavour, including engagement on public policy issues and elections.

It has been iterated that the focus of social networking sites are interpersonal relationships and in affirming that stance, scholars Gillin and Schwartzman (2011) suggest that social networking sites offers social capital to businesses and organisations for gathering marketing intelligence and identifying opportunities by listening to the target market and monitoring social behaviours on social networking sites. Gillin and Schwartzman (2011) further aver that social networking sites can also be used for marketing purposes and increasing an organisation's influence in the marketplace. Just as marketing concepts are used in other types of organisations, political marketing is used to communicate the ideologies, values, and the offerings of the political organisations to their target market.

Moreover, the social networking sites concept, as advanced by Mangold and Faulds (2009), involves the use of Internet based applications and services for communication, collaboration, creation and exchange of contents by individuals and groups. The main focus of social networking sites is the communication that takes place, how the communication takes place and the relationships that develop based on these communications. social networking sites allow individuals and groups to develop, maintain and stay connected to a network of other individuals and people with common interests. Social networking sites is thus a very important platform for businesses and organisations to utilise to reach their target audiences (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Based on their use to facilitate political engagement and campaigns in the US 2008 presidential elections, social networking sites tools such as Facebook, Twitter and the rest have gained increased prominence in politics all over the world based on their historic and unprecedented potential for increased and limitless political communication. Today, news consumers head to social networking sites for their information and as a result, social networking sites platforms have not only become important channels for distributing news but have also remained a central part of how well the news is communicated.

Politicians have upped their game from the use of the old media such as the print (newspapers) and the electronic media (television and radio), to the use of the new media during electioneering to actualize their political goals. This was clearly depicted by the Obama campaign in 2008, as social networking sites were major tool in his campaign. According to the narratives from Carpenter (2009) as cited in Mergel (2013), Social networking and content (such as YouTube videos, Facebook Fan Pages, Twitter accounts, etc.) were used to reach out to constituents and electorates with accompanying exceptional success rate during the 2008 presidential campaign of the then Senator Barack Obama. This strategy was again employed in the successive 2012 elections with same results. As a result, politicians today have embraced the use of social networking sites, which is one of the fastest communication tools in the 21st century to carry out their campaign aspirations.

In recent times, many countries in Africa principally Ghana, have also experienced growth in the use of social networking sites in their political engagement due to the increased availability of the internet. For instance, Ajayi & Adesote (2015) recount that social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are amongst the most visited websites in Ghana. They argue further that these social networking sites are characterized by their participatory, interactive, and cost-effective nature, and this has entrenched their positions of becoming effective, efficient and veritable instruments for carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities, political engagement and mobilization among others (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015). The unprecedented adoption and increasing use of the media networking sites globally and particularly, Ghana leaves much to desire. More importantly, as this study posits, its ramifications are inadequately observed and considered. The trajectories and nuances with the adoption and increasing use of media networking sites call for critical investigation to foretell future implications for deploying the media networking sites in all manners of political active-campaigns, electioneering and party activities including even social and economic events.

## **1.2. Statement of Problem**

Evidence about evolution of media networking sites in the world today has informed the changes and modifications of various systems and structures, including the political system. The political system has embraced the use of social networking sites to advance their cause. social networking sites in the 21st century has been used as a tool for not just political awareness, but also for political mobilization, and eventual selection or choice of leadership, by the electorates

Consequently, these platforms are popular news channels because they do not only carry a strong and influential voice, but they also provide opportunity for direct interaction and feedback with the target audience. A 2014 study showed that 62% of web users turn to Facebook to find political news. The increasing use of social networking sites platforms is largely due to its ability to ensure quick dissemination of political information and encourage political participation. Lin (2001) is suggestive of the fact that social networking sites have the propensity to create values based on social relationships, a position that is entrenched in social capital theory which advances the idea that investment in relationships can be made with expected economic, political, labour, or other form of returns.

Meanwhile, Finkbeiner (2013) agrees with the position of Lin (2001) on the assertion that the social relationships created on social networks have embedded in them the needed resources, opportunities, and dividends which the researchers have defined as social capital. On this premise, businesses and organisations can take advantage of social networking sites to increase their influence and create value.

However, it is important to note that the success of the use of social networking sites for political campaigns by political actors is highly dependent on the political uses of social networking sites by the electorates. Hence Abdelhay (2012) asserts that the power of digital technologies such as social networking sites have introduced a new paradigm in political communication and participation. Howard and Parks (2012) along that tangent intimate that this has afforded the electorates the opportunity to be more empowered in the expression and enforcement of their political views.

Howard and Parks (2012) also submit that social networking sites are used as a source of gathering more momentum by the electorates in a way that affects political structures and systems. The authors further go on to aver that, even the minority and ostracized groups have been strengthened by social networking sites, thus giving them an influence in politics (Howard

and Parks, 2012). In support, the process of strengthening can be seen in the increased participation of young adults in the political process, a position advanced by Baumgartner and Morris (2010).

Consequently, social networking sites do not only allow politicians to seek information and affords them the advantage of interacting and expressing themselves online but in the submissions of Kumar (2016), helps the electorates to also express themselves politically through various means. For instance, Hellweg (2011) cited in Boateng (2019) exemplified this in the Occupy Wallstreet and the Arab Spring Movements, where social networking site was deemed to have played an unquestionable role that served the purpose of reinforcement and aided in the spread of democratic ideals. Tayeeba (2016) portends that social networking sites provides avenues for open, participatory, inclusive, and deliberative decision-making processes, advances the discussions and dissent of opinions on issues which helps in facilitating effective networking thereby creating communities and organizations. The works of Mensah (2017) and Dzisah (2018) demonstrate the use of social networking sites in political campaigns and provide useful insights into the use of social networking sites by political actors in Ghana especially the two dominant political parties in Ghana in their campaign efforts during the 2016 presidential elections in Ghana.

Meanwhile, the world has been affected by the devastating wave of the novel Corona Virus, also known as Covid-19. According to the world health organization, and as stated in Bradbury-Jones and Isham (2020), the pandemic has brought in its wake a lot of changes, spanning from physiological ones to social as well as professional ones. In essence, lives have been affected by the pandemic because of a number of restrictions imposed on people by governments in a concerted effort to bring the spread of the pandemic under control. Pencarelli et al (2020) submits that, the restrictions that included the implementation of full and partial lockdowns had implications on how people connected with each other as well as the rest of the world. Significantly, Pencareli et al (2020) argue that this period has been characterized with a corresponding increase in the use of social networking sites to ease the burden of establishing contact with family, relatives, work colleagues, school mates, teachers, mentors and friends both far and near. Social networking sites also ameliorated and abated the psychological strain that came with the pandemic and imposed lockdown by providing an avenue for people to have fun, serving as a source of distraction and a good way to while away time (Pencarelli et al, 2020). The added advantages of social networking within this period included its significant role in aiding in the spread of information while simultaneously serving as a source of

information about the pandemic, despite debates about its efficacy. Contenti (2020) and Webnoviny.sk (2020) highlight the exponential increase of social networking sites use during the pandemic and explored the most used social networking sites such as Tik Tok, Pinterest, Twitter, and LinkedIn, not forgetting messaging applications like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as a result of the adherence to the social distancing and lockdown protocols in most countries.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth report on management of election in Africa noted that during the pandemic, many stakeholders in the election process including political parties have had find other ways to communicate since normative means like public events like rallies, conferences among others had been rendered perilous to human health due to the safety protocols advanced in most countries affected by the pandemic (Commonwealth, 2020). The report asserts that many of these political parties have embraced the innovativeness that comes with the use of technological platforms in ensuring that the public had unincumbered access to relevant information about their activities as far as the campaigns are concerned. The report contends that in Nigeria, there has been an expansion and an attendant proliferation of new media channels and technologies used by political parties in communicating with the populace. The election in Ghana was no different. The Electoral Commission of Ghana was noted by the Commonwealth (2020) to have blended the use of new as well as traditional media in disseminating information about the elections. The same observation was made about political parties as well. This raises some important questions that form the basis for this empirical inquisition.

Thus, this study reinforces the existent literature on the power of social networking sites generally and in particular, the nature of social networking sites 's influence on voter decisions of candidate choice. The researcher believes that the pandemic which necessitated a significant part of campaign activities to be actuated on social networking sites offer an excellent opportunity to contribute to existing debates revolving around social networking sites political campaigns.

Until the mid-seventies, frantic efforts to introduce the concept of political marketing, particularly, the use of social networking sites into mainstream marketing has been battled and contested by marketing scholars like Reid (1988) that the task of getting elected is essentially a marketing one which involves the application of marketing principles to the realm of politics,

and in that sense, political parties may deliberate in determining the scope and the most effective way of communicating their political messages to the target audience. Additionally, Reid (1988) stated that the electorates are basically indifferent in making the needed effort to understand deeply the messages politicians put across in their campaigns. In proffering a solution to that dilemma, Benyi (2013) advances that the onus therefore falls on the politicians to effectively and efficiently communicate their political agenda through marketing applications to help shape voter preferences. Druckman (2014) states that the advent and proliferation of social networking sites has presented political actors and parties alike the challenge of reaching the masses through an effective and efficient channel or medium in recent times.

In Ghana, the limited amount of research that has been carried out using political marketing has as well focused mainly on political marketing strategies such as the popular study by Alabi (2007), Gyimah and Boadi (2009), Tweneboah-Koduah (2010) and Mensah (2009 and 2011). In the perspective of social networking sites and its use and influence in political campaigns, few studies like Ajayi & Adesote (2015) for instance, recount that social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are amongst the most visited websites in Ghana. The findings of their study show that these sites are the most proliferated and most used for political purposes due to their participatory, interactive, and cost-effective nature, and this has made them more effective, efficient, and veritable instruments for carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities, political engagement, and mobilization among others (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015).

Dzisah (2018) discusses the various roles and contributions that the media, particularly social networking sites have played in Ghana's democracy with focus on the 2012 and 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections. The key questions asked in his study revolved around issues of political knowledge, efficacy, and participation. The findings of the study shows that social networking sites is becoming a key feature in Ghana's democracy, and access to these social networking sites promotes democratic discourses thereby enhancing participation.

Literature on the influence of social networking sites on the voter choice of electorates in Ghana has not been fully explored. Particularly, literature on the effectiveness of social networking sites in presidential election campaigns, examining it from the perspective of the electorates in a pandemic-stricken era where physical activities were abated due to safety protocols introduced is virtually non-existent. Indeed, this raises several empirical questions provided

below which intend to help brings out the trajectories of political marketing in the election processes in Ghana

### **1.3. Research Questions**

What were the motivations and strategies used by the political parties in ensuring that they capitalized on the new virtual world that was introduced in the wake of the novel Covid-19 pandemic? What is the nature of social networking sites use among the electorate, and what are the political needs satiated by their use of social networking sites during the pandemic? How did their campaigns, which was mostly advanced on social networking sites influence the political activities of electorates? Was the electorate's choice of presidential candidate in the 2020 Ghanaian elections predicated on activities on the social networking sites platforms of the political actors and political information obtained by the electorates on social networking sites? Were the motivations that resulted in the social networking sites campaign strategies adopted by the political parties actualized in the aftermath of the 2020 general elections?

Following from the research objectives discussed above, the following questions will be answered at the end of the study.

1. What are the motivations for the use of social networking sites for political campaigns in the 2020 Presidential elections by the political parties?
2. What strategies were used by the political parties in their social networking sites political campaigns during the 2020 elections?
3. What was the nature of social networking sites use by electorate during the 2020 Presidential elections?
4. What was the influence of the social networking sites political campaign strategies adopted by the political parties on the candidate choice of the electorates during the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana?

### **1.4. Research Objectives**

Broadly speaking, this study examines the effectiveness of social networking sites as a political campaign tool in elections by zooming its lens on how political parties and actors used social networking sites, and how the strategies implemented affected how the electorate's choice of candidate in the 2020 presidential elections. The following specific objectives will undergird the research.

1. To unearth the motivations for the use of social networking sites by the political parties
2. To explore the strategies used in the social networking sites political campaigns by the political parties
3. To investigate the nature of social networking sites, use of electorates during the 2020 electioneering period.
4. To analyse the influence of the social networking sites political marketing of the two parties on the candidate choice of the electorates during the 2020 elections.

### **1.5. Scope of the Study**

The focus of this study is to assess the role of social networking sites as an effective campaign tool in the 2020 presidential election. This study is against the backdrop that, observations by Pencarelli (2020) and others are suggestive of the fact that the lockdown restrictions imposed stirred changes to all facets of life including the political realm. Commonwealth (2020) observes that, some stakeholders in political and election environment have had to reinvent strategies to still deliver their mandate while taking the precautionary measures into consideration. As a result, a lot of political settings like the USA and a host of African Countries have had to fall on the advantages and proliferation of social networking sites to keep electorates informed and abreast of developments.

### **1.6. Justification of the Study**

The use of social networking sites for political campaigns however is not new. But the pandemic and its resultant effects have forced a lot of political actors and political parties to rethink their social networking sites strategies and adopting methods that increase their visibility on these new media platforms. The two dominant political parties in Ghana namely the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) are said to be the main contenders since the beginning of the fourth republic ushered in through the promulgation of the 1992 election (Dzisah, 2018). However, Dzisah (2018) observes that these parties have embraced social networking sites political campaigns as part of their political marketing strategies, a factor he believes culminates in their performance in elections. A cursory examination of the social networking sites trends during the election campaigns will show that these two parties dominated the social networking sites debates. The study seeks to investigate the strategies used by the two parties in their social networking sites in political campaigns.

The study seeks to measure the success of the strategies used by the political parties against the candidate choice of the electorates during the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana. The researcher understands that there are a lot of factors that influence voting decisions and so it will be difficult to determine effects. The study seeks to understand the roles that the social networking sites strategies used by the two political parties played in the choice of candidate by the electorate during the 2020 presidential election.

Accordingly, this study will undoubtedly enrich current discourse on political marketing and the use of social networking sites in politics by providing a Ghanaian perspective on the issue. It will also contribute to the scarce literature on political marketing in Ghana. Especially, it will be a reference point to future studies into elections in a pandemic era, providing insights from the perspective of increased social networking sites used by political actors, political parties, and electorates.

Additionally, the study will be helpful to all political stakeholders especially the two leading political parties; The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in identifying the most effective and efficient ways of using social networking sites for political will be useful to social networking sites users who seek political information on those platforms.

### **1.7. Organization of the Study**

This part discusses the chapter disposition of the study. The study consists of five chapters. Chapter One discusses the general overview and background to the study, statement of problem, outlines the research objectives and questions, scope of the study, significance of the study and chapter disposition. The Second Chapter deals with the literature review which assess, examines, and evaluates literature in relation to the subject under discussion. It discusses the theoretical framework, conceptual review as well as the review of other related empirical studies. The Third Chapter deals with the methodology which focuses on the discussion of the research design to be employed, data collection method and tools, population, sample and sampling technique as well as methods that will be employed for the analysis of data. The Fourth Chapter, the penultimate chapter is dedicated to the presentation, analysis and discussion of key findings. The Fifth Chapter provides the summary of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on how social networking sites is used in political communication and its influence on the relationships between political parties and their stakeholders as well as on voting patterns and decisions. The chapter begins by deconstructing the important concepts in this study while simultaneously examining and assessing the empirical studies that have contributed to the field. The chapter then reviews work related to the study. This is done, first by scanning the global scholarly field of work examining the effect of social networking sites in political campaigns and concludes by examining the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study.

#### **2.1. Theoretical Foundation**

The discussions above give credence to the suitable theory that can be used in this study. The following theories will guide this study.

1. The Democratic Participant theory
2. The Two-way Symmetrical Model of Communication.

These theories are discussed in greater detail in the pages that follow.

##### **2.1.1 Democratic Participant Media Theory**

The democratic-participant media theory emerged because of the dissatisfaction with other models such as Libertarian theory, social responsibility theory, etc. The media today has been characterized by commercialism, and in an era where countries are predominantly democratic, there is the need for a paradigm shift in how the media is supposed to operate in these environments McQuail (2005). The democratic-participant media theory believes there is democratic and professional hegemony in the media today and the media is totally commercial. The theory argues that these ill practices should be removed for the media to be democratic and be easily accessible or participatory. The democratic participant theory by McQuail (1987) is of the tenet that individual citizens and minority groups should have right of access for a while of need. It also advances that media organization and content should not be subjected to centralized state or political bureaucratic control particularly in democracy where popular participation is crucial for good governance.

The theory advances that people can express their views freely, exchange ideas without fear and with absolute freedom, by making use of innovations in technology. The internet, according to McQuail (2005) revolutionized communication without any control from central authority.

The theory challenges commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media; it reacts against the centralism and bureaucratization of media institutions, as pointed out by McQuail (2005). It rather encourages citizens participation in community and national affairs. The underlining premise of the theory is that mass communication does not need to be “uniform, centralized, high cost, commercialized, professionalized, state controlled or privately controlled” (McQuail, 2005). This implies that mass communication can occur without the mass media as predicated by happenings in Egypt, Tunisia, and other Arabian countries in the Mediterranean regions in Africa in building up social currency for protests against authoritarian regimes to demand more freedom and accountability (Vilanilam, 2019). Vilanilam (2019) agrees with McQuail (2005) that this unconventional journalism spurred on by the advent of the internet has had profound impact on political communication and political engagements between politicians and electorates. Deconstructing this premise, it offers both parties another avenue besides mainstream mass media, the opportunity to interact political. Political campaigns have been argued to gain so much intensity as in the case of Obama (2008-2016), which has shown to have so great effect on voter behaviour (Stieglitz and Dang- Xuan 2012). The Web 2.0 and its accompanying inventions like social networking sites, have changed and created more value in politics engagements, campaigns, and democratic participation on the part of electorates (Vilanilam, 2019).

In Dzisah’s evaluation of the 2016 elections in Ghana, he argued that the use of social networking sites in political campaigns, which has assumed a global dimension, caught up with Ghana because it does not exist in isolation (Dzisah, 2018). Lately, the importance of social networking sites has been predominantly emphasised in politics since the use of social networking sites (Facebook) and microblogging services (Twitter) are thought to have the propensity to positively induce political participation (Stieglitz and Dang- Xuan 2012). Studies which have sought to analyse the importance of social networking sites in elections such as Dzisah (2018) articulate that the perceived needs of people seem not to be well satisfied by the traditional media in Ghana. Therefore, the widespread acceptance of social networking sites in sourcing and disseminating information which is believed to be an important facilitator to democratic participation and is what influenced the choice of this theory.

### **2.1.2 The Two-way Symmetric Model by Grunig and Hunt**

Grunig and Hunt (1984) propounded a political communication model which includes press-agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric models of communication. The models of Grunig and Hunt were developed at a time where social networking sites was not in use. However, their model has proven useful in contemporary studies with other scholars (for example, Grunig 2009; Grunig 2001; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2006; Crozier

2006; Blumler 2001; Blumler & Gurevitch 2001). These studies have been focused on the symmetrical communication of social networking sites in terms of interactivity and feedback. Hence, the study seeks to adopt one of the models, known as the two-way symmetrical communication, since it epitomizes the thrust of this study.

Through the advent and proliferation of social networking sites, the focus of political communication has now shifted, and much prominence is being placed symbiotic interactions and mutually beneficial relationships between the political actors and the electorates in democratic processes and practices (Boateng, 2019). Grunig et al (2006) posit that, symmetric communication is one that balances the interests of the organization with those of the public in the frantic efforts of building long term relationships with them. Lane (2004) argues that political institutions have adopted what he calls a “bi-directional flow” between their institution and the citizenry which does not only allow them to disseminate information, but also gives room for receiving feedback to messages and information communicated to the publics. Lane (2007) advances that, the thrust of symmetrical communication lies in its quest for building communication strategies and processes purposefully for engagement and feedback, central to the creation of mutually beneficial relationships.

This model characterizes political communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which has been characterized by professionalism of political advocacy, intense media competition, different forms of populism and anti-elitist sentiments (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001). The two-way symmetrical perspective is also pivotal in this study due to the spread of the internet, which has introduced new forms of communication and social networking sites, which could affect information reception as well as exchange (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001).

Boateng (2019) argues that two-way symmetrical communication is practically done by politicians who monitor online websites and profile pages on social networking sites platforms

such as Facebook and Twitter for uncontrolled and unrestricted engagements and interactions with the public.

Lane (2007) argues that this theory is a relation-building based perspective of communication which stresses on the need for direct engagements between political parties and their stakeholders. These direct interactions and engagements provide the political actors and parties with the opportunity to project their organizational qualities, behaviours, and attitudes in addressing issues. Lane (2007) explains that the involvement and engagement of stakeholders in the setting of public agenda yields the potential of averting negative news and crisis situations for the political parties. social networking sites are interactive platforms that have provided allowance for user-generated content by audiences and the public also enhances the two-way symmetrical communication perspective.

This study believes that a two-way symmetric communication is the normative framework as well as the best way of assessing stakeholder engagements and relationship building by political parties who use social networking sites as a medium for political campaigns. This is predicated on findings of Boateng (2019) in his assessment of how the two main political parties in Ghana, notably the NPP and the NDC used Facebook in their engagements with the stakeholders. The study, based on the discussions, proposes that, social networking sites are critical tools use by political parties to interact and engage with their stakeholders and used as a medium of marketing their candidates, policies, programmes and views on national issues, thereby giving their campaigns social and political currency.

### **2.1.2. Basic Assumption**

Broadly speaking, this study examines the effectiveness of social networking sites as a political campaign tool in elections by zooming its lens on how political parties and actors used social networking sites, and how the strategies implemented affected how the electorate's choice of candidate in the 2020 presidential elections. The study assumes that political candidates and parties were motivated by some factors in adopting social networking sites as part of their political campaign strategies. Furthermore, the study perceives that some crucial strategies were adopted as part of social networking sites usage in political campaigning during the 2020 general elections in Ghana. The study intends to identify and assess these strategies in light of their effectiveness. Moreover, the researcher assumes that the strategies adopted by the two political parties i.e. NPP and NDC had some significant influence on the voter behaviour of electorates. The researcher argues that in holistically understanding the broad roles of social

networking sites on political campaigns, it is also relevant to investigate how this strategy was influential in voter decision processes.

## **2.2. Review of Related and Relevant Empirical Literature**

### **2.2.1 Nature of Social Networking Sites Used in Political Campaigns**

There have been contestations with respect to the efficacy of social networking sites for political participation and as such, some scholars have made strides in studies along that tangent. Abdillah (2014) studied the use of social networking sites in political campaigns in Indonesia. The author explored the advantages and social networking sites implementation of political parties in Indonesian legislative elections in 2014. The findings cultivated from the analyses of social networking sites platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, indicate that social networking sites is an effective tool for current and future political campaigns. The study also concluded that social networking sites is an effective tool that maximizes the ability of politicians to reach voters and supporters instantly

Freelon and Karpf (2015) studied the prominent role that social networking sites played in the 2008 United States presidential elections, and the 2012 elections respectively. The findings from the content analyses of social networking sites platforms used showed the 2008 election stay in history for the unparalleled use of social networking sites platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The use of social networking sites within the presidential campaign of the United States in 2008 was also sustained and even improved in the 2012 presidential campaign. Barack Obama and Romney spent a substantial amount of money on social networking sites in particular Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest with the sole aim of reaching the young generation. But the findings of this study, though very instrumental in understanding the dynamics between social networking sites and voter behaviour, is not comprehensive enough to make broad generalizations over different geographies and demographics.

Stranberg (2013) for instance, found that the use of social networking sites especially Facebook and Twitter generate an excessive effect to involve in political activities. The study which involved a content analyses of the social networking sites platforms of politicians revealed that users who ordinarily would not be so much involved in politics are more likely to consciously access political content through social networking sites. Thus, the findings augment the idea that social networking sites serves as a potent tool for political participation, and strongly influences the political behaviour of electorates. This study contributes strongly to

understanding the democratic participant media theory in the sense that, traditional or mainstream media are not as influential as they were. The incidence of social networking sites and its proliferation, in furtherance by Stranberg (2013), has democratized political communication, making social networking sites a viable and potent tool for communicating political ideals, engaging with political stakeholders and sharing in political viewpoints due to its uncensored nature.

For Freelon and Karpf (2015), their analysis of the United States presidential elections in 2008 and 2012 revealed how riveting social networking sites was in the campaign successes and ultimately the participation of the electorates. Prospective voters comprehensively involved themselves in these social networking sites platforms by posting, commenting, video-sharing and even the conventional media covered the social networking sites battle between the two campaigns (Freelon & Karpf, 2015). Their study, although not using the democratic participant theory as a theoretical framework, demonstrated how alternative media like social networking sites, provided politicians with a huge political capital and helped them amass votes, participation and interaction from the electorates. This indication is one of the most important premises of the democratic participant media theory.

The parameters for this study are critical since it offers a unique way of examining the political use of social networking sites by electorates, and subsequently, its effects on them in terms of voting decisions.

The analysis by Lee et al. (2012), just like the above studies, are indicative of a direct correlation between social networking sites use and political participation in the form of following politicians, joining groups based on political characteristics, as a means of having access to political news and information, influencing votes in a particular direction, among others.

### **2.2.2 Social Networking Sites and Political Campaign Strategies**

It is worth noting that political parties in Ghana are changing with the times and have embraced social networking sites as an alternative channel to reach the voters, especially the youth. Mensah (2017) argues that the 2012 and 2016 elections generated a great deal of discussions about the structures, organisation and the nature of participation that underpinned the new dawn of a political system in Ghana, noting the newness of the political campaigning that was introduced by the political parties. News Ghana (2016) reported that social networking sites

were pivotal tool in the 2012 presidential elections of Ghana evidenced by the engagement of supporters the NDC and NPP in their social networking sites campaigns on Twitter and Facebook. Dzisah (2018) opines that *“in the run-up to the 2016 elections in Ghana, a video post on the official Facebook page of the presidential candidate for the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which was about the presidential candidate spending time with one of his Facebook friends, within the first four days of the post was viewed 155,000 times and shared 1127 times, which suggest that Ghanaian politicians as well as voters have embraced the idea of social networking sites as a complementary and effective communication tool as well as a source of political information”*

Dzisah (2018) further observed that the increasing use of social networking sites could be observed through the posts and tweets by Nana Akufo- Addo, the NPP presidential candidate, as well. The value of social networking sites in democratic election campaigns, as pointed out by Essoungou (2010) lies in the extent to which they network with old media to provide a multimedia platform that allows for greater democratic participation, inclusion, and expression. Essoungou (2010) further argues that when African youth go online, mostly with their mobile communication devices, they spend much of their time on social networking sites platforms.

Generally, a keen observation by Dzisah (2018) shows that political campaigning activities increases in intensity often three to four months ahead of the general elections in Ghana, an opportune moment for political parties publicise their manifestoes, campaign launch and campaign rally itinerary. This kickstarts their campaign journey into the general elections. However, the complexities of modern-day campaigning, notes Dzisah (2018), transcends the activities beyond normative manifesto launches and political rallies. Marketing and communications for internal party executive elections, for example, and the presidential and parliamentary elections have taken on a national dimension with the use of social networking sites platforms in addition to the traditional media frenzy that engulfs the country during this period. This is also buttressed by Boateng (2019) in his assessment of the use of social networking sites for internal elections by the two dominant parties. The findings are suggestive of how central Facebook, one of the most used social networking sites platforms, was used in these intra-party elections, and how this contributed to the debate surrounding the relevance of social networking sites to political campaigns.

Gyampo (2017) in assessing the appropriation of social networking sites and traditional media in Ghana discussed a number of ways in which political parties in Ghana use and deploy social

networking sites to advance their political fortunes in their attempt to amass votes and gain political power. The findings of his study show that, the two main political parties, namely the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) used social networking sites in several ways in their respective pursuit of electoral power. They used social networking sites in communicating their organizational policies as well as their positions on key issues. social networking sites was also used by the parties to discuss and solicit the opinion of the public on topical issues of national significance, mobilizing support, party membership as well as a medium to raise funds. The findings of the study of Gyampo (2017) are reiterated by Macnamara (2018) who opined that, social networking sites can be used by political parties in a manner that transforms direct engagements and conversations with stakeholders and citizens, based on the realization of the centrality of the citizen and how aware and informed they have become about their choices and power to reject, repel and rebel against governance systems that are non-transparent.

The findings of Gyampo (2017) showed that, Facebook and WhatsApp were the two main forms of social networking sites that were commonly used in Ghana during the 2016 elections. The virtual platforms were used by both presidential and parliamentary candidates to execute their political campaigns, promote engagements, and ensure meaningful participation (Gyampo, 2017). social networking sites was used by the political actors to state their positions on issues of national interest. Augmenting these findings are conclusions drawn by Penplusbytes (2017), where the two main contenders for the 2016 elections namely Nana Akuffo Addo of the NPP and John Dramani Mahama of the NDC used Facebook and Twitter especially for their campaign activities.

Hadji (2016) observes that during the elections in 2016, social networking sites were not only used by political parties and political aspirants at presidential and parliamentary levels, but it was also used by civil society organizations such as the Coalition of Domestic Observers (CODEO) mainly to effectively to educate the people about the need for political participation and other issues that pertained to the electoral processes. CODEO, as discussed by Hadji (2016), launched an initiative where a blog was created for the 2016 elections in Ghana called Ghana Decides, which was primarily meant to encourage citizenry participation in electoral processes.

The above discussions underscore the fact that, the Ghanaian democratic terrain is characterized by political engagements and activities on social networking sites platforms. It

also shows how these new forms of political communication continues to change the political lives and communication systems of institutions, parties, and the citizens. This further buttress the need for political actors to put a lot thought into the appropriation of social networking sites as cost-effective measures for the political engagement and communication initiatives (Boateng, 2019). Four years on, this study will interrogate the extent to which these social networking sites networks have been appropriated by the two main parties and the dividends that this has yielded for their performance in the 2020 general elections.

### **2.2.2.1 Social Networking Sites as a Relationship Management Tool between Political Actors and Citizens**

Hellweg (2011) is of the belief that, online activities on social networking sites provides opportunities for political parties and public figures to create and sustain relationships with political stakeholders in the attainment of result-oriented campaigns in political communication. This perspective is entrenched in a study by Livingstone and Brake (2014) who posit that social networking sites platform enhance communication as well as long-term relationships. The two-way symmetrical communication that characterizes the use of social networking sites has advantages in the forms of interactivity, adaptation and feedback which enables political parties, actors and public figures to transform their relationships with other political stakeholders by meeting their demands, which are also enhanced with the use of social networking sites. Boyd and Ellison (2008) assert that, social networking sites provide opportunities or friendships, as well as allowing the users to be visible and articulate themselves expressively through their engagements with political figure heads. Kim et al (2011) explain that the features of social networking sites such as the ability to form online connections, update and use personal profiles, contribute to online groups and promote interactions with other users online, while being able to express their opinions views and being able to find information.

Kietzmann et al (2011) portends that, the ability of social networking sites to create relationships is dependent on the functions of social networking sites as cooperative technologies that provide opportunities for the creation, maintenance and nurturing of new friendships and communities. Thus, social networking sites create online communities through the internet, which helps to foster public discussions in both humane and social ways resulting in the creation of webs of personal relationships within the internet. However, Fuchs and Trottier (2015) caution that, the relationships that are created and maintained on these social

networking sites does not represent real life communities and only possess some superficial features. This means that, the relationships created are solely based on the communication level since the addition of friends on these sites results in a situation where they will never meet in real time. (Fuchs and Trottier, 2015).

Kaplan (2016) advances that, social networking sites are used by people to be expressive of their opinions, while others vent their anger and frustrations or show acceptance of the actions of governments, political parties and other political groupings. Bob-Milliar (2014) observes that they also serve the additional purpose of analysing political violence and threats to democracy, which in the case of Ghana, the issue of political vigilantism comes to mind. Fuchs and Trottier (2015) advise that, in a bid to maximize the propensity of the social networking sites to build relationships, users, in this case the political actors and public figures reinforce the use of loose and virtual connections in a concurrent manner to draw out and narrow in on the potential of such relationships. The World Development Report (2016) notes that, there is the use of social networking sites used by political actors as means of ensuring participation and interaction re more effective when the users of these platforms are responsive. Boateng (2019) concludes that, social networking sites networking reinforces mutually beneficial relationships between the political parties, political candidates, and the citizens. It also enables governments and politicians to keep a surveillance over the activities of its stakeholders as well as influence these activities to a large extent. Online engagements between organizations like political parties and citizens when established and sustained results in a natural development of relationships and communities through these social networking sites platforms (Fuchs and Trottier, 2015)

### **2.2.3 Influence of social networking sites on Political Campaigning**

Due to the transformational impact that social networking sites has had on political communication and political activities as evidenced by the number of political actors as well as citizenry, there has been attention by a vast body of scholars who studied and published their findings on many forms of social networking sites and their effect on political communication. Notable among these, are the works of Kearney (2017; 2013) and Borah (2016) who focused on Facebook, Moyo (2015) who focused on Twitter and Miller (2011) who focused on YouTube, alongside a plethora of others. What these studies have in common is that all speak to the reality that the increasing popularity and ubiquity of these social networking sites channels have had a correlational effect on the patterns of engagement and the nature of

relationships between the various political stakeholders. In sum, all studies are testament to the fact that the incidence of these technologies and social networking sites is giving political actors, an augmenting medium with which they can engage and interact with their followers in an efficient and effective manner, which helps in the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between the various stakeholders. The deficiency in the literature and as supported by the perspective of Goncalves (2014) is with regards to the actual role that social networking sites has played in the enhancement of relationships in the management of political communications. However there have been he attempts by some studies to analyse attempts to demystify this mystery of the role of social networking sites in political communication in general and political campaigns. McQueen &Green (2010) argue that the United States Presidential election offers a reference point in acknowledging the role of social networking sites , since it was concluded that Barack Obama’s use of 15 social networking sites sites to compliment other offline campaign strategies.

The use and appropriation of social networking sites has been examined in different geographic and political contexts by a number of scholars such as Bosch (2016), Kamau (2016), Mare (2016) and Nnanyelugo & Nwafor (2013). The above studies, although from different perspectives have attempted to illustrate the impact of social networking sites on political activities, democracy, and electoral processes such as elections, specifically in the areas of its influence on perceptions and voting patterns of electorates. The results also show that the social networking sites platforms serve interactive purposes which promote direct engagements and enabling communication messages to be disseminated and exchanged easily with recipients in physically inaccessible and remote geographic locations.

In his assessment of the role of social networking sites in politics, Beciu (2011) brought to the fore, some functions which are performed by social networking sites. The findings of this study show that social networking sites makes it possible for political actors such as political parties and aspirants to broadcast messages, giving them the avenue to express their views and opinions without intermediation from traditional media, opponents, and other constraining media (Beciu 2011). The above assessment shows that social networking sites use is a strategy that is used to circumvent the challenges associated with the use of traditional media in their direct engagement and communication with the citizens for a beneficial relationship. Beciu (2011) also concluded that, social networking sites creates avenues that allow for the posting and the replication of news, views, opinions and broadcasts on social networking sites that were first made on traditional media both locally and internationally. The potential helps the

political actors as well as the stakeholders and to use social networking sites as channels for enhancing the prominence and visibility of their major information and messages which can be directed and delivered to targeted recipients. Becui (2011) further argues that news items and political information which were once the preserves of the traditional media like radio, tv and print, are now accessed on social networking sites increasing the range and reach of news and political information. This has in turn provided the traditional media with a tool, as evidenced in the simulation of social networking sites platforms as part of the mediums, for the dissemination of news and political information. Becui (2011) argues that it is now commonplace to see traditional media who have social networking sites extensions in a bid to augment their mandate of spreading information and increase their influence by capitalizing on these social networking sites. In Ghana, most of the traditional media be it radio, television or print have online platforms such as blogs, websites, profile pages on Facebook, twitter, and Instagram where they repeat or publish political information that they publish on their traditional platforms (Boateng, 2019). This has resulted in a situation where information has become more accessible to as many people as possible irrespective of limitations such as geography, distance, and time which hitherto, impinged the ability of traditional media to play their function as interlocutors and purveyors of information (Becui, 2011).

Becui (2011) notes that, the proliferation of social networking sites has enabled political parties, politicians as well as stakeholders such as the users of social networking sites and their followers to launch and advance political agenda. Shirky (2008) observes that, since 2004, social networking sites has become one of the tools in the armoury of political parties and candidates evidenced in the use of notable social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, for the purposes of political activism and the mobilization of their supporters. This makes social networking sites a nexus of public and political influence which has the potential of transforming political strategies and processes such as campaigns into successes (Shirky, 2008). These new forms of mass communication have been used by political actors to market their policies and programmes hence enhancing their reputation and recognition. Hellweg (2011) argues that social networking sites, within the context of the above arguments, are marketing platforms which enhance the communication strategies of the political actors with the citizenry, especially those that have interests in the political organization and their activities. Becui (2011) supports this by explaining that the promotion of the ideologies, doctrines, policies and views of political parties and candidates on social networking sites are

more advantageous than political communication advanced on traditional media, adding those social networking sites platforms due to their interactive, narrative and conversational qualities provides a lubrication for what he termed “political public relations”.

Becui (2011) concludes that, social networking sites are used by politicians as electioneering tools in their campaign strategies to win power. In doing so, they leverage on the different types of resources online. Becui (2011) observes that, the spread of the internet and social networking sites enables political parties to mobilize their electorates online to collectively advance political agenda, opine their views and actively participate in discussions about central issues of national and public interest and concern. This translates into the use of social networking sites by politicians for grassroots campaigns through regular interactions as well as interpersonal encounters with the electorates made possible via social networking sites (Becui, 2011). Hellweg (2011) confirms the correctness of the above argument, seconding that, unlike the passive engagement between the electorates and the traditional media, social networking sites on the other hand enables the electorates to develop more knowledge, insight, have more conversations and participate in activism on issues in an active and participatory manner. Becui (2011) hints that, political stakeholders can interact in an efficient and effective manner with the political parties without institutional and bureaucratic drawbacks due to social networking sites.

Kiranda (2016) argues that the utility of social networking sites in politics is pivotal on three factors. These are access to such social networking sites platforms by the citizenry, utilization of those platforms by political parties, politicians and the electorate for useful conversations and the deliberative culture of democracy in the way and manner politics is pursued in that country or society (Kiranda, 2016). social networking sites has relationship and connecting power that provides visibility for the discussion of topical issues which are relegated to the background by traditional media to serve as a public agenda. Kiranda (2016) states that, social networking sites empowers political actors to influence and mobilize voters to act in certain ways in reaction to issues.

Boateng (2019) observes that, there are still objections that continue to linger with respect to how social networking sites has and continues to transform political communication, democracy, and general electoral processes in non-western countries, especially Africa. Kamp (2016) notes that, governments have refined their strategies of engaging their citizenry based on the acceptance of the developments in these technologies, with specific emphasis on social

networking sites. Kamp (2016) further notes that, the use of social networking sites platforms by governments and political actors has the tendency to influence the perceptions, views and actions of the citizenry who were once influenced by information from traditional media. Effing et al. (2011), in light of this advance that, the use of social networking sites will continue to be on the ascendancy and its proliferation is due to the utility seen in the emergence of new online platforms, contents and websites, which are being adopted and appropriated by political parties. Scholars such as Kamp (2016) hold the thought that, the proliferation of social networking sites globally seems to pose a challenge to undemocratic societies especially in instances where political leaders in Africa have made attempts to control its usage, particularly in elections. Kamp (2016) also notes that, the technological divide that has resulted in lack of internet access in the rural areas has contributed to impeding the spread of social networking sites to a much wider and broader public.

Kamau (2014) states that, the future of political communication in Sub Saharan Africa hinges on the appropriation of social networking sites. Volders (2013) offers that, the increased ubiquity of social networking sites in democratic systems throughout the world has empowered citizenry with direct access to varied information and news sources. In essence, the social networking sites technologies affords political stakeholders the opportunity and independence to be selective in the news and information they receive while simultaneously contributing to these contents. Volders (2013) exemplifies this assertion by explaining that, people that use twitter can use the features of the medium to keep track of issues under discussion, as well as news and updates on issues while Facebook provides users the opportunity to stay in touch with other individuals while establishing relationships and rapports. It is against this backdrop that this study takes the stand that, social networking sites promotes symbiotic relationships between political actors and the citizenry.

Although social networking sites has become the most popular, convenient and fastest avenues for the spreading of messages and information among citizens that are politically active and interested, there are consequences of this liberalization, where the unrestricted and uncontrolled freedom regarding social networking sites communication has far-reaching effects for political communication in particular and the political system in general (Boateng, 2019). Kaslens (2016) highlights three main repercussions such as offensive online behaviours, negative media attention, and limited resources associated with the appropriation of social networking sites in politics.

Kaslen (2016) explains that, offensive online behaviour on the social networking sites platforms of political parties and politicians can expose them to various threats, and burdens them with additional responsibilities of ensuring that these comments are moderated. This results in a situation where political parties have had to, as a means of promoting sanity on their social spheres, take on drastic measures such as blocking certain persons or deleting the comments that are considered unfavourable to the election prospects of the political parties as well as the candidates (Kaslen, 2016). Kaslen (2016) highlights another consequence in the form of negative media attention where bad and unpleasant comments on social networking sites have the potential to make the news on these media. This holds water currently where social networking sites has been noted to influence the news making agenda and functions of the traditional media. Kaslen (2016) notes that, as a counter strategy, political parties and politicians have seen and embraced the utility in controlling the channels due to the open access that citizens have to them. The third and the last repercussion advanced by Kaslen (2016) is the situation where there is lack of trained and dedicated employees under the employ of these political parties who are mandated to handle social networking sites activities. This deficiency, in the intimations of Kaslen (2016), generates unprofessional and unethical challenges in the use and appropriation of the social networking sites platforms.

In addition to the above discussed challenges espoused by Kaslen (2016) regarding the appropriation of social networking sites by political parties and actors, Kamp et al (2016) also lament that social networking sites can be used to spread rumours and promote content that they refer to as abusive and sectarian. Kamp et al (2016) explain that all forms of ills associated with the internet and the use of social networking sites such as cybercrimes, political and ethnic hatred, political defamation, intrusion of privacy, among others are promoted and come to play in the appropriation of these networking sites by politicians to gain social and political capital. This is possible due to the freedom of speech, and the user's right to internet access cannot be controlled on social networking sites. Kamp et al (2016) observes that, fake news has become one of the banes of social networking sites given the freedoms of speech, as well as the untrammelled access and use of these new platforms in the digital space.

## **2.3 Conceptual Framework**

### **2.3.1 Social Networking Sites**

With the rise of digital and mobile technologies as well as the internet, interactivity amongst media users became easier than ever. The essence of interactivity and feedback (a critical feature that other media forms do not have) is what has triggered the relevance of social networking sites in our world today. Social Networking Sites often refers to recent forms of internet enabled media that involve interactive participation (Manning, 2014).

Social Networking Sites can also be seen as those forms of electronic communication through which media consumers create and manage virtual communities with the shared interests of sharing information, ideas and other content (Edosomwan et al., 2011). According to Edosomwan et al. (2011) social networking sites are derivatives of physical social network and the main aim of social networking sites is to mirror physical social networks but with the core and active presence as well as relevance of internet mediated devices. Often the term Social Networking Sites (SNSS) are commonly referred to as the umbrella term for social networking sites and computer-mediated communication (Boye, 2015; Brandtzaeg, 2012).

Social Networking Sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct profiles, display user connections and search and traverse within that list of connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Contrary to other media platforms and indeed other computer technologies developed for communication, SNS have provided virtual landscapes that mirror elements of pre-existing physical communities. They have the capacity to link people together and create feelings of belonging that are a replica of physical social communities (Boye, 2015).

According to Shirky (2010) SNS have caught on well with society becoming arguably the most preferred means of information sharing and community building due to their low costs of collaborating, sharing and producing information. At the advent of digital technologies and the internet that facilitated the proliferation of SNSs, social media emerged as specialized social networking systems that facilitated quick online interaction (Bercovici, 2010). Social media sites include popular platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

### **2.3.2 Political Participation in Ghana.**

Alidu (2014) argues that one pivotal element of democracy is political participation since it enables citizens to realize and make use of their political rights in a bid to make their voices heard. Political participation is a broad concept that encapsulates different scores of activities.

Yang and Dehart (2016) argue that political participation involves actions by the citizens of a particular population which is geared towards influencing the decisions of the government including voting during elections, communication with the political parties as well as their representatives. Resnick and Thurlow (2015) submit that, political participation also extends to other areas such as meetings and deliberations with community members and participating in cooperative actions like strikes, protests, and many others. Boateng (2019) is of the view that, the fourth republic which ushered in Ghana's democratic dispensation has changed the political processes, giving the chance for the media, citizens, and civil societies to make their voices heard, all in the process of governance. Abdallah (2013) seconds the above motion, by advancing that, the democratic dispensation in Ghana has accommodated and encouraged many political parties, who are competing against each other, in national elections. Boateng (2019) explains that, this has implications on the electoral system in Ghana since well qualified Ghanaians have the opportunity to not only contest for elections, but to vote at all political levels in the nation's political ecosystem.

Gyimah-Boadi and Yakah (2012) portend that, the participatory nature of Ghana's thriving democracy has been also enabled by contributions and roles by international institutions such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others. Although the above argument holds water, one cannot overlook the roles that local institutions have also played in the establishment and sustenance of the participatory nature of Ghana's democracy. Gyimah-Boadi and Yakah (2012) states that, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Center for Democratic Development (CDD), and the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) have worked in proximity with the international institutions to entrench and strengthen the democratic processes by broadening the parameters for inclusion and participation by political actors and stakeholders in Ghana.

Boateng (2019) adds that, one of the major milestones chalked in the processes of strengthening Ghana's democratic structures is the independence of the media under the fourth estate which enables them to exercise their democratic functions as watchdogs and drivers of democratic development. The media has become proliferated in Ghana and is seen as significant in the fourth republic since it has contributed to the transformation and legitimization of the citizens and activism as espoused by the 1992 constitution. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2001) submits that, the repeal of the Sedition and the Criminal Libel laws which were adopted by the military regime to intimidate and control the media and inculcate a culture of silence in the citizenry, has

expanded the political processes by removing boundaries and allowing for political engagements, activism and participation of citizens and civil society. Consequently, the tolerance and receptiveness of successive governments to democratic ideals has resulted in a phase where citizens are capitalizing on their freedoms to have political engagements and participate in discussions and decision-making processes. Coupled with the freedoms enjoyed by the media under this democratic dispensation, Gyampo (2017) argues that citizens are taking advantage of alternate media and uncontrolled avenues made prominent due to the prevalence of the internet to engage more with political parties and be expressive of their views in the political communication process and taking part in decision-making processes as a way of demanding accountability and responsiveness from governments.

### **2.3.3 Political Campaigning**

The concept of Political campaigning does not lend itself to easy definitions. Often placing an explanation on the concept means drawing from different perspectives that bother on institutional conditions as well as a generic intensity in the political atmosphere of an identified social group (Brady, Johnston, & Sides, 2006). According to Brady et al. (2006) often some institutional conditions define the period of political campaign of a group. For instance, when the date of an election is made, the candidates involved are known, certain actions that are normally unregulated become regulated by a recognized electioneering body, when candidates are available to spend a lot of time with electorates, then in a non-technical sense we know we are in an era of political campaigns (p. 2). The authors explain that political campaigns are a period right before electorates make a real political choice. During these periods, electorates feel a heightened attention to political issues which often gets higher as dates of elections draw closer. Furthermore, the media maintains a high level of focus on political issues. This is to say that the media becomes politically charged, paying more attention to political campaign messages and issues of elections.

Hansen (2011) argues in line with Brady et al (2006) that there is a constant wave of political advertisements in the media. This does not only heighten the political atmosphere within the media but also amongst the entire citizenry as well. This is often because voters rely heavily on information from the media to construct their own understanding of the political atmosphere and to make decisions on who to vote for (Sciarini, Kriesi, 2003).

While political campaigning in recent times have become an embodiment of complex systems in recent times, political campaigns in historic times concerned a basic case of sporadic preparation and communication channelled through party press and mass rallies. The arrival of broadcast television however revolutionized political campaigns. Political campaigns since have become more strategic, media centred, coordinated and professionalized (Farrell & Webb, 1998). At the advent of social networking sites and internet enabled technologies, political campaigns have seen an even radical revolution with electorates now having the power of entrenched political engagements and participation (Ahmad, Ittefaq, & Alvi, 2019)

#### **2.3.4 COVID-19 and the Use of Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigns**

Commonwealth (2020) in their assessment of how elections were managed as a result of the covid-19 pandemic stated that, the pandemic brought challenges to how pre-election, election and post elections activities and processes were traditionally handled. In their assessment, some of the key challenges identified were issues that related to voter registration, tabulation of votes, transmission of vote tabulation processes, among others. Ijon (2020) argues that the pandemic has had unprecedented disruptions on the elections across the globe, evident in the delay and sometimes postponement of elections. Ijon (2020) notes that, more than 130 elections worldwide have been affected due to the novel pandemic.

Ijon (2020) notes that the government of Ghana, just like others around the world responded swiftly to the outbreak through the introduction of measures to contain the spread such as the introduction of the Imposition restriction bill, 2020 and the introduction of a two-week lockdown in most of the affected areas in Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Kasoa. Despite these measures and responses from the government, the pandemic had a great impact on the 2020 elections which marked Ghana's 8<sup>th</sup> elections since being ushered into the fourth republic on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1993 (Ijon, 2020). Landman and Splendore (2020) advance that, there are three stages in the election cycle that was affected by the pandemic namely the pre-election period which encompasses the training, information, voter registration. The second stage in the electoral cycle includes the nomination of candidates, political campaigns, voting and results; with the final stage encompassing the review, reform as well as strategies (Landman and Splendore, 2020).

Endersby and Petroick (2001) notes that, voter mobilization is one of the most important activities in every democratic election since it goes a long way in determining the ability of a candidate or political party to win the elections. Thus, mobilization is dubbed the most

important element in modern-day political campaigns because they are opportune moments for political parties as well as candidates to sell their campaign messages to their voters while persuading voters of the suitability for the position in relation to their opposition (Endersby and Petroick, 19). Ijon (2020) notes that, the most traditional methods of campaigning include rallies, door-to-door campaigns, and town-hall meetings, all of which are significant parts of a vibrant and inclusive democracy, giving citizens the opportunity to participate in the electoral process and make their grievances known. Ijon (2020) notes that, although these traditional methods of campaigning were highly affected because of the pandemic, the internet and social networking sites platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter offers candidates cost-effective avenues to engage with voters. This is against the backdrop that, there has been an exponential increase in the use of social networking sites for political campaigns in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2020) argue that the covid-19 social distancing protocols have been the norm across affected countries in the world, resulting in a movement of civic life spanning from political campaigning to voter registration to virtual environments. It is argued that the renewed emphasis and use of online civic spaces has the potential of increasing the involvement of young people in political engagement through political campaigns actuated on these platforms. The Center (2020) also argue that the shift to online spaces is a better way of reaching and targeting young voters, especially those of which are first time voters who might not be influenced by actual traditional campaigns. The Centre observe that, during the pandemic, the youth were noted to increasingly turn to social networking sites platforms to learn, engage and share information about Covid-19, politics and social movements like Black Lives Matter. The analysis of the Tisch College Youth Survey (2020) by the centre showed that, 70% of young people had gotten information about the 2020 American election on social networking sites , 36% of them reported to have posted political content on social networking sites , 60% indicated that that creation of social networking sites content helped them feel more informed, represented and heard, with 37% feeling unqualified to voice out their personal opinions online, indicating the existence of a spiral of silence even amidst the plethora of advantages that social networking sites brings to political participation, engagement and mobilization (Tisch College Youth Survey, 2020). The reasons for this as explained by the survey include misogyny, high rates of cyber bullying experienced by women and debates about the qualification of women to voice political opinions online.

The Tisch Survey by Ruby et al. (2020) indicated that, political engagement among the youth on social networking sites during the campaign season of the pandemic-stricken elections was on the rise with the American election, the pandemic and the Black Lives Movement being the most topical conversations. 51% of the sampled respondents indicated that they got information about the elections from Instagram, 48% from Twitter and 47% from Facebook, consolidating the existing belief among scholars that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram remain very important social networking sites in social networking sites political campaigns. The highlight of the survey was when it was concluded that, political activities on the platforms increased by 25%, as compared to other election years.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2020) assert that, often, the discussion around the use of social networking sites by young people is mostly negative. But the findings of the Tisch Survey showed that social networking sites was an important source of information about the elections, a space for engagement and expression of one's voices, political activism, and expression of their political identities (Ruby et al, 2020). Stromer-Galley (2020) in her assessment of how American political campaigns turned to the internet amid the pandemic argued that it was revolutionary since candidates were robbed of their typical ways of connecting with their supporters and amassing votes. The campaigns of front runners Joe Biden and Donald Trump were brought to a near halt since public rallies were not helping due to social distancing guidelines promulgated resulting in an evolution of their campaign strategies to incorporate and prioritize digital media and the internet's diversified array of social networking sites platforms, a medium that political operatives have been trying to perfect for many years (Stromer-Galley, 2020). Campaigns on digital media were bound to be heavily dependent on social networking sites, campaign-specific mobile applications and paid advertising on social networking sites. To cash in on the prospects that the digital world offered, campaigns prioritized the expansion of their data bases by understanding the likes of supporters, their habits, political behaviours, and their psychological dispositions which helps in the identification of supporters in online campaigns (Stromer-Galley, 2020). The parties used Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat alongside YouTube, emails, and websites in nicely woven integrated communication system, taking advantage of the interactivity of these networks to convert supporters.

Not only were social networking sites used, but mobile-based applications were created and launched by the campaign teams of both contenders where only supporters and curious opponents downloaded and used them (Stromer-Galley, 2020). The applications served the

purpose of giving the supporters information of the party's activities, collecting privileged information such as their photos, social networking sites accounts, location, among others from the supporter. Stromer-Galley (2020) argues that this tactic was used to obtain data that gave the campaigns a more extensive picture of their ardent supporters, enabling them to access those with similar characteristics, and initiating them into the campaign.

Harris (2020) argued that the social-distancing as well as the stay-at-home orders meant to curtail the rate of Covid-19 infections presented an opportunity for the two major parties in America who already had the digital infrastructure in place, to still deliver on their campaign mandates. Harris (2020) argues that the Democratic National Committee for instance, modernized its data operation and digital targeting technology since they already had the tools to reach voters, allowing them to meet the demands of the new normal. Fundraising events were done on social networking sites such as Zoom and Facebook Live, where any one can watch. Harris (2020) states that the social networking sites were a valuable tool in harnessing grassroots support. Aside fundraisers moving online, Harris (2020) indicates that, political advertising has also moved online, stemming from the need to engage donors and voters online through adopted digital tools due to the temporary restrictions in the wake of the pandemic.

Ijon (2020) in the exploration of the impact that covid-19 had on the 2020 elections in Ghana argued that the elections were negatively affected as evidenced in the low voter turnout (in relation to the expected turnout of about 20 million Ghanaians) due to the fear of contracting the virus while presenting political parties and election bodies such as the electoral commission with the opportunity to be innovative in their activities. Ijon (2020) argues that the pandemic had positive impacts on the innovativeness of political parties as they increased their use of social networking sites in mobilizing voters by organizing campaigns and other political activities through the internet. But the paper, failed to provide an empirical assessment of how social networking sites was used in the election campaigns and the various roles it played. At best, Ijon (2020) recommended that social networking sites and digital technologies be adopted by politicians to aid in their campaign activities, considering how central campaigns are to a candidate's prospects, a citizen's choice, and a nation's democratic processes. This study seeks to understand the motivations for the use of social networking sites for campaign activities by the two main political parties, the strategies used and role these strategies played in the choice of candidates by the electorates in the build-up to the 2020 elections.

## **2.4. Operational Definition of Terms**

### **2.4.1 Social Networking Sites**

Social Networking Sites refer to internet enabled platforms that allow for online interactivity between political candidates and electorates. These include social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube.

### **2.4.2 Political Campaigns**

Political campaigns refer to various platforms and avenues political parties and candidates engage in order to communicate some political ideas (often about reasons why electorates should vote for them). Political campaigns within the context of this study refers to such political engagements that occurred on social networking sites.

### **2.4.3 Covid- 19 Pandemic**

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus

### **2.4.4 2020 General Elections**

2020 General Elections is the Presidential and Parliamentary elections organised in Ghana every four (4) years to elect leaders for the country and constituencies respectively.

### **2.4.5 Ghana**

Ghana, officially the Republic of Ghana, is a country in West Africa. It spans the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean to the south, sharing borders with the Ivory Coast in the west, Burkina Faso in the north, and Togo in the east.

### **2.4.6 Strategies**

Strategies are plans of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim

### **2.4.7 Motivation**

Motivation is the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors

### **2.4.8 Assessment**

Assessment is the systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of people.

## **2.5. Relevance of the Study**

The core objective of this study is to assess the use of relevance of social networking sites in political campaigns which has become increasingly significant in light of recent events in line with the COVID-19 pandemic. The study therefore seeks to assess how political parties in Ghana employed social networking sites as strategies to advancing political campaigns while also studying how electorates adopted social networking sites as a means of receiving political information during the 2020 general elections in Ghana.

The relevance of this study is multiple folds as the study will impact knowledge, policy and practical strategy development for political campaigning in Ghana. The study is relevant as it seeks to provide a Ghanaian perspective on the topic under discussion. This study will improve current conversation on political marketing and the use of social networking sites in politics. It will also add to Ghana's sparse literature on political marketing. It will serve as a starting point for future research on elections in a pandemic era, presenting insights from the standpoint of growing use of social networking sites by political actors, political parties, and voters.

Additionally, the relevance of this study will be expressed in its contribution to practical strategy development for some political parties in Ghana, especially, regarding how to strategically adopt social networking sites for political campaigns. The study will therefore be beneficial to all political stakeholders, particularly the two major political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), in identifying the most effective and efficient ways of using social networking sites for political purposes. It will also be beneficial to users of social networking sites who seek political information on those sites.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the discussion of relevant literature in the analysis of the use of social networking sites as a political communication medium and as a strategic tool in political campaigns of political parties in their quest to secure electoral power. The discussions covered the role of social networking sites in political communication, social networking sites as part of management function and the political uses of social networking sites. The review also assessed how social networking sites is used by electorates as far as political participation is concerned and looked at the dysfunctions that can be produced by social networking sites. The chapter concluded by discussing the theories that will be used in the study. The Democratic participant theory by McQuial (2005) and the Two-way symmetrical model by Grunig and Hunt (1984) were adopted as the theoretical frameworks of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

The main aim of this study was to understand the role of social political campaigns in Ghana's 2020 general elections in a pandemic era. The objectives of the study, informed by key theoretical debates regarding the efficacy of social networking sites political campaigns in elections and the local context within which the study was carried out were.

1. To understand the motivations for the use of social networking sites by the political parties
2. To explore the strategies used in the social networking sites political campaigns by the political parties
3. To investigate how the electorates used social networking sites during the 2020 electioneering period.
4. To understand the role that social networking sites played in the choice of the candidate by the electorates during the 2020 elections.

This chapter explained the methods and approaches used to gather data for the purpose of answering research questions. This chapter also included an explanation of the research design methods that were used and other information about how the research was carried out. These included the population, sample size, survey, sampling technique and established access to the field. The others were the data collection method and instrument, data analysis and the sources of data. For the purpose of this research, a multipurpose approach was used.

#### **3.1. Methods**

This study for its intent and purposes adopted the mixed methods approach. According to Moran-Ellis et al (2006), mixed method approach is the use of two methods that are based on different theoretical and philosophical underpinnings. Existing studies on social networking sites political campaigns have been geared towards the use of one methodology as observed in Dzisah (2018), Gyampo (2017) and Boateng (2019). But the deficiencies identified in these studies cements the need for a holistic approach in the investigation of the role that social networking sites political campaigns play in the voting process.

According to Kelle (2001), the use of mixed methods increases the accuracy of the findings and contributes effectively to the generation of new knowledge through a combination of the

two research approaches. Lang and Lang (1968) in their study conclude that mixed methods are an effective research approach in understanding political events, especially in studies that are exploratory in nature. Although studies on social networking sites political campaigns abound, there is no study, especially with regards to the Ghanaian situation that has sought to understand the strategies employed by political parties in their use of social networking sites and how these strategies paid dividends in the elections through an examination of how these strategies played a role in the choice of candidate by the electorate.

To answer the research questions, a multi-method approach was adopted to gather primary data. Increasingly, communicating researchers are engaging in multi-method research which triangulates the insights of one method with the insights of another method (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). This is in recognition of the fact that, no research method is perfect, hence the need to offset the limitations of one method with the strengths of another method (ibid). The rationale for this approach is that the research questions for this study are beyond the scope of any one research method.

### **3.3 Population**

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects known to have the same characteristics, which form the focus of a scientific query. It is for the benefit of the population that research is done. Polit and Hungler (1993) refer to population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects, or members that conform to a set of specifications.

The populations for this study were the political actors (i.e., political parties) and electorates who are resident in Accra. The rationale for focusing on the electorates was that, since the research seeks to understand the role that social networking sites political campaigns played in their choice of candidate during the 2020 general elections in Ghana, it makes sense to understand the phenomenon from the electorate's perspective as to the importance of social networking sites political campaigns in just ended elections. Studies have already established a relationship between social networking sites political campaigns and the choice of candidate in elections. The political actors, that is the political parties on the other hand also form part of the population they are known to strategically use social networking sites as an avenue of amassing electorate support and vote during previous elections in Ghana (Dzisah, 2018).

First, the populations selected are likely to satisfy the theoretical considerations of the study which were divided between voters and political actors. Another consideration was their access to the varied media through which these social networking sites campaigns can be accessed.

### **3.4 Sample**

The sample is usually the subset of the population. Sampling is selecting a subset of a population to participate in the study, it is a fraction of the whole, selected to participate in the research project (Brink, 1996; Polit and Hungler 1999). The concept of sampling comes from the inability of the researchers to test all individuals in each population. The sample must be representative of the population from which it was drawn, and it must have a good size to warrant statistical analysis. The main function of sampling is to allow the researchers to conduct the study to individuals from the population so that the results of their conclusion can be used to derive conclusions that will apply to the whole population.

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The sample are selected because they are easier to recruit for the study. For a study like this one, the population is very large that it was impossible to include every individual. It is for this reason that this study relied on non-probability sampling techniques like convenience sampling. It was also selected because it is fast, inexpensive, and easy and the subjects are readily available.

A convenience sample of 150 men and women were sampled from the Accra municipality. As explained earlier, the choice of population gives confidence in the findings of the study that seeks to understand the roles that social networking sites played in their choice of candidate in the 2020 general elections, given that, there are several contextual factors that come into play in the process.

In addition, another set of two (2) personalities were selected from the two main political parties in Ghana, namely the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) campaign teams were involved in a qualitative study. The campaign personalities from the two main parties are essential to this study as they serve as knowledge base that spoke to the motivation behind the use of social networking sites in political campaigns, the role of these social networking sites in their campaigns as against the envisioned effects of its use in their political campaigns.

The electorates that were sampled for the quantitative survey provided data that spoke to the significance of social networking sites political campaigns in a pandemic era by assessing the role that social networking sites campaigns played in the electorate choice of candidate during the 2020 general elections. Their perspectives helped the researchers ascertain if the envisioned

motivations for the use of social networking sites by the political parties and actors served the intent and purposes of playing significant roles in voter decisions.

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

According to Johnson et al (2004), mixed method research is a class of research where the researcher mixes or combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques, methods, approaches, theories and or language into a single study. Mixed methods because, the researchers gain in depth understanding of the problem under study and several means (methods, data sources and researchers) to examine the same phenomenon (source). Consequently, quantitative, and qualitative approaches have been adopted to validate findings of the study.

### **3.6 Quantitative Surveys**

Survey in research is defined as “the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions (Check & Schutt, 2012). This type of research method allows for a variety of methods to recruit participants, collect data, and utilize various methods of instrumentation. It can use either quantitative and qualitative research strategies or both. As it is often used to describe and explore human behaviour, surveys are therefore frequently used in social and psychological research (Singleton & Straits, 2009). The surveys will be used to answer research questions three and four which seek to understand the political uses of social networking sites and the role that social networking sites played in the electorate choice of candidate in the 2020 general election.

#### **3.6.1. Quantitative Data instruments**

First, a survey was conducted by administering a close ended questionnaire of twenty (20) questions to a total number of 150 sampled men and women in Accra, who were selected through convenience sampling. Survey research is a research method involving the use of standardized questionnaires or interviews to collect data about people and their preferences, thoughts, and behaviours in a systematic manner (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Closed ended questions are simply those questions that provide respondents with limited response options. Close ended questions are critical for collecting survey responses within a limited frame of options. They form the foundation of all statistical analysis techniques applied

on questionnaires and surveys. These questions typically asked the respondent to choose from a distinct set of responses such as yes or no or from a multiple-choice list and so on. They were used to gather facts about the respondents, in a typical scenario such as this study.

A carefully selected probability sample, with standardized questionnaires or interviews gives the possibility of making refined descriptive assertions about a student body, a city, a nation, or any large population (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). A probability sample is obtained from a random sampling technique which utilizes a set of procedures that ensures that different units in the population have equal capabilities of being chosen. Probability sampling simply is random sampling that represents a group of an entire population.

### **3.6.2. Collection and Analysis of Quantitative Data.**

The questionnaires were self-administered distributed in a random manner based on the convenience sampling technique to the respondents. The questionnaires were collected upon completion for the purpose of treatment, processing, and analysis.

The data was categorized into the various themes that were captured in the questionnaires, informed by the research objectives, and enabled the researcher code the data and made entries. Also, the data was presented in the form of tables, charts, and bars to help give a better understanding to readers about the research results. Moreover, analysis of the data was done with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

### **3.6.3 Qualitative data instruments**

To augment the limitations of close ended questionnaires in uncovering the influence of celebrity political endorsements in the 2020 general elections, in-depth interviews were conducted to get a richer understanding of the use of social networking sites in political campaigns, especially in a pandemic era and to understand their role in the 2020 general election. The qualitative approach was used to answer research questions one and two which seek to understand the motivations for the use of social networking sites by political parties and the strategies adopted by the political parties in their use of social networking sites as an election campaign tool in the 2020 general elections respectively.

According to Wimmer & Dominick (2006), intensive interviews or in-depth interviews are essentially a hybrid of the one-on-one interview approach. To do this, semi-structured interviews were conducted on two personalities from the campaign teams of the two main political parties namely the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress

(NDC). Therefore, the integration of these two personalities in the study shed more light on the motivations for their social networking sites used in their campaign efforts as well as understand the various strategies they employed to yield the most dividends from their social networking sites political campaigns.

Semi-structured interviews are suited when a researcher has narrowed their focus to the point of wanting information from an informant only on those specific questions (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

### **3.6.4 Collection and Analysis of Qualitative Data**

For this study, the researcher first determined the questions to pose that provided the desired data. These questions originated from research question two, which fell outside the scope of the survey. A question guide for a semi-structured interview was thus designed to aid researchers in collecting data. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of enquiry that combines a predetermined set of open questions (questions that prompt discussions) with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore themes or responses further. Next, researcher met the respondents separately and conduct the interviews on them using question guides. These interviews were recorded using sound recorders. These audiotapes were later transcribed into textual data for the purpose of easy analysis. The next stage involves unitizing the data. According to Baxter & Babbie (2003), unitizing involves breaking down the data into the simplest form of information that could stand on its own. Coding categories of the data were then developed. The various units of data were first coded under four broad themes which were later condensed into three themes, each of which is presented in the findings. The researcher then combs through the entire data, categorizing each unit under the three broad coding categories identified. Each theme of data is then stored as a separate file for the purpose of analysis.

The researcher then analysed each thematic category of data for patterns. The patterns uncovered by analysing the four separate files denoting different themes were then used to answer research question.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

Ethical issues arise from the kinds of problems social scientists investigate and the methods used to obtain valid and reliable data. Acting ethically requires the researcher to balances the value of advancing knowledge against the value of non-interference in the lives of others.

Ethical principles concerning the study were duly observed. Information accessed from the methods used were strictly used for the purpose for which they were generated. No personal information was accessed from respondents who were sampled for this study. Meanwhile ethical requirements of the university where this study was sanctioned were duly followed by the researcher.

### **3.8. Limitations and Delimitations**

This study was interested in assessing social networking sites used within political campaigning strategies in Ghana during the 2020 general elections. This study was restricted to making findings based on the 2020 general elections alone. Hence, although the study followed the mixed methods approach and thus included some forms of quantitative data gathering and analysis techniques, the findings made in this cannot be necessarily extrapolated onto other elections in Ghana or any other nation. Additionally, the study limited itself to making findings based on a crucial variable – COVID-19 pandemic. This made the study fixated on a special case of the pandemic made it incompatible to make extensions onto other campaign processes that do not include such pandemics.

The study was limited most significantly by time. The academic requirements of this project meant the researcher had to work against time in order to complete the study within the required time frame. This impacted on crucial aspects of the study such as expanding respondents to be included in the surveys and interview sessions in order to access a wide pool of data and also access in-depth data for the study.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter explained the research method that were used. The justification for selecting the mixed-method technique as the most appropriate methodology for a study of this nature was presented. The quantitative and qualitative data collecting methods that were employed in the collection of primary data were also described in the chapter. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how qualitative and quantitative data were gathered and analysed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN A PANDEMIC ERA: AN ASSESSMENT OF GHANA'S 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

#### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

##### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings on the data collected from the field. The study employed qualitative and quantitative means of data collection, and these are presented and discussed in the sections that follow.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE SPSS APPLICATION**

##### **4.1 Presentation and Discussion of Qualitative Findings**

The study began with a qualitative interview with two campaign team members of the main political parties, namely the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The interviews were structured around research questions one and two which entailed understanding the motivations for the use of social networking sites by the political parties and to assess the various strategies used by political parties in incorporating social networking sites into their political campaigns (Participant one, NDC; Participant two, NPP).

##### **4.1.1 Understanding the Motivations for the Use of social networking sites by the Political Parties**

Some researchers like Ajayi and Adesote (2015) have indicated that, there is a growth in the use of social networking sites for political engagement. To understand this, the study first interrogated the motivations for the use of social networking sites by the political parties and candidates. The two participants indicated to have served their various parties for a long time, and both played instrumental roles in the political campaigns of their various parties, making them best suited for the discussions about their social networking sites political campaigns the other. The findings revealed that the two major political parties had clearly defined motivations for the use of social networking sites for their various political campaigns. Their political campaigns had social networking sites playing a pivotal role in their overall strategy. For the NDC representative, the party had a general campaign strategy, but due to organizational structures, information was only privy to people serving capacities.

In general, yes definitely as a political party you definitely cannot go into battle without a strategy and in all organization campaigns or strategies are on its own bases depending on what level you are at that would determine what information you need to know (Participant one, NDC).

The discussions with the representative of the NPP indicated that since the Ghanaian electoral population was youthful in nature, they had broad campaign strategies that were targeted at the youth. The analysis done in the second chapter shows that, there are arguments which indicate that, the proportion of people who use social networking sites are mostly the youth. Statistics from the Pew Research Center (2012) affirms that social networking sites usage is dominated by the youth. The findings of this research also do not dispute that fact and demonstrate the awareness of the political parties and actors in this regard and how they strategize on getting the most out of their social networking sites campaigns. For the NPP representative, social networking sites featured very prominently in their overall campaign strategy due to the fact that, the youth was one of their most important voter constituency. The discussions also revealed that the popular and most proliferated social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram platforms were used by both parties and featured prominently in their social networking sites campaigns. This buttresses the findings of Ajaye and Adesote (2015) when they intimated that Facebook, twitter and Instagram were the most visited sites which makes them suitable for the purposes of campaigns, engagement and mobilization.

Most of these people are on social networking sites, so we could use Facebook, twitter, Instagram, in fact everywhere to market our content to sell to the Ghanaian youth and the people of Ghana through social networking sites with adverts, videos, news, articles newspapers in fact anything digital that we had as of that time we made use of it (Participant two, NPP).

The NDC representative explained how algorithms was used by the political party to influence trends and inform content that will set the agenda on these platforms.

We have twitter algorithms that tells you what trends are number one, number two or top ten trends in Ghana. You have ways that you can use team work in order to achieve that which will influence what people know or read about Ghana outside what people in Ghana also are privy to (Participant one, NDC).

Ayankoka (2015) indicated that the increasing rate of social networking sites use among the electorates increases the tendency of political actors to accentuate their use of social networking sites. Social media was one of the most used communication tools by the party's

flagbearer. This was manifested in the findings when the NDC participant explained that social networking sites is a can-do-without in the new media age as it helps gets information to the doorstep of the electoral population. The prevalence and proliferated use of social networking sites among the electorates today enables the party to target a lot of people simultaneously with their campaign messages, an advantage that is deficient in the use and dependency on traditional media. It helped them to segment the electoral population and target them with consistent campaign messages. The NDC representative explained that the flagbearer of the NDC epitomized this strategy in every interaction in the pursuit of the campaign goals. This was in relation to his assertions that, social networking sites, and for that matter the youth, featured prominently in the over campaign strategy of the party.

Everywhere he went (Flagbearer), he actually made sure he embraced social networking sites which was the greatest tool he used to actually communicate to the followers and people who were interested in knowing and getting updates on his campaign (Participant one, NDC).

The participant from the NPP explained that the continuous spread of covid-19 in the build up to the elections made it incumbent for the party to find innovative ways to campaign aside the normal ones that were hinged on physical human interactions. This revelation confirmed Pencarelli et al. (2020) who notes that, the use of social networking sites in the pandemic periods increased exponentially. Their fortunes in the 2020 elections were centred on the effective and efficient use of social networking sites. Similar sentiments were raised by the NPP representative when asked who the targets of their social networking sites political campaigns were.

Do not also forget that covid-19 also made it difficult for you to have too much personal and physical engagement which provided an opportunity again for a gap to be filled to utilize a tool effectively to do the same thing (Participant one, NDC).

Generally, the social networking sites campaigns of the New Patriotic Party were targeted at the youth across several jurisdictions. This was not misplaced in the findings of the conversation with the representative from the NDC. He highlighted that, although the social networking sites political campaigns were targeted at literate electorates, the advantages of infographics, a characteristic of social networking sites, helps the party communicate with electorates who have difficulty with reading and writing (Participant one, NDC). The youth

also featured prominently in the views expressed by the NPP representative. These are presented as follows;

The youth make the biggest part of population and people who about to complete SHS and universities. We were sending our messages to them on social networking sites. The target was between 14 to 30 (Participant two, NPP). Our target was on average those who can read and write but then along the way you realize that it now becomes the entirety of the Ghanaian electorate. one, when you take for instance someone who has not gone to school or cannot read and write, you can still communicate to that person through videos (Participant One, NDC).

For the NDC, one of the most strategic use of social networking sites was the targeting of junior high school pupils, although not of voting ages. The idea is that, their exposure to the ideas and policies that will favor their senior high school education will help them convince their parents to give the political party the nod to administer the country, with the hope of realizing that dream. But the strategy also targeted those in the working class as well as those in secondary school.

a JHS leaver is not a voter but can influence the parent who is a voter because the parent has not even stepped in school at all, but he has or she has stepped in school and when he watches a video or can read something on social networking sites he can communicate to the parents (Participant one, NDC).

Both participants from the two parties highlighted the instrumentality of social networking sites in terms of its impact due to its proliferated use and increased dependency because of the pandemic (Participant one, NDC; Participant two, NPP). In an information age where smart phone use has become the norm, the participants indicated that it is easier to have your policies circulate on social networking sites and get the traction needed to set the agenda. This is presented in the intimations of the two representatives.

The number one is that social networking sites, that is why I am telling you that for instance if you look at how it was done though the larger target is those who we can say that the larger target is anybody with a smartphone (Participant one, NDC).

Currently, most of the youth, most of the university guys, most girls, in fact both the male and female most of them are on twitter some few of them that you will see them on Facebook or Instagram (Participant two, NPP).

The representative from the NPP particularly highlighted the saturation of the youth on social networking sites and the increased belief that people have about information circulated on Twitter platforms (Participant two, NPP).

The study investigated which social networking sites platform(s) was most prioritized by the political parties and the rationale for such choices. A few studies have suggested various social networking sites platforms that are most efficient and effective in interacting with voters and fulfilling the aspirations of social networking sites political campaigns. Kumar (2016) for one indicated that social networking sites helps the electorates to also express themselves politically through various means. The findings showed that, Facebook and Twitter were the most used social networking sites platforms by both parties in their social networking sites political campaigns due to the multifaceted advantages of text and video options. However, others like Instagram and Twitter were also mentioned. This is indicated in the excerpt that follows.

I used Facebook, Instagram and twitter. But mostly with Facebook you can put a lot of video content. You can also share your content and do correct targeting (Participant two, NPP).

I think Twitter, because you know how twitter works. If you post something on twitter you will have a lot of people depending on who posted the thing on twitter (Participant two, NDC).

#### **4.1.2 Strategies Used in Social Media Political Campaigns by the Political Parties**

Mergel (2013) indicates that social networking sites platforms such as YouTube videos, Facebook Fan Pages, Twitter accounts were used to reach out to constituents and electorates with accompanying exceptional success rate during the 2008 presidential campaign. Based on this success, similar strategies were replicated in the 2012 elections. These findings formed the basis for the inquisition into how the parties used social networking sites in 2020 elections.

The interview with the political party campaign representatives also discussed the various communication strategies used by the various political parties in the appropriation of social networking sites for the purpose of political campaign. The findings indicate that some of the parties allocated some resources towards the funding and maintenance of a social networking sites team that had the sole responsibility of managing the various social networking sites outlets. The aim was to ensure that the social networking sites platforms of the political parties as well as their candidates were still interactive and lively.

For twitter we had a whole twitter team that we put together from 2016 and they still exist. We share the content but then we make sure we get interactive with the people on twitter (Participant two, NPP).

The NDC representative indicated that, their approach to social networking sites political campaigns was based on a strategy where priority was given to the projection of the flagbearer's image to position it favourably in the minds of the voters. Others included being intentional about sharing perspectives on topical political issues. In all this, they also saw the interactions with the voters as one of the most valuable methodologies.

The number one was to make sure we dictated the trends or the pace. Number two was to hold on to some strong matters or topical issues. Three was to continually and consistently project our flagbearer's messages in order to get it sink in the minds of people. Four was to always have an appropriate responses response to concerns that were raised (Participant one, NDC).

However, the NDC representative indicated that they used a lot of social networking sites platforms simultaneously and this was coupled with traditional methods of text messaging and emails to get voters to know about the existence of their various social networking sites platforms. Commonwealth (2020) indicated that this new normal have forced political parties to blend the use of new as well as traditional media in disseminating information about the elections

All I need to do is to create a link and share with you via a text as well as e-mails, it sends you to a social networking sites platform. The text messaging itself was not really a proper social networking sites app but was a catalyst to the social networking sites platform (Participant one, NDC).

The appropriation of social networking sites by the NDC is hinged on the understanding of the numbers associated with social networking sites use in Ghana. The interview revealed that, the choice of social networking sites platforms was predicated on the most dominantly used in Ghana, and also based on the smartphone culture. This presented the party with a gap that they needed to occupy.

The most used When you come to Ghana Facebook seems to be number one before twitter and Instagram and in that order, it maybe alternating and so if you know that about 60% of the voting class has smartphones and access to these platforms (Participant one, NDC).

The findings show that, as reported by Commonwealth (2020), the covid-19 pandemic also increased the urgency of an effective and effective strategy to replace the physical campaigning strategies. This also helped the two parties strategize. But in all this, it was revealed that research played a very important role in the idealization process of the social networking sites strategy for their political campaigns (Participant one, NDC; Participant two, NPP). While the NDC representative iterated that, their party failed to do the necessary research to aid in the proper appropriation of social networking sites, they rather resorted to knee-jerk reactions as there was no strategy in place. People were not assigned roles as far as the social networking sites political campaigns were concerned and there was little investment and prioritization of the research department of the party.

We do not value research. I am sorry but to say that we think that we always be approaching adhoc or kneejerk solutions to matters. If you do not plan you are actually planning to fail (Participant two, NDC).

However, as indicated in the interview, the live streams of the activities of the NDC party on social networking sites was one strategy that required a lot of capital, and although it lacked a fully coordinated action plan, brought the party some gains.

We even have a single production house where we could do livestreams and do a studio work and do what we needed to do (Participant one, NDC).

The NPP representative indicated that, although research was not needed to establish the trendy social networking sites platforms during the time of the elections like Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok, research was needed to find out which of the mediums was the most effective means of reaching voters.

You may rather have to do research to find out which one is the most effective, which one would yield the most results, which one would be the most appropriate because some are just a lot of noise (Participant one, NPP).

The participants were asked by the researcher to provide an assessment of how well their social networking sites strategies or social networking sites political campaigns fared, as far as their results in the general elections were concerned. They indicated the social networking sites platforms that were most instrumental to their political campaigns (Participant one, NDC; Participant two, NDC). But the degree of importance varied between the two parties. The NPP representative indicated that there were some limitations due to the Covid-19 pandemic that hampered the Party's ability to campaign like they used to. This however, did not discount how important social networking sites was to their election outcome.

I would say social networking sites played like 8% of our winnings in 2020 elections because we could not go out to campaign like the normal way of campaigning before elections and it was solely social networking sites (Participant two, NPP).

In comparison, the NDC representative also admitted to the instrumentality of social networking sites to a not-so-normal election campaign.

Social media has contributed to between 25 to 40% of whatever outcomes we have seen in the 2020 election in my party (Participant one, NDC).

## **4.2 Presentation and Discussion of Quantitative Data**

The survey was employed to collect data from the electorates in response to research questions three and four which revolved around investigating how the electorates used social networking sites during the period and the role that social networking sites played in their choice of candidate in the 2020 elections

### **4.2.1 Demographic Profile and Social Media Usage Information**

This section gives details of the basic demographic data of the respondents as well as information on their social networking sites usage. Specifically, the respondents were first profiled according to their age and gender and the analysis as shown in Table 1 indicates that the respondents were dominantly male, representing 53% of the total number of respondents. However, the females characterized 47% of the respondents sampled. This means that, a majority of the data were sampled from the male segment of the sample. The sample also comprised respondents between the ages of 18-24, followed closely by respondents from the age group of 25-31. This shows that that, majority of the respondents were the youth. The least represented age group of 46-52 as they shown in the 2% of the respondents.

This section also had the goal of understanding the rate at which the electorates in Ghana used social networking sites. As such, questions that sought to unearth the frequency of social networking sites use, preferred social medium and others are addressed. The respondents were asked if they used social networking sites during the electioneering period. The frequency distribution table (1) below presents the findings of the responses which shows that, 97% of the total valid responses indicated that they used social networking sites with 3% stating that they did not during the 2020 general election period.

In an assessment of the rate at which the electorates use social networking sites, respondents were asked if they use social networking sites frequently. The findings which are also highlighted in the Table 1 below is indicative of the fact that, 69.3%, and 18.7% of the respondents agreed that they used social networking sites always and sometimes respectively, with 12% indicating that they rarely used social networking sites. These findings are consistent with the assertions of Zhang (2013), who indicated that, in an information and digital age, social networking sites platforms are gaining so much prominence. Ajayi and Adetose (2015) indicate in their assessment of social networking sites use in Ghana that, many African countries, particularly Ghana have been characterized by growth in the use of social networking sites, especially during electioneering periods due to the increased availability of the internet. Against the knowledge that social networking sites use was dominant in the build-up to the general elections in 2020, the respondents were asked to indicate which social networking sites platforms they used the most. The findings are presented in the Table 1 below. These findings show that, Facebook was the most used social networking sites outlet by the respondents during the electioneering period, as indicated by 43.3% of the respondents. Instagram was the second most used social networking sites networking site as selected by 36.7% of the respondents and YouTube was the least used by the respondents. In a study conducted in Ghana by Ajayi and Adesote (2015), it was concluded that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were the most used social networking sites platforms in Ghana due to their participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature.

**Table 4.1 Demographic Profile and Social Media Usage Information**

Measures	Sample Composition	
	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Percent (%)
<b><i>Gender</i></b>		
Male	80	53
Female	70	47
<b><i>Age</i></b>		
18-24 years	73	47
25-31 years	45	30
32-38 years	22	15
39-45 years	7	5
46-52 years	3	2

<b><i>Do You Use Social Networking sites</i></b>		
Yes	147	98.0
No	3	2.0
<b><i>Frequency of Social Networking sites Usage</i></b>		
Always	104	69
Sometimes	28	19
Rarely	18	12
<b><i>Social Network sites Used by Respondents</i></b>		
Facebook	65	43
Instagram	55	37
Twitter	25	17
YouTube	5	3
<i>Source: Field Data, 2021</i>		<b><i>N=150</i></b>

#### **4.2.2 Social Network Site Usage for Political Participation**

The objective of the study required that we assess the use of social networking sites for political participation by the respondents during the 2020 election period. The findings, which are demonstrated in the Table 2 below (where SD means Strongly Disagree, D means Disagree, N means Neutral, A means Agree and SA means Strongly Agree), show that 43% of the respondents indicated that social networking sites is a medium (generally agreed) that is used for political participation. While 27% remained neutral to that assertion, the remaining 30% however refuted the claims that they used social networking sites for political participation. Ajaye and Adesote (2015) indicate that, social networking sites is becoming an effective, efficient and veritable instrument for election activities like campaigns and particularly for the purposes of political engagement, participation and mobilization. As noted by Ijon (2020), social networking sites has become the new platform that replaced traditional methods of campaigning include rallies, door-to-door campaigns, and town-hall meetings. This claim has been prominent in this study as attested to by the 43% that asserted that social networking sites served as a tool for political participation. According to McQuail (2005), this is due to the knowledge that, social networking sites has resulted in what he calls a democratization of politics in a way that participation and engagement of electorates has increased.

**Table 2 Social Network Sites Usage for Political Participation**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Responses (Percent)</b>				
	<b>SD</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Use of social networking sites for political participation</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Contribution to political discussions on social networking sites</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Tendency to follow political party pages</b>	<b>Yes = 53</b>			<b>No = 47</b>	

*Source: Field Data, 2021**N=150*

Dzisah (2018) in his analysis of how social networking sites increased the boundaries of democratization in the 2016 general elections concluded that, political parties have embraced the use of social networking sites based on its potency in augmenting other communication strategies as well as their political campaign activities, thus becoming an interface that has enhanced the engagement between political actors and their electoral base. This part of the study sought to investigate whether the respondents followed the pages created by political parties, in the build-up to the elections. The findings as presented in the Table 4.2 above show that, 53% of the respondents indicated that they were followers of the social networking sites pages of political parties in the build-up to the 2020 general elections. 47% stated that they did not. The findings however depict the assumptions of the two-way symmetrical model as desposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) where social networking sites was seen as a medium that guarantees interactivity and feedback.

Pew Research Center (2012) has iterated that social networking sites has become a popular means of communication due to the convenience associated with their use, and how it capitalizes on the inadequacies of traditional media. The survey, based on this assertion sought to understand whether the respondents sampled contributed to political discussions on social networking sites, especially during the election period in 2020. The findings in the Table 4.2 above shows that 48% of the respondents indicated that they contributed to political discussions on social networking sites, while 27% remained undecided. However, 25% of the respondents indicated that they did not participate of social networking sites based political discussions. This is made profound in the findings of Abdelhay (2012) among others that social networking sites has introduced a bottom-up approach which has empowered the electorates to express and enforce their various political viewpoints. The use of social networking sites in Ghanaian

election campaign does not only promote democratic discourses, but Dzisah (2018) notes that it has enhancing participation through the diverse platforms.

### 4.2.3 Electorates’ Perceptions of Political Uses of Social Networking Sites by Political Parties

The study sought to explore the political uses of social networking sites during the 2020 general elections since social networking sites has introduced a new paradigm of political campaigning and participation. To do this, respondents were asked a series of questions to help achieve this goal. Results from analyzing their responses are shown in the Table 3 below

**Table 3: Electorates’ Perceptions of Social Media Usage by Political Parties I**

Statements	Responses (Percent)				
	SD	A	N	D	SD
<b>Social media serves a good purpose in political campaigns</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Social media provides parties with capital and influence</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>I paid attention to social networking sites campaigns during the 2020 elections</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>

Source: Field Data, 2021

N=150

There are a lot of arguments that have been espoused to understand the role of social networking sites in election campaigns. The respondents were asked whether social networking sites served a good purpose in elections and election campaigns and the results are presented in the table above. The results show most of the respondents indicating that social networking sites serves a good purpose in political campaigns, especially in a pandemic era. The findings from CIRCLE (2020) indicates that, during the pandemic, the youth were noted to increasingly turn to social networking sites platforms to learn, engage and share political information is validated. This also buttresses findings by Dzisah (2018) who stated that politicians have also embraced the use of social networking sites as an alternative channel to reach voters. Dzisah (2018) in his assessment of the use of social networking sites by the political parties in Ghana argues that, social networking sites played an important role in the 2016 Presidential elections based on the reactions that the political posts of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) on their social networking sites pages.

The survey also investigated the gains made by politicians in their use of social networking sites for political campaigns. The respondents were asked their level of agreement with respect to the assertion that the use of social networking sites in political campaigns increases the political capital of the political actors, as well as increasing their influence. The findings from the frequency distribution table above shows that 77% of the respondents agreed with the assertion that the use of social networking sites provided political actors with the capital and influence they need. This revelation is buttressed by the findings of Marx (2017) in the examination of the role that social networking sites plays in presidential campaigns, where the examination of the tweets of President Donald Trump, showed that the use of social networking sites by political actors increase the attention they receive in the media and among their supporters. Druckman (2014) in his assessment of the use of social networking sites in the US Election in 2008 and 2012 also concluded that social networking sites is a powerful tool that affords political actors the added advantage of communicating with their followers, hence increasing their brand visibility.

Based on the assertions by various scholars that underscore the proliferation in the use of social networking sites as a tool in political campaigns, the study wanted to explore whether the increase in social networking sites political campaigning gained the necessary attention from the perspective of the electorates. The frequency distribution table above is a representation of the responses in line with whether the respondent's paid attention to social networking sites political campaigns during the 2020 elections. The findings show that, 52% of the respondents indicated that they paid attention to social networking sites political campaigns, while 14% indicated that they did not. This gives credence to the assertions of Dzisah (2018) about social networking sites increasing its intensity and becoming key in Ghana's democracy by enhancing political participation.

Although social networking sites campaigns have become pervasive, the influx of social networking sites platforms creates a fragmentation in the audiences, creating the need for strategic attempts by political parties and actors to reach electorates on all mediums. The survey sought to unearth the most sought-after social networking sites networking site that was used in the buildup to the 2020 general elections. The findings from the frequency distribution table above shows that, 51% of the respondents that participated in the study indicated that Facebook was their most preferred medium that they depended on for their interactions and engagement with their political parties, followed by Twitter with 22%. Finding from the analysis of social networking sites use in the 2008 and 2012 US elections by Freelon and Karpf (2015) showed

that Facebook was the most used social networking sites networking site. Abdillah (2014) also concluded that, Facebook and Twitter were the most effective in the assessment of social networking sites political campaigns in Indonesia. The findings are however complimented by an earlier assessment by Ajayi and Adetose (2015) who recounted that, Facebook and Twitter are among the two most used social networking sites platforms in Ghana. In a pandemic related study by Ruby et al. (2020), Facebook was one of most sought-after social networking sites platforms by the respondents.

The study also assessed the electorate’s perspective on the political parties that made the most strategic use of social networking sites in the 2020 general elections. The findings as depicted in Table 4 show that, 54% of the respondents believe that the New Patriotic Party made the most strategic use of social networking sites. However, 38% believed that the National Democratic Congress used social networking sites more strategically during the 2020 election period. This realization of social networking sites being used strategically by the two dominant parties is also buttressed by the findings of Dzisah (2018), who concluded that, the rate of social networking sites use by the two major political parties in Ghana. News Ghana (2016) in a similar survey concluded that, social networking sites was effectively used by the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party in elections. The various strategies and motivations as indicated by the various political party campaign team members were validated in these findings both parties were observed to have used social networking sites dominantly in the covid-stricken elections.

**Table 4: Electorates’ Perceptions of Social Media Usage by Political Parties II**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<i>social networking sites platform used by parties to engage electorates</i>		
Facebook	76	51
Instagram	22	15
Twitter	33	22
YouTube	19	13
<i>Political parties that made strategic use of social networking sites</i>		
Nation Democratic Congress	58	38
New Patriotic Party	80	54

Convention People's Party	3	2
Ghana Union Movement	4	3
Others	4	3
<b><i>Reason for the choice of party based on benefits of their social networking sites</i></b>		
They used social networking sites to effectively communicate	95	63
Social media augmented their traditional campaigning methods	40	27
Others	15	10

*Source: Field Data, 2021*

***N = 150***

The survey also aimed at understanding the rationale for the choice of political parties in the earlier question. When asked which political parties made the strategic use of social networking sites during the 2020 elections, they indicated that the NDC and the NPP used it the most. However, in explaining the rationale for their choice of political parties, 63% of them indicated that, their choices were because the two parties were able effectively use social networking sites to communicate with their electorates. 27% of the respondents however indicated that, the two political parties strategically used social networking sites to augment their traditional campaign activities. This is seen in the presentation of the findings in the frequency distribution that follows. According to News Ghana (2016), social networking sites played an important role in the 2012 presidential elections of Ghana with supporters of the two leading political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), continuously engaging in political campaigning on Facebook and Twitter. Analysis from Dzisah (2018) also indicated how intensive activities on the social networking sites pages of the two main political parties in the 2016 elections.

#### **4.2.4 Role of Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigning and Voter Decisions**

This part of the study examined the functions of the various social networking sites platforms and the extent to which they influenced on the decisions of the electorate during the 2020 elections. Responses from participants are reported in the Table 5 below.

**Table 5 Role of Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigning and Voter Decisions**

Statements	Responses (Percent)				
	SD	A	N	D	SD
I believe social networking sites has an influence on the voting choices of electorates.	31	45	21	3	-
Political parties that competed in the 2020 elections benefitted from their use of social networking sites for campaign activities.	33	44	17	6	-
Social media made me know more about and understand the policies and personalities of the candidates and parties that contested in the elections.	26	44	23	7	-
My perspective on some policies and candidates have been affected through political engagements on social networking sites and particularly through social networking sites political campaigns.	20	43	20	13	4
My preference for a political candidate or party was fueled by their social networking sites campaigns and interactions that occurred afterwards.	16	30	25	25	4
I had an earlier preference for a party or candidate, but that decision was swayed based on the social networking sites political campaigns of other candidates.	20	20	20	20	20

Source: Field Data, 2021

N=150

The electorates were asked to indicate the level at which they agree with the assertion that social networking sites political campaigns influence choice of candidates during the 2020 elections. The findings show that, a huge percentage of the respondents indicated that they agreed with the assertion that spoke to the influence that social networking sites political campaigns have on voter choices, accounting for 76% of all the respondents. However, 3% disagreed while 21% were neutral about this assertion. Holbrook (1996) indicated that, the use of social networking sites for political campaigns is used to target voters with the sole purpose of garnering votes. Furthermore, some findings have shown that the use of social networking

sites to be precise, amplified traditional offline engagement, such as voting (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011).

The study also explored whether the respondents agreed with the assertion that political parties that advance social networking sites political campaigns get some benefits, especially using the 2020 election as a case. The findings are illustrated in the Table 4.5 above. The findings show that, the respondents agreed that social networking sites political campaigns work to the benefit of the political parties. This makes up 77% of the total number of respondents. The findings also suggest that 4% of the respondents disagreed with those assertions.

The Table 4.5 also shows the responses with regards to the level of agreement on the part of the respondents in examining whether social networking sites promoted helped them have a deeper knowledge and understanding of both policies and political actors in the 2020 elections. The findings indicate that, most of the respondents, representing 70% of the total respondents, indicate that they agreed with the assertion that social networking sites contributed immensely to their knowledge and understanding of political actors as well as political policies while 23% of them remained undecided. McQuail (2005) explains that social networking sites use results in higher democratic participation and engagement in politics. Lee et al. (2014) asserts that, social networking sites affords electorates the opportunity to follow politicians, join groups based on their political ideologies as a means of having access to news and information about their political actors and their policies.

This section also examined whether social networking sites affected the perspectives of the electorates with regards to political actors or their policies during the 2020 elections and the findings are presented in the table below. The findings show the respondents overwhelmingly indicating that, they have had their perspective on political candidates and their policies affected by social networking sites political campaigns. The effect that social networking sites has on the perspective of electorates is mainly due to the effects it has on the political viewpoints as attested to by Freelon and Karpf (2015).

The survey finally explored whether social networking sites contributed to changes in voter preferences. Findings reveal that only 46% of the respondents indicated that their preference for a political party, candidate or policy changed because of social networking sites political campaigns while 25% remained neutral and 28% disagreed. Changes in candidate or party preferences were also reported. Specifically, the findings indicate that, the 40% of the respondents indicated that their preference of a candidate or party was swayed by social networking sites while 20% remained undecided. The findings also indicate that, 40%

indicated that their decisions or preferences remain unchanged and unfazed by the proliferation of social networking sites campaigns.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the presentation and analysis of the findings from the mixed approach. The data was collected using qualitative and quantitative approaches and interviews with two party campaign team members as well as the surveys with 150 electorates were presented and discussed. The findings show that, there was an intentional use of social networking sites by the political party resulting in a concurrent use of social networking sites by the electorates for gathering political information and as a means of political participation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This final chapter serves as the concluding chapter where the findings are summarized. The chapter also explores the limitations of the study and makes recommendations that will influence and inform further studies into social networking sites and voter behavior.

#### 5.1 Summary of the Study

The first chapter served as the introduction to the study. It gave an overview of what the study is going to look like. It contained the background of the study which created the setting of the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, and the research questions.

The second chapter reviewed extant literature related or relevant to the topic and its objectives. This was done to help contextualize the study to fit into the arguments of other related studies as well as specify the areas to which the study could contribute. The chapter began by exploring and discussing the various theoretical underpinnings of the study. The theory used in the study was the Two-way asymmetrical model by Grunig and Hunt (1984). The chapter then continued with a review of the concepts undergirding this study such as social networking sites, social networking sites and political participation and social networking sites political campaigns. Empirically, the chapter reviewed studies that were conducted in other jurisdictions on social networking sites usage among electorates and the influence of social networking sites political campaigns on the voting behavior of electorates, as well as the effect on Covid-19 pandemic on elections.

The third chapter presented the methodology used in the collection of data and the conduct of the empirical part of the study. The research purpose and objectives necessitated the use of the mixed method approach which involved a blend of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The qualitative method employed was the semi-structured interviews, where representatives from the campaign teams of the two political parties were used. Quantitatively, the study employed the use of surveys where questionnaires were developed and administered to 150 respondents.

The fourth chapter analyzed the data collected and made meaning out of them. Since the mixed method approach was adopted, the researcher used thematic analysis in the analysis of the qualitative data and statistical methods in the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data. Frequency distribution tables were used in the presentation of the findings, coupled with

descriptive analysis to help make meaning out of the data collected. The findings were then discussed in tune with the broad research objectives that formed the basis for this study. The fifth chapter focuses on the summary of the study, the main conclusions as well as limitations of the study.

## **5.2. Conclusion of the Study**

The key findings of the study are discussed in accordance with the research objectives.

### **5.2.1 Understanding the Motivations for the Use of Social Networking sites by the Political Parties**

The political party representatives sampled for the study explained the various motivations that underpinned their use of social networking sites in the 2020 general elections. The core assumption of the two-way symmetrical model advanced by Grunig and Hunt (1984) which indicated that political communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by interactivity and feedback as seen in the use of with the use of social networking sites as one of the most preferred methods was made prominent in the findings of this study. The focus of the political communication of the two parties was determined by the need to interact and build relationships with the electorates. The study revealed that the use of social networking sites by politicians was in response to the increased proliferation of social networking sites by electorates for various purposes such as political engagement. Characteristically, the uniqueness of the 2020 elections where physical campaigns and other political activities were mitigated in hopes of stopping the spread of the corona virus sparked an increased use of social networking sites for political campaigns. For the NDC, the study revealed that, their main target was the youth, and the use of social networking sites guaranteed them access. Similarly, analysis from the findings show that the NPP also increased their social networking sites use to attract the youthful voter constituency. Social media was used to generate and set agenda, position their candidates favorably as well as interact with their support and general electoral base. In all, Facebook and Twitter came out as the most strategically used social networking sites platform by the parties.

### **5.2.2 The Strategies Used by the Political Parties in their Social Networking Site Political Campaigns**

Lane (2007) makes this simpler by explaining that, one of the core tenets of the two-way symmetrical model lies in building strategies that incorporate feedback and engagement. In this study, the two political parties had different strategies regarding their use of social networking sites for political campaigns. Both parties saw social networking sites as a very strategic tool to amass votes and had different approaches that aimed at maximizing their gains. The NPP indicated that they had a team that oversaw their social networking sites platforms especially Twitter. Their strategy was also backed by research to know which social networking sites platform was the most effective in targeting and reaching the voter populace. For the NDC, while the representative indicated that little to no significance was given to research regarding the most efficient and effective ways of using social networking sites, they however had a production team that was responsible for ensuring that, there were live streams of their activities on social networking sites. The use of social networking sites was also augmented with traditional mediums like TV, emails and SMS. The various strategies adopted by the political parties show the bi-directional flow that was explained By Grunig and Hunt (1984), where political actors adopt bi-directional flows which enables them to send information and get feedback from the messages communicated.

### **5.2.3 Social Networking site Usage Among Electorates During the 2020 General Elections**

The two-way symmetrical model by Grunig and Hunt (1984) highlights the importance of symbiotic interactions between the political actors and the electorates. This was brought to bear on the study as social networking sites was highly used by the respondent since it has become proliferated and necessary due to limitations on human interactions resulting in a subsequent change in political party activities like rallies, campaigns, etc. This was in part true due to indications by the political party campaign team representatives that they prioritized the use of social networking sites during the 2020 elections. The electorates used social networking sites frequently and among all the existing social networking sites networking sites, Facebook was the most used social networking sites for political participation. The findings indicate that social networking sites serves a good purpose in political campaigns as seen in how politicians have embraced the concept as an alternative in their political campaign ventures. The 2020 general election was characterized social networking sites activities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the respondents stated that they paid attention to these social networking sites

political campaigns. The perception assessment revealed that, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) were the parties that made the most strategic use of social networking sites political campaigns.

#### **5.2.4 Role of Social Networking Site in Political Campaigns and Electorate Decisions**

The effects of the interactive and symbiotic relationship building approach of the two-way symmetrical model according to Lane (2007) is seen in the engagements between the political parties and their electorates. This is observed in public engagements, advocacies and involvement of electorates in political activities. This was manifested in last objective of the study which sought to explore the role of social networking sites political campaigns on the electorates' choice of candidate in the 2020 general elections. Social media was observed to have increased the knowledge and understanding of the electorate regarding the political parties, candidates and their policies, as well as their perspectives on the candidates and the policies. While some indicated that social networking sites political parties changed their preference for a political party or candidate, others indicated that social networking sites political campaigns fueled their preference for their candidate or party. However, the criticisms levelled against the two-way symmetrical model by Laskin (2009) where political parties were portrayed as the most powerful was particularly true for this study. The findings indicated that, the electorates also have power over the political engagements as seen in their assessment of social networking sites use by the political parties and their subsequent choice of electorates.

#### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

As with any research, the study suffered from the following limitations:

- i. The study, based on financial and resource constraints used a smaller sample size, hence affecting the extent to which the findings of the study can be generalized.
- ii. The study, based on the above-mentioned constraints failed to examine the social networking sites pages of the political parties. This would have added a fresh perspective and contributed towards the findings of the study.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies**

Based on the above limitations, the study makes the following recommendations for future studies.

- i. A more national survey could be done with a larger sample size for both quantitative and qualitative parameters to give the study a much broader scale and make the findings more generalizable
- ii. Future studies should also examine the social networking sites platforms of the political parties to have an accurate assessment of how they used social networking sites during election campaigns.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abhilash, G. B. (2014). *Disaster Recovery Using VMware vSphere Replication and Center Site Recovery Manager*. Packt Publishing Ltd.
- Abdallah, M., 2013, Ghana's 2012 elections: Lessons learnt towards sustaining peace and democratic stability. Accra: KAIPTC.
- Ahmad, N. & Popa. L., L., 2014, The social media usage and the transformation of political marketing and campaigning of the emerging democracy in Indonesia: Case study of the 2012 gubernatorial election of the special region of the capital city Jakarta. In B., Pătruț & M., Pătruț, M., (Eds.), *social media in politics: Case studies on the political power of social media*, London: Springer.
- Alabi, G. and Alabi, J. (2008). Analyses of the effects of ethnicity on political marketing in Ghana. *Int. Bus. Econ. Res. J.*, 6(4): 39-52.
- Alabi, J. (2007). "Analysis Of The Effects Of Ethnicity On Political Marketing In Ghana".
- Bachmann, I., Kaufhold, K., Lewis, S. C., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2010). *News platform preference: Advancing the effects of age and media consumption on political participation*. *International Journal of Internet Science*, 5(1), 34-47.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (2012). *Specification, evaluation, and interpretation of structural equation models*. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 40(1), 8-34.
- Bakker, T. P., & de Vreese, C. H. (2011). *Good news for the future? Young people, Internet use, and political participation*. *Communication Research*, 0093650210381738.
- Baumgartner, J. C., & Morris, J. S. (2010). *Who wants to be my friend? Obama, youth and social networks in the 2008 campaign. Communicator-in-chief: How Barack Obama used new media technology to win the White House*, 51-66.
- Benyi, K. A. (2013). *Marketing the Political Product: Perspectives among Tertiary Students*.
- Berman, S. (1997). *Civil society and political institutionalization*. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40(5), 562-574
- Beciu, C. (2011). *Sociologiacomunicăriiși a spațiului public: Concepte, teme, analize. Polirom Publishing House, Iași*.

- Berdou, E. & Lopes, A. (2015). *The case of UNICEF's U-Report (Uganda)*, World Bank, Washington, District of Columbia: World Bank.
- Berger, C., R. (2000). *Goal detection and efficiency: Neglected aspects of message production*. *Communication Theory*, 10(2), pp. 156-166.
- Borah, P. (2016). *Political Facebook use: Campaign strategies used in 2008 and 2012 presidential elections*. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 13(4), pp. 326-338.
- Bosch, T., E. (2016). *Using online social networking for teaching and learning: Facebook use at the university of Cape Town*. *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research*, 35(2), pp. 185-200
- Chaffee, S. H., Zhao, X., & Leshner, G. (1994). *Political knowledge and the campaign media of 1992*. *Communication Research*, 21(3), 305-324.
- Chaffee, S., & Frank, S. (1996). How Americans get political information: Print versus broadcast news. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 48-58.
- Cox, S., & Flin, R. (1998). Safety culture: philosopher's stone or man of straw? *Work & stress*, 12(3), 189-201.
- Craton, L. (2009). *The Victorian freak show: The significance of disability and physical differences in 19th-century fiction*. Cambria Press.
- Davis, R., & Owen, D. M. (1998). *New media and American politics*. Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Druckman, J. N., Kifer, M. J., & Parkin, M. (2014). US Congressional campaign communications in an internet age. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 24(1), 20-44.
- Dimitrova, D. V., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2011). The effects of digital media on political knowledge and participation in election campaigns: Evidence from panel data. *Communication Research*, 009365021142600.
- Drennan, J. (2003). Cognitive interviewing: verbal data in the design and pretesting of questionnaires. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 42(1), 57-63.

- Drew, D., & Weaver, D. (1998). Voter learning in the 1996 presidential election: Did the media matter? *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75(2), 292-301.
- Drucker, P. F. (1973). Managing the public service institution. *The Public Interest*, (33), 43.
- Dzisah, W., (2018). social media and elections in Ghana: Enhancing political participation in Ghana. *African Journalism studies*. DOI: 10.1080/23743670.2018.1452774.
- Edosomwan, S., Prakasan, S. K., Kouame, D., Watson, J., & Seymour, T. (2011). The history of social media and its impact on business. *Journal of Applied Management and entrepreneurship*, 16(3), 79.
- Effing, R., van Hillegersberg, J., & Huibers, T. (2011, August). social media and political participation: are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube democratizing our political systems?. *International Conference on Electronic Participation* (pp. 25-35). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Essoungou, A. M. (2010). A social media Boom Begins in Africa: Using Mobile Phones, Africans Join the Global Conversation. *Africa Renewal Online*.
- Foot, K., & Schneider, S. M. (2006). *Web Campaigning (Acting with Technology)*. The MIT Press.
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of marketing research*, 39-50.
- Freelon, D., & Karpf, D. (2015). Of big birds and bayonets: hybrid Twitter interactivity in the 2012 Presidential debates. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(4), 390-406.
- Gibson, R. K. (2009). New media and the revitalisation of politics. *Representation*, 45(3), 289-299.

- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 319-336.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Molyneux, L., & Zheng, P. (2014). social media, political expression, and political participation: Panel analysis of lagged and concurrent relationships. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4), 612-634.
- Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2009). Another step forward for Ghana. *Journal of Democracy*, 20(2), 138-152.
- Henneberg, S. C. (2002). Understanding political marketing. *The idea of political marketing*, 93- 170.
- Henneberg, S. (2004). *Political marketing theory: Hendiadyoin or oxymoron*. University of Bath, 2004-01.
- International Business & Economics Research Journal Vol. 6, No. 4 pp. 39-52  
Babbie, E. R. (2015). *The practice of social research*. Nelson Education.
- Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2003). A boost or bust for democracy? How the Web influenced political attitudes and behaviors in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 8(3), 9-34.
- Kim, Y. M., & Geidner, N. W. (2008). Politics as friendship: The impact of online social networks on young voters' political behavior. In 58th International Communication Association Conference", Montreal (Vol. 22).
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media . *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Kaye, B. K., & Johnson, T. J. (2002). Online and in the know: Uses and gratifications of the web for political information. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 46(1), 54-71.

- Koomson, A. B. (Ed.). (1995). *Prospects for Private Broadcasting in Ghana: Proceedings of a*
- Kotler, P., & Kotler, N. (1981). Business marketing for political candidates. *Campaigns and Elections*, 2(2), 24-33.
- Kotler, P., & Kotler, N. (1999). Political marketing: Generating effective candidates, campaigns, and causes. *Handbook of political marketing*, 3-18.
- Lee, F. L. (2011). Does discussion with disagreement discourage all types of political participation? Survey evidence from Hong Kong. *Communication Research*, 0093650211398356.
- Lee, K. M. (2006). Effects of Internet use on college students' political efficacy. *Cyberpsychology & behavior*, 9(4), 415-422.
- Lees-Marshment, J. (2001). The product, sales and market-oriented party-How Labour learnt to market the product, not just the presentation. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(9/10), 1074-1084.
- Lindell, M. K., & Whitney, D. J. (2001). Accounting for common method variance in cross-sectional research designs. *Journal of applied psychology*, 86(1), 114.
- Lock, A., & aris, P. (1996) "Political marketing - vive la différence!" *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 30 Iss: 10/11, pp.14 – 24
- McChesney, R. W. (2015). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*. New Press, The.
- McQuail, D. (1987). *Mass communication theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McNair, B. (2011). *An introduction to political communication*. 5th ed, New York, NY: Routledge.

- Mensah, K. (2009). "Symbolically Speaking: The Use of Semiotics in Marketing Politics in Ghana". *Identity, Culture and Politics*. Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 75-89
- Mensah, K. (2011). "Political brand management: forms and strategies in modern party politics". A Thesis in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Sheffield.
- National Conference for Prospective Broadcasting Operators in Ghana Held at the Commonwealth Hall, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, November 15-17, 1994. Gold-Type Limited.
- Okan, E. Y., Topcu, A., & Akyuz, S. (2014). The role of social media in political marketing: 2014 local elections of Turkey. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 6(22), 131140.
- Tayeebwa, W. (2016). Impact of social media on traditional journalism: Challenges and opportunities for media houses in Uganda. In M., Kamp (Ed.), *Assessing the impact of social media on political communication and civic engagement in Uganda*. Uganda Programme, Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung
- Tettey, W. (2017). Mobile telephony and democracy in Ghana: Interrogating the changing ecology of citizen engagement and political communication. *Telecommunication Policy*, 41(7/8), pp. 685-694.
- Tweneboah-Koduah, E. Y., & Owusu-Frempong, N. (2013). Social marketing on AIDS: using Transtheoretical model to understand current condom usage among commercial drivers in Accra, Ghana. *International Journal of Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 18(4), 241260.
- Valente, T. W. (1996). Social network thresholds in the diffusion of innovations. *Social networks*, 18(1), 69-89.

Vitak, J., Zube, P., Smock, A., Carr, C. T., Ellison, N., & Lampe, C. (2011). It's complicated: Facebook users' political participation in the 2008 election. *CyberPsychology, behavior, and social networking*, 14(3), 107-114.

Walgrave, S., & Verhulst, J. (2009). Government stance and internal diversity of protest: A comparative study of protest against the war in Iraq in eight countries. *Social Forces*, 87(3), 1355-1387.

Zhang, W., Seltzer, T., & Bichard, S. L. (2013). Two sides of the coin assessing the influence of social network site use during the 2012 US presidential campaign. *Social Science Computer Review*, 31(5), 542-551.

**APPENDIX**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE GHANAIAAN MEN AND WOMEN THAT USES SOCIAL**  
**NETWORKING SITES**

Dear Respondent, I am a master's student at the Ghana Institute of Journalism conducting a study on "The influence of social networking sites political campaigns on voter behaviour in a pandemic era. A case of the 2020 General elections in Ghana".

The research is a fulfilment of the requirements for a master's degree in Communication Studies. I therefore entreat you to participate in this survey, as this forms part of the requirements for the attainment of the degree. Kindly note that your response will be treated within the confines of the research with confidentiality.

Select from the options provided, *only one* that best answers the questions.

**SECTION A**

**INSTRUCTION: Please tick [√] beside the responses that are applicable.**

**SECTION A**

**Demographic Data**

1. Gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  
2. Age
  - a. 18-24
  - b. 25-31
  - c. 32-38
  - d. 39-45
  - e. 46-52

Education

Region of Origin

## SECTION B

### Rate of social networking sites use among electorates in Ghana during the 2020 general elections.

3. Do you use social networking sites?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. How frequently did you use social networking sites during the campaigning season in 2020?
  - a. Very often.
  - b. Often
  - c. Not so often
  
5. Which of the following social networking sites outlets did you use the most during the 2020 election campaigns?
  - a. Facebook
  - b. Instagram
  - c. Twitter
  - d. YouTube
  
6. Do you use social networking sites for political participation?
  - a. Yes, I do
  - b. No I do not
  - c. Sometimes.
  
7. I am a member of some political party pages on social networking sites?
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree

8. I follow the pages of political parties on social networking sites.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
  
9. I contribute to political discussions on social networking sites by commenting, sharing or monitoring
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree

## SECTION B

### PERCEPTION REGARDING THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES FOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

10. social networking sites serves a good purpose in political campaigns
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
  
11. social networking sites has provided politicians with a huge political capital and helped them amass votes, participation and interaction from the electorates
  - a. strongly agree
  - b. agree
  - c. neutral
  - d. disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
  
12. I pay attention to political activities like political campaigns on social networking sites during the 2020 elections
  - a. strongly agree
  - b. agree
  - c. neutral
  - d. disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
  
13. Which social networking sites platform did you depend on most for your interactions and engagement with your preferred party and candidate?
  - a. Facebook
  - b. Instagram
  - c. Twitter
  - d. YouTube

14. In your estimation, which of the political parties that contested the 2020 election made strategic use of social networking sites in their campaigns?
- a. National Democratic Congress (NDC).
  - b. New Patriotic Party (NPP)
  - c. Convention People's Party (CPP)
  - d. Ghana Union Movement (GUM)

15. In one sentence, explain the reason for your choice in question 12 above.

.....

.....

.....

.....

16. Which political party did you eventually vote for?

- a. National Democratic Congress (NDC).
- b. New Patriotic Party (NPP)
- c. Convention People's Party (CPP)
- d. Ghana Union Movement (GUM)

## SECTION C

### **DETERMINING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS ON VOTER BEHAVIOR.**

**17. I believe social networking sites has an influence on the voting choices of electorates.**

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. neutral
- d. disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**18. Political parties that competed in the 2020 elections benefitted from their use of social networking sites for campaign activities.**

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. neutral
- d. disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**19. social networking sites made me know more about and understand the policies and personalities of the candidates and parties that contested in the elections.**

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. neutral
- d. disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**20. My perspective on some policies and candidates have been affected through political engagements on social networking sites and particularly through social networking sites political campaigns.**

- a. strongly agree

- b. agree
- c. neutral
- d. disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**21. My preference for a political candidate or party was fueled by their social networking sites campaigns and interactions that occurred afterwards.**

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. neutral
- d. disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**22. I had an earlier preference for a party or candidate, but that decision was swayed based on the social networking sites political campaigns of other candidates.**

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. neutral
- d. disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

*Thank you for participating in this survey.*

**INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH POLITICAL PARTY CAMPAIGN MANAGERS (One from both NPP and NDC).**

1. As a member of your party's campaign team, did your party have any formal campaign strategy for the 2020 general elections?
2. Did the use of social networking sites for your campaigns feature in that broad campaign strategy?
3. What were the motivations for the incorporation of social networking sites in your party's political campaign activities?
4. Who were the targets of the social networking sites political campaigns and why?
5. What social networking sites platforms were used and what informed those choices?
6. Which of the mediums would you say was most instrumental to your political campaigns and why?
7. What communication strategies were used in your social networking sites political campaigns?
8. What is your assessment of the contribution of the social networking sites political campaign strategies to the general election outcome?