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Social Media and Political Campaign Communication in Ghana.

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**Beatrice Eyram Amenyewu
MSc Communication,
Spring 2021
Capstone Project: Research Thesis
Social Media and Political Campaign Communication in Ghana.**

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Abstract

Originally designed for social networking and interactions, social media has gained precedence in business and organizational operations. Politics which has had a long relationship with the media has seen some changes in its campaign and communication due to the evolution of the media. Social media has proven to be an effective strategy in political communication and campaign. Given its numerous features such as the like button, live videos, content sharing, comment option, photo sharing, status update, tags, amongst others it has enabled the dialogue between political stakeholders. Furthermore, social media impacts elections and democratic discourse with its dialogic feature which helps nations that have adopted democracy to make governance fully participatory. It has also generated interest in politics by the younger generation as political communication and campaigns have become more appealing to them. Dual usage of traditional media and social media yields desired results of wider coverage and electorate engagement.

The study is an explorative one that adopted purposive sampling to select participants from the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) the two major political parties in Ghana. The findings revealed that social media has been integrated into politics in Ghana and increased political stakeholder engagement. It also underpinned the importance of traditional media intersecting with social media for the achievement of optimal political mobilization.

Abbreviations

CPP – Convention People’s Party

NDC – National Democratic Congress

NPP – New Patriotic Party

UGCC- United Gold Coast Convention

Chapter 1

Introduction

Politics and the media have always worked closely. The media derive stories from politics, while politicians rely on the media for coverage and promotion. The media is responsible for information dissemination, bridging the gap between policymakers and the people, transmitting political developments, educating the society, and raising awareness of issues of importance in the society. (Karadoğan, 1996: 54; Bekci, 2013: 7). Political parties and candidates in African countries like many other nations depend on the media for coverage and visibility of their work and activities. Media and political relations started in Africa mainly with newspapers during the struggle for independence from colonial rule. Television and radio in political campaign communication emerged after the colonial era. The channels of communication since then have changed and continue to evolve. Although social media dates back to the early 1990s, it was not until the mid-2000s that it gained popularity in Africa. Today, Africa is the second continent with rapid social media growth. Since its inception in 1996, social media has become one of the popular media channels aside from print, radio, and television. In the past few years, social media has shown rapid growth in user counts and has been an object of scientific analysis. (Wigand et al 2010; McAfee 2006). For instance, Facebook has 2.80 billion monthly active users. (Facebook, 2021). With such huge engagement figures, there is no doubt that social media is extremely relevant to any organization for the promotion of their product and services and an effective tool for public engagement. Many other organizations are harnessing the advantage of social media's vast coverage to give their brands publicity. Political organizations are no different and are beginning to change their campaign communications focusing on not just traditional media but social media as well. With over half of the global population being social media users, it has

becoming crucial to prioritize the use of social media in political communication. Social media has become so vital that the lack of it in communications strategy of businesses and organizations could be deemed as unseriousness. Politics like other disciplines have in recent times been influenced by social media too. Television, radio, and print media continue to contribute to political campaign communication however, social media plays a significant role in today's political campaign communication.

Research studies on social media and politics exist in the western world but very little about Africa. This study focuses on political communication using social media in Ghana. Ghana is the focus of this study as it is one of the highly democratic countries in the African continent. The research intends to identify the model of social media political communication in Ghana and how it could be adopted by other countries to strengthen their democracies. This research will specifically focus on political parties in Ghana concentrating on the 2012, 2016, and 2020 general elections.

Research Problem

This project is a research thesis on literature exploring how social media can be used effectively in political campaign communication in African countries modeling Ghana as an example. This research has the following aims 1) How political parties in Ghana have harnessed the use of social media in the political campaign 2) How the use of social media has changed the trajectory of political campaign communication in Ghana. 3) The benefits of harnessing social media for political campaigns in Ghana and how other African countries and the world at large can follow emulate the story of Ghana.

Through the study, the researcher hopes to analyze the use of social media in political campaign communications in Ghana. The research seeks to find out the social media strategies and tactics used by modern Ghanaian politicians and the effectiveness of using social media in political campaigns.

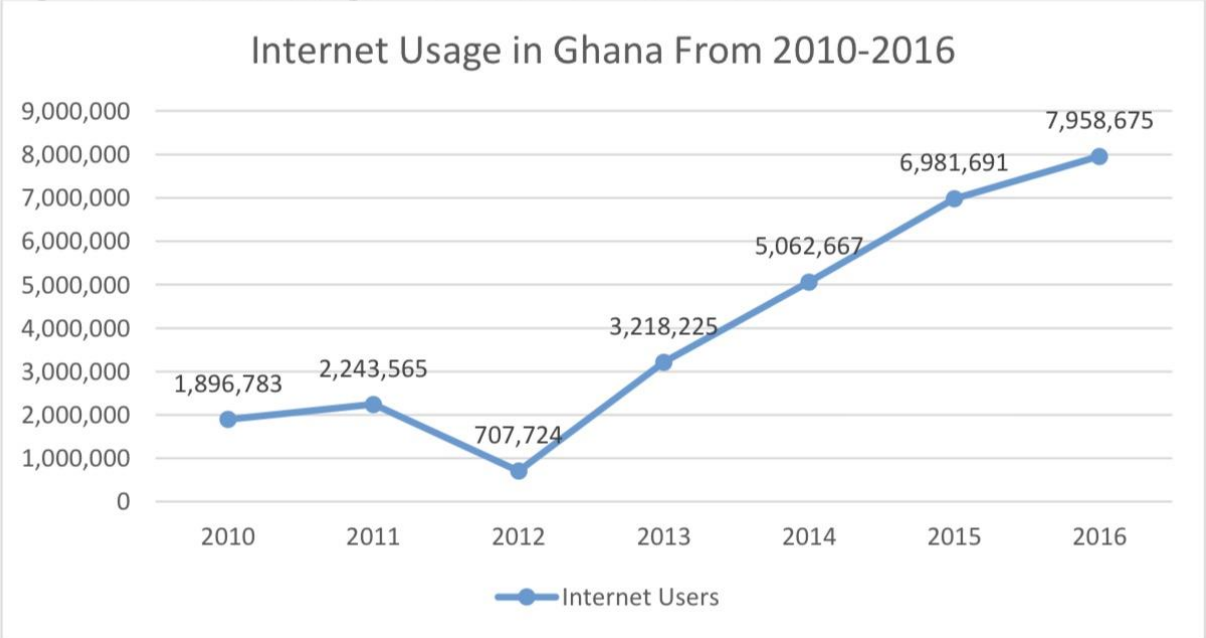
This research also aims to provide a document to educate the world about changing trends in African politics and guide for other countries and persons with political ambition.

The Rationale for Research Problem.

This research intends to analyze and contribute to original and current knowledge and findings on the use of social media in political campaigning in Ghana. The main arguments of focus are the current use of social media in Ghanaian political campaigns and how it is a more effective medium of communication. Ghana is one of Africa's thriving democracies, having enjoyed a stable electoral process since 1992 when the country transitioned from military dictatorships to a multi-party democratic state. Often described as the beacon of Africa, Ghana has set the pace by actively using social media in its political campaign over the last ten years. The media has played a vital role in political communication in Ghana since the struggle from colonization. Although the debate on the relationship between political campaigning and media, especially social media, is still under rigorous interrogation, some scholars see mixed benefits emanating from that interrelationship; ones that potentially enhance the quest for empirical data in establishing the impact of that symbiotic relationship. (Asante, 2020). For example, the 'majority of research into e-campaigning has been conducted on political campaigns in the United States (US), where citizens and politicians adopted the Internet earlier on' (Vergeer, 2011), and prior research shows that political parties and candidates have increased their web presence considerably (Gulati and Williams, 2007). The

digital revolution has had its fair share in Africa with the wide use of social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Ghana has set the pace with the inclusion of social media in its political campaigning and is a great model for other African countries to adopt. The surge of the use of social media by Ghanaians has made it pertinent for an analysis of social media strategies and their impact on political campaigns in the age of digitalization. According to Mensah (2017), social media was identified as being a key communication tool in campaigns and other political activities before, during, and after the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections.

Figure 1: Internet Usage in Ghana from 2010-2016



Key Terminologies

Social Media: Social media are web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible. (McCay-Peet & Quan Haase, 2017 P 17)

Political Campaign: A political campaign is an organized effort that seeks to influence the decision-making process within a specific group.

Political Communication: Political communication refers to the methods of communication which are put forth by political actors or organizational structures and convey to the mass through media systems. (UKEssays, 2018) It can also be described as the field of political communication studies the interactions between media and political systems, locally, nationally, and internationally'' (Gibson and Römmele, 2008; p.475).

Mass Mobilization: Mass mobilization is defined as a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective through dialogue. (Wikipedia, 2021)

Chapter 2:

Hypothesis

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the participatory democratic theory. Participatory democracy is a process of collective decision-making that combines elements from both direct and representative democracy: Citizens have the power to decide on policy proposals and politicians assume the role of policy implementation. (Aragones & Sanchez-Pages, 2009). This review discusses participatory democracy in relation to social media in current democratic settings. In many African societies, the fundamental problem of participatory democratic theory is that the electorate has limited knowledge of the issues they face and the choices they have to make. There is also the problem of lack of zeal and incentive to seek new information. This presents the modern-day African politician the avenue to provide the electorate with information at little or no cost compared to using traditional media which comes at a huge cost. The reality of every democratic dispensation is that the candidates must take the initiative to reach out to the public rather than the public reaching out to them. Participatory democracy entails the involvement of all political stakeholders. Traditional media tends to limit the full realization of participatory democracy because all stakeholders do not fully participate in the political discourse. The discourse is purely monologic with political parties and their candidates addressing the electorate about their intentions, goals, and why they should be voted for. Social media on the other hand reinforces the participatory democratic theory because it gives all political stakeholders the chance to contribute to political campaigns and discourse. The public can engage with politicians through social media by liking, commenting, and sharing their posts. Candidates can also whip up the interest of the public by creating content that resonates with the electorate.

Literature Review

The literature review considers the following concepts, politics, democracy, and the media with emphasis on social media. The themes for discussion under these concepts are political campaigning, democracy, and participatory politics, and content creation as a tool for persuasion. The themes have been chosen because they correlate with politics and the media.

Political Campaign Strategy.

Political campaigns play an important role in any democratic electoral process. It creates an avenue for political figures and candidates to engage with the electorate and the general public. Every political campaign starts with a plan. To effectively communicate their message, political actors draw a plan and outline strategies and tactics for their campaign. Effectively, campaigns should encompass the thoughts and expectations of the electorates, taking into consideration, the socio-economic and political needs and the aspirations of possibly all the stakeholders on the political spectrum, clearly spelled out in the diction, messages, channels of communication, with specific reference to the targeted audiences and the environment. (Asante, 2020) .

Political campaigns have evolved over the years however, its binding relationship with the media still stands. Media coverage is a crucial factor of political campaigns because it widens the reach of audience. The close relationship between the media and politics suggests that as the media evolves, political communication strategies would have to change as well. Political campaigns have undergone such a radical transformation that those principles and practices accepted by practitioners and theorists even 15 years ago are largely irrelevant today (Trent and Friedenber, 2000, p4). From the above assertion, it is clear that one of the determiners of the evolution of

political campaigns is technology. Although the media remains a constant feature in political campaigns, the evolution of the media directly affects the campaign strategy of political parties. For instance, with the growth of social media in the African sub-region, politicians have had to include WhatsApp, a popular social media application in Africa as a channel of communication in their campaign strategy whereas some sixty years ago, the only relevant channels were face-to-face interactions and newspapers. Unforeseen circumstances such as pandemics can also affect political campaigns. In 2020, when the Coronavirus pandemic hit the whole world, the US and Ghana were in an election year. The campaign strategy of many political parties had to include zoom to facilitate virtual rallies unlike the regular face-to-face with media coverage.

Democracy and participatory politics.

The Webster New Encyclopedia Dictionary (1995) defines democracy as a government in which supreme power is invested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through representation. In general terms, democracy is the system of governance by the people and for the people. According to Larry Diamond (2004), a democratic system should have four main elements: i) A system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; ii) Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; iii) Protection of the human rights of all citizens, and iv) A rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. Communication is a vital part of democratic governance. Thus, political communication plays an essential role in democracy. The concept of political communication emerged during the inception of democracy. It has been argued by many scholars that the Grecian democracy unconsciously used political communication to interact with the citizens under the term “rhetoric” (Asante, 2020). Political rhetoric, very popular in the ancient Greek city of Athens which was practiced by political

stakeholders and hugely affected the outcomes of political campaigns and mobilization of the electorate. Political communication uses the advertising and persuasion model. Political parties advertise their mission, vision, goals, and plans they have for the electorate. They also persuade the electorate to vote for them by sounding convincing in their ideology, actions, and content. Yunis (2004) argues: since it was the politician's job to present his citizens with cogent advice that would serve their interests, the politician was responsible to the audience for the content of his message. When a politician won approval for his policies and the policies were successful, the politician was likely to reap rewards.

The media has been a driving force for political communication over the years since its inception in ancient Greece. In the Greek culture, speakers who were a representation of modern-day political aspirants had to make a speech before an Assembly. Here, the medium for communication was direct with members of the society as audiences.

The active participation of all political stakeholders is a requirement in democratic governance. This ensures that the diverse thoughts of the people are taken into consideration to facilitate effective decision-making. A good example of participatory politics is the system that existed in Athens, Greece. The electorate is invited to an assembly where they are addressed by each aspiring candidate before a decision was made to choose a leader. Presently, this has evolved into political campaigning where candidates convey their intent to the electorates through rallies, debates, and other political programming. Before the advent of digital technology and the internet, political campaign communication through the media was mostly monologic. The political parties aired their content and what they wanted the electorate to know but they did not know the position of the electorate on their views. Social media has solidified the concept of democracy by allowing citizens to actively participate in political elections and discourse by a tap on their phones. Social

media gives the electorate a direct avenue to participate in governance, unlike newspapers, radio, and television. Digital media has defined and put into perspective the dialogic nature of democracy. Today many candidates have social media accounts and update them regularly with campaign messages. The electorate and general public can interact with candidates by liking, sharing, and commenting on their post. Social media also facilitates exposure to news and political content and permits all users to publicly show their agreement or disagreement through posting content and commenting. In terms of Facebook's likes and shares or Twitter's retweet function, this can involve nothing more than a single click. However, organizations and peers can also share invitations to demonstrations, to sign petitions, or to get more involved in a campaign (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska 2017, p25).

Digital Media

About thirty years ago social media was perceived to be non-existent. Nonetheless, some scholars are of a different opinion that social media dates back to the nineteenth century when a series of dots and dashes were tapped out by hand by a telegraph machine. Social media as we know it today stems from the digital revolution in the latter part of the twentieth century. . The advent of the internet and digital technology paved the way for the popularity of social media. With the invention of the internet, the speed with which information travels between people has increased, as snail mail has been replaced by the instant connection of email and social media sites. Social media can be described as web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by sharing and consuming information. (Nations, Daniel 2021) There are different social media platforms but the most popular ones are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit. These different social media platforms have different target audiences and utilize different tools

that enable their users to connect by sharing text audio and visuals. The number of social media users is increasing rapidly with a current number of over 7 billion global users. The increasingly large number of users on these sites has attracted companies to include internet advertising in their marketing plans, due to social media's targeting capabilities and that it is often less expensive than TV or print advertising. (Ton, Thao, 2016). Facebook alone has about 2.70 billion active monthly users followed closely by YouTube and WhatsApp which have approximately 2 billion active monthly users. Twitter has about 300 million monthly active users. According to Instagram's parent company Facebook's latest announcements, the current known number of Instagram users is 1 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2021) These statistics here prove that many people use social media today and it is a necessary tool in reaching out. Many organizations and business entities have realized the advertising, brand promotion, and consumer engagement advantages of these social media sites and using it to their advantage. Political parties, mainly in the western world have also grasped how beneficial social media is to their campaign communication and strategy.

Social media and Agenda Setting.

An important role of the media is to set the agenda. Agenda setting is a theory of mass communication that describes how the mass media interacts with and affects the public it targets. At the core of the theory is the notion that mass media forms the primary interface between the public and the world around them. In the age of traditional media, agenda-setting was solely done by the media. However, all political stakeholders in the digital age have the ability to also set the agenda. Agenda setting theory suggested that the media could influence an election by offering one candidate preferential treatment, such as tripling the volume of coverage about him (coverage

bias), painting his candidate in a consistently negative light (statement bias), or not reporting key events involving his opposition (gatekeeping bias). This theory when it intersects with social media is morphed. With political parties creating content and engaging directly with the public, they are afforded the benefit of setting the agenda to some degree and giving themselves visibility.

Persuasion

Persuasion is typically defined as “human communication that is designed to influence others by modifying their beliefs, values, or attitudes” (Simons, 1976, p. 21). Persuasion theory is an advertising theory that has the aim of subtly changing attitudes, values, and beliefs. The cognitive dissonance theory which is a type of persuasion theory has a goal of inducing enough dissonance in listeners for them to change their attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors. The social judgment theory which was created by Muzafer Sherif and Carl Hovland on the other hand believes that it is easier to persuade people who agree with the persuader. In politics, however, every candidate has an aim of winning. The road to victory does not only envision the support of loyalists but also that of undecided electorates as well. In Ghana for instance both frontrunner parties, the National Democratic Congress(NDC) and New Patriotic Party(NPP) have strongholds in the country. The NDC whose stronghold is the Volta region always comes up with strategies to woo some of the electorates in the Ashanti Region which is the stronghold of the NPP and vice versa. Both theories of persuasion are vital in political campaigning. Politicians would like to persuade their loyalist to continually vote for them but they have a greater task of persuading the electorate who are not on their side or undecided.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Study Method and Design

This research project is an analysis of existing literature and works on social media and political campaign communication in Ghana. It examines a wide range of current and past theories in understanding the research question. This research intends to add to existing knowledge about the influence of digital media in African politics and serve as a guide for future studies on the topic.

Study Area.

The physical area of study for this research is Ghana. A country in West Africa and the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from colonial rule. The time frame for the study is the 2012, 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

Study Sample

The target population for this study was political stakeholders in Ghana. These political stakeholders included political parties, candidates, and the electorate. The two main political parties that were the focal point of this study are the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party. The candidates who dominated this study are John Dramani Mahama of the NDC and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of the NPP. The Ghanaian population was considered the electorate. The NPP and the NDC are two major political parties in Ghana. The NDC, after the 2016 elections attributed their defeat to the utilization of social media by the NPP.

Research Approach

A social research approach was used for this study. The specific social research approach used for this study was the secondary research approach. Information and data were collected from secondary sources such as existing literature on online libraries, information on political party websites and social media accounts. All secondary data collected were compared and analyzed to derive conclusions. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used for this study.

Sources of Data

Secondary data was the sole source for data collection. Secondary data is used to review other writers' opinion on the subject matter and to form a theoretical background which serves as a backbone to this piece of work is built. Secondary data is historic and not seen as first-hand information. Secondary data is more reliable for building on already established knowledge and can also be a source of challenging established knowledge. More so, the secondary data depicts critics on the subject matter. (Ofori, 2019) Existing literature relevant to the topic under study was collected from online libraries. Data was also collected from the website of the political parties under study. Social media pages of political parties, aspirants, and the general public were also an immense source of data.

Analytical Techniques

Secondary data analysis was the main technique used for this research. Secondary data analysis is the analysis of data that was collected by someone else for another primary purpose. The utilization of this existing data provides a viable option for researchers who may have limited time and resources.

The narrative view analysis approach was adopted for this research. Existing literature and theories about politics and media were collected and analyzed to support the research hypothesis of social media as a campaign strategy for politics with focus on Ghana. Content analysis approach was also used to analyze the social media platforms of stakeholders.

Reliability and Validity Study Method

The availability of data and material is crucial for every research. The research topic of this study was based on politics and social media use in Ghana. For this research, only secondary data was used. Secondary data is data collected by someone else other than the primary user. (Wikipedia). Secondary data can include any data that were examined to answer a research question other than the question for which data was initially collected. (Vartanian, 2011) Most of the secondary data were scholarly material pertinent to the research topic that had been analyzed by various qualified researchers. About the literature review, it is noticed that the results from the selected secondary data are not directly intended for this research. However, they are theories that are related and relevant to the research. The secondary data analysis approach was used to validate findings from the selected literature to the hypothesis. Although the selected literature did not totally answer the research question the theories in there justified the hypothesis. The concepts and theories in the literature are valid to the study because they underpin the importance of the study and provides an understanding of the relevance of the topic of interest.

Assumptions and Implied Limitations of Study Method and Design

The literature review was aimed at examining a wide range of sources related to this study and draw conclusions based on the findings. With an original intent of being inclusive research, the researcher had some assumptions that resulted in some bias in the research processes. These assumptions include: (1) Ghana has one of the best democracies in Africa. (2) Social media is averagely accessible in Ghana. (3) Social media in political campaign communication was pioneered in Africa by Ghanaian politicians. (4) The use of social media is cost-effective for political campaigns. (5) Social media is patronized by the younger generation. The literature review provides multiple insights and perspectives affirming and disagreeing with these presuppositions.

The limitations of the study method and design were the limited time frame of the project which necessitated the use of only secondary data. This research was conducted in 14 weeks which limited the use of primary data. The research in question is focused on Africa with minimum research conducted on the topic. Thus, finding enough secondary data to support research was limiting. Most of the literature used was related to research conducted in western environments. Although the concepts may be global and should cut across they could be limited due to the realities in Africa and Ghana such as socio-economic and technological setbacks.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Overview of the research project

Politics and the media have always been closely related. The media is an avenue for communication in varied forms. It exists in the form of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and more recently social media. The media has a primary role of information dissemination. In a democracy, the media is often described as the unofficial fourth element. The media can also be described as a middleman between the politician and the electorate. With a growing global population, candidates cannot always have face-to-face interactions with the public. Thus, candidates rely on the media to transmit or convey their messages to the general public. The media has also acted as watchdogs of politicians, holding them accountable to the public through investigation and scrutiny. Their role fundamentally focused on effecting social change by strengthening the public sphere, promoting participation and representation, etc., in a democratic setting (Lazaroiu, 2012).

Results

Politics and media are closely related. From the literature review, the following themes were realized which are pertinent to the research question: (1) role of traditional and digital media on political campaigns, (2) the impact of social media on political campaigns, and (3) political campaigns in Ghana. These themes underpin the relationship between the media and politics and the impact of social media on political campaigns. An overview of political campaigning in Ghana would also provide more insights into the relevance of social media strategy in African politics.

Role of traditional and digital media on political campaigns.

The media forms an integral part of society and is often considered the fourth arm of government. The media has a crucial role of disseminating information to the public. In a democracy, the media is the main source of political and socio-economic information. Access to information is essential to the health of democracy for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a “checking function” by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them. (USAID,1999). In a political campaign, the media supports political parties and their candidates with advertisements and coverage. Political advertising is a campaign tool politicians use to persuade and influence the electorate. Political advertising includes any advertising displays, newspaper ads, billboards, signs, brochures, articles, tabloids, flyers, letters, radio or television presentations, digital or social media advertising, or other means of mass communication, used for appealing, directly or indirectly, for votes or financial or other support in any election campaign. (RCW 42.17A.005(39)).

Politicians require the services of the media to advertise their content to the general public to influence their voting decision. Political advertising in Ghana started during the struggle for independence. In traditional Ghanaian societies, leadership is a birthright, and kingmakers choose leaders. Thus, the struggle for independence from the British was Ghana’s foretaste of political campaigns. During the struggle for independence, the main medium for communication with the public was newspapers. Radio existed at the time; however, the radio stations were owned by the colonial government and freedom fighters could not use that medium to communicate with the public. There was however the privatization of newspapers. The freedom fighters used print media largely to interact with their supporters. There were times where these candidates were in prison

and still wrote letters that were disseminated by newspapers. One of the popular newspapers during colonial politics was the Evening News. After independence in 1957, television was introduced in Ghana, but it was not until 1992 that the media played a significant role in political campaigning. Traditional media is impactful to political campaigns. For instance, television is still relevant today in politics mainly because of political debates. In Ghana, the Institute of Economic Affairs organizes a presidential debate every election year which is broadcasted on numerous television stations. The limitation of traditional media is the utilization of the concept of non-interactivity among political stakeholders continues to make a less desirable communication channel.

Digital media is influencing politics in an unprecedented way and has changed the trajectory of political campaigns and the engagement of the electorate. Vergeer et al (2011) argue that with the invention of the internet and subsequently social media, political communication has been revolutionized. Social media's biggest advantage over traditional media is the interactivity that it affords stakeholders. With social media both political parties and candidates can have their respective accounts where they interact with the public. For instance, both major political parties, NDC and NPP during the 2016 elections had active accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. John Dramani Mahama the candidate of the NDC has an active account on major social media channels, likewise, his rival Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP.

Both traditional and digital media are important in political campaigns. There is a need for a mixed-method approach in the communications strategy of political campaigns. With digital network strategy becoming an integral part of political campaigns today, traditional media should not lose its place as a channel of communication either as it also plays a distinct role. The value of social media especially in democratic election campaigns lies in the extent to which they interlace with old media to provide a multimedia platform that allows for greater democratic

participation, inclusion, and expression (Essoungou 2010). For example, in certain parts of Africa which are still underdeveloped with limited internet access, the use of radio, television, and print media will still be an ideal communication strategy. The relevance of the mixed approach emanates from its multi-faceted nature, e.g., traversing basic planning, from field organizing to fund-raising, from branding/messaging to press relations, and from registering people to vote to get people out to vote (Michaelsen, 2011, p. 181). In a nutshell, the media's role in politics is critical, and is fundamentally focused on effecting social change by strengthening the public sphere, promoting participation and representation, amongst other things, in a democratic setting (Lazaroiu, 2012).

Impact of social media on political campaigns in Africa.

The introduction of democracy in Africa over the last three decades has impacted the dynamics of governance. The prominence of the media has increased in the African continent due to its importance in a democracy. The advent of new media technologies has transformed the communication process, making it more direct, fast, and complex, besides the added benefit of shrinking the world and expanding access at the same time (Rahul, 2016). Social media is described as a communication platform that allows users to disseminate information and content to a wide audience. Social media platforms can also be described as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, p211). These benefits of social media make it a great avenue for interactive communication.

Patronage and usage of the internet in Africa are growing at a steady rate. In 2010 it was reported that only 10% of the African population had access to the internet. However, by 2015, it had changed to one in five persons having access to internet connection. (ITU, 2015, ICT Facts and

Figures - The World in 2015). The increasing use of the Internet in Africa correlates with the enthusiasm of people to download and use social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. For example, in June 2015, Facebook counted 120 million active users across Africa, of which over 80% were accessing the platform using mobile devices (BBC Afrique, 2015, 'Facebook ouvre un bureau en Afrique').

Democracy and the impact of social media in the governorship election in Ekiti state of the federal republic of Nigeria were analyzed by Adeiza. According to him, that election presented an interesting case for exploring the interaction between politics and the use of digital media by politicians. 'The preliminary findings indicated that the winner of the election was able to use digital media to his advantage while framing them as elitist tools. The candidates framed and used digital media differently during the election' (2014, p. 10). (Asante, 2020). Ghana like Ekiti state in Nigeria adopted social media as a political campaign strategy since the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections, however, it was more evident in the 2016 election which was one of the highly contested elections in the country since it returned to democratic rule in 1992. Politicians do not seem to underestimate the power of social media to galvanize, canvass, and rake-in floating voters and keep their loyal supporters up-to-date with information and news' (Penplusbytes, 2017). The 2016 general election in Ghana is often referenced as the social media election because there was huge candidate-voter engagement on social media. These voters were perceived to be the youth. Statistical studies show that as of 2017 that 75% of Facebook users in Ghana were between the ages of 18- 35 years. Thus, this buttresses the fact that the role of social media in the 2016 general elections was immense. Also in April 2020, the Social Media Statistics in Ghana stood at, 'Facebook, 42.96% Twitter 29.38%, Pinterest, 12.6%, Instagram,10.15%, YouTube, 4.49%,

Reddit, 0.11% (Startcounter, 2020), this shows an increase in social media use in Ghana over the years.

Ghana's 2016 election is a justification of the pivotal role of digital platforms as vital tools for information dissemination and public participation in governance. NDC and NPP, the two foremost political parties utilized social networking platforms, especially Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. They consistently posted statements and 'planted stories, and photos of candidates, as well as audio - and audio-visual materials of party activities.

Political Campaign in Ghana.

Colonial Era

Ghana is the first country in sub-Saharan West Africa to gain independence. Before independence, it was known as the Gold Coast. The journey to independence pioneered political campaigning in the country. Before colonization, the country was made up of different traditional communities with chiefs as leaders. These chiefs naturalized as leaders because it was their birthright as they were born into royal families. Elections started in the country in the 1920s when nine local people were elected to the legislative assembly. The legislative assembly had limited adult suffrage with voters from only three provinces: Accra, Cape Coast, and Sekondi. The 1951 legislative assembly election however was held under universal suffrage, the first of its kind in Africa. The legislative assembly election had minimal campaign because the voters were just a few aristocrats and elites. Political campaigns started during the struggle for independence. The first political party in the country, the United Gold Coast Convention(UGCC) was formed in 1947 by some educated Gold Coasters who felt it was time for the black man to manage his own affairs. In 1948, there was a

riot in Accra, the capital of the Gold Coast. Three soldiers were killed after a group of veteran soldiers went to present a petition to the governor demanding their benefits after fighting in World War II for the British. Prior to this, there was a month-long boycott of all European shops in the country organized by a local Ga chief, Nii Kwabena Bonney due to the exorbitant prices of goods and services. The killing of the soldiers sparked looting of European shops by locals as a response to the brutality meted out to the veteran soldiers. This created a lot of unrest in the country. Kwame Nkrumah, a member of the UGCC capitalized on the situation to stir up an immediate transition to self-governance. On February 29, 1948, amid the rioting, he cabled to the Colonial Office in London saying that people were demanding self-government and that a commission to supervise the transition towards independence should be sent to the Gold Coast. He sent copies of this message to the international press such as The New York Times and the Associated Negro Press. (Popa, 2010) This signified the first time the international press was involved in direct politics in Ghana. In 1949, Kwame Nkrumah broke from the UGCC to form his own political party, the Convention People's Party (CPP). Kwame Nkrumah believed that the Gold Coast needed independence now but the UGCC's goal was independence in the shortest possible time hence his exit. The CPP and the UGCC both had candidates in the 1951 legislative assembly election. The CPP won 35 out of the 38 seats. CPP attained this resounding victory because they engaged newspapers in mobilizing people for rallies and a national strike dubbed "positive action". The most relevant channel of communication during the time was newspapers and the CPP used that as a strategy and won. They used this strategy in subsequent elections in 1957 and the first presidential election in 1960.

Post-Colonial(1966-2000)

Ghana just like many African countries experienced political unrest with many coup d'états and military rule. In 1992 however, the country returned to civilian rule and adopted democratic governance. The NPP and NDC the two major political parties participated in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 1992. Traditional media was used as campaign communication strategies. Television, radio, and newspapers were used to convey content such as manifestoes, rallies, and goals of the various political parties and their candidates. In 1992, the privatization of the media bill had been passed so many private media organizations were springing up to give more and equal opportunities of coverage to all political actors.

Current Dispensation(2012-2020)

The trajectory of political communication and campaign in present-day Ghanaian politics has changed with the advent of digital technology. This new era of electoral campaigns can be better understood in the context of continuous technological and socio-economic development which in turn have transformed electoral communication in such a way that political parties and journalist, as well as other political actors, have been forced to react to the ongoing revolution in order to remain relevant in the political scene. The emergence of the internet gave rise to social media which has become very popular among not only Ghanaian youth but the older generation as well. Today the major political parties all have social media accounts, notably on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. According to News Ghana (2016), social media 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 even when official campaign activities had ended.



New Patriotic Party @NPP... · 12/22/20 ...

There should be no doubt! The Electoral Commission, in accordance with the Constitution and electoral laws, declared the @NPP_GH's candidate for Techiman South as the MP-elect. Once a person is validly elected, any challenge must be through the courts.

#NPPWonTechimanSouth



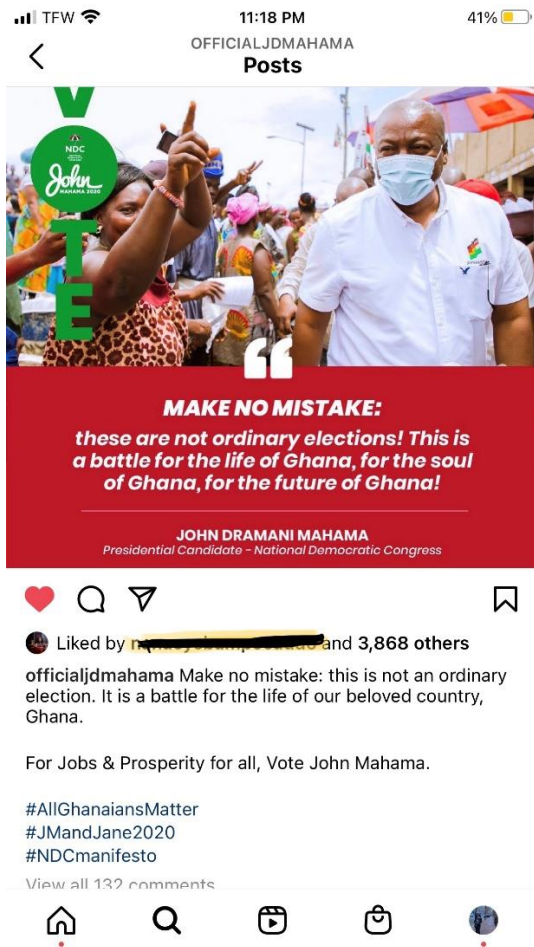
Tweet from the NPP during the 2020 election

2016, was a crucial election year in the history of the country. The NDC had been in power for two terms, that is 8 years. The interesting aspect of this election however is that it was the third time NPP presidential hopeful at the time Nana Addo Akufo-Addo was contesting. For the 2016 election campaign, the NPP decided to capitalize on the use of social media and digital media in general as a driving force for their campaign. Nana Akufo-Addo was contesting with the incumbent John Dramani Mahama, thus a major strategy used for the election was to persuade the electorate with their alleged failures of the NDC. Social media was used greatly to disseminate this information.

In the run-up to the 2016 elections in Ghana, a picture of the NPP presidential candidate Nana Akufo- Addo drinking Kalypo, a locally produced fruit drink went viral. Kalypo is mainly patronized by young children so it was a bit awkward to see a presidential candidate drink it. The NPP capitalized on the popularity the picture was gaining on social media and started the Kalypo

drinking challenge. They engaged many celebrities and party stalwarts to take a picture drinking Kalypo and post on social media. Soon this turned into a public frenzy with many supporters of the NPP joining the challenge. The Kalypo challenge is a good example of public engagement with social media in political campaign education.

The use of Hashtags is also popular in the Ghanaian political campaign landscape. The NDC's campaign in 2020 adopted the hashtags #JManJane and #AllGhaniansMatter. Both hashtags recorded over 1000 posts on Instagram. (Instagram, 2020) incorporated various media strategies, including the heavy use of social media by the presidential candidate of the NDC. The NPP hashtag for the 2016 elections was #4moretodomore. The incumbent, Nana Akufo-Addo, and his supporters adopted the hashtag #4MoretodoMore which also increased public and electorate engagement. Another interesting twist to the 2020 elections was the use of Snap Chat by both the NDC and the NPP. Both parties design Snap Chat filters with background music for Snap Chat patrons to use. This was the first of the kind in the country and many young people embraced it.



Instagram post by NDC candidate John Mahama with hashtags #AllGhanainsMatter and #JMandJane2020

The broadcast of political debates in Ghana has also changed. Television was the main medium for airing political debates. Today, although it is still broadcasted live on television, it is still streamed on all major social media platforms. For instance, during the electioneering period in 2012, the Institute of Economic Affairs devoted a YouTube channel to air live a presidential debate organized by them so that Ghanaians and other internationals outside the country can follow the debate online (Wasswa, 2013). Many people now prefer to watch political debates and rallies online because they can engage with other stakeholders in real-time through the comment section. This affirms Acquaye's (2015) argument that it has become a common practice now for Ghanaians to take to social media to discuss emerging political issues some of which spark

debates lasting sometimes for a week, thus intensifying political interaction among Ghanaians online. Traditional media organizations have also started incorporating social media in their service delivery by inviting viewers and listeners to share their opinion on different political issues through Facebook and WhatsApp.

The adoption of social media in political campaign communication has been profound with many advantages. Politicians have taken advantage of social media and using it for political campaign strategy, political advertising and electorate engagement. Social media as an expressive or unmediated form of participation has its own implications for the future of Ghana's political system (Putnam 2000).

Descriptive Analysis

The findings of the literature review show that social media is a useful and effective political campaign media strategy. The concept of democracy which is the embodiment of political communication and campaign requires inclusive participation of all stakeholders. Traditional media disseminated information and advertised content but there were lapses of dialogue and public engagement. Social media bridges this gap by affording democratic states to have a dialogic communication with all stakeholders, particularly the electorate.

Reliability and Validity of Analysis

This literature review outlines the major theories, studies, and concepts related to politics and the media. The studies included the analysis of secondary data to validate the assertion that social media is an effective communication strategy. The recurring ideas and concepts from the data confirm the validity of the findings. The sample used for the research, that is two major political

parties in Ghana was relevant to the study because their following on social media and supporters, in general, formed the majority of the electorate in the country.

Hypothesis

The original hypothesis of this paper proposed that social media inclusion in political campaigns and communication was pertinent and a tool for democracy. The literature to a large extent showed that social media as a political campaign strategy was effective for political discourse, political advertising, and public engagement. Thus, the original hypothesis matched the findings from the literature review.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of Material

The study investigated how social media is revolutionizing electoral campaigns in Ghana. The aims of this study were to 1) assess how the various political parties, aspirants, and their allies use social media to campaign to the masses. 2) assess the effectiveness of social media as a political communication campaign tool. 3) to demonstrate social media as a cost-effective medium of political communication as opposed to other media. 4) assess public engagement on social media in developing countries. 5) assess the availability of the internet to drive social media engagement concerning politics in developing countries in Africa such as Ghana. The literature review discussed key topics on democracy, media and politics, and campaign strategy. The data reviewed for this study were new which suggests that the area of studies is still developing thus this research is an addition to the existing literature on this topic by providing a Ghanaian perspective. Both qualitative and quantitative methodology was used with great reliance on secondary data to understand the use of social media as a campaign strategy. Content analysis of social media accounts from the two political parties also complemented the secondary data analyzed for this research. The analysis from the data gathered acknowledged the essential role of social media in political campaigns.

Findings and Implications

Social media is regarded as an effective tool in present-day political campaigns and the literature review justifies this. The importance of social media as a new media cannot be understated which is the reason why many politicians worldwide now utilize social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to reach and interact with their constituents and supporters. (Aidoo, 2018) Studies conducted by (Baker, 2009; Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010) also suggest

that although direct links have not been drawn between a candidate's presence on social media and victory in an election, there is a positive trend that these social media sites have an influence on voters online. However, there some studies that argue that a mixed-method approach of using both traditional and social media is more a more formidable strategy. For example, Aronson, argues that in a dominantly illiterate environment, the old media become very effective in information dissemination (Aronson, 2012). Asante (2020) also supports Aronson's view suggesting the best option, in this instance, is the adoption of a mixed approach in communications, in terms of strategy, because the use of a digital network strategy has become an integral part of a campaign. Thus, each political jurisdiction must assess its populace and its needs and limitations to inform the best channel of communication.

Analysis of findings.

From the research, it is realized that politics and the media work hand in hand. From the inception of politics and the concept of democracy, the media has been a force that propels political activities. Political actors use campaigns for political advertising and electorate engagement. Traditional media has been used as a channel for political campaign communication for a long time. However, with the advent of the internet, social media has revolutionized the scope of political campaigns. Social media fulfills a factor of democracy that calls for the participation of all stakeholders. There is more electorate engagement with the use of social media. However, from the literature review, it is worth noting that traditional media has not entirely lost its relevance in political campaign communication. Social media is an added advantage and it should be utilized with traditional media for effective and results-oriented political campaigns.

Hypothesis and Findings

The hypothesis of this study predicted that social media is an effective tool in political campaign communication and should be adopted by other African countries as it had positive results in Ghana. This research project's findings to a large extent support the hypothesis. Social media supports dialogic communication and increases public engagement which is a requirement for democracy and effective governance. The successful use of social media also in the 2016 and 2020 elections in Ghana supports the hypothesis. Thus, the literature regarding this topic provides information that supports the assertion that social media is crucial for political campaigns in today's technology - world.

Post Analysis and Implications of Hypothesis and Findings

Digital technology has changed the operations of many industries be it in education, business management, and healthcare. Many institutions are using social media to drive advertisement and engagement with their stakeholders. Thus, politics is not the only industry that has been influenced by social media. With regards to the long relationship between politics and the media, political actors must be current with changes and trends in media. It is also important for political actors in the future to recognize that the emergence of new media does not mean preceding media should be relegated to the background but should adopt ways to use existing and new media to achieve results.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion Summary of Academic Study

Overall, the literature review showed that social media strategy in today's political campaign is important. Politics from its inception has worked in close relation to the media. Democracy, a political concept that is participatory governance emphasizes the role of the media in information dissemination and engagement of all political stakeholders.

Based on the literature, the media, in general, gives visibility and coverage of political activities. However, traditional media limited interaction between political actors and the electorate. Social media bridges this gap by facilitating engagement among political parties, candidates, and the general public. Social media also gives political stakeholders the chance to also set the agenda on issues and maximize their coverage without absolute dependence on social media.

It is worth noting, however, that traditional media has not lost its relevance in politics and political campaigning in general. Politicians should maximize the benefits of both traditional and social media in their campaign strategy to facilitate optimal electoral engagement.

Reference to Literature Review

In this research, the initial literature review was a crucial part of defining the final research project. Although social media is the most popular media today and changed the scope of political campaigns and communication it is not an absolute communications strategy. The studies showed that traditional media is still useful and a mixed approach of fusing both media in campaigns and communication is bound to yield results.

Implications of Academic Study

Incorporating social media in a political campaign strategy has many advantages. It maximizes the coverage and visibility of political parties and candidates while keeping all stakeholders engaged. Social media usage by political actors facilitates active engagement and dialogic interactions. Social media use in Africa is still fairly new. With a growing number of users in the continent, political parties and candidates must begin to factor social media and digital technology in general into their campaign strategy. Leveraging on the benefits of social media such as advertising, strong public engagement and affordability can help candidates to achieve their goal of ultimately winning elections. Traditional media should continue to be harnessed as it has its merits depending on the demographics and situation. Media and politics will continuously closely be linked, therefore political actors must be abreast with the changing trends in media to stay relevant and meet the communication needs of their electorate.

Limitations of the theory or Method of Research

The major limitation of this research project was the use of purely secondary data. The topic for research is fairly new in Africa thus, there is a limited study and works analyzed. Primary data sources would have been ideal to ascertain the real issues on the ground. However, the time frame for this research was 14 weeks and the researcher couldn't incorporate interviews of different political stakeholders in the study. The analysis of the various social media pages of the NDC, NPP, and their candidates by the researcher may also present some unconscious biases. Biases of the various references used for this research project may also be reflected in this study.

The literature review to a large extent validated the research question and hypothesis. However, many of the literature used were of western origin due to the limited literature available for the

African perspective. Thus, some of the recommendations may not be relevant to purely African societies. Also, the socio-economic situation of the continent and accessibility to strong internet was not assessed. Thus, the findings of this study may be a representation of only the elite or middle-class population and not the entire population of Africa and Ghana.

Recommendations or Suggestions for Future Academic Study

This study recommends a more extensive study on the research topic. For the future, researchers should prioritize the use of primary data and an extended for this research topic. Ghana and Africa at large have different demographics to the western world and more inquiry must be made into the topic on the ground instead of full reliance on secondary data and personal analysis to produce a less biased study.

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