

ПРОБЛЕМЫ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЕЙ В КАЧЕСТВЕ СРЕДСТВА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ¹ THE CHALLENGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEDIUM OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION²

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Аннотация. Социальные медиа — самое популярное
в мире средство политической коммуникации во всех
политических структурах. Они стали платформой как
для политических элит, так и для «низов», платформой,
позволяющей общаться с гражданами и электоратом
в избирательном округе, даже в мире международной
политики. Основная цель данного исследования —
определить проблемы социальных медиа как сред-
ства политической коммуникации. Социальные медиа
являются жизненно важным инструментом для распро-
странения массовой информации, однако некоторые
лидеры не используют социальные медиа и даже не
имеют ни одного аккаунта в социальных сетях. В рамках
исследования попытаемся определить причины этого.

Результаты исследования подчеркивают роль социаль-
ных медиа в современной политической коммуникации,
проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются социальные медиа
в области политической дезинформации, ложной иден-
тичности, фальшивых новостей, интернет-фобии, а также
влияние руководителей социальных медиа, которые под-
рывают их как средство политической коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: социальные медиа; политическая
коммуникация; интернет-фобия; фальшивые новости;
ложная идентичность

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- **Abstract.** Social Media has been the most popular medium
• in the world for political communication across all political
• structures. Social media has become a platform for both
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• spread mass information, yet there are some leaders who
• do not use social media and do not even have any social
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• determine the reasons behind their decisions.

- The research findings will highlight the role social media
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• false identity, fake news, internet-phobia and the influence
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- **Keywords:** social media; political communication; inter-
• net-phobia; fake news; false identity

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Social Media has been the most popular medium in the world for political communication across all political structures. Social media has become a platform for both political elites and the grassroots to communicate to citizens and the electorate in the constituency, even in the world of international politics. The main purpose of this research is to determine the challenges of social media as a medium of political communication. Social media is a vital tool to spread mass information, yet there are some leaders who do not use social media and do not even have any social media handle. As part of the study, the researcher will try to determine the reasons behind their decisions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political communication is the main item of activities in democratic and non-democratic society; Political communication is a single tool that is used by political leaders to campaign for votes, design policies, implement policies and accounts to the citizens. Political communication has long been communicated through the traditional media for many years. In the new era of technology, almost all the traditional communication media, be it telephone, radio, television, post mail, newspapers, gonggo-beaters etc., are remodeled onto the internet, giving birth to new electronic services such as email, television, digital newspapers. Social media have been video streaming websites. All this has also been modified into a single social media platform for both parties. As stated, social media include a broad array of internet-based applications [13].

Today, social media have become a battle field for information across the length and breadth of the earth. In international politics, social media have become part of a hybrid tool for supremacy in international politics, social media is not just a platform for communication, but it is also a tool for the influence of super powers. This has

effectively influenced the challenges of social media as a tool for political communication.

Social media is growing in all spheres as a medium of communication, politicians have opted the way to use social media for their communication, politicians use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, VKontakte, etc. Some politicians manage their own account; they write, publish and share information publically on their social media platforms, while others employ social media managers to manage their social media platforms. Instead of journalists monitoring the political activity, political actors themselves produce their content and make them publicly available on the social media platforms [17].

Political communication on social media has a replicate effect on the constituent and beyond, when political leaders post information on social media, followers and friends of political leaders quickly share the information on their social media accounts. The information can spread beyond the boundaries of the constituency. Social media enables reciprocal communication by both users using the social media medium [2].

The features of social media communication make it easier to spread information as well as to manipulate information in a form of propaganda message by the opponents of political parties and political activists, with social media, all users are content creators. Barack Obama is a clear example of a politician who used social media to raise funds, campaign and also influence all America citizens, including young people who, could not vote because they are underage but were able to use social media to campaign for Obama, the method Obama campaign used the internet for his communication has forever changed how election campaign are run, which has also significantly all communication in the political sphere [5].

Social media as stated has transformed the way we communicate, going into the future social media will be the main medium that politician and voters will engage in day to day communication, because it is more advantage than the traditional method of communication. Notwithstanding the advantage there are numerous challenges facing social media as methods of political communication, this paper therefore seeks to analyse the challenges

of social media in political communication by using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather data through social media. According to Bouchrika [4], a contemporary method sprung from the mixed methods, either the combination of quantitative and qualitative, also known as triangulation in social research. This method will, therefore, enable the research to study the challenges of social media with empirical data and add additional knowledge to the existing literature.

Social media has also become a platform of information war, just to mention a few in India TikTok has been banned for fear that it will spread propaganda information and also acquire data of Indians to the Chinese government. This information war is likely to increase into a form of multipolar information war.

2. RELATED WORK

The technological era has changed the old way of communication be it newspaper, radio, post, messenger etc. [1]. Stated, Communication medium and communication technologies play a significant role in ensuring effectiveness of the communication outcome and thus the effectiveness of the medium that best suit the communication channel should not be overlooked. Managers of social media play significant role on how social media users communicate on social media as stated [14], creating a meaningful environment for the users does this. The most central and paramount part of social media manager's role is to take appropriate, strategic steps that ensure meaningful conversations.

Social media platform is the playing grounds for all political stakeholders involve, and they all try to use the same platform to undermine each other superiority or influence on the constituents. As state [11] politicians have the power to influence individuals by adopting certain strategies that compliment populism. Politicians because of their popularity in the community they use populism in social media to influence followers against the opposition or the ruling government depending on the position of the politician.

Social media has taken the role of traditional media and this has created an open space for communication, demanding accountability by the voters has also been easy and effective. Social media has changed how we are governed by making the process more transparent. Many leaders across the world have taken to social media to voice their opinions and priority issues, giving people a better understanding of the government they have elected [10].

The impact of social media has not only changed the method of communication but has also challenged every aspect of political institutions and political culture

and social-political system in the society, social media is therefore a medium for political debate.

Using social media as a medium of political communications comes with numerous daily challenges due to many factors. The challenges people encounter using the internet is directly related to social media because social media also use internet for connectivity and networking. The common challenges involved with social media in political communication are, misinformation, fake news, social media\internet-phobia fake identity, hacking, social media management/ chief executive officer influenced. As stated (European Union, 2021) Social media offer great opportunities to spread false information to a great number of people.

But it is also a challenge on how to manage political information or communication that has elements of security that can be control by government in traditional media to prevent conflict, but on social media is more challenging to control information.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Social media is a powerful political communications medium, with widespread influence over every corner of our society on earth, as we are moving towards the digital revolution. The digital revolution has not only influenced businesses and made the world more accessible to trade, but it has also changed the way we communicate. According to *Datareportal* there are 4.74 billion social media users around the world in October 2022, equating to 59.3 percent of the total global population [16].

Political leaders and activists are aware that politics is numbers; therefore, social media is now the area for all political communication engagements. The effectiveness of social media in communication has attracted Politicians to sign on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, VKontakte, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, etc. has seen an increase in the number of political accounts for political leaders.

Develop democratic nations and developing democratic nations leaders are all engaged on social media, Notable president that have used social media to the admiration of the citizenry to engage in effective political communicate is Barack Obama. Barack Obama rose to prominence as a political communicator who could deliver speeches with universal themes and the opportunities of digital age to maximum political strength [7]. When Obama left office his successor Donald Trump also used social media effectively especially with the twitter, that require just a combination of few words to get the conversation going, according to Bickart, Fournier & Nisenholtz [3], America presidential campaign, political

commentators urged Donald Trump to give his Twitter account a rest. He did not consider their call; he rather increased his provocative communication, bypassing mainstream media in favor of social media to deliver his messages directly, frequently, at all hours, and without filters.

Journalists and media persons visit social media platforms to read what they post and write on their social media handles and report. Traditional media like Television, radio, newspaper just to mention a few also get their sources of information on social media platforms which they report to their listeners and viewers. Obama and Trump often had their communication on social media been re communicated by traditional media houses, social media has youthful followers, as a result traditional media want to get their information to both the old and young people that are mostly on social media. Almost all young people used smartphone with at least one social media account, therefore making it easy to access political information. According to Dasli [6], media such as social media platforms provide information to individuals, reach them in a short time and spread the available information. Social media is fast, interesting, free to access and communicate that can be access in any part of the planet but with daily challenges associated with the Internet that also poses challenges to political communication.

4. THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There are numerous challenges politicians and their constituents encounter accessing information on social media. The main challenges that are associated with internet users also affect social media users, such as misinformation, fake news, cybercrime, and so on.

To analyze the challenge, I took data on social media platforms that I belong with members from Ghana and Russia were the majority. The data was used to analyze the issues citizens encounter in identifying, fake news, the official accounts of politicians on social media platforms. Information on social media may come from different social media platforms but initially emerge from one source.

This therefore, makes it difficult to identify real source of information communicate on social media; the medium of communication is very important in political communication. A reliable and verified account will make communication effective, [1] stated communication medium and communication technologies play a significant role in ensuring the effectiveness of the communication outcome and thus the effectiveness of the medium that best suits the communication channel should most overlooked. Fake information has become the most widespread challenge in using social media; this

is because people are more interested in the information of fake news rather than factual or real news. People create fake accounts of politicians to share fake news which tarnish the image of the politicians. Another form of fake news is editing the real information by inserting fake information to discredit the real information.

Another challenge is the way social media developers and managers control the social media platforms. They define the rules and conditions of communication on the various social media platforms; freedom of speech has a limit on various social media platforms. Social media owners and managers directly and indirectly influence the limit of freedom of speech, which sometimes is centered on rules and regulations of the social media application. Donald Trump is one of America president that was removed from Twitter because the managers used their power to suspend his account indefinitely based on his Twitter messages. The managers said he violated Twitter conditions and terms, yet Donald Trump was only expressing his freedom of speech. As soon as the new managers took over Twitter, he was on his way to regaining his account. Elon Musk when he bought Twitter, he did a survey by asking a simple question, to reinstate Trump or not to reinstate, the poll result showed that 51.8% in favor of reinstating Trump and 48.2% were opposed as reported by (Paul & Duffy CNN 2022) Trump account was banned following January, 6, 2021 attack on capitol, Trump account was restored by Twitter chief executive officer, the new owner Elon Musk. So there is a clear indication that managers and owners of social media platforms are challenges to political communication on social media platforms.

Verification of information on social media is very limited, therefore making it a challenge to verify sources of information; information sharing is paramount in political communication, especially during election campaigns. Therefore, there is need for political activists to verify the information for political consumption. Verifying information needs special skills, since information is shared across different social media platforms and it will only take people with skills in communication and technology to verify information.

Misinformation is widely spread on social media, and it is very difficult to control the social media space. The challenges keeps on going as experts find solutions to existing problems, new problems emerge.

5. DATA ANALYZE AND PRESENTATION

The research data was taking by sending questionnaire on social media platforms that I belong Facebook, WhatsApp, VKontakte and Telegram. Since the study focus was on the challenges of social media as a medium of

political communication, the researcher chose to use social media to gather data to support the study. This is not to say that people who are not on social media platform do not access information on social media.

Table 2. Sex

| Sex | Male | Female |
|---------------|------|--------|
| Number | 49 | 1 |
| Percentage, % | 98 | 2 |

The total number of respondents were 50 out of that 49 were male representing 98% whilst 1 was female representing 2%, in general women are not much interested into politics and as the data shows, men dominate in the political sphere therefore, their interest in political communication. There are discussion going on across the world by women advocate, to promote women to go into politics, social media is a very good platform for promoting women in politics agenda.

Table 2. Ages

| Age group in years | 20–40 | 41–60 | Above 60 |
|--------------------|-------|-------|----------|
| Number | 30 | 18 | 2 |
| Percentage, % | 60 | 32 | 8 |

The data of the ages of respondents indicates the interest by young people in social media, people between the ages of 20–40 years were 30 representing 60%, the ages between 41–60 years were 18 respondents representing 36% and above 60 years were 2 respondents representing 4%. The data above confirm that young people are the majority in social media usage. Young people most often used social media to stay informed about current affairs. As compared to older generation who are more likely to get their news source from traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines.

Table 3. Sources of political information

| Source | Social media | Traditional media |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Number | 48 | 2 |
| Percentage, % | 96 | 4 |

When asked respondents about the source of political information, 48 respondents representing 96% used social media for their political communication, 2 respondents representing 4% access political communication through traditional media. The availability of smartphones and the availability of internet make it easy and free to access information anytime at anywhere; therefore many peo-

ple will continue to use social media for their political communication. In contrast it is more difficult to carry televisions along with you and one need to be at home to be able to watch television. People been able to communicate with their political leaders on social media will continue to motivate constituent to used social media as a medium of communication.

Table 4. Challenges encounter

| Are there challenges in accessing political communication on social media | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| Number | 49 | 1 |
| Percentage, % | 98 | 2 |

When asked are there challenges in accessing political communication on social media 49 people representing 98% answered yes and 1 person representing 2% answered no. This is an indication that they are many challenges in using social media as medium of political communication by social media users.

Similarly when asked to mention some of the challenges they encounter on social media, fake news and misinformation were the most common concern among the respondents, they pointed out that fake news is basic facts of current event on social media.

False identity respondent largely acknowledge that political leaders and activist images, photos and names are used by scammers, internet farmers, to share information and discredit each other for political gains. Scammers used political leader’s profiles to scam people and steal money from innocent people at the blind site of political leaders.

Respondent were also concerned about the lack tools to verify false information and the inability of social media managers and application developers to quickly block false information on social media, is not making social media a better place as compare to traditional media in dealing fake news and misinformation. Few of the respondents also mention cyber-attack on social media as challenge to personal data of users.

Table 5. Government control of social media

| Do your government control social media | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| Number | 24 | 26 |
| Percentage, % | 48 | 52 |

The question on government control on social media had almost a split response 24 people representing 48% believed that government control information on social media while 26 people representing 52% believed that government do not control social media. The response reflect the nature of social media groups or platform I

belong and which was where I collected my data, therefore, I further interpreted the data based on nationality. In all my social media platforms Ghanaians are majority except two which the majority are Russians, that is the telegram platform and the VKontakte platform. The answers therefore, reflect this dynamics of nationality and what is happening in their countries. Since in Ghana government has never blocked social media, the respondents among Ghanaians will definitely answer no, in contrast Russia government currently blocked some social media platforms before the Russia-Ukraine conflict LinkedIn was blocked and when the war started many more social media platforms were blocked by the government, therefore Russians are more likely to answer yes.

Government in other parts of the world when there is protest or conflict with government, the first thing government authorities does is to block social media platforms to prevent sharing of information or escalation of the protest. Other government block social media for fear of their security, India has blocked TikTok and America government is following suit. The global war on information by super powers is also in play; China is trying to also develop social media application to counter America social media application a place where young people access political information.

To determine the reason why some politicians and political leaders do not have social media accounts, the response was classified into two theories, internet phobia and personal reasons. Many political leaders are internet phobia, internet phobia is the fear of putting one data on the internet, fear that hackers will hack their accounts, fear that people will use their profile to create fake accounts and used for criminal activities. Others don't just want to be on social media due to personal reasons which is difficult to determine.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this research, the researcher propose these recommendations and suggestions.

Government and application developers should invest in making sure that misinformation is quickly detected on social media and be blocked to prevent it been shared to multiple social media platforms.

Social media platforms should add tools on the platforms to make users to quickly verify information especially political information, to authenticate the facts and reality of the information.

Government should demand that all social media platforms that has user accounts should put measures that will prevent scammers to use profiles and photos of political leaders and activist to scam and defraud people, this can be done by using facial or photo recognizing

tools to authenticate multiple accounts of political leaders and to deactivate suspicious accounts without third party report or complain.

There should be a universal law that will punish scammers and those who create fake content on social media that has security implication to world social media ecosystem. Since fake content from a local community on a single smartphone has the potential to spread across the world with minutes.

Social media should be liberal and free of speech should not be limited on social media and government should make sure social media platforms are not blocked for political gains by the ruling governments.

All political leaders who do not have social media account due personal reasons or internet data phobia, should overcome any obstacle that is preventing them from having social media account and create at least one since political leaders are public servant is therefore necessary to be in contact with their citizenry all the time.

7. CONCLUSION

Social media has seen a rapid increase in information sharing and effective direct communication between political leaders and ordinary citizens, which will have been impossible on traditional media. Respondents are optimistic about social media, which is the voice for the voiceless. Social media to also feel powerful just as the political leaders and this has made political communication very productive.

Young people are all over social media as earlier mentioned in the data analyses, traditional media is only for the few older people, therefore all political leaders and politicians must be on social media, politicians that are social media phobia should overcome the fear and get involve.

Political leaders and politicians should overcome social media phobia.

Social media increase political communication with voters, political actors and all those in the political process, however there are challenges associated with social media as medium of political communication, the challenges is inevitable but can be managed.

Social media is of great importance especially for young people to communicate about politics through social media free of charge with a smart phone on their fingers.

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