



**FACEBOOK USAGE IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN GHANA: THE CASE  
OF TWO POLITICAL PARTIES**

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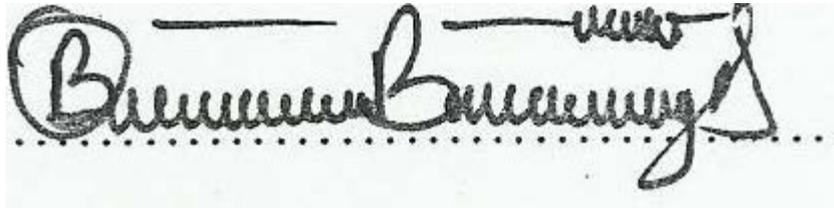
**APRIL 2019**

## **Declaration**

This PhD thesis “Facebook usage in political communication in Ghana: The case of two political parties” was conducted at the Centre for Communication, Media and Society in University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa from the year 2017 to 2019 under the supervision of Professor Donal Patrick McCracken.

I, Akwasi Bosompem Boateng (217010993) hereby declare that this thesis is my own unaided original work, which has not been previously submitted for any other degree or examination at another university elsewhere. All the sources, citations and borrowed ideas used in my work have been duly acknowledged in the thesis and detailed in the bibliography section. This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of PhD at the Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS) in the School of Applied Human Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa.

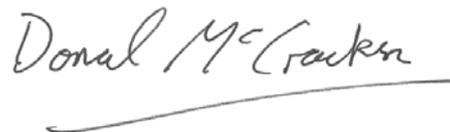
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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my late grandfather, Chief Superintendent (Retired) S. K. Yamoah, formerly of the Ghana Prison Service, who could not live to see the completion of this doctoral programme. He passed away during the first year of my PhD studies in December 2017. It is also dedicated to my grandmother, Mrs. Mary Yamoah who continues to encourage me to strive for the best in life. God bless you!

## **Abstract**

The emergence and spread of social media are changing activities in many walks of life. These technologies have ushered in a digital era that has transformed communication, engagements and relationships. Social media have revolutionised how political communication and politics, particularly electoral processes are also done. This study is centred in Ghana and investigated how Facebook is used in intra-party elections by New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. Since the New Patriotic Party took over the reign of political power in 2017, there has been a considerable rise in political vigilantism in Ghana, which some have attributed to lack of direct access to parties and officials due to limited time given to stakeholders during “phone-in” segments on political programmes in traditional media. There are also debates as to whether social media have improved political communication and participation in Africa. More so, studies conducted on political use of social media in Ghana have not explored their appropriation in intra-party elections. The purpose of this study is to shed new light on the debate regarding social media usage in political communication in Africa, examining how Facebook is appropriated by political parties in Ghana. The study employed qualitative and quantitative techniques (mixed methods approach) in sequential triangulation of interviews and content analysis. Underpinned by interpretative and pragmatic paradigms, this study conducted interviews with communication officials of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. Contents of Facebook posts of the parties were analysed to corroborate or dispute data collected from interviews. Observations were also made from visits and activities of parties during data collection. The transcribed data was thematically organised for the study to analyse and present in narrative forms. Data from content analysis of Facebook was also coded and put into figures, numbers and tabular formats. This study anchored on the theories of technology appropriation, relationship management, and agenda setting. Generally, this study indicated that political parties in Ghana particularly New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress use social media especially Facebook in political communication and intra-party elections. However, the parties were particularly using Facebook for public information purposes instead of establishing mutually beneficial relationships through interactive engagements and two-way symmetrical communication on the social networking site, or perhaps not making good use of Facebook especially in internal elections. Parties considered and delivered social media communication on ad-hoc value without concerted efforts and political public relations strategies to maximise potentials. Inasmuch as political parties in Ghana demonstrated the desire to establish relationships by creating pages on

Facebook to get closer to stakeholders and the public, they could not achieve this. They have focused their attention on passive traditional communication without reconsidering their activities to improve social media use especially “Facebooking” for interactions and mutually beneficial engagements and relationships. This study suggests that political parties improve interactions and conversations with stakeholders. Parties need to create political public relations units of communication professionals with expertise and skills to advice and manage social media engagements as specialised activities to extend mutually beneficial relationships. Communication officials of parties have to be trained in political public relations and social media for more knowledge and understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with these new forms of communication technologies to harness their utility.

**Key words:** Ghana, Political Communication, Social Media, Facebook, Public Relations, Vigilantism, Technology Appropriation, Relationship Management, Agenda-Setting

## Abstract (isiZulu)

Ukuvela nokusabalalisa kwezokuxhumana kwabantu kushintsha imisebenzi emikhakheni eminingi yokuphila. Lezi zindlela zobuchwepheshe ziye zafaka inkathi yedijithali eguqule ukuxhumana, ukusebenzisana nobuhlobo. Imithombo yezenhlalo iguqule indlela ukuxhumana kwezombangazwe nezombangazwe, ikakhulukazi izinqubo zokukhetha zenziwa. Lolu cwaningo lwenziwe eGhana futhi luhlolisise ukuthi i-Facebook isetshenziselwa kanjani ukhetho lwangaphakathi kweqembu iNew Patriotic Party ne-National Democratic Congress. Njengoba i-New Patriotic Party ithatha ukubusa kwamandla ezombangazwe ngo-2017, kuye kwaba nokwanda okukhulu kwezobucayi kwezombusazwe eGhana, abanye abaye babonisa ukungabi nokufinyelela okuqondile kumaqembu kanye nezikhulu ngenxa yesikhathi esinqunyiwe esinikezwe abahlanganyeli ngesikhathi " -in "izingxenywe zezinhlelo zezombusazwe emidlalweni yendabuko. Kukhona futhi izingxabano mayelana nokuthi imithombo yezokuxhumana yenza ngcono ukukhulumisana kwezombangazwe nokuhlanganyela e-Afrika. Ngaphezu kwalokho, ukuhlolwa okwenziwe ekusetshenzisweni kwezombusazwe kwezokuxhumana eGhana akuzange kuhlolwe ukwabiwa kwabo emakhethweni angaphakathi kweqembu. Inhloso yalolu cwaningo kwakuwukweza ukukhanya okusha kwi-mpikiswano mayelana nokusetshenziswa kwezindaba zenhlalo ekukhulumisaneni kwezombangazwe e-Afrika, ukuhlola indlela i-Facebook eyabelwe ngayo amaqembu ezombangazwe eGhana. Ucwangingo lwalusebenzisa amasu afanelekayo nokulinganisa (izindlela ezixubileyo) endleleni yokucubungula ngokulandelana kwemibuzo kanye nokuhlaziywa kokuqokethwe. Exhaswe yiziboniso zokuhumusha nokuziphendulela, lolu cwaningo luqhutshwe izingxoxo neziphathimandla zokuxhumana ze-New Patriotic Party ne-National Democratic Congress. Okuqokethwe kwe-Facebook okuthunyelwe kwamaqembu kwahlaziywa ukuze kuqinisekise noma kuphikisana nedatha eqoqwe kusuka ezinkingeni. Ukubheka kwakwenziwa futhi ngokuvakashelwa kanye nemisebenzi yamaqembu ngesikhathi sokuqoqwa kwedatha. Idatha ebhaliwe ihlelwe ngokweqile ukuze isifundo sihlaziye futhi sibonise emafomu elandisa. Idatha kusuka kokuhlaziywa kokuqokethwe kwe-Facebook nayo ibhalwe futhi ifakwe ematsheni, izinombolo namafomethi we-tabular. Lesi sifundo sisekelwe emibhalweni yokwabiwa kwetheknoloji; ukuphathwa kobudlelwane; nokuhlelwa kokuhlela. Ngokuvamile, lolu cwaningo lubonise ukuthi amaqembu ezombusazwe eGhana ikakhulukazi i-New Patriotic Party ne-National Democratic Congress zisebenzisa ama-social media ikakhulukazi i-Facebook ekukhethweni kwezombusazwe kanye nokukhethwa komphakathi. Kodwa-ke, amaqembu asebenzisa kakhulu i-Facebook ngenhloso yolwazi lomphakathi

esikhundleni sokusungula ubuhlobo obuzuzisayo ngokubambisana okuhlangene nokuxhumana okunomqondo ohlanganiselwe kwisayithi lokuxhumana nabantu, noma mhlawumbe ungasebenzisi kahle i-Facebook ikakhulukazi kukhetho lwangaphakathi. Amaqembu acubungula futhi athumele ukuxhumana kwezokuxhumana kwezenhlalo ngokubaluleka kwe-ad-ho ngaphandle kwemizamo ehlanganyelwe kanye nezindlela zokuxhumana zomphakathi zezombangazwe zokukhulisa amathuba. Njengoba amaqembu ezombusazwe eGhana abonisa isifiso sokwakha ubuhlobo ngokudala amakhasi e-Facebook ukuze asondelane nabathintekayo kanye nomphakathi, abakwazanga ukufeza lokhu. Baye bagxila ekukhulumisaneni okungokwenkolo ngaphandle kokucabangela amasu okuthuthukisa ukusetshenziswa komphakathi kwezokuxhumana ikakhulukazi "Facebooking" ngokusebenzisana kanye nokuzibandakanya okuzuzisayo kanye nobuhlobo. Lolu cwaningo lubonisa ukuthi amaqembu ezombangazwe athuthukisa ukusebenzisana kanye nezingxoxo nabathintekayo. Amaqembu adinga ukudala ubudlelwane bezobudlelwano bomphakathi kwezombusazwe ochwepheshe bezokuxhumana abanekhono namakhono ukuze banikeze iseluleko futhi baphathe ukubandakanyeka kwezindaba zenhlalo njengemisebenzi ekhethekile yokwandisa ubuhlobo obuzuzisayo. Izikhulu zokuxhumana zamaqembu kufanele ziqeqeshelwe ubudlelwano bomphakathi kwezombusazwe kanye nemithombo yezokuxhumana ukuze uthole ulwazi oluthe xaxa nokuqonda amathuba kanye nezinsalelo ezihambisana nalezi zinhlobo ezintsha zobuchwepheshe bokuxhumana ukuze zisebenzise usizo lwabo.

**Amagama ayisihluthulelo:** IGhana, UkuPhathwa kwezombangazwe, iMedia Media, Facebook, Relationship Public Relations, Vigilantism, Ukwabiwa kweThekhnoloji, Ukuphathwa kobudlelwane, Ukuhlelwa kwe-Agenda

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS**

CAMRI-Communication and Media Research Institute  
CDD-Centre for Democratic Development  
CIDA-Canadian International Development Agency  
CODEO-Coalition of Domestic Election Observers  
DFID-Department for International Development  
EC-Electoral Commission, Ghana  
EU-European Union  
ICT-Information, Communication and Technology  
ICTADP-ICT for Accelerated Development Policy  
IEA-Institute of Economic Affairs  
MNO-Mobile Network Operator  
NCA -National Communications Authority  
NDC-National Democratic Congress  
NIMD-Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy  
NPP- New Patriotic Party  
PNDC-Provisional National Defence Council  
PPR-Political Public Relations  
PR-Public Relations  
SNS-Social Networking Sites  
UNDP-United Nations Development Programme  
USAID-United States Agency for International Development  
WDR-World Development Report

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Political communication is conceptualised as the distribution and exchange of information or messages about political processes, decisions and activities between political actors (Mutsvairo & Karam 2018; Olukotun & Omotoso 2017). Political communication is a critical process that allows political parties to influence the opinions and decisions of citizens for their political support (Slothuus 2010:158). Political communication involves the “creation, shaping, disseminating, processing and effects of information among political actors” (Esser & Pfetsch 2016:3). This makes it possible for political stakeholders to engage and communicate with one another to enhance relationships (Olabamiji 2014:46). How the messages in political communication are presented and interpreted by citizens promotes understanding of issues and, consequently in exercises of preferences as regards policies and programmes of political parties (Slothuus 2010:158). Therefore, the availability of accurate and timely information and interactions between political stakeholders could enhance relationships as electorates provide responses, feedback and inputs to political agenda. This transforms the minimal engagements of citizens, where democracy is restricted to representation or perhaps participation in elections to choose political elites into maximalist participation, where politics is seen as a social process, giving individuals the chance to take part in decision-making in society and outcomes, especially through the media (Carpentier 2012; Mouffe 2000). Social media contribute to the improvement of political communication, engagements and participation (Riaz 2010:161-164). The various forms of social media enhance the formation of opinions and provision of feedback through fora where political parties and their stakeholders exchange views, as well as advance collective agenda at a time when face-to-face and interpersonal engagements with political leaders have hardly become possible (McQueen & Green 2010:315-318).

These features demonstrate the significance of social media channels as tools for making information accessible; providing conversations and interactions, which serves as a major way of offering citizens and stakeholders some form of direct communication and engagements. More so, if stakeholders are not informed about activities, events and decisions of political parties and governments, or perhaps if stakeholders are not given opportunities to contribute and give feedback to political parties and politicians, then, political engagement and participation, as well as mutually beneficial relationships and understanding may not

necessarily be obtained, nurtured and sustained. In other words, if political stakeholders do not engage and interact for “win-win” outcomes, then democracy as a form of government is subject to question (Rose, Flak & Sæb 2018:362-364).

### **1.0 Context and Background to the Research**

Inasmuch as the traditional forms of news media continue to be sources and means of political communication, the advent of the internet and spread of social media have played important roles in political engagements, interactions and relationship building. This has led to the growth of democratic participant citizens (Carpentier 2012; Mouffe 2000). As the number of internet users continue to rise, there is a concomitant increase in access to social media platforms. The emergence of the internet has promoted the spread of social media in Africa with a population of over 453 million users on the continent, with a penetration and growth rates of 35.2% and 9.9%, respectively (Internet World Stats 2017). While Ghana has an internet population of 10.1 million users, with penetration and growth rates of 34.3% and 33.6%, respectively (Internet World Stats 2017). A popular networking site at the forefront of the social media phenomenon is Facebook, a monolithic application and social media networking service that connects people and organisations globally via the internet (Bosch 2009; Mazman & Usluel 2010).

Facebook is as a social utility which enables people to share and exchange information, as well as communicate efficiently with family, friends and co-workers, among others (facebook.com). The platform offers personalised profiles to users while providing opportunities for communication, sharing information, creating friends lists and photo albums, as well as forming relationships and social interest groups through the application of features, and forms of online games, among others (Mazman & Usluel 2010:445). This means that with Facebook, members of the platform are able to send messages, upload photos, chat and tag themselves and others, write on the walls of friends, create and join new groups, exchange, share and promote ideas through group discussions, use or add applications and also play games using Facebook (Mazman & Usluel 2010).

Facebook has been considered as a political communication tool due to the opportunities it provides, such as promoting relationship via peer feedback, suitability in respect of political and social context, as well as an interaction platform (Kearney 2013:7). It is changing communication from one-way passive towards two-way symmetric engagements through its features, particularly interactions and feedback. As the communication activities of political parties are not immune to the effects of social media, which makes it critical especially at

elections with political parties and electorates using them for their varied communication needs. A notable example that is often mentioned to illustrate the success of social media appropriation in political communication and elections include the use of Facebook by President Obama in the 2008 and 2012 United States of America presidential elections (Borah 2016; McQueen & Green 2010). Facebook contributed to Obama's victories at the polls as his campaign used the social networking site efficiently and effectively to connect and engage with American voters, emphasising its utility and suitability as communication tool for conversation and persuasion to advance political agenda (Kamau 2014:1). The success of Barack Obama's presidential campaigns also demonstrates the power of social media in communicating and enlisting the support of voters, considering how its categories including mobile phones, micro-blogging, social networking, video sharing and video gaming sites were concurrently utilised in campaigns (McQueen & Green 2010:315-318). The increasing population of Facebook subscribers in Ghana with a population of 4.9 million users, as well as penetration and growth rates of 34.3% and 33.6%, respectively (Internet World Stats 2017) provide the need for better understanding of the impact this form of social media has on society, especially in political communication activities and elections in Ghana.

This study takes place and interviews participants in Ghana, specifically Accra. Political parties are key actors in Ghana's democratic dispensation. Successive elected governments have promoted democratic culture and values, as well as the rule of law by strengthening constitutional and human rights, entrenching multi-party democracy and multiplicity of political parties in Ghana (CDD-Ghana 2008; Fobih 2011). Over the years, political parties in Ghana have been encouraged to promote inclusive and participatory citizens and stakeholders as a way of consolidating its growing democracy (Ahwoi 2010; Zounmenou 2009; Bofo-Arthur 2008). In this regard, political parties are searching for new ways of engaging stakeholders especially with the emergence of social media platforms (Mensah 2017:1-5). The New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress are the dominant parties in Ghana; political power has alternated between them since 1992 (Gyimah-Boadi 2008, 2009). In the last presidential elections in Ghana, the New Patriotic Party had 5, 716, 026 (53.9%) votes and the National Democratic Congress had 4, 713, 277 (44.4%) of valid votes cast of 10,781,917 (EC-Ghana 2016). The New Patriotic Party had 169 seats (61%), while the National Democratic Congress had 106 parliamentary seats (39%) out of the 275 seat parliament, with the former holding nearly a two-thirds majority in the legislature (EC-Ghana 2016).

In their attempts to enhance their political equity, many political parties and politicians are using social media to attract stakeholders and citizens. They exchange and extend political

discussions and debates for engagements and participation on these new form of communication channels. The characteristics of Facebook posits it as key enabler and better means of assessing social media activities in a true public sphere and political engagements, its appropriation worldwide also demonstrates its utility for political communication research (McGirt 2007:74) in the context of Ghana. This study investigates the social media practices and issues raised in political communication activities of political parties and their relative significance to intra-party elections specifically in Ghana. The research focuses on New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress because they are the two major parties with representation in parliament that have assumed power since multi-party democracy in 1992 (Whitfield 2009; Annan 2012). The study focuses on these parties on the premise that having been in existence longer than other political parties in Ghana, and participated in all elections since the multi-party democratic dispensation, they could have used social media for different political communication and electoral activities. Against this backdrop, this research investigates the Facebook usage as a form of social media in political communication in Ghana, and how such platform(s) have been incorporated into the larger communication efforts and intra-party elections of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. As this thesis was carried out in pre-internal election period, the study gives insight into how these two parties appropriate social media particularly Facebook in stakeholder engagements and mobilisation before, during and after their congresses and internal elections (June 2018 to November 2018) for national executives, when communication might have been intense.

For this study purposes, the researcher attempted to determine political communication engagements and participation via posts, content sharing, likes and comments made on the official Facebook profiles and walls of the New Patriotic Party including their intended purposes and outcomes. The study also determines if the appropriation of these social media channels and engagements of stakeholders by political parties through interactions and conversations on such social media channels have improved political communication, relationships and intra-party election campaigns in Ghana. It also analyses the Facebook pages of the political parties to analyse how frequent they post information and messages on this social media, as well as the nature and forms of messages they post on the site and the feedback from users, stakeholders and the general public.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

Ghana's body politic has been bedevilled by low-intensity violence and lawless vigilantism (Bob-Milliar 2014: 126). Stakeholders especially supporters, foot soldiers and

affiliate groups contribute to elections and capture of power by political parties. As a result, they see a change in government as a chance to claim political opportunities. These supporters use violence and lawless acts of aggression to seek their demands, or register their displeasure with political parties for unfulfilled promises. Several factors such as issues of winner-takes-all political system and neo-patrimonial politics, lack of trust in security institutions, violence mobilisation and counter mobilisation by political parties for electoral advantage, among others cause vigilantism and low-intensity violence (Bob-Milliar 2014: 126). However, there is a considerable rise in the menace of political vigilantism by members and affiliate groups of political parties in Ghana, which some have connected to the lack of direct communication and interactions between political parties and their stakeholders. In other words, there is limited interactive space in communication between political parties and their stakeholders especially followers in setting agenda and discussions for understanding and mutually beneficial relationships.

Since the assumption of power by the New Patriotic Party in 2017, some of its members, supporters and affiliate vigilante groups have unlawfully taken over public office, seized and occupied public property or evicted occupants of state buildings, among others who are seen as political opponents to press their demands from government. In reaction, members of the major opposition party, National Democratic Congress have also formed vigilante groups to respond to those attacks. This development in Ghana is worrying considering that lawless vigilantism fades public confidence in state institutions, with some attributing such happenings to lack of direct access to political parties and officials due to the limited time that is allowed during “phone-in” segments on political programmes via traditional media especially radio and television. The expectations of stakeholders are different from what they experience on traditional news media. This lack of participation by citizens has generated dissatisfaction and spurred violence, contributing to the rise in political vigilantism.

Along with rise of vigilantism, however, there are growing concerns and search for two-way symmetric communication for dialogues, interactions and mutually beneficial relationships that traditional forms of media do not provide. Therefore, questions have been raised against too much reliance on traditional news media by political stakeholders for engagements. With the rise of social media use as a popular response to these challenges, new questions emerge regarding technological appropriation for both relationship management and advancement of political agenda. This study addresses such lacuna by examining how Facebook as a form of social media can be used as an alternative media by political parties to

engage and interact with followers in dealing with issues and grievances to forestall the use of vigilantism and public violence for their demands.

Some literature and studies has been conducted on new media and politics in Ghana. These include studies on political parties, social and traditional media (Gyampo 2017); mobile telephony in democracy and political communication (Tettey 2017); social media in political marketing (Dankwah 2016); election petition (Atengble 2014); and social media in presidential and parliamentary elections (Penplusbytes 2017), among others. Those studies have not investigated how Facebook as a communication platform has been appropriated by political parties in their intra-party elections to choose other national executive officers, as opposed to few on presidential candidates. Therefore, this study investigates how Facebook has been used as a tool by political parties for engagement, participation and interactions with their stakeholders and followers in internal party electoral processes and congresses to address this gap.

The other lacuna is that there is a dilemma in political communication: the academic and professional discourses that underpin political communication and appropriation of social media diverge (Lamberti & Richards 2017; McDaniel & Steward 2017; Chilton 2004). This quandary stems from disagreements over effects of social media on political engagements (Boulianne 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux & Zheng 2014), due to the varied activities and definitions of political participation. The dilemma that this study addresses is to examine how Facebook as an interactive online forum is used by political parties to engage, converse and develop mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders to consolidate the pillars of democracy in Ghana. With social networking engrossing political actors into interactions, it is difficult to ignore the correlation between Facebook usage and political parties' communication.

More so, the contemporary debates about the values and potentials of social media in political communication and democracy in Africa has gained prominence. Conversely, a number of scholars (Windeck 2011; Riaz 2010; Albirini 2008) argue that social media have not improved engagements in political discussions and participation in Africa as compared with the Global North. The impact of social media on political communication on the continent is not yet clear because a larger amount of research in this field have focused on developed nations (Gunaratne 2011; Wang 2011). This study uses Ghana to examine the claims by these scholars (Windeck 2011; Riaz 2010; Albirini 2008), that social media have not largely altered perceptions of democratic communication and political participation in Africa. It explores how

Facebook as social media is changing the political communication dynamics in Ghana by circumventing the boundaries of traditional media.

### **1.2 Purposes of the Study**

This study aims to shed new light on the debate with respect to the effect of social media on political communication in Africa by examining how social media is appropriated by political parties in Ghana. It seeks to promote improved engagements and interactions on social media network for political goals. Therefore, this study makes a central argument for the appropriation of technology in relationship management for the advancement of political agenda. This form of communication requires mutually beneficial relationships through participatory-interactive approaches in the form of two-way symmetric communication by political parties in their engagements with stakeholders and the public. In this regard, the thesis situates social media as an avenue for political actors to communicate and build relationships, as it explores the role of Facebook as an alternative media for engagements and interactions between political parties and their stakeholders especially during intra-party elections. The study comprises of two parts. The first part involves qualitative interviews with participants in the study, followed by the second part that quantitatively analyse data from posts on Facebook pages of political parties to compare sources with each other, as well as compare with the literature reviewed in the study to address research questions.

### **1.3 Democratic Dispensation under Ghana's Fourth Republic, 1992-2019**

The post-independence history of Ghana has been characterised by long periods of military regimes and human rights abuses (Oquaye 2004; Alidu 2014). After the overthrow of the First Republic (1960-1966) under President Kwame Nkrumah, there were interludes of civilian governments during the Second Republic (1969-1972) and the Third Republic (1979-1981), which did not survive due to successive military subversions (Zounmenou 2009:2-3). The last coup d'état in Ghana, was led by Jerry John Rawlings in 1981, suspended the Third Republic (1979-1981) (Burke 2012; Oquaye 2004). The revolution led by Rawlings subsequently metamorphosed into the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) that ruled the country until 1992 when the military regime lifted the ban on party politics allowing Ghana to return to a multi-party democracy with elections of parliamentarians and an elected president (Gyimah-Boadi & Yakah 2012:1-2).

The Provisional National Defence Council transformed into National Democratic Congress (NDC) to contest in the general elections after the ban on multi-party democracy and won the November 1992 parliamentary and presidential elections with President Rawlings

emerging as the winner (Zounmenou 2009:3). The opposition parties specifically New Patriotic Party boycotted the parliamentary elections (Bawumia 1998:47-49), giving the National Democratic Congress a landslide majority in the 200 seat legislature with 181 parliamentarians as against other opposition and independent candidates who had 19 representatives (Gyimah-Boadi & Yakah 2012:1-3). The National Democratic Congress won again in the 1996 general election, retaining political power until the general elections in 2000 when the New Patriotic Party led by President John Agyekum Kufuor gained political power (Zounmenou 2009:4). The general elections in 2000 were remarkable because it was the first democratic changeover of political power in Ghana's history (Abdul-Gafaru 2009; Burke 2012). After two terms of office in political power, the New Patriotic Party lost to the National Democratic Congress at the 2008 general elections (Osafo-Danso 2015:72-73). However, in the 2016 general elections the National Democratic Congress again lost power to the New Patriotic Party after serving another two terms of office (Gyampo, Graham & Yobo 2017:25).

The discussions above demonstrate how political power has been alternating or perhaps revolving around these two main political parties in Ghana. The New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress have dominated the political atmosphere with their candidates winning all presidential and parliamentary elections that have taken place in Ghana since 1992 (Osafo-Danso 2015; Gyampo *et al.* 2017). However, in spite of the tense competitions that exist between these parties (Whitfield 2009; Debrah 2014), Ghana has continued to enjoy stable democratic dispensation and political environment; hence positing it as a model of African democracy (Crawford 2009; Abdulai & Crawford 2010; Gyimah-Boadi 2015). This stable political conditions have not only enhanced Ghana's image worldwide, but also promoted participation in democratic processes (Frempong 2008; Gyimah-Boadi & Prempeh 2012).

#### **1.4 Political Participation in Ghana**

Political participation is an important element of democracy as it enables citizens to claim and realise their political rights, as well as make their voices heard (Michels 2006: 324-326). It is a concept that encompasses or perhaps describes different sets of activities. Political participation involves the actions by members of a particular population, which is aimed at influencing government's decisions including voting at elections; communicating with political parties and their representatives; meetings with community members; as well as taking part in cooperative actions including strikes, protests, among others (Michels 2006; Resnick & Thurlow 2015; Yang & DeHart 2016). In resonance with this, the democratic dispensation under the Fourth Republic has changed the Ghanaian political dynamics, encouraging the

media, citizens and civil society to express their opinions in governance, decision and policy making, among others. The democratic dispensation in Ghana has accommodated and encouraged many competing political parties in national elections (Ahwoi 2010; Annan 2012; Abdallah 2013). This means that qualified Ghanaians have the opportunity to contest and vote in elections at all levels in the country's political system.

Many international institutions, such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), European Union (EU) Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Department for International Development (DFID), Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), among others have contributed towards participatory democracy in Ghana especially during elections (Gyimah-Boadi & Yakah 2012:7-8). A number of local organisations including Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) and Coalition of Domestic Elections Observers (CODEO), among others have also worked closely with these international bodies to strengthen democratic processes in broadening the spheres for inclusion and participation by political actors and stakeholders in Ghana (Gyimah-Boadi & Yakah 2012:7-8). More importantly, the media has independence as the fourth estate of the realm to exercise their role as watchdog and vehicle for democracy.

The proliferation of independent and free media is a significant development in Ghana's Fourth Republic. This has transformed and legitimised citizens and rights-based activism in the democratic culture as enshrined in Ghana's 1992 constitution. The repeal of sedition and criminal libel laws adopted by the military regime to intimidate the media and discourage contribution from citizens in a "culture of silence" that existed in Ghana before 1992 has expanded the political grounds for engagements, activism and participation of civil society especially citizens (Ansu-Kyeremeh 2001:31-33). Prior to the return to constitutional democracy under the Fourth Republic, the military intimidated and curtailed the opportunity for civil society and citizens to participate in governance through the media and public platforms. With the transition to democracy, governments are becoming receptive and tolerant as they attempt to facilitate the engagement of citizens and civil society in discussions and decision making processes through dialogues. As a consequence, citizens are taking advantages of freedom, alternate media and uncontrolled avenues with the presence of the internet to engage with parties and express their views in political communication and decision making processes for accountability and responsiveness from governments (Gyampo 2017:187-188).

## **1.5 Internet Access in Ghana**

Ghana was among the first countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that had access to the internet in 1989-1990 (Sey 2011:381). Since then there has been an increasing trend of internet access, consequently enhancing the spread of social media. The growth of access to the internet is a major driver of political communication (Kamp 2016:6) and content spending in activities (Kamau 2014:18). The internet promotes electronically enhanced democracy by supporting horizontal and lateral communication: lower costs, interactivity, point-to-point and non-hierarchical models of communication, low costs to users, and rapidity as communication innovation (Kamau 2014:27). More than a quarter of Ghana's population have access to the internet given the rise in mobile phone usage and expansion of fixed broadband services in the country (Sey 2011:381). Users of the internet in Ghana include the elites, politicians, students and civic actors, among others who influence the process of politics and governance. Even though there is a surge in on-line engagements and interactions on social media using mobile devices through the internet in Ghana, users are largely people who live in urban areas. Despite challenges including the sparse telecommunications infrastructure and limited broadband access, there is a rise of internet users in Ghana (Sey 2011:381). The expansion of mobile telephony addresses the deficiency in internet connection via broadband. The increase in telecommunication firms and expansion of their network coverage, robust legal regime and availability of cheap smart phones from China has widened access to mobile phone and the internet. The free market approach in the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) sector has also encouraged the use of new forms of media in many walks of life in Ghana (Sey 2011:381).

The number of Ghanaians who have access to the internet have increased to over 10 million users (Internet World Stats 2017). Compared to the overall population of Ghana, this number is relatively small. However, this is counterbalanced by a tremendous rate in respect of access and usage of mobile phones which stands at over 36.4 million users with penetration rate of 100% and growth rate of 1.75%, respectively (NCA; Mobile Network Operators 2017:2), expanding the number of social media apps users. There is also a subscription of over 21.8 users in Ghana to mobile data, with 76% penetration rate and growth rate of 1.98% (NCA; Mobile Network Operators 2017:11). As a result of such improvements, many Ghanaians are able to comment on issues that come their way and discuss varied opinions from different sources, enabling them to connect with other people and establish friendship, make enemies and support or vilify leaders especially in politics, among others using social media platforms. The sharing of information among users on social media shapes the perception and opinion of

the larger mass population. This is an indication that social media through the support of the internet are transforming communication from what was traditionally practiced in the past into new ways of engaging, consuming, distributing and reporting news and information (Kamp 2016:3).

In spite of the improvement in communications and technology in Ghana, and consequently Africa, the digital divide on the continent cannot be ignored in the discussion of social media. With the high digital divide between the Global North and the Global South, the gap between the information-rich and information-poor in many African countries continue to widen (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda 2019; Gillwald 2017; Robinson 2015). Inasmuch as digital communication networks, particularly mobile and broadband technology continue to drive socio-political and economic change, internet penetration in Ghana and Africa, upon which social media functions and thrives remains low as compared to other parts of the world. Even though mobile internet access requires minimum skills to operate with little power and electricity (Gillwald 2017:1-3), the digital inequality with regard to access and use in Ghana still remains high. In other words, the digital inequality and gap between people in Africa who have access to broadband and the internet, as well as the means to utilise them, and those who are marginalised from their usage continue to increase (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda 2019; Robinson 2015). Many factors including high cost of access in Africa and Ghana prevent citizens from using digital tools for communicating politically. These stumbling blocks potentially affect participation in political communication in Ghana and Africa. Therefore, making it difficult for political stakeholders, especially political parties and citizens to harness the democratic potentials of digital technologies, for example, the internet and social media in communication (Gillwald 2017:1-5).

In line with this development of content creation in new media, consumption and distribution via internet-empowered digital devices, Ghana has initiated a number of strategies and policies to promote the appropriation and explore the opportunities from these technologies. Among these initiatives is the *ICT for Accelerated Development Policy* framework in 2003 “to accelerate Ghana’s socio-economic development process towards the realisation of the vision to transform Ghana into a high income economy and society that is predominantly information-rich and knowledge based within the next two to three decades or less” (Republic of Ghana, 2003:14-15). These initiatives including the *Ghana Open Data Initiative* project in 2012, among others are attempts at widening access to new communication technologies and information by Ghanaians. Consequently, the trend among media users of the internet in Ghana has shifted from traditional news media to social media avenues for news

updates and information, enabling users to interact and share news, pictures and videos, as well as promoted engagements, conversations and discussions on issues, news, and events (Kamp 2016:4). Such opportunities have allowed political groups and individuals to communicate by integrating new forms of communication channels, establish digital representation of themselves and cooperate with other users to build relationships in advancing agenda (Nentwich & König 2014:109-110).

### **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

In general terms, this study seeks to provide new light on the debate regarding the effects of social media on political communication in Africa. In that regard, it examines how social media are appropriated by political parties in Ghana to identify and give elaboration and analysis of Facebook usage, and communication experiences in politics. It attempted to explore the perspectives of information exchange and interaction in political communication activities of the two major political parties that have alternated in governments since Ghana's Fourth Republic since 1992. From the data gathered, it showed that New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress are appropriating social media specifically Facebook both in and out of political power; during election times and periods other than elections.

The study examined whether variables identified were associated or perhaps linked to one another. In this regard, the research was more descriptive, as it illustrated the trend of social media and Facebook appropriation in political public relations and communication, among variables. Those variables are identified to develop recommendations for engaging and strengthening political party-stakeholder relations in Ghana. In the light of these reflections, the study specifically sought to achieve the following objectives:

To examine how Facebook has transformed the political communication and information activities of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress.

To interrogate how Facebook is used for various activities before, during and after national executive elections of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in 2018.

To determine the ways in which New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress use Facebook to engage and interact with stakeholders and followers, and highlight how such engagements (if ever) have optimised the relationship and understanding between them.

To reflect on the nature and purposes of messages posted on Facebook accounts by New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress and their audiences to describe the content of information and level of activities on pages/walls.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

Based on literature review on the subject under discussion, and attempts to address the lacunae with respect to scholarship and practice, this study addressed the objectives stated above. In order to achieve these overarching objectives of this thesis highlighted, the research addressed the questions enumerated below to guide the study in the process of data collection. These research questions assisted the study to meet the objectives of this study. To be able to achieve this, the study addressed these questions:

How can one distinguish between the role played in and reason for utilising and appropriating Facebook by political parties in Ghana as different from other forms of communication?

In what ways do political parties in Ghana use Facebook to engage with stakeholders for communication and activities before, during and after internal party executive elections?

How might political parties in Ghana and their stakeholders interact meaningfully on Facebook to create mutually beneficial relationship to achieve political goals?

In the sharing of political opinions, what is the nature and overall quantitative content of messages and corresponding comments posted by political parties and their followers in Ghana on Facebook walls?

### **1.8 Significance of the Research**

This study is important for a number of reasons because it seeks to make original contribution to scholarship on social media use in political communication in Africa. It is hoped that this thesis will serve as a useful reference source for research candidates and scholars in different subfields of communication, particularly political communication, public relations and interactivity of social media. It is envisaged that political parties, politicians and policy makers looking for insight into the impact of social media on politics in Africa especially Ghana would find this study interesting. This study aims at contributing to the developing area of research in the fields of political communication and public relations in Africa by exploring the appropriation of Facebook as a social networking tool, that is, how communication via

Facebook has become binding, authentic and interactive, as well as the importance attached to social media communication by political parties in Ghana, as opposed to other forms of communication and media outlets.

This research seeks to extend the debate on political communication dimensions of *political party-stakeholder* relations, and how political parties communicate with their stakeholders focusing largely on public engagements, interactivity and conversations. In view of this, the study presents the opportunity to evaluate how political parties in Ghana use technology and digital forms of interactions with their communication stakeholders to address issues of social media in politics and their connected effects. The findings and results of this study seek to extend knowledge on the subject to propose Facebook as alternative media for political parties in Ghana in establishing and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and groups to curb political vigilantism.

This study aims at advancing research into a field at the heart of political discourse but under-investigated in Ghana and Africa. This research seeks to situate Facebook in political communication research in Ghana by recounting and comparing the experiences and practices of communication officials in different political parties through mixed methods approach in the form of sequential triangulation. It offers empirical data via qualitative and quantitative techniques to illustrate and highlight the utility of social media as regards their appropriation in intra-party elections of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in Ghana. More so, the research hopes to provide a *reality check* for party officials involved with social media communication and *Facebooking*, activities. This includes challenges to their usage in engaging stakeholders, significance to relationships and participation especially before, during and after internal congresses and elections in the political parties.

### **1.9 Definition of Keywords**

A number of terminologies have been used in this study. The following key terms have been operationally defined to provide readers ideas about the context in which these words and phrases are used in this study in subsequent chapters:

**Political communication:** This concept has many definitions. Political communication functions as a verb by demonstrating how communication is conducted politically, while in another context it serves as a noun referring to a specific field of study (Savigny 2017:16). In this study, political communication as a term refers to any form of communication involving political actors, especially political parties, politicians and citizens for the purposes of achieving specific goals and objects.

**Social media:** A widely accepted definition of social media is the one provided by Kaplan and Haenlin (2010:61), positing the concept as internet-based applications, which thrive on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation of user-generated contents. For the purposes of this research, social media refers to any form of new media that is used for interaction and sharing information, such as but not limited to social networking sites (for example Facebook); microblogging (for example Twitter); mobile phone application (for example texting), as well as other webcasts, blogs, photos and video sharing (for example You-Tube).

**Facebook:** Facebook is a tool for managing relationships through *Likes* to predict sensitive issues not only in respect of political news, but also personality traits, intelligence, happiness, sexual orientation and gender issues, among others (Kosinski, Stillwell & Graepel 2013:5802-5805). Facebook in the context of this study is posited as a social networking website that allows people to show information about them, as well as enable them to communicate with other users, groups of friends and colleagues through interaction and feedback.

**Political public relations:** This concept demonstrates how political organisations establish relationships with the media, members, supporters, as well as the general public, which also enhance intra-party communication and activities including elections (Goncalves 2014:99-108). Political public relations in the context of this study indicates the process whereby organisations or individual actors for political purposes via purposeful communication and actions, attempt to influence and establish, nurture and sustain beneficial relationships and reputations with the public to draw support for their mission and achieve goals.

**Technology appropriation:** Technology appropriation has been used in different contexts. The concept shows how users make technologies their own through the process of adoption, where the individual, technology and collective practices are transformed (DeSanctis & Poole 1994:27). Within the context of this study, technology appropriation demonstrates how people access, adopt, adapt and incorporate technology designs into their work, activities and practices for their utility.

**Relationship management:** The concept of relationship management is drawn from the public relations perspective. Public relations remain a management function, which involves planning and solving problems (Grunig & Hunt 1984; Grunig 1992; Grunig & Grunig 1992). The term relations management in this study refers to the planning and solving problems

to establish, and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics.

**Agenda-setting:** In his work on *Public Opinion*, Lipmann (1922:40-48) posited agenda-setting in the intermediary role that the mass media play between events that occur and types of images created in the mind sets of the public. For this study, agenda-setting is referred to as the ability of media, be it social or traditional media to influence and tell people what issues are important for consideration and discussions in the public space.

**Press-agentry:** The first perspective in Grunig & Hunt (1984:5) model is the press-agentry, indicating how organisations seek the assistance of the media to gain positive coverage in public space through a top-down approach. In the perspective of this research, press-agentry is a one-way passive communication approach where organisations seek to gain positive coverage in public through the presentation of their achievements and gains in the media.

**Public information:** In the public information approach, organisations set their agenda through the media, particularly through traditional and other forms of media to deliver homogeneous information from them to passive audiences in public through a one-way approach with no dialogue (Drageset 2014:18). This study describes public information as a one-way communication approach where organisations inform the general public with truthful and factual information about their organisations and activities through media reportages.

**Two-way asymmetric:** With regard to the two-way asymmetrical communication practitioners explain and advise management of their parties on what would be acceptable to the public through research in order to persuade and influence the public without engaging them in dialogue (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2006:46). Two-way asymmetric communication as contextualised in this study is where organisations use persuasions in order to be acceptable to the public and influence their behaviours without direct engagements, exchange and feedback in communication.

**Two-way symmetric:** This form of communication is becoming the trend in communication. The two-way symmetric communication uses “research and dialogues” for “symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviours” (Grunig, 2001:13) of organisations and their publics. Similarly, this study describes the two-way symmetric concept as communication approach that involving direct engagements between organisations and their stakeholders, providing opportunity for organisational qualities, behaviours and attitudes to be adjusted in promoting mutual interests and benefits.

**Vigilantism:** The concept of vigilantism has been situated in different contexts. For example, Bob-Milliar (2104:126) puts the concept in the context of “electoral violence,”

describing it in the perspective of political infractions, disturbances and riotous behaviours, among others of political party supporters. Drawing from this notion, this study posits vigilantism as where persons join together in groups and try in unofficial ways to either prevent, interfere or apprehend and punish individuals who have or are perceived to have committed crimes due to lack of confidence in official authorities for controlling crimes.

### **1.10 Overview of Thesis Structure**

The overall structure of this thesis is made up of nine chapters including this introductory chapter. Chapter 1 introduces the study by providing the context and issues in respect of the political dispensation under Ghana's Fourth Republic. It presents brief discussion of participation; social media activities; and internet access in Ghana. This chapter further specifies the research background; problem statement; preliminary literature leading to this study; research objectives and questions; significance; overview of thesis structure of the study; and justification for the study.

The literature review is conducted in two segments. Chapter 2 excavates literature and issues on political communication including features and processes involved, as well as trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chapter also grapples with political advertising and public relations, examining how political communication has transitioned through Grunig and Hunt's (1984) models (that is Press-agentry; Public information; Two-way asymmetric and Two-way symmetric) communication. The other sections in Chapter 2 also address the concept of public sphere, as well as the relations and reputational dimensions in public relations before discussing political communication in the context of democracy.

Chapter 3 concludes the literature review chapters. The third chapter discusses the emergence of social media encompassing conceptual definitions, features, categorisation, benefits and challenges, among others. The functions of social media in political communication and the repercussion(s) of their political use are also interrogated in this chapter. This chapter further discusses how social media serves as relationship management tool by positing it as exemplar of a social networking site. It also grapples with the political use of Facebook, and situates social media in political communication research.

Chapter 4 theorises social media appropriation for political communication. It illustrates the theoretical approaches that underpin the study that include: technology appropriation model; relationship management; and agenda-setting frameworks.

The methodology and approach, as well as the philosophy/paradigm, methods, techniques and procedures, among others that the study employs in the research are presented

and discussed in Chapter 5. The fifth chapter also gives overview as regards ethical considerations that are relevant to this study. This is then followed by the presentation of data analysis and findings in Chapters 6 and 7, and subsequently with further discussion of findings in Chapter 8. The findings are discussed and reported in respect of themes, as well as figures and tabular formats using codes and numbers. The study draws conclusions from findings in Chapter 9, and provides recommendation for practice and policy, among others.

### **1.11 Motivation for the Study**

My experience over the years as political activist, as well as personal observations of communication activities of political parties in Ghana has driven this thesis. More so, my engagements with literature on social media technologies and election campaigns in different contexts exposed me to how these platforms are changing the dynamics of political communication in other parts of the world. This motivated me to study the political appropriation of these new forms of communication from the Ghanaian perspective.

This research was therefore conceived to investigate the impact of these social media in politics in Ghana to compare their usage in African perspective with what exists in democracy in Global North. Against this backdrop, this study attempts to explore the political use of social media by political parties in Ghana to discover new information and reach new understandings. It investigates how Facebook serves as a social networking site for political parties in relationship building, interactions and mutually beneficial engagements in politics and intra-party elections.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

#### 2.0 Introduction

As with any academic research, it is advisable at the beginning of a study to review literature on the subject under consideration. This chapter provides the context with respect to the subject under discussion, thus, social media use in political communication in relation to political parties. It is necessary for the study to synthesise and examine many literatures to provide relevant discussion in the study. This study adopts the *scoping literature review* method (Arksey & O'Malley 2005:20) that makes it possible for the researcher to holistically compare literature and decide on themes to be discussed in the review chapter. The materials reviewed in this research are in English, which allows the study and other scholars to read and draw meanings from literature.

The literature review chapter of this study is divided into two parts (Chapters 2 and 3). In chapter two, the study conducts a comparative review of political communication of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, while chapter three examines the political usage of social media. These contexts orient this thesis in widening debate and discourse regarding the central argument for technology appropriation for relationship management in the advancement of political agenda, propounded by this study. This chapter (Chapter 2) provides discussions and understanding of the concept of political communication, features, role and processes, as well as how its practice is similar or different from the models of public relations. In this regard, this chapter also proposes that political parties including politicians adopt the two-way symmetrical approach regarding their communication and engagements with stakeholders to establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships.

#### 2.1 Political Communication

Political communication functions as a *verb* by demonstrating how *communication is conducted politically*, while in another context it serves as a *noun* referring to a *specific field of study* (Savigny 2017:16). It is an important field of communication and media studies. However, research in political communication is interdisciplinary, engaging literature and scholars from diverse academic disciplines, theoretical and methodological backgrounds. It emerged from the fields of *political studies* and *social psychology*, as well as *media and communication* (Savigny 2017:4). Political communication conjures the functioning of democracy (Perloff 2014:16). Political communication has become a famous phrase because it

captures the wider and symbolic processes through which individuals transmit and interpret messages, hence giving meaning to power (Mutsvairo & Karam 2018; Olukotun & Omotoso 2017). Several attempts to reach a consensus regarding the definition of political communication have not been possible due to the dual role of the phrase as “noun” and “verb,” which open the concept to different definitions and explanations (Savigny 2017:16). In general, Savigny (2017:3) attributes political communication to activities of states, political parties, politicians and spin doctors, governments, newspapers and propaganda, as well as election campaigns and advertising.

While there is the lack of consensus regarding the definition of political communication, its primary goal is to articulate problems, propose and debate for solutions, as well as explain policies and their implementation to citizens and officials (Hahn 2003:2-10). Central to this observation and assertion is the understanding of political communication as an attempt to promote mutual informational interactions between political actors who are connected by their relations to power and rivalry, as well as co-operation (Sobkowiak, 1996:163). This conjures the different forms which political communication can take, such as interpersonal, participative, and receptive (Emmer, Fütting & Vowe 2006:217). While the interpersonal form of political communication entails talks and opinions on political issues in co-presence or via one-to-one or perhaps, one-to-many media platforms that include telephone, chats and e-mails, among others (Emmer *et al.* 2006:217), the participative political communication encompasses public political engagements in the form of voting, demonstrations, and signing petitions, among others (Emmer *et al.* 2006: 218). As its name suggests, receptive political communication conjures any means by which people use the media for information about politics (Emmer *et al.* 2006:218). These functional dimensions give credence to the reciprocity of political relations, which Marciniak (2012:16) notes in terms of the ability of actors in political communication to understand, accept and disagree, as well as modify their own and influence other people’s convictions.

Other scholars including Tuman (2008:10) have adopted a nuanced approach to the concept, describing it as something of a misnomer, contending that information is not really shared in political communication, but instead a machinery through which propaganda, distortion, half-truths or fake news and exaggeration are applied to unethically manipulate and influence citizens and voters in elections. It is the process through which leaders, media or citizens use language and symbols to precipitate intended and unintended effects on individuals’ political cognitions, attitudes and behaviours, or on other words influence the outcome of a country’s public policy (Perloff 2014:30). The motivation for political communication as

Savigny (2017:3) underscores is the quest to win power through elections and need to attract audiences for political gains. In this regard, the concept of political communication entails the different forms of communication activities that political actors undertake to extend their messages and achieve their political objectives (McNair 2012:40). Communication about activities of political actors has traditionally been initiated via the news media, editorials and political discussions (Kamau 2014:16). Some of the main functions include electioneering where political parties and organisations help voters to make their choices, mobilise citizens to participate in elections, recruit and train political candidates, promote political interests, as well as form governments and opposition groups in the practice of democracy (Strömbäck *et al.* 2011:9).

The situation and activities in political communication in the Ghanaian perspective is not relatively different from what happens elsewhere in Africa. A number of scholars (Dzisah 2018; Gyampoh 2017; Asah-Asante 2015; Debrah 2005; Yankah 2004) have conducted some studies as regards the communication between political actors in Ghana as compared to other countries. They report that political communication in Ghana have been in the form of interviews in the media where political actors market and advertise their programmes and policies (Debrah 2005:73-74). Political communication has occurred through interviews in the media where political actors advertise their policies and programmes (Debrah 2005:73-74). Political parties have also used manifestoes in elections to explain their political intentions to galvanise support from the electorate in Ghana (Debrah 2005:168). Newspaper review programmes, as well as serial calling into political programmes and talk shows in traditional news media have also become common means of communicating politically (Yankah 2004:17-19); advertisements (Oye 2009:17); and press conferences and public rallies (Asah-Asante 2015:128), among others have also transformed political communication in Ghana's democracy. Similarly, other mechanisms, such as ideology (Heywood 2017:45), slogans, songs, gestures and the creation of communication teams of political parties and propaganda to spread messages and influence behaviours to poll votes in elections have become popular practices in Ghanaian politics (Asah-Asante 2015:128-129). While Gamble and Gamble (1996:145-146) suggest that non-verbal activities in the form of gestures and body language have become useful in political communication, replacing words and phrases to make it easier for voters to recall and give meanings to political messages, Nianxi (2009:2-3) reiterates how these communicative forms have now become common in politics.

Considering the changing context of political communication, this study notes features of the various definitions in relation to the thinking, beliefs, and behaviours of political actors

and institutions, as well as the settings within which they exist (Graber 1993:305). With this in mind, this study posits political communication as “the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages” (Graber 2005:479), which directly or indirectly influence politics. These messages are sent or received by politicians, journalists, organised and unorganised citizens, among others (Graber 2005:479). This means that for communication to be regarded as political it must be able to influence people to act or take a decision in a particular way. The bottom line of the communicative purpose of political parties is to mobilise supporters, as well as convince floating and undecided voters (Karlsen 2011:41). Irrespective of how politics is defined, political communication serves as the “vehicle for political thought, debate, and action” (Denton & Woodward 1998:2). The focus of political communication on transmission posits it as a means to political goals. It providing the means for messages including motives, interests, ideas, ideologies and values, as well as policies to be spread to influence political actions (Crozier 2006:2).

The new forms of technology and media platforms have stimulated research on how political communication activities have changed over the decades (Cook 1998: Wyatt 1998). With the emergence of new forms of technology and media platforms, the context within which political communication takes place has significantly changed. More so, a large number of research and literature on the subject are based on Western contexts with little emphasis on developing countries. With the contention of scholars (Windeck 2011; Riaz 2010) that the impact of technology, especially social media on political communication over the years has not been widely noticed in global discourse, there is the need for more research to address how political communication has transformed into symmetric communication via the intersection of new forms of technologies and platforms especially in Africa. In this pursuit, this research attempts to suggest recommendations by which Facebook as a social media tool could be used to promote engagements and interactions for mutual understanding and beneficial relationships between political parties and their stakeholders to curb the rise in vigilantism in Ghana. Having gained an understanding of the various definitions of political communication presents the need for some insight into how political communication is conducted in politics, and also as a field of study. In that regard, the next section of this chapter presents a discussion of the essential elements of political communication.

### **2.1.2 Features of Political Communication**

A number of scholars have recounted many features of political communication. As Perloff (2014:30) highlights, the first characteristic of political communication is that it involves a process, implying that political communication neither occurs anyhow, nor happens within a tick of the clock. The process begins with an initiative and followed by steps and actions to achieve goals. For example, a president of a country proposes an initiative; however, to convert such idea into a bill, and subsequently a bill into law, legislators have to be influenced in several ways to pass such bill or alter policies (Perloff 2014: 30). The second feature is that political communication primarily centres on words and symbols. In this sense, political communication is perceived as the use of language to move people to think and act in ways that they might not otherwise think and act (Ball 2011:42). This involves the harnessing of the power of language through “colourful phrases, apt metaphors, syntax and rhythm” (Perloff 2014:30) to move citizens and change attitudes. For example, President Barack Obama aroused the imagination and passion of electorates in the United States of America by using speech and eloquent rhetoric to capture, and language to mobilise, as well as metaphors for galvanising support for his campaign and policies (Perloff 2014:30). Political communication is characterised with symbols, which is referred to as a sort of language through which an organisation represents a concept or idea that is, conveying rich cultural and psychological meanings. Symbols encompass words such as “justice, freedom and equality, and other non-verbal signs including flags and religious cross,” among others (Perloff 2014:31). The process of political communication entails the transfer of such symbolic meanings, as well as the communication of emotional words, which can arouse, instigate, and also disgust.

The third feature is that political communication has three key players. The first players under this characteristic are “leaders and influence agents,” who comprise of elected officials, cabinet members, policy experts and chieftains in the bureaucracy of government (Perloff 2014:31). The next players of this feature are the media, which broadly encompass the conventional new media, partisan promulgators of websites, bloggers, hosts of political programmes (entertainment) and individuals with mobile (cell) phone cameras or citizen journalists (Perloff 2014:31). The last players that remain the centre piece of political communication are the citizens (voters), who represent a mixture of politically engaged opinions including people that are actively involved in civil groups (Perloff 2014:31). The fourth feature of political communication is that they are either intended or unintended. For example, Perloff illustrated that presidential speeches are usually intended to influence, however, the myriad of favourable feedback through text messages and e-mails that are

received by the office of the president from audiences or recipients after the president's speech indicate the intended effect.

In another scenario, the placing of negative advertisements against opponents are designed to cause electorates to look at and assess the targeted opponents unfavourably for a decline in their fortunes at polls demonstrates an intended communication effect (Perloff 2014:31). However, in certain cases political communication effects are not intended to change individual attitudes. In their responsibility to provide critical perspectives on people and leaders who control power, the media and reporters with their personal and self-interest motives broadcast stories which attract viewers and also boosts their ratings. In this regard, their motives are not to change the attitudes of audiences in a partisan perspective through persuasion.

The fifth characteristic outlined by Perloff (2014:33) is that political communication effects take place at different levels. This means that the breadth of political communication constitutes its relevance and significance. In this context, political media drive their influence at the *micro-level*, where the thoughts, attitudes, feelings, assessments and behaviours of individuals are affected. It also works on the *macro-level*, where public opinions, political activism, public policy and institutional change are largely affected (Perloff 2014: 33). Much wider effects extend to the cultural level at the *macro-stage*. From a broad perspective, Schudson (2003:19-33) notes that news constructs a symbolic world that is given priority and legitimacy because when the media provides news items to the public, audiences and receivers perceive them as public legitimacy, therefore, offering forums for public discussions by the general audience.

In addition to the above discussions, political communication is noted for the opportunities it provides in democratic participation. Participation is not only a significant concept in communication in general, but also a critical attribute of political communication and public relations as subfields, especially with the advent and popularisation of Web 2.0 and social media platforms (Carpentier 2012, 2007). With the introduction of these new forms of technologies in political communication, democratic participation has shifted from the *minimalist model* of engagements, where democracy is confined to representation and engagements of citizens in elections for the selection of political leaders and elites (Carpentier 2012; Carpentier & De Cleen 2008). The trend of participation is transforming into the *maximalist model* of citizen engagements, where there is a combination of representation and adequate involvement of people in decision-making processes (Carpentier 2007; Mouffe 2000). This implies that politics and democracy are now taking social dimensions due to the

decentralisation of power and the fact that citizens are given more opportunities to influence leaders and decision-making in society via different media (Carpentier 2012; Carpentier & De Cleen 2008; Mouffe 2000). In the next section, the study examines the processes that are involved in political communication to generate its eventual effects and outcomes. It puts the communication process through the lens of politics to illustrate how political actors exchange information and messages.

### **2.1.3 Political Communication Process**

The communication process, which underpins political communication process, is in four folds, thus, the “source, message, channel and receiver” (Asah-Asante 2015:114). The process of communication is initiated from a source. Within a political context, the source could be political parties or politicians, media and individuals, among others. In a democratic environment, the sources of the message, which in this study includes political parties, media and individuals, communicate messages to their target audiences, thus, the citizenry and voters. The idea of the source, usually in varied forms such as words (either written or spoken), gestures, emblems, pictures, mobile phone text messages and songs, among others are transmitted to the recipients (Asah-Asante 2015:114). The meanings from these messages are created by both the source and receiver. Another key feature of the political communication process is the network or channel that is used in communicating the message. In this regard, the purpose of the communication has to be clear so as to determine the appropriate channel or platform for promoting effective communication. Some of the channels that have been utilised in this process of communication include radio, television, newspapers, as well as recent platforms such as mobile phones, the internet and social media, among others.

Primarily, the role of various channels of communication in the political process is to distribute and extend political messages over time and space. This process of distribution is referred to as *information diffusion*, encompassing three essential stages such as: *newsbreak*, *dissemination*, and *saturation* (Asah-Asante 2015:93). The *newsbreak* deals with issues regarding the period and length of time that is required by the communication media to spread or extend political messages and information. At the *dissemination* stage is the point of diffusion or the point at which political information and messages are communicated to citizens (voters). However, the *saturation* stage remains the level at which recipients and receivers of political messages become fully aware with detailed knowledge of the information that are aired, published or telecast. News stories and information which are of significance to individuals and receivers diffuse quickly, implying that the levels of diffusion of news vary

with respect to the type of information which is being communicated (Asah-Asante 2015:93). The conclusion of the communication process settles on the message recipients, in this sense the citizens and voters, who decode the messages into meanings.

In an illustration, Dominick (1990:523) clarified that the targeted audiences provide feedback to the source or sender by reacting to the information and messages received. In the process of selecting the appropriate channel for sending the message to be communicated, the sender proceeds with an outline, highlighting items and issues that are critical in communicating the message(s), hence, reinforcing the setting of agenda in political communication process. With the changing dynamics of political communication from passive relationship and propaganda to direct engagement and interpersonal relationships, the process and pattern of political communication is transforming. This is especially true with the spread of social media. In the following section, the study provides brief discussion regarding the trend of political communication activities in contemporary times.

## **2.2 Political Communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

However, the “first-age” of political communication is traced to the 1940s when partisan political allegiance, strong and stable political institutions existed amidst easy access to mass media (Crozier 2006:3). This first period was followed by a transition to the “second-age” when limited channel networks such television became available, expanding political audiences and giving the news media significant prominence in the activities or calculations of political parties and governments. During this period, the media particularly television channels delivered political information to the public in a homogeneous and passive way. On the other hand, the contemporary “third-age” has witnessed the multiplication of avenues of political communication, which aim at diverse, fragmented and active audiences (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999:213). This means that there are now many ways and modes of communication that accelerate the news cycle and information, hence, reducing journalistic roles and political timeframes.

In the words of Crozier (2006:3-4), the rise of information and communication technologies is contributing to a new cultural environment and political order that is characterised by “social reach, ubiquity and high velocity”. The trends in the “third-age” of abundance have contributed to professionalism in political advocacy, intense competition between and within media organisations, new forms of populism and anti-elitist popular sentiments, as well as increase in the potentials of multilateral communication in terms of how social media and new forms of communication affect political experience and reception

(Blumler & Kavanagh 1999; Blumler & Gurevitch 2000). These issues within the contemporary trend have shifted and emphasised how “power relations among key message providers and receivers are being re-arranged” and “the culture of political journalism is being transformed” (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999:209).

From a similar perspective, Pippa Norris (2000:140) outlined another typology with respect to the shifting patterns of political communication in post-industrial societies based on historical experience. This trend categorisation is based on the nature and types of campaign which encompasses the: mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to 1950s (pre-modern); early 1960s to late 1980s (modern) and 1990s onward (post-modern) eras. In terms of pre-modern type, political campaigns were local and decentralised where active party volunteers locally canvassed and held party meetings, which provided feedback to electorates in a stable environment with a partisan press and active reception (Norris 2000:137). On the other hand, the modern campaign type is characterised by nationally coordinated campaigns that involve professionals, intermittent opinion polling, as well as diminishing social and party alignment, and a broadcast network (for example television news) having a passive reception (Norris 2000:138). In the post-modern society where there is rapid growth of technology and new communication tools, citizens have unprecedented access to computers and media connectivity. This is especially true given the spread of cell phones, the internet and social media, which are enhancing globalisation and participation through interactivity. As a result, post-modern campaigns are coordinated nationally with decentralised operations, where the campaign remains a permanent process that involves the use of dedicated campaign units of political parties and professional consultants. In this sense, feedback becomes necessary via constant polling, interviews, focus groups and interactive media, where there is a form of social and partisan de-alignment with campaign media to respond sensitively to social diversity (that is, active-fickle reception) via narrow telecasts and targeted directed mail, as well as market-segmented advertising (Norris 2000:137-149).

Political communication as an old activity has been conducted through a top-down or one-way approach where information and messages are transmitted from politicians to the citizenry (Macnamara 2018:12). However, with a number of discoveries and reforms in democratisation toward participation and inclusion, political communication has shifted into the public sphere and relationship building (Macnamara 2018:6). As the trend of political communication in the twenty-first century has transformed, where political parties and politicians are appreciating the reasons for manipulating and promoting ideologies, policies, values, events and people, as well as organised habits and opinions of citizens rather than mere

dissemination and propaganda, political public relations have gained currency in politics and democracy (Bernays 2005:37). The novelty of political communication in the twenty-first century emanates from changes in social, cultural and technological advancement (Crozier 2006:3). These changes present their ramification for more research into the impact of communication and technologies on political processes and institutions, as well as examining empirical and conceptual frameworks for analysing such development (Blumler 2001: 203).

The shifts and transformations discussed in this section examine the trends of political communication as a concept within political systems and in the larger socio-cultural contexts. Considering how political communication occurs in different phases, coupled with the quest for direct participation, involvement and access to politicians and information, Macnamara (2018:6) recommends the need for professionalism in the process of engagements. In this regard, the study attempts to illustrate how political communication has occurred and reflected Grunig and Hunt's (1984) models of public relations, as an analytical framework to situate the trend of engagements. It allows the study to demonstrate how political actors have engaged in communication with their and stakeholders at different times. Before this assessment through Grunig & Hunt (1984:) framework, the study explains political advertising and public relations as foundation knowledge to inform the analysis as regards the public relations models in relations to political communication trends. As the rationale of the communication activities in politics at all times has been to either engage or deliver information and messages by politicians to their publics especially electorates (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999; Norris 2000), then it can be said that actors have been involved in political public relations. Before situating how political parties and politicians relate to the public in the models, the study discusses political advertising as a related concept.

## **2.2 Political Advertising**

Political marketing and advertising provide another form of political communication particularly in times of elections (Kaid 2004:156-157). Several scholars (see Lock & Harris 1996:21) see political marketing to be concerned about communicating with political stakeholders (for example party members, media and electorates as well as sources of funding). It entails is an exchange process that exists between political organisations and their environment and stakeholders to position their entities and communications in public sphere. Through political marketing parties and their candidates can use opinion research and analyse the environment to produce and promote competitive and attractive policies and programmes that will help them to realise organisational, as well as satisfy different groups of electors for

their votes to win political power (Wring 1997: 653). Political advertising is a critical process for achieving the goals of political marketing. It serves as a way through which brands and identities are created by organisations and individuals to market themselves in competition (Boateng 2015:48). It is central to modern political communication as it distinguishes one political organisation from another (McNair 2011:33). It enables political parties and politicians to make their positions on issues, public record and vision publicised. This results in shaping voting behaviours through multifaceted activities including television news interviews and election broadcasts, among others (Wring 1997: 653).

However, the assertion that political advertising shapes voting behaviours has been disputed by a number of scholars (for example Diamond & Bates 1984:351; Cundy 1986:232), who argue that though political advertising could reinforce existing political attitudes, as well as behaviour patterns, it hardly changes them. To these authors (Diamond & Bates 1984; Cundy 1986), political advertising remains an inverse proportion with respect to audiences' knowledge of a political party or candidate that is advertised. Therefore, once a party has been able to carve a niche or an image, it becomes difficult for new information to generate any significant change through political advertising (Diamond & Bates 1984:351; Cundy 1986:232). This study however contests this view, reinforcing that the content of political adverts can change the mind-sets and pattern of votes of electorates if such messages are created to meet their expectations and aspirations than what the parties they are affiliated to offer them. More so, with the emergence of image management as a central component of political communication, political messages can be crafted in ways to attract positive responses from audiences. For example, factors that enhance the image of political personalities such as dress code, colour and other stage settings, among others are aspects of the communication message that could influence the perception of the audience about the communicator and the message (McNair 2011:34).

Political advertising does not only inform but also persuades citizens regarding the choices and alternatives available to them as political consumers (McNair 2011:86). Through political advertising, parties and politicians exercise full control of their messages, in that they as sources or senders, have the choice or chance to say what they prefer; therefore replacing the agenda of the media and journalists with their own, and consequently allowing parties to posit their strength, and also highlight the weaknesses of opponents (McNair 2011:86). This implies that political advertising remains the major form of mass media that politicians exercise control over it. Contrary to this assertion, McNair (2011:86) re-examined his earlier work to reiterate how the spread of social media and networking channels are opening up new channels

of communication for political parties and governments to communicate “unrestricted” messages. With the rise of new technologies particularly the internet, a number of alternatives to the traditional forms of media especially television, radio and print advertising have become available to political actors in expanding their communication activities, engagements and controlling information.

The critical issue against political advertising as a form of political communication is that recipients of political messages perceive them as “propaganda,” “biased” and “partial” (McNair 2011:118). In this sense, information in political communication is regarded as politically loaded messages, which reflect the interest, values and ideas of the sponsor of the advertisement. As a result, the effectiveness regarding political advertising as a persuasion mechanism is limited (McNair 2011:118). For that reason, political actors have begun to explore “free media,” particularly social media platforms where political parties and politicians gain coverage and exposure without necessarily paying any media outlet for usage (McNair 2011:118). However, making use of *free media* comes with costs as organisations require public relations activities through which political parties can appropriate these platforms to construct and manufacture events, as well as relate and interact with their publics to their benefits. Considering that it may be difficult for political advertising to erase the images that are created by political parties, it provides the rationale for political communication to be more directed at political public relations. In this context, the political communicator serves as a performer, who is judged by audiences based on the quality of his or her performances (McNair 2011:34). Through the use of political public relations, political parties can prepare and work their messages to achieve results even though they may have little or no control over the environment into which the message is transmitted, as well as the uses for which audiences will put those messages. (McNair 2011:33).

### **2.3 Political Public Relations**

Political communication bears a number of similarities with respect to the activities in political public relations. In general terms, public relations are the management of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders (Grunig & Hunt 1984:5). It is a communication management function that ensures “development, maintenance, growth, and nurturing of mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their significant publics” (Thomlison 2000:178). This means that public relations balance the interests of organisations and stakeholders via the management of the organisations’ relationships with their publics (Ledingham 2003:1). Political public relations are a branch of the traditional public relations

practice which is developing amidst considerable potentials (Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011:8). The concept of political public relations was developed from the intersection of political communication, public relations and political marketing, making it difficult for scholars to identify the concept with a specific field (Goncalves 2014:99). In his argument within the context of political communication, McNair (1999) argued that public relations have been restricted to the management of relations with the media. However, situating it in the context of communication management, Grunig and Hunt (1984) contend that public relations should not be limited to the instrumental perspectives of the media relations, as the public relations framework ensures the development of communication, both externally and internally. Externally, it establishes relationships with the media, members, supporters, as well as the general public, while internally it enables intra-party communication activities including elections (Goncalves 2014:99-108).

Despite that political public relations could be new, its practice has been in existence over decades (Drageset 2014:11). It became popular in the 1770s when the slogan “No taxation without representation” was invented by revolutionaries in the American War of Independence, which brought the need for political parties and government to make the public aware of their sides of the stories (Stromback & Kioussis 2011:8). Political parties then began to look for opportunities to relate with the public to present them with true information for their understanding and cooperation. In the same vein as what transpires in public relations, many studies regarding political communication have concentrated on the development communication strategies that target specific publics. These publics include the media and citizens (Goncalves 2014:100). The difference between public relations and political public relations is the aim of the latter, which Strömbäck & Kioussis (2011) highlight in their definition. Given this back drop, Strömbäck & Kioussis (2011:8) refer to political public relations as:

The management process by which an organisation or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve goals.

In drawing comparison, this study notes that political communication focuses on the conflicts of power through “the exchange of symbols and messages between political actors and institutions, the general public and news media that are the consequences for political systems” (McLoed, Kosicki & McLoed 1994:4). Political public relations sometimes, albeit not always

the trend coincides with public relations on matters that are managed and resolved through communication (Strömbäck & Kiouisis 2011:6).

However, the notable variance between political public relations and public relations is that the definition of the former does not include the term “mutual,” which the public relations gives credence to (Drageset 2014:11). In their argument, Strömbäck & Kiouisis (2011:4) indicate that many descriptions of public relations have used varied prescriptive, descriptive and normative elements, clarifying that: what public relations should be and what it is are two different issues. The use of the word “mutual” distinguishes public relations from political public relations, as the term demonstrates a two-way communication between organisations and their publics, which is not recognised in the latter’s definition, hence the notion of political public relations as asymmetric communication for achieving political goals (Drageset 2014:12). These assertions show that unlike public relations that concentrates on two-way symmetrical communication, political public relations tends to be a one-way approach. This is clear from the definitions of these two concepts. Despite their dichotomy, political public relations and public relations converge on the relational perspective (Strömbäck & Kiouisis 2011:11). In addressing the definitional lacuna, political public relations activities have to exploit mutually beneficial relationships by promoting interactions and two-way symmetric engagements. In view of the relational dimensions, political public relations has evolved from influencing views and opinions via propaganda and persuasion into establishing, nurturing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between political parties and their publics (Strömbäck & Kiouisis 2011:11).

With the emergence of new forms of technology especially social media and other interactive platforms of communication, this study reinforces the need for “mutual” relations between political stakeholders via exchange of information and messages than the passive dissemination. Subscribing to the two-way symmetric structure, this study posits social media as political public relations medium for balancing the interests of stakeholders and engaging them through conversations, interactions and feedback to establish mutually beneficial relationships. A popular framework that provides the lens to demonstrate how the practices of public relations are conducted in different organisations and activities is Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) role models. The next section presents how practitioners of communication and political public relations have performed their functions through the trends of political communication.

### **2.2.1 Political Communication in the Lens of Grunig and Hunt's Model**

The phases of political communication discussed in a previous section demonstrate characteristics as regards components of the public relations role models that Grunig and Hunt (1984) have propounded. These include the press-agentry; public information; two-way asymmetric; and two-way symmetric models of communication. Even though Grunig and Hunt's work was developed at a time when social media was not central to communication, their models have been recently revised and extended in other studies, especially with other scholars (for example, Grunig 2009; Grunig 2001; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2006; Crozier 2006; Blumler 2001; Blumler & Gurevitch 2001) to reflect the symmetrical communication framework of social media in terms of interactivity and feedback. Hence, Grunig and Hunt's model is significant to this study. In line with this, this study excavates activities in the various trends to identify practices that reflect the respective elements of these models of communication.

#### **2.2.1.1 Press-Agency Model**

The first perspective in Grunig and Hunt's (1984) model is the press-agentry, where organisations sought the assistance of the media to gain positive coverage in public space. In such cases, organisations present their achievements and gains to the public through a one-way approach, for example, where media personnel are invited to events of the organisations in order to present and publicise their accomplishments to the passive or receiving audiences (Grunig & Hunt 1984:21). Apart from being a one-way passive process, information in the press-agentry framework could be "incomplete, distorted, propaganda or half-true information" (Grunig & Hunt 1984:21). This is because the press and media embellish reportages from the coverage of events in ways that project organisations positively to the public. Some scholars, for example Crozier (2006:3) associate the press-agentry model with the "first-age" of political communication in the 1940s when partisan political allegiance, strong and stable political institutions had easy access to mass media. In that case the political parties and groups sent different forms of information, either true or half-true information through the media especially the press or newspapers to project the achievements under their stewardship through a one-way approach to passive audiences and recipients, who could not make any input nor provide feedback to the messages. The flaw in this up-bottom approach is that political parties did not factor the perspectives, engagements and feedback from audiences in the creation and transmission of information to the public. More so, interaction which remains a critical ingredient of political communication could not occur between parties and

their stakeholders via the passive form of engagement. With the perception of press-agentry as propaganda machinery, organisations including political parties began to explore how they could provide objective information to the public, hence, the public information approach.

### **2.2.1.2 Public Information Model**

The increase in propaganda and fake news to situate organisations in positive light and search by journalists for negative news about political institutions and politicians, organisations started informing the public with truthful and factual information about their activities. Public information activities involve the use of press statements and releases, among others by parties to send their messages to the public (Asah-Asante 2015:107). With public information, political parties disseminated objective information about their organisations the general public via media reportages. This largely occurred during the “second-age” of political communication (Blumler & Gurevitch 2001; Blumler 2001), when television became available for extending political audiences and the news media were the only avenues for political parties and governments to reach the public. In the public information approach, political parties set their agenda through the media. In this regard, the media particularly television deliver homogeneous information from political parties to passive audiences in public through a one-way approach with no dialogue (Drageset 2014:18). Even though public information diminishes social and party alignments via broadcast network such as television news it still has passive audiences and reception that does not make room for feedback and interactions. The missing link is that the voice of the public is not listened to, which contradicts the claim that democracy thrives on “vox populi,” not solely in speaking, but particularly in the sense of being listened to (Macnamara 2016:2). Against this backdrop, political organisations sought new ways of listening to the public and involving them in two-way information approaches.

### **2.2.1.3 Two-way Asymmetric Model**

The demand for increasing voice and inclusion in decision making and participation by the public shifted political communication from a one-way to the two-way information flows (Kenney 2016:80). The two-way information flows are common with the contemporary third-age that create many avenues for political communication amidst diverse, fragmented and active audiences (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999:217). With the emergence of new forms and modes of communication, journalistic and political timeframes have changed. The two-way asymmetric became prevalent in politics because political institutions realised the importance of presenting their views favourably to the public juxtaposed with persuading stakeholders to rally behind them for their goals. In this sense, political communication practitioners became

responsibility for explaining and advising management of their parties on what would be acceptable to the public.

However, similar to the press-agentry and public information models, the two-way asymmetric approach also focused on persuasion and influencing the behaviour of the public without engaging them in dialogue (Grunig *et al.* 2006:46). In the post-modern era, feedback from the public has been gathered via constant polling, interviews and focus groups, where there is a social and partisan de-alignment to respond sensitively to social diversity via narrow telecasts, targeted directed mail and market-segmented advertising based on research (Norris 2000:137-149). A popular activity that can be categorised as a two-way asymmetric approach in political communication include the use of press conferences, where political parties speak and grant interviews to the media on sensitive and key issues trending in public (Asah-Asante 2015:120-121). As democracy becomes more participatory with political stakeholders seeking opportunities for direct engagements and conversations through win-win situations, a new dimension to political communication has developed in the two-way symmetric approach.

#### **2.2.1.4 Two-way Symmetric Model**

With the focus of communication shifting to mutually-responsive interactions and beneficial relationship with the public in democratic processes and practices, the two-way symmetrical approach is drawing much attention in political communication. As Grunig *et al.* (2006:46) puts it, symmetrical communication balances organisational interest with those of the public to build long term relationships. Hence, political institutions have adopted a bi-directional communication flow between their organisations and the public, which enable them to put out information and also receive feedback to the messages they communicate to their publics (Lane 2004:10). Unlike the two-way asymmetrical approach, the two-way symmetrical communication focuses on the process of communication for engagement and feedback for mutually beneficial relationships (Lane 2007:71-74).

The two-way symmetric communication uses “research and dialogues” for “symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviours” (Grunig 2001:13) of organisations and their publics. This model characterises political communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where professionalisation in political advocacy, intense media competition, different forms of populism and anti-elitist popular sentiments, as well as the spread of the internet, new types of communication and social media affect information reception and exchange (Blumler & Gurevitch 2001:1-4). This means that the mounting of online websites and profile pages on social media platforms such as Facebook by political parties for uncontrolled and unrestricted

engagements and interactions with the public and stakeholders provides a form of two-way symmetric communication.

The two-way symmetric communication as a relationship-building technique, stresses the need for direct engagements between political parties and their stakeholders, which provides opportunity for them to project their organisational qualities, behaviours and attitudes in addressing issues. The involvement and engagement of stakeholders in setting public agenda could prevent negative news and crises for political parties. With the emergence of social media and interactive platforms, providing allowance for user-generated content by audiences and the public has enhanced two-way symmetrical engagements (Lane 2007:71-74). This study posits the two-way symmetrical communication as the normative framework for stakeholder engagements and relationship building by political parties. In this regard, the study proposes social media as critical tools for political parties to interact and converse with their stakeholders, irrespective of location, distance and time. Social media is upsetting the conventional understandings of private and public spheres. Having discussed how political communication has evolved through public relations models, it is relevant to explain the notion of *public sphere* as a venue for communication, as well as the *relational* and *reputational* dimensions of political public relations.

### **2.2.3 Concept of Public Sphere**

The terminology of *public* recurs throughout the sections of this chapter prompting a discussion of the concept of *public sphere*, which is relevant for providing understanding of political public relations and relationship management (Drageset 2014:29). Defining *public* is problematic due to its varied meanings to different stakeholders. This study uses *public* as a concept as opposed to other terms like *audience* because the latter could raise issues regarding engagement and participation, which reinforces the need for two-way communication to establish mutually beneficial relationships. *Publics* are “creators, re-makers and redistributors,” who engage in sharing culture and knowledge through social exchanges and discourses in media receptions (Ito 2008:2). Against this backdrop, Habermas (2006:415) posited “public sphere” as a realm of social life within which public opinion are formed and where all citizens have the chance to participate in deliberations. This means that the public sphere is created at a point and platform where individuals assemble as a public body to converse (Habermas 2006:416). Considering explanations above, this study highlights public debate as a form of public sphere (Habermas 2006). Within this context, political communication occurs in “an open, unrestricted fashion,” giving recognition to publicly accessible places and platforms via

the “circulation of non-profit media” (Anderson & Gray 2007: 413). The existence of public sphere breaks the control over political communication (Habermas 2006:417), providing citizens unrestricted access to places for dialogue and free discussion of issues without coercion or pressure (Drageset 2014:30).

However, Anderson & Gray (2007:413) argue that the suitable conditions for enhancing the public sphere have been eroded by how information has been commodified and public debate, as well as the emergence of powerful government structures in modern politics, which interfere in a variety of democratic, socio-cultural and economic processes. From a nuance perspective, Moloney (2006:29) criticised public relations in the lens of public sphere; arguing that public relations are forms of “social engineering done with communications to gain the consent of public opinion for capitalist interest”. This study focuses on the types of publics that engage with political parties online and offline, that is, those who are engaged in the shared culture of such parties via communication (Ito 2008:2). With the emphasis on symmetrical communication and relationship management approaches, the concept of public sphere is gaining significance in political communication. As a consequence, social media especially networking sites including Facebook serve as unique avenues that allow the public to gather and engage in discourse (Boyd 2007:125). These platforms contribute to the interactive processes for building relations by organisations with stakeholders. In the next section, a brief discussion as regards the relational dimension of public relations is provided.

### **2.2.2 Relational Dimension**

Inasmuch as the use of relational approach is central to political public relations, and public relations in general, there is lack of adequate empirical cases of dialogic public relations (Pieczka 2011:116). As Drageset (2014:13) recounts public relations is not restricted to the outputs of communications but also extending relationships. Providing a holistic description, Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994:2) referred to the relational dimension of public relations as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the ‘publics’ on whom its success or failure depends on”. Therefore, establishing relations is a critical element of both public relations and political communication (Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011:11). With the focus on relational perspective, the practice of political communication and political public relations is transforming. The reason is that public relations is changing from how opinions are influenced through propaganda and persuasion into the establishment, building and maintenance of relationships that are mutually beneficial to organisations and their publics (Ledingham 2006:466-473). Stakeholders are a

key section of the public that are significant in relationship building because their experiences and perceptions influence the reputation of organisations.

Considering the above discussions, this study reiterates the relational functions as critical activities in engagements because the ultimate rationale for communicating with the public and stakeholders of organisations including political parties is to establish long-term relationships to win support for their goals. It means that communication does not work in a vacuum as it is influenced by relationship with the public. In this regard, this study proposes relationship management as a means of promoting understanding and cooperation between political parties and their stakeholders especially supporters and followers. It situates social media as a relational tool for two-way symmetric communication and interaction with the public to advance the political agenda of parties in democracy. As mentioned above in this section, the reputation of an organisation is affected by the experiences and influence of stakeholders. The next section discusses the reputational perspective of public relations before drawing comparison of the various terminologies in subsequent section.

### **2.2.3 Reputational Dimension**

Another critical element in connection with public relations and political public relations is “reputation” (Drageset 2014:13). In reputational terms, a major difference that exists between these two concepts is in respect of their respective directions (Rindova, Petkova, Server & Williamson 2005:1033). While public relations practitioners give more priority to the management of relationships (Grunig 2009; Gordon 2011), political public relations practitioners are largely particular about reputation (McNair 2003; Moloney 2006). Scholars, such as McNair (2003) and Moloney (2006) assert that public relations serve as a manipulative tactic of communication or perhaps a “weak willed” propaganda, hence challenging the co-existence of political public relations and democracy. Contesting the assumption that organisations communicate with publics for mutual understanding, Moloney (2006:74) described such process as an idealism which cannot be sustained conceptually because it has little or thin evidence.

Synthesising the varied viewpoints, this study disputes those assertions of McNair (2003) and Moloney (2006) in that, it is importance for political parties to extend and manage relationships through the traditional public relations approach. This is because the mere perceptions of stakeholders, thus, *reputation* about their political organisations may not translate into votes if there are no relationships, interactions and understanding between parties and their publics. In an attempt to situate relationship in political public relations, this study

examines the activities of political communication by political parties in Ghana through the framework of relationship management to posit how political public relations are able to promote mutual engagements, benefits and understanding from stakeholders of political organisations for the advancement of political goals. Having discussed the relational and reputational perspectives of public relations, the following section gives a comparative analysis of the effects of these dimensions.

#### **2.2.4 Comparing the Relational and Reputational Dimensions**

While the goal of public relations regarding business organisations is to establish and enhance dialogue with their publics for long term beneficial effects, political parties focus on winning political power through elections, and consequently delivering the programmes and policies of the party (Drageset 2014:14). Put in the context of Rindova *et al.*'s (2005) understanding of reputation, this study suggests that the ability of parties to implement programmes and policies creates value for them in competition. For political parties to be able to implement programmes and policies, they require favourable support from the public at elections (Drageset 2014:14). This implies that, unlike business organisations, parties have been particular about retaining political power than representing the interest of the public, and responding to the expectations of stakeholders (Stonecash 2013:27). Political parties make “efforts to disparage the reputation of the opposing party” as an attempt to favourably position their organisations to the public (Stonecash 2013:11).

The assertions above demonstrate the concerns of political stakeholders in dual perspectives. With the changing political dynamics, this study notes that political parties should add more credence to both *relationship* and *reputation* management. The focus of attention has to be multi-faceted rather than dwelling on a particular dimension of public relations. The issue lies in the dichotomy of meanings of political public relations from contexts outside of politics. Political communication is viewed from the market-oriented perspective of public relations, which identifies and addresses the requirements of stakeholders, and similarly to relationship management, which also draws on the joint or mutual interests and goals of stakeholders as the foundation of relationships (Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011:8). This study makes two different assumptions from the preceding statement. That is, a political party that focuses on relationship management will be interested and involved in extending or enhancing the quality of relationship it establishes with the public and stakeholders (Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011).

While on the other hand, a political party which is market-oriented will be particularly concerned about voter behaviour, focusing largely on issues and activities such as registration,

voting and donations, among others (Drageset 2014:15). In providing further specification, as regards distinction between the two perspectives, Drageset (2014:15) clarified that whereas a relationship management-focused political party embrace “mutuality and balance,” market-oriented political parties focus on “victory and dominance”. This puts the variance between the relational and reputational contexts of public relations into goals and strategies. The relationship management approach seeks short-term goals, as the market-oriented approach explores short term strategies, especially the winning of elections (Drageset 2014:15). Even though this study is situated to the relationship management framework, stressing the essence of mutuality and balance on the part of political parties to communicate and interact with stakeholders to achieve political goals. However, a combination of the relational framework with the market-oriented approach could enable organisations to achieve the full potential in political public relations in democracy.

### **2.2.5 Political Communication and Democracy**

Do political communication and public relations contribute to democracy? Central to this study is how social media especially Facebook serves as a tool for promoting two-way symmetric communication and interactions in politics and democracy especially in Africa and Ghana. In order to address this puzzle, it is appropriate to examine how political communication and public relations relate to democracy. Political communication thrives on that political system that exists in a country (Drageset 2014:31). Therefore, political public relations have either beneficial, negative or neutral impact on democracy (Moloney 2016:96). In order to achieve a more neutral impact, Moloney (2006:96) suggest the separation of deliberative democracy from representative democracy. The *representative* form involves competition, where government and political parties market their policies to the electorates for votes, while the deliberative form involves the thoughts and debates that are expressed in arguments and conclusions by people in society (Drageset 2014:31).

Considering these illustrations above, political public relations has the semblance of the representative framework of democracy, as it represents the “voices” of a number of actors in society, who are competing for acceptance and recognition of their opinions or inputs in public sphere (Moloney 2006:77). The neutral elements of political public relations focus on the “technical component of the promotional culture,” which exerts neutral effects on democracy (Moloney 2006:77). From another angle, Drageset (2014:32) equates political communication to public relations, stressing that both make enable political parties and groups to “compete in the market place of ideas” within liberal democracy. They extend “information subsidies,” thus,

anything that promotes positive attention (Sriramesh & Verčič 2009:12) in the form of interviews, press releases and Facebook posts, among others, which may be directed at the public rather than the media.

With the intense competition in politics and public relations, many political parties are constantly searching for efficient and effective ways to draw the attention of citizens and media to put forward their agenda via political public relations (Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011:8). Despite the opportunities that the development of new forms of technology and engagements provide in democracy, the role and impact of political public relations have not significant currency, or perhaps relegated to the backdrop of democracy. This is compounded with a number of criticisms. For example, Moloney (2006:29-31) asserted that political public relations prevent pluralism due to public arguments, in that, the culture of “making arguments” is circumvented by one of “having arguments”. In terms of resources, Drageset (2014:32) wobbles that political public relations are restricted to organisations and individuals who could afford, hence, serving the interest of the financially privileged in democratic societies. The “asymmetry of communication” in political public relations “reinforces unequal power relationships” (Moloney 2006:88). This implies that political organisations and groups in democracy respond to the interests and expectations of the many stakeholders whose voices are not featured or heard in traditional media avenues via direct engagements.

Inasmuch as political communication lubricates the exchange of messages and information between political actors, its role in democracy cannot be underestimated despite its peculiar drawbacks. With the spread of the internet and emergence of new forms of technology especially social media, the significance of political communication as a means of reaching the public via a two-way symmetric communication and unrestricted engagements at cheaper costs. This disproves the statements by Moloney (2006) and Drageset (2014) that political communication and public relations are restricted to the privilege of those who are financially sound in democratic societies. More so, by the presence and usage of social media for stakeholder engagements, interactions and building relationships, equalisation and efficiency of resources are achieved in democracy.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter of the thesis reviewed the existing literature and research on political communication. The chapter commenced with a background discussion of political communication, comparing definitions, features, categories and processes involved in the activity. It also situated communication and engagements in framework of political public

relations practice. In this regard, it posited political communication through Grunig & Hunt's (1984) public relations models, as well as other concepts in connection with public relations and democracy. The literature reviewed also addressed issues from many studies on political communication with particular regard to the two-way symmetrical approach. From the above discussions and understandings, it can be argued that just as in the business circles, the political sphere has witnessed the contribution of public relations to the success of organisations, which extends beyond the tactic of media relations (Goncalves 2014:100).

The various definitions and meanings of public relations focus on the "relational paradigm," which underpins the argument in this chapter, serving as the essence of interactive avenues for communication, organisation and mobilisation in the sphere of politics (Goncalves 2014:100). The three of Grunig & Hunt's (1984) models, specifically the *press-agentry*, *public information* and *two-way asymmetrical* engagements are connected with the asymmetrical communication models of practice (Goncalves 2014:101). These models occur in political communication when political parties largely persuade the public for their political advantage without prioritising the interests of stakeholders. Therefore, asymmetrical communication is considered as "unethical and socially irresponsible" means of engagements (Grunig & White 1992:38-42). This means that it is the "two-way symmetric" approach that distinguishes political public relations and mutual engagements from propaganda or passive political communication from parties to the public (Grunig & Hunt 1992:38-42). The two-way symmetrical model provides dialogic and participatory engagements with the aim of balancing the interests of political parties and their stakeholders, as well as the general public (Goncalves 2014:101).

In view of the shift towards interpersonal communication and direct access to political actors, this study advances the two-way symmetric communication as more effective in political communication that promotes mutually beneficial engagements and relationships, as opposed to other models of communication and public relations. Within the symmetric approach, political parties are able to foster the support and understanding of their stakeholders for their causes and political agenda (Goncalves 2014:101). Therefore, political communication practitioners have to employ the two-way symmetrical communication to engage stakeholders in democratic process and decisions to enable political parties govern and implement their policies, as well as legitimise their actions, behaviours and influence the political sphere in a peaceful atmosphere (Goncalves 2014:101). The following chapter reviews research and literature on social media exploring their characteristics and appropriation in

politics including discussions on Facebook as political communication and relationship management tool, among others.

## CHAPTER 3

### SOCIAL MEDIA

#### 3.0 Introduction

Previous studies on political public relations practice and the spread of social media show that political communication is changing with the emergence of free media (Crozier 2006:3). As social media platforms continue to transform political activities, their usage by a large number of politicians and other individuals has drawn the attention of scholars to study and publish their findings on many forms of social media, such as Facebook (Kearney 2017, 2013; Borah 2016), Twitter (Moyo 2015) and You-Tube (Miller 2011), among others. With the increasing popularity of these new channels, the patterns of engagement and relationship between political stakeholders have changed. The dynamic expansion of communication technologies and social media is offering political parties the chance to engage and interact more effectively to develop mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders. In spite of this, there is little knowledge as regards the role of social media in enhancing relationships from the perspective of public relations, particularly at the strategic management level of political communication (Goncalves 2014:103). This means that political parties and politicians are especially interested in strategies for securing votes than engaging and listening to voters as citizens.

Against this background, this study posits social media as an avenue for two-way symmetric relationships to intra-party communication, engagements between parties and their internal and external stakeholders. This promotes trust, openness, satisfaction, access, involvement, commitments, investments and mutual control (Grunig & Huang 2000; Ledingham 2011). In this chapter, the study defines and extends discussions on issues that are relevant to social media and networking channels. It reviews literature on social media in general context, examining their features, categories, benefits and challenges, as well as their political functions and repercussion. This includes perspectives with regard to the role of social networking in building political relationship (Kirigha, Mukhongo & Masinde 2016:156-160). In view of this, the chapter advances that social networking sites are effective tools for political parties to establish mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders in communication. Therefore, the study also synthesises a number of research and reviewed literature in relation to Facebook as an exemplar of social media and relationship management platform. The study

begins with a background to the emergence of social in the next section of the chapter before its attempts at defining social media.

### **3.1 Emergence of Social Media**

The development of information, communication and technology including social media has shaped many activities in the modern world (Tayeebwa 2016:9). The reason for their wide spread is that these tools promote efficient and effective communication in the digital information age. These new discoveries in communication are transforming dynamics and transactions across distance and locations via cyberspace in real time and instantaneously (Carr & Hayes 2015:7-8). The emergence of the social media concept has been attributed to Manuel Castells in his study on “Network Society” in 1996 (Tayeebwa 2016:9). In his analysis of *The Information Age*, Castells (2010:162) elaborates how the internet has empowered the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, transforming information into a raw material. The emergence of social media particularly networking sites including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace, Google Plus, Cyworld and You-Tube (Ellison & Boyd 2013:151), as well as blogs, among others has incited research on social media. These platforms have extended the concept, with some contending that social media shape the perceptions, opinions and actions of many people whose opinions and behaviours are also influenced by information from traditional news media channels (Kamp 2016:1). Social media continue to spread or perhaps grow because their utility is powered by new developments in technology, coupled with the knowledge and skills of social media users. This is especially true as new and many online contents, platforms and websites continue to emerge.

Many attempts have been made by scholars within communication and media, as well as across cognate disciplines including information science, public relations and marketing communications, among others to offer explanations and meanings for social media as a concept. Many of these definitions (see Kaplan & Haenlin 2010; Fuchs & Trottier 2015; Trottier & Fuchs 2014) of the concept converge on the notion of social media as digital technologies, emphasising on user-generated content and interactions (Terry 2009:507-510). Other scholars, such as Kent (2010), have considered social media by looking at their characteristics, while some like Howard and Park (2012), have either identified the directionality of messages, or utility of particular tools especially Facebook and Twitter to exemplify interaction modes as a way of explanation. To provide a holistic understanding of the concept, this study compares and contrasts various definitions and attributes of social media in the following sections.

### 3.2. Concept of Social Media: Definition

Several definitions have been given to social media. The social media concept is associated with a number of notions, such as “user-generated content; convergence culture; the people (audience); participatory media; peer-production; and Web 2.0. (Mandiberg 2012:2). Put in a broader context, social media denotes interactive communication channels which allow for two-way interactions and feedback, emphasising that social media provide “potential real time interaction, reduced anonymity, a sense of propinquity, short response time,” in promoting networked engagements (Kent 2010:645). From another perspective, Russo, Watkins, Kelly and Chan (2008:22) posited social media as platforms facilitating online communication, networking and collaboration. In this sense, social media become the label for digital technologies which give people the chance to produce, connect and interact (Rathore & Ilavarasan 2018:7126), as well as share contents (Lewis 2010:2). Similarly, Jacka and Scott (2011:5) refer to social media as the group of web-based broadcast technologies which democratises content, and makes it possible for people to produce and publish content, instead of being passive consumers of content. However, one widely accepted definition of social media is that of Kaplan and Haenlin (2010:61), positing the concept as internet-based applications that thrives on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and therefore, allowing the creation of user-generated contents.

In their search for a social media framework involving different scopes, Carr & Hayes (2015:8) note that “social media are internet-based, dis-entrained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, driving value primarily from user-generated content”. These are electronic communication platforms that serve as websites for micro-blogging and social networking activities because they provide opportunities for users in establishing communities online to connect, communicate, interact and exchange ideas, messages and contribute to contents and participation (Fuchs & Trottier 2015:5). A major channel that drives the craze of social media is the *social networking sites* (Boyd & Ellison 2008:211). This plethora of definitions above indicates the difficulty in reaching a consensus on a generally accepted functional and theoretical definition regarding the social media (Carr & Hayes 2015:8). This is especially true as Howard & Park (2012:362) suggest that scholars have based their definitions on what sociality means to them, or perhaps the social roles and functions that a social media medium performs. In view of this, scholarship regarding social media is convoluted with definitional lacunae in literature. However, the common characteristics that are noticeably featured throughout the various explanations of social media include *interactivity* and *user-generated content*. From the definitions of social

media, this study notes that what distinguish these new forms of communication from the traditional forms of media are the presence of unrestricted and uncontrolled access enjoyed by individuals.

With the emergence of new forms of technology and media platforms, the context within which political communication takes place has significantly changed. The advancement of information and communication technologies has ushered in a digital era that has impacted competitive democracies across the world in many different ways. The use of social media has emerged as an important electoral campaigning tool in recent years. Social media differ from traditional or industrial media in quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence (Gyampo 2017). Crucially, social media tools operate in a multidimensional communication system involving many source dimensions and many receivers unlike the traditional media, which operates under a linear transmission model with one source to many receivers. More so, they serve as strategic or open avenues for the public to voice out their views and participate in setting political agenda within wider and global audiences.

In spite of these, there are still many questions with respect to how new these technologies are transforming political communication, democracy and electoral processes in Africa, and whether social media contributes to democracy in the third world. With the developments in information, communication and technology especially social media, there is increased acceptance that such platforms have redefined the way governments engage the citizenry, with some scholars asserting that social media platforms influence the perceptions, views and actions of individuals whose opinions have traditionally been influenced by information from traditional forms of media (Kamp 2016:1). Social media continues to spread because its utility is supported and enhanced by new technological trends and developments, and the improvement in knowledge and skills of social media users. This is especially true as new and many forms of online contents, platforms and websites continue to emerge. Political parties are thus trying adapt to this changing environment by attempting to appropriate social media to their benefit (Effing, Van Hillegersberg & Huibers 2011:25-30). However, since social media influence many people globally, its spread seem to be a challenge to undemocratic environments. In reaction to the social media effects on democracy, political leaders especially in Africa have attempted to control their usage, particularly in elections. In the specific case of Africa, other issues regarding lack of access to the internet especially in rural areas impede the spread of social media to a wider public sphere (Kamp 2016).

As Kamau (2014:10) indicates, social media appropriation is the nexus of political communication especially in Sub Saharan Africa. There is no doubt that with the increased

internet penetration and social media communication platforms throughout the world, the electorate in democratic systems could access a number of messages and news sources directly and provide feedback in the form of conversations and interactions (Volders 2013:9). This implies that social media platforms offer political stakeholders the independence and freedom to select news and messages they receive and send, as well as contribute to contents. However, their appropriation differs amongst users based on their personal needs and possibilities which are presented by the various social media platforms. For example, while users of Twitter could use the channel's features to keep track of issues under discussion, news and updates, Facebook provides its users the opportunity to stay in touch with other individuals and establish relationships (Volders 2013:10). This means that social media provide political stakeholders the independence and freedom in terms of news and messages they prefer to receive or send, and contribute to contents. However, their uses differ amongst users based on their individual needs and possibilities that are provided by the different social media platforms. For example, as users of Twitter use the channel's features for keeping track of subjects under discussion, news and updates, Facebook allows its users to stay in touch with other people and establish relationships (Volders 2013:10). Against this backdrop, this study posits the value of social media as significant because they promote mutually beneficial relationships through instant messaging, news provision and exchange. Even though online participants use several social media networking sites for communication, Facebook is the most common choice among them (Kamau 2014:10).

What is the state of political use of social media in Ghana? There is increasing scholarship interest on how social media are used in politics in Ghana (see Dzisah, 2018; Gyampo 2017; Tettey 2017; Dankwa 2016; Atengle 2014). In his study of the appropriation of social media and traditional media in Ghana, Gyampo (2017:186) discusses a number of ways by which political parties in Ghana deploy social media to advance their political interests in their attempt at capturing power. From the findings of his study, Gyampo (2017) notes that political parties particularly the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress have made use of social media in several ways. These include their use different forms of social media for communicating organisational policies and positions on key issues, discussing and soliciting public opinion on topical issues of national importance, mobilising support and party membership, as well as fund raising (Gyampo 2017:6). Political parties can use social media to transform direct engagements and conversations with stakeholders and citizens given that electorates have now become aware of their choices; hence rejecting, repelling and rebelling against non-transparent governance (Macnamara 2018:12).

Facebook and WhatsApp are the two main forms of social media common in Ghana (Gyampo 2017:6). During the 2016 general elections, presidential and parliamentary candidates used the virtual space and social media platforms to prosecute their political campaigns, and promote civic engagements and meaningful participation (Gyampo 2017:2). Using social media, political candidates stated their positions regarding issues through those networks in canvassing for votes online. In the presidential race, the two main contenders, Nana Akuffo Addo and John Dramani Mahama used social media channels especially Facebook and Twitter for their campaign activities (Penplusbytes 2017:8). Apart from political leaders, civil society organisations in Ghana particularly the Coalition of Domestic Elections Observers (CODEO) used social media effectively to educate the public about political participation and other electoral issues (Hadji 2016:84-85). A notable flagship initiative by the Coalition (CODEO) in 2016 was the establishment of an online blog for the Ghana election project, which was dubbed “Ghana Decides” to encourage participation in electoral processes by the citizenry (Hadji 2016:84-85). The political activities and engagements on social media platforms in Ghana show how the opportunities from those new channels are changing the political lives and communication spaces of institutions and citizens. This emphasises the essence for political actors to appropriate social media platforms as cost effective avenues for political communication and engagements, given their real time and interactive features for reaching out to stakeholders.

### **3.3 Features of Social Media**

Many scholars have highlighted a number of characteristics of social media. What makes social media different from other platforms is that they provide interactive participation and allow users to modify information and messages online (Sarah 2012:146). Other elements that are characteristic of all social media include their “flexibility, convergence, immediacy or real-time feedback, prominence, performance and easy usability” (Anena 2014:12-13). Conceptualising the characteristics of social media, Mayfield (2008:5) illustrates the normative features of social media under five main themes, namely participation, openness, conversation, community and communality, and connectedness”.

#### **3.3.1 Participation**

A major characteristic of social media is in respect of how they empower interested parties and users to engage and interact with others in conversation (Mayfield 2008:5). This demonstrates the social element of those platforms, and how it gives participants and users the chance to involve and exchange information with one another in a two-way symmetric way, as

opposed to the passing of messages to audiences via a one-way top-down approach without feedback. In this sense, participation is determined on the basis of the behaviours of citizens and stakeholders of organisations, as well as the length of stay and frequency of visits by users of social media platforms (Mayfield 2008:5). If these conditions are to be achieved, it will require openness.

### **3.3.2 Openness**

The next feature after participation is openness. Social media platforms secure openness from user participation and promote feedback (Mayfield 2008:5). This means that these new avenues of communication are breaking the barriers which prevent people's access to information by allowing them to comment on issues and messages. Social media have made the transmission and exchange information between their sources and users, as well as amongst users (Mayfield 2008:5). However, the openness of social media is enhanced by the availability of simple mechanisms that enable users to create and share contents on those platforms. It is noteworthy that three forms of behaviour, such as "requesting, receiving and acting" serve as the basis for determining the openness of a social media (Mayfield 2008:5). Subsequent to this section, a discussion on conversation as another feature of social media is provided.

### **3.3.3 Conversation**

Conversation is also a critical characteristic of social media. It demonstrates how social media enhances a two-way symmetrical communication relationship, as opposed to one-way directional transmission and distribution of messages and information to audiences (Mayfield 2008:5). With the internet as the catalyst, social media platforms establish a two-way symmetric communication environment that extends the capacity and speeds dialogic engagements. There is the reinforcement of interpersonal features as component of social media communication. In this context, the dimension of feedback serves as the focus of attention in accessing the effect of the two-way communication relationship (Mayfield 2008:5). Such relationship is achieved in a social group or community of individuals who could share common interests and expectations.

### **3.3.4 Community and Commonality**

Situating it in the general perspective of relationship management, Mayfield (2008:5) highlights that social media channels give organisations and individuals the opportunity to form communities quickly and easily, as well as develop effective relationships with other people and organisations that share similar values and commonalities with them. Inasmuch as the main

utility of social media lies in their capacity and ability to link or connect organisations and people for their mutual needs, interests and objectives during interactions, they create communities. These free media channels are also cheap, viable and effective ways of building communities and relationships (Mayfield 2008:5). For example, many organisations and individuals use Facebook as a popular exemplar of social media through *likes*, *shares*, *comments* and other features that allow for relationships in the form connections and conversations, enabling them to address the views, feelings and expectations of diverse stakeholders.

### **3.3.5 Connectedness**

The last feature of social media in Mayfield's (2008) framework is social connectedness. Key elements of social connectedness include active, trustful and mutually beneficial interpersonal behaviours (Mayfield 2008:5). Organisations and individuals that have high connectedness have a feeling and sense of belonging and closeness, making them amiable with other people. Connectedness allows groups and individuals to identify and engage with others, while individuals without connectedness on the other hand, perceive themselves to be outsiders, making them less confidence in social activities and situations (Mayfield 2008:5). In other words, connectedness illustrates the quality that enables people to tie or hook-up with the outside world as a means of expanding their networks, experiences and agenda. Having illustrated how connectedness is generated, the next section enumerates some categories and types of social.

### **3.4 Social Media Categorisation**

As Kaplan & Haenlin (2016:61) recount, the continuous spread of new avenues makes the classification of social media difficult. In spite of this, scholars have made many attempts to categorise such novel phenomenon. Social media comprises of social networking, blogs, widgets, linking and posting, RSS feeds, content rating, micro blog, audio podcasting, bookmarking sites, and video podcasting (Sajithra & Patil 2013:73). Putting social media into the perspective of media research, Kaplan & Haenlin (2016:62) also enumerate two essential elements forming the basis of social media classification, such as "social presence" or "media richness" and "self-presentation" or "self-disclosure".

**Figure 1: Social presence/Media richness**

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Source: Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:62

The figure above depicts the various user commitments in different forms of social media. From the figure, it is noted that users who are fully active and involved in the virtual world than just adding texts to their blogs show more details about themselves either consciously or unconsciously (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:62). In this sense, their presence online demand them to involve and engage more with media tools.

This study discusses the types of social media by drawing from the categorisation of Kaplan & Haenlin (2010:63-64). The first type, “collaborative project” allows many users to jointly and concurrently create contents, which includes the various *wikis*, especially Wikipedia (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:62), among others. These forms of social media enable their users to add, change and remove contents. The other prototype of collaborative project is “social bookmarking” that provides group based collection, internet links and rate media content (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:62). The second type, thus “blogs” were the earliest forms of social media developed from personal web pages, which display date-stamped entries in a reverse chronological order (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:63). The most popular of these are the text-based varieties.

The third type is “content communities,” that is purposely used to exchange media content between different users (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:63). For content communities, users do not have to create personal profile pages. They involve *photographs* (for example Flickr), *text* (for example Book crossing), *power point presentations* (for example Slide Share) and *videos* (for example You-Tube), among others. The fourth category of social media is the

“virtual game worlds,” developed from a three-dimensional framework allowing users to appear as personalised avatars and interacting according to rules of the game (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:64). The *World of War-craft* is an example of virtual game worlds. The fifth type of social media is the “virtual social worlds,” that enables inhabitants to select freely particular behaviours and live in a virtual world similar to real life environments (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:64). Example is the *second life*.

The last social media type is the “social networking sites” that allow users to connect via the creation of personal information and profiles, and enables them to invite friends and other users to access their profiles, as well as send instant messages and emails (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010:63). Items that are usually found on the profiles of users include videos, blogs and audio files, among others. *Facebook* is an example of social networking sites. This study focuses on *social networking sites* because it is the common type of social media that has been experienced by many Ghanaians over the years. In the following section of the chapter, the significance of social media is highlighted.

### **3.5 Benefits of Social Media**

Social media are enhanced by digital technologies; their importance is multi-faceted cutting across many sectors and fields (World Development Report 2016:27). The advent of the internet and social media has come with a number of benefits. With one-fifth of the global population making use of social media, such channels could shape and promote beneficial interactions, behaviours and activities of users. These platforms have enhanced growth and development by enabling individuals and organisations to be more productive, providing opportunities for people to connect, search for job and participate in many activities, as well as help governments in delivering public service to citizens (World Development Report 2016:5). In other words, social media have secured “connected people, connected businesses and connected governments” (World Development Report 2016:6). These platforms minimise the costs of information in economic and other transactions, boost inclusion, efficiency and convenience, hence, supporting innovation (World Development Report 2016:5). Social media also provide avenues for information dissemination to promote social change and political mobilisation (World Development Report 2016:28).

In democratic circles, social media enhance the accessibility of leaders and people through diverse channels, as well as facilitate the process of transmitting messages and exchanging knowledge between citizens and other actors (Tayeebwa 2016:16). For example, the role that social media played in the Occupy Wall Street and Arab Spring movements have

reinforced these tools as instrument for spreading democratic values and ideas. Such channels especially Facebook and Twitter have created audiences that are aware of the contents in messages and how those elements are processed (Hellweg 2011:23). Another unique advantage of social media is the avenues they provide for discussions and difference of opinions on issues, which also facilitate effective networking among users, allowing them to create different and many forms of communities and organisations (Tayeebwa 2016:17). Inasmuch as social media platforms provide avenues for open, participatory, inclusive and more deliberative decision-making processes, they could be used as tools in mobilising citizens and voters for a particular cause, or spur social and political actions (Tayeebwa 2016:17). This is because social media platforms have become convenient vehicles for daily engagements and conversations irrespective of geographic distance or time. Contrary to their benefits, the spread and use of social media are impeded by a number of factors. The next section attempts to identify some of the drawbacks of the appropriation of these channels.

### **3.6 Social Media Challenges**

Despite the opportunities presented by social media, they face a number of challenges. As a result, the benefits of these platforms have not been effectively harnessed for various reasons. The fact that about sixty percent of the world's population still remains offline limits the extensive usage and participation in the social media economy (World Development Report 2016:5). This situation is compounded by the digital divides across geography, gender, income dimensions and ages of people within countries. From another angle, social media has been perceived as not possessing all the characteristics of public good, in the sense that access to the internet usually requires payment. Hence, people who cannot pay for the internet are effectively excluded from their appropriation. The coverage of social media has been described as an urban phenomenon, which largely involves the youth. Many rural folks cannot access social media platforms due to the lack of technological infrastructure, particularly the internet and mobile phones which are the critical catalysts for social media communication (Kiranda, Mugisha & Ojok 2016:34). Similarly, Tayeebwa (2016:14) reiterates that the accessibility and use of social media may be prevented by poor infrastructure, cultural apprehension to social media and new technologies, poor literacy and profit interests, among others. These mean that social and digital media channels exacerbate socio-economic disparities. More so, once people are able to access these free platforms, the consumption of information they transmit and their availability to other users in the public sphere cannot be restricted.

With high levels of illiteracy, social media engagements face challenges because a small number of individuals are able to use those platforms despite that they are user-friendly. This is especially true considering that many users of these new forms of communication are largely the educated, young, males and wealthy individuals who were better off before the advent of social media (World Development Report 2016; Berdou & Lopes 2015:88). Many of the benefits perceived from social media are neutralised by a number of risks. Several risks including organisational interests and regulatory uncertainties, as well as limited contestations on different social media platforms could create harmful concentration in certain spheres. There are also issues regarding e-governance, where governments and state institutions use digital technologies and social media to control citizens rather than empowering them (World Development Report 2016:5). These attempts to control social media emanate from the assertions that they serve as conduits for gossips, misinformation, slander, harassment, crime and bullying, among others (World Development Report 2016:28). To avoid such control, there is the need for investments into digital and social media for regulations that are able foster organisations and individuals to leverage the internet in competing, innovating and improving skills. This will enable people benefit from digital and social media opportunities, as well as make institutions accountable by making governments responsive to the needs and demands of citizens. In this regard, social media could radicalise their usefulness to accelerate development.

As mentioned earlier above, the other drawback is in respect of generation gap, where a larger number of individuals using the internet and social media platforms are the youth (World Development Report 2016). This relegates a larger number of the elderly people in society from the social media phenomenon, therefore, preventing them from tapping into the benefits of such new opportunities (Tayeebwa 2016:14). Social media channels have contributed to the menace of “information overload” that makes it difficult for users to filter the large data on social media for useful information, which could lead to “digital isolation” and “social fragmentation” (Tayeebwa 2016:8). Throwing more light on the challenges, Tayeebwa (2016:8) posits that social media have provided avenues for varied forms of offences and online crimes involving cyber-bullying, cyber terrorism, stalking, hacking, defamation, spread of false or fake information and inciting messages, among others (Tayeebwa 2016:14). To be able to maximise the benefits and full potential of social media, users have to be professional to limit their negative effects and minimise the risks regarding data insecurity. Is the emergence of social media reshaping the dynamics of politics and political communication? In addressing this question, the following section explore some functions and repercussions peculiar to social

media use in politics and political communication, as well as online engagements and relationships established through these channels in subsequent discussions of this chapter.

### **3.7 Functions of Social Media in Political Communication**

The use of social networking platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Instagram and YouTube, among others has emerged as an important electoral campaigning tool in recent years. The widely acknowledged electoral campaign to have systematically used social media is the 2008 United States (US) presidential election where former president Barack Obama used fifteen social media sites to complement his offline work with an online campaign as well as raising funds (McQueen & Green 2010:315-318). Another widely known example of social media mass mobilisation are civilian protests in the Middle-Eastern countries which demonstrated how social media could change the game of politics. A 2017 symposium organised by the Africa Media Centre, Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) noted the growing group of African politicians from Egypt, Rwanda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia to South Africa who use social media to leverage their communications with citizens. In many other African countries, “election candidates are increasingly taking to Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp and other platforms to generate viral messages whose influence and scope are yet to be examined” (CAMRI 2018).

The political appropriation of social media platforms has been examined in different locations and contexts. A number of scholars (see Bosch 2016; Kamau 2016; Mare 2016; Nnanyelugo & Nwafor 2013) have investigated the phenomenon from many perspectives. These studies on social media have attempted to illustrate their impact on political activities, democracy and electoral processes regarding the appropriation of such new forms of communication to spread and influence the understandings, perceptions and voting pattern of electorates (Cap & Okulska 2013). The platforms also offer interactive channels, which promote direct engagements and enable communication messages to be disseminated or exchanged with many recipients in inaccessible and remote geographical locations.

Citizens and voters resort to social media platforms for various kinds of information, such as political messages, hence, they are likely to make voting decisions and cast their votes based on the information and contents of the message received from political parties and politicians (Pinkleton, Austin & Fortman 1998:34-39). The ability of social media to directly engage the electorate encourages participation in communication and political processes. Social media have become an important tool for political fund-raising, as well as organisation

and mobilisation activities. The campaign team of President Barack Obama was able to raise over 55 million dollars as a result of linking his social media channels and accounts to other sites (Penenberg 2009:11).

In assessing the role of social media in politics, Beciu (2011) illustrates the functions which are performed by social media channels. Social media makes it possible for political parties and politicians to broadcast “controlled speeches,” allowing them to freely express their views, opinions and feelings with no “interruption” and intermediation by the traditional forms of media and journalists, as well as opponents and other constraining media formats in communication (Beciu 2011:281-282). In this regard, social media circumvent traditional news media by providing political parties and politicians the opportunity to engage and communicate directly with citizens and political stakeholders for beneficial relationships to advance political agenda. The elimination of traditional forms of intermediaries including newspapers, radio and television, among others facilitates interactions; conversations; understanding; and mutually beneficial relationships between political actors, especially political parties and their stakeholders in their attempt at engaging and mobilising voters for the achievement political goals.

Social media create avenues that allow for posting and online replication of political news, views, opinions and broadcasts that were made in the traditional media at both local and international levels (Beciu 2011:281-282). These help political actors and their stakeholders and actors use social media as platforms for enhancing the visibility in respect of their major information and messages which are directed and delivered to target groups. It is now common for social media users to view online versions of news items and political information that are published in traditional news media outlets including newspapers, radio and television on social media platforms, such as website, social networking sites micro-blogging, among others to reach the general public and engage with wider audiences. It is a common practice these days that most traditional media channels including the newspapers, radio and television have set up official online websites for the outlets, or established profile pages on social media sites particularly Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, where they repeat or post political information that they publish and broadcast on those social networking platforms. Because of such practice, information has become accessible to many people irrespective of geographical location, distance and time as audiences and social media users could easily find news and information they might have missed posted, or perhaps updated on online platforms and websites of traditional media outlets.

Because of the emergence and spread of social media, political parties and politicians, as well as their stakeholders especially users and followers on those platforms could launch or advance media political agenda (Beciu 2011:281-282). Since 2004 social media have become a campaign tactic in the sense that social media including blogs and other social networking sites especially Twitter and Facebook, among others have been used as critical tools for political activism and mobilisation of supporters by political parties and politicians (Shirky 2008:184). Compared to other forms of media, Shirky (2008:184) explains that recipients of information communicated through social media are concerned about the sources of the messages, where recipients seek more details about the senders' information on them, hence enhancing the potentials for political activism. This means that the potential for political activism is promoted by political parties and other actors via the usage of social media to mobilise support, participation and engagements in open, interactive and continuous dialogues (Hellweg 2011:24).

In that regard, social media serve as the nexus of public and political influence that transform political tactics and processes into successful campaigns. This is true because it has become a common practice for traditional news outlets, as well as their media practitioners and journalists to broadcast messages, news, press releases and statements which were originally taken from posted on social media, thus blogs and other social networking sites including Instagram, Twitter and Facebook walls of political parties or politicians. As a result, there is a symbiotic relationship existing between traditional media and new or social media (Wei & Gao 2016; Beciu 2011). New forms of mass communication have been used by political parties, members and leaders in marketing and explaining their policies and programmes, giving them reputation and recognition of good leaders. Social media platforms are political marketing tools which enhance communication with people that have interests in political organisations and their activities (Hellweg 2011:23). Shedding more light, Beciu (2011:281-282) explained promoting the doctrines and policies of political parties, and their electoral projects in new forms of media is different from what occurs in traditional political communication activities. These social platforms exist in “interactive, narrative and conversational forms,” which lubricates political public relations and two-way symmetric communication and engagements (Beciu 2011:281-282).

As a way of making the electoral messages and information of political parties visible, politicians use social media networks as online electioneering tools for their strategies to win power (Beciu 2011:281-282). Different types of online resources and social media are used for activities in election campaigns. With the spread of the internet and social media, political

parties and politicians can mobilise electorates online to advance political agenda, opine their views and participate in discussions about critical issues of national interest and public concerns (Beciu 2011:281-282). This implies that social media as instruments and tactics for political engagements allow political parties and politicians to undertake grass root campaigns via regular interactions and interpersonal encounters with the electorates (Graber 2010:194). It is especially true given the shift from how citizens and voters make decisions on information that is passively transmitted to them through the traditional news media to the appropriation of social media in developing more knowledge, insights, conversations and activism regarding issues (Hellweg 2011:24).

Political stakeholders can interact “efficiently” and effectively beyond bureaucratic and institutional drawbacks due to social media networking (Beciu 2011:281-282). The utility of social media in politics thrives on three conditions. These are “access” to such social media platforms by many people and users; “utilisation” of those platforms by political parties, politicians and the electorates for useful conversations, as well as the “deliberative culture of democracy” with respect to politics (Kiranda *et al.* 2016:34). The relationship and connecting power of social media provides the visibility for discussions of topical issues which are relegated to the backdrop of political communication on traditional news media to be deliberated as public agenda. These social channels enable political actors to influence and mobilise voters to act in certain ways in reaction to issues. Despite their usefulness, social media have their peculiar repercussions which are examined in the following section.

### **3.8 Repercussion of Political Use of Social Media**

Social media have become popular, fast and convenient avenues for spreading messages and information or breaking the news among politically active and interested citizens. As a consequence of the liberation, unrestricted and uncontrolled freedom regarding social media communication, users of these channels have applied them in political communication in a number of ways with far-reaching repercussions. Three forms of repercussion such as: offensive online behaviours, negative media attention, and limited resources are associated with the appropriation of social media in politics (Kalsnes 2016:5). Stressing further, Kalsnes (2016:5) point out that much offensive online behaviour on social media platforms of political parties and politicians expose them to various threats, burdening them with additional responsibilities as news editors as they attempt to moderate user comments. Against this backdrop, there is the possibility for political parties to exclude and block certain persons from

their pages, or perhaps deleting their comments that may not be favourable to political parties and politicians (Kalsnes 2016:5).

Another consequence is the negative media attention with regard to comments (Kalsnes 2016:6). Bad and unpleasant comments on social media especially Facebook by users could potentially make the news through these free media. This is especially true considering that these days it is very easier for politicians and other individuals to write bad things in social media, which are picked by media outlets and journalists in news bulletins. Therefore, there is a spin out of control regarding social media information on the side of politicians and political parties due to the open access citizens have to them on those free platforms (Kalsnes 2016:6). The inability to control channels also creates excessive publishing on political platforms. The third is the effect of limited human and financial resources (Kalsnes 2016:6), where the lack of trained and dedicated employees by political parties to handle social media activities generate unprofessional and unethical challenges in the appropriation of those platforms. For example, Kalsnes (2016:6) explains that inasmuch it is free to create Facebook accounts or profile pages, their usage come with some costs. Many political parties do not have trained personnel to manage social media activities and engage stakeholders online, making it difficult to integrate social media activities into their communication routines.

Aside the social media consequences enumerated by Kalsnes (2016) in political communication, other repercussions have been highlighted by other scholars. For example, Kamp, Messerschmidt and Rugambwa (2016:26) lament that social media platforms have been used to “spread rumours” and “promote abusive and sectarian content”. Political and ethnic hatred, different forms of cybercrimes and political defamation are promoted, while the privacy of individuals on social media platforms is intruded. More so, politicians use these social platforms against their opponents, and also propagate fear and panic, which consequently threaten national security, unity and stability in society because the rights of users to privacy, freedom of expression and open access to the internet cannot be curtailed on social media channels (Kamp *et al.* 2016:29). With the spread of social media, cybercrimes especially identity theft where social media data that are stored could get into the hands of wrong people, or the real identity of individuals and sources of messages and information are difficult to determine (World Development Report 2016:20). Social media users may disguise their identity to churn out explosive revelations and politically charged messages in the scenes of political power (Kamp *et al.* 2016:27). In addition to cyber trolling and bullying, fake news has become the bane of social media given the freedom of speech, unrestricted and uncontrolled

space offered by these new platforms and complex digital public space in political communication (Kamp *et al.* 2016:29).

### **3.8.1 Fake News and Misinformation: The Bane of Social Media**

The repercussions of *fake news* have been a critical challenge to social media communication. Fake news and misinformation are major threats to the integrity of knowledge and sovereignty of information and democracy that has been used in many situations to “misinform, mislead and manipulate” public opinions (Macnamara 2018:12). Describing it as information divorced from the reality, Waisbord (2018:1866) indicates that *fake news* or *disinformation* is not new. However, with the spread of the internet and many forms of social media there is a surge in issues as regards the question of truth and reality that are presented by the emergence of fake news in the regime of post-truth especially during the 2016 elections in the United States (Waisbord 2018:1866). The rise of fake news is replacing “dialogue and personal relations” with “propaganda or polemic” (Carey 2009:25, 64). It denotes new forms of propaganda, thus news and information that are deliberately created and spread to trick or perhaps influence public opinions (Gross 2017; Sismond 2017). Fake news is that fabricated information which mimics news, as well as affect the existing public beliefs and perceptions to influence electoral behaviors especially on social media in electoral contests in many countries (Waisbord 2018:1866). It has been witnessed in different context in the United States through blogs and other forms of social media to mainstream and traditional media. However, the use of “fake news” by Trump in 2018 attracted huge press attention to his political advantage. Since the application of surveillance and intelligence by the Trump election campaign on social media to manipulate public opinion through fake news, political parties and politicians in other parts of the world are taking advantage of the trend in contemporary news to dismiss press and media critics (Erlanger 2017).

These happenings are not different from the Global South especially Africa. A number of scholars, such as Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018:3), have explored how the spread of fake news has changed in Africa especially South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria with the emergence of new media. They highlight events/occasions of social media, especially Facebook and Whatsapp, as platforms where false news occurs particularly during election campaigns. Fake news and propaganda in the African context have taken the forms of extreme speeches which tend to incite violence and spread racist, misogynous and xenophobic messages, among others (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales 2018:3). The study of Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2018:5) reveals that media consumers including social media users in Africa

are exposed to fake news as regards politics on regular basis, with some audiences perceiving that stories and news from and about political parties on social media platforms are mostly made up. As a result, news on social media are not trusted by many users of these platforms.

In an attempt to address the menace about the dangers of fake news, a number of attempts have been made to educate users and audiences of social media to restore the level of trust. These have served as the premise for developing strategies to address the spread of fake news, as well as mitigate the declining level of trust on social media platforms (McKenna, Myers & Newman 2017:87-94). This is because the high amount of perceived exposure to disinformation and misinformation if not addressed can undermine the foothold and utility of social media appropriation in Africa. More so, these platforms are perceived as tools for instigating violence, considering that social media especially Facebook has been fed with fake news, false information, rumours and gossips that fade the fabric of democracy and politics, as well as create tensions (Nnanyelugo & Nwafor 2013:32). The discussions on fake news is not an anti-technology contestation; however, it is a call for critical consideration of how new communication technologies are used. This is because these technologies including social media and especially Facebook can be useful interactive and conversational avenues for promoting understanding and mutually beneficial engagements, as well as tools for manipulation and predation (Macnamara 2018:6).

Given the negative effects that have come along with the emergence of social media, a number of questions have come up as to whether these platforms have become threats to political actors and citizens (Zhu & Xi 2012). In other words, why have governments tried to suppress their usage? Considering the role of social media in mobilisation, organisation and collective action for the “leaderless” revolution in the Arab Spring, a number of countries have been irritated by the spread of social media especially in politics. As a means of curbing the far-reaching repercussions of social media, governments in some African countries, such as Egypt, Uganda, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Mali, among others have attempted to restrict their usage via a number of regulations. These include imposition of social media taxes as a way of suppressing dissenting voices and also neutralising the capability of social media as a tool for the mobilisation of citizens especially the youth, as well as facilitating revolution and fuelling uprising (Kamp *et al.* 2016:27). As part of attempts to prevent their use, governments in some cases have requested owners of social media sites to expose the true identities of online activists and users, which have been turned down (Kamp *et al.* 2016:27). In their rationalisation of such regulatory mechanisms, governments have enumerated a number of factors including pornography, sexual abuse and terrorism, among others as some of the reasons for restricting

or censoring social media. These hinders social media appropriation by political parties and politicians in their communication and engagements with stakeholders. In the foregoing we have established that a tremendous change in political campaigning across the world has been the rise in social media.

The obsession with the regulation of social media has been attributed by some scholars to the fear of the influence of social media especially at elections (Kamp *et al.* 2016:30). Despite social media's vulnerability to abuse, their regulation or perhaps relegation from political communication activities is difficult. Therefore, attempts by governments to restrict their usage as a means of preventing free speech and expressions, as well other rights and liberties enshrined in democracy have not been successful. Even though social media have been criticised for some reasons, they are major avenues for advancing and discussion critical issues. Social media are promoting interactions and conversations to address the communication challenges as regards bureaucratic and limited spaces in traditional forms of media to enhance engagements and constructive politics. As long as these platforms provide the features and characteristics of "openness, interactivity, participatory and user-centred activities, they will continue to be a force to reckon with in political and other forms of communication (World Development Report 2016:24).

### **3.9 Social Media Networking as Relationship Management Tool**

If access to information, engagement, exchange and participation can be considered as characteristics of political public relations, then this study could argue that the spread of the internet and social media has affected politics. How have such platforms impacted on politics, and in what ways have they enhanced relationships in political engagements? Studies have established that there is a significant relationship between online and offline political communication, and also participation (Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm & Dansmore 2005:571-580). With the rise of social media networking, individuals spend much time interacting and discussing politics on social media sites. Political parties, politicians and electorates use social media for disclosure, as they post pictures, personal information and present public messages to friends and constituents within a cyber space (Hellweg 2011:24). By such online activities, social media channels provide opportunities for political parties and public figures to create and sustain good relationships with stakeholders for achieving result oriented campaigns in political communication.

This concurs with the study by Livingstone and Brake (2014) that posits social media platforms as the enhancer of communication and long-term relationships. The platforms are

transforming relationships by meeting the demands of users for a two-way symmetrical communication in the form of adaptation, interactivity and feedback. Similarly, Barabási (2003) categorised social networking sites as a form of social media, specifically network tools that enable two or more people to connect and establish relationships. They provide opportunities for friendship, as well as allow users to be visible and articulate themselves through engagements (Boyd & Ellison 2008:211). Social media use “mobile phones” and other “web-based technologies” to create “highly interactive platforms” through which communities and people are able to “share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre 2011:241). These activities promote relationships between users who meet or connect on social media platforms.

As noted previously, social networking sites (SNS) are the main type of social media that enhances relationships. These sites serve as integrated channels, combining many media, digital image, digital video, discussion group, guest book, connection list and search engine. In their work on Social Web Sites, Kim, Jeong and Lee (2010:217-226) recounted the features of social networking sites as their ability to form online connections, update and use personal profiles, contribute to online groups and promote interactions with other users online, as well as express and share opinions, views and also find information. In other words, Boyd and Ellison (2007:211) described social networking sites as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; articulate a list of other users whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

The definitions above are not very different from what Fuchs & Trottier (2015:6) propound, referring to social networking sites as web-based platforms that integrate different forms of media, information and communication technologies, which allow profiles to be generated for displaying information about users and connections or connection list. This means that networking sites promote connections between users that are displayed on connection lists; and enhance communication and exchange between users. Drawing from the various explanations, this study notes social networking as enabler for people to meet and establish relationships online. A critical terminology that runs throughout the meanings of social networking, which Boyd & Ellison (2007) and Kim *et al.* (2010), as well as Fuchs and Trottier (2015) postulate is the “connections” that users are able to establish online. With this

in mind, this study addresses how social networks promote increased interactivity between political stakeholders and people.

On the contrary, Boyd & Ellison (2007:211) contest that the meeting of people and strangers on social networking channels is not what actually distinguishes those platforms from other forms of social media. For these scholars (Boyd & Ellison 2008), what makes networking sites unique is the ability of users to create visible social networks which metamorphose into connections and relationships between their users and strangers. This implies that the usefulness of social networking sites for relationship management emanates from the conversations and interactive opportunities they provide for people to publicly display their personal profiles, show networks of connected friends, and capacity for users to publish comments, texts, multimedia and photographs to those profiles and platforms. The forms of connection offered by these platforms differ from one networking site to another. Many social networking sites (for example Facebook) require a bi-directional “friendship” where users use their own discretions to send, decline or confirm friendship requests that could be seen on user profiles, while other sites (for example Twitter) do not demand any confirmation of friendship to enable users to follow pages (Boyd & Ellison 2008:13).

Considering such disparities between social networking channels, Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:243) reiterate that social networking sites work differently with relation to “identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups,” in effecting changes in user engagements. This means that how users of these networks expose their identities influence their experience of those sites. However, based on the security settings used for setting up profiles by users, social networking sites allow people to access profiles, as well as materials posted to those platforms and react to them in public sphere. In this sense, the potentials of networking sites as relationship development media are situated in their functions as integrated tools and platforms of cognition, communication and co-operation. They serve as co-operative technologies in that they provide opportunities in creating new communities and friendships, as well as maintenance and nurturing of existing friendships (Fuchs & Trottier 2015:6). From Rheingold’s (2000) perspective, social networking sites create virtual communities through the internet, hence, fostering public discussions amidst a sense of human and social feeling, and consequently, generating webs of personal relationships within cyberspace. Conversely, Fuchs & Trottier (2015:6-10) dispute the assumption that every relationship which is created and maintained online in social networking illustrate some forms of community, reckoning that there may be superficial, or no serious relations developed by the mere display of connections in users’ connection list. For example, if users add the friends

of their friends on social networking sites, who they have never met nor do not interact with continuously, or in other words, if users add individuals who share similar interests on these sites, but do not communicate with them, then the usage of these networking sites remains merely on communication level (Fuchs & Trottier 2015:6-10). In this case the co-operation and relationship building potentials of virtual communities are not achieved.

Inasmuch social networking platforms are used especially by people to freely express their opinions and vent their anger and frustrations, or to show acceptance of the actions of governments and political groupings (Kamp 2016:1), they serve as relevant indicators for analysing potential violence and threats to democracy, and in the particular case of Ghana political vigilantism (Bob-Milliar 2014:126). Therefore, to be able to maximise the relationship building prowess of networking sites, users have to explore both loose and virtual connections concurrently to draw the real and effectual potentials of co-operation. This is especially necessary considering that communities on social networking platforms rely on sustained communicative work to build and enhance social bonds on networking sites, or perhaps bring a community from outside the platform (Fuchs & Trottier 2015:7). The use of these platforms for disseminating information and monitoring problems could be straightforward. However, for political parties and politicians using social media networking as means of providing stakeholders and citizens with greater voice, participation, interaction and conversation, these platforms help when users are responsive (World Development Report 2016:24).

Social media networking reinforces mutually beneficial relationships between political parties and citizens, and also enables governments and politicians to keep surveillance or influence the activities of stakeholders. Synthesising the discussions above, this study notes social networking as enabling people to establish friendship over distance, and stay in touch with established contacts within existing and new communities to crystallise their utility in relationship building. As individuals and organisations are able to establish and sustain online engagements and social bonds with people they never knew in advance but connected on networking sites, then communities and relationships are developed inherently from social media platforms (Fuchs & Trottier 2015:7). Given the opportunities and source of feedback that the tools present, social networking sites could be considered as the theatre of engagement and mutually beneficial relationships in contemporary political communication. From a conceptual point of view, this notion is idealism. Therefore, this study attempts to check reality and address issues regarding social media networking through the lens of Facebook. In the following section, the study discusses Facebook as an exemplar of social networking sites to

explain how they promote engagements, conversations and participation for relationship building in political communication.

### **3.9.1 Facebook as Form of Social Media Networking**

*Facebook* is a social networking website where people can show information about themselves, and also communicate with various groups of friends, colleagues and classmates, among others. Facebook was launched on February 4, 2004 as “*thefacebook.com*” after it started as a community for college students in the United States (Wrestling 2007:3). The Facebook community was initiated by Mark Zuckerberg as a networking tool for students at Harvard University (Cassidy 2006:50), and originally created with the intention of providing online version of the publication of papers, pictures and information on freshmen in Harvard (Cassidy 2006:50-52). Students at Harvard had the opportunity of creating and setting up profile pages containing personal information, as well as keeping contact with one another. Users only required their students’ email addresses and attainment of a minimum age of eighteen (18) years to join the “thefacebook” fraternity. Soon after the launch of the site, “thefacebook” then, began to add more universities including Stanford, Yale, Columbia, New York, Massachusetts (MIT) and Cornell, among others to the network (Cassidy 2006:52). The name was consequently changed from “thefacebook” to “Facebook” in September 2005, and in October 2005, the community opened up to institutions outside of the United States of America. As a networking site, Facebook provides interpersonal features and characteristics that enhance exchange of information through posts and responses to messages and comments, updating profiles, chatting and also liking posts, among others (Kearney 2013:6). It promotes cognition, communication, networking and co-operation, involving communities and collaborative work, as well as sharing of user-generated and other contents.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Facebook cannot be a mere innovation within the internet world because it influences, shapes and forms opinions. It serves as a tool for managing relationships because the *Likes* by users makes it possible to predict sensitive issues not only in respect of political news, but also personality traits, intelligence, happiness, sexual orientation and gender issues, among others (Kosinski, Stillwell & Graepel 2013:5802-5805). From the predictions of sensitive characteristics and behaviours, moods, wellbeing, happiness and demographics, as well as types of activities and involvement of groups and individuals can be inferred for appropriate actions or perhaps reactions to their effects (World Development Report 2016:20). The Facebook phenomenon has widely spread among the youth constituting the larger population of users who resort to them as sources of political information and for civic activities

(Kamau 2017:128-135). In this regard, it provides the platform and means of connecting with various constituents and electorates and voters. Many users turn to Facebook to find, connect, comment, like and follow others. The reason is that it offers conversations enabling people share their opinions and views on issues, personalities and organisations, which allow stakeholders to obtain real time feedback through interactions. As a result, many organisations have created Facebook accounts and set up profiles to connect globally, maintain their presence and engage with contents and visuals. More so, Facebook groups make it possible for many people and organisations to enter into collaborations and meaningful engagements with other to execute specific tasks and promote collective interests and objectives (Bosch 2009:193).

Putting Facebook into dimensions, Kearney (2013:6) posits Face-to-Face communication and interaction as its essential features. Compared to other forms of social networking sites, Facebook provides higher degrees of identity salience and prominence. This implies that as the online setting and activities increase, the behaviours of individuals are socially deregulated in many ways to form the patterns of face-to-face communication. In this sense, Facebook connects users with accessible profile information, therefore, promoting active and sociable discussions (Halpern & Gibbs 2013:1160). Another unique attribute of Facebook is that it promotes friendship, hence facilitating mobilisation and organisation (Bond, Faris, Jones, Kramer, Marlow, Settle and Fowler 2012:295-298), as opposed to other social networking sites especially *You-Tube* which gives users much more anonymity (Halpern & Gibbs 2013:1160). Facebook enhances face-to-face and interpersonal communication, which fosters interactive online communication and conversations with the potential to influence behaviours and attitudes of users and individuals offline (McLeod & Shah 2009:2-7). Put into political perspective, Zang, Johnson and Bichard (2010:75-80) contrary described social networking sites particularly *Facebook*, *My Space* and *YouTube* as mere representation of online political discussions, contesting that it is only face-to-face political discussions that result into political participation.

Despite this argument, Bond *et al.* (2012:295-298) reinforce that Facebook enjoys wide currency and influence in political activities as regards communication, elections and political marketing, among others. In view of the divergent opinions on the impact of Facebook in politics, this study notes that engagements and activities on social media occur differently based on particular networking sites. With that in mind, scholars have conducted a number of studies regarding the political roles and activities of Facebook from different contexts, essentially the utility in political communication (Kearney 2013:7). This study looks at Facebook use and its effect on political communication, mobilisation and intra-party elections

in Ghana to make comparisons with findings of previous research. Through the lens of public relations, this study focuses on the appropriation of Facebook in view of political parties' engagements and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. The next section provides a discussion about how Facebook has been applied and the rationale behind its use in political spectrums.

### **3.9.2 Political Use of Facebook**

The increasing popularity and prominence of Facebook are drawing the focus of attention of information, communication and media scholars (for example Rosenberg & Edberg 2011; Park & Kee 2009; Hunt, Atkin & Krishnan 2012), encouraging them to examine its appropriation and influence through varied concepts in many contexts (Dillard 2008:65-70). As highlighted in earlier discussions above, it enhances the sharing and exchange of information, which includes updating profiles, posting messages and responding to comments, as well as chatting and liking posts (Kearney 2017:107), among others. A number of studies have examined Facebook from different perspectives to demonstrate its political power. For example, while Borah (2016) investigated how Facebook was used in the United States 2012 presidential elections; Macková and Štětko (2016) explored Facebook in respect of how it transforms from "likes" to votes in political activities in Czech; as Bayraktutan, Binark, Comu, Doğu, İslamoğlu and Aydemir (2014) also examined the use of Facebook in the 2011 Turkish general elections by political parties and their leaders, among others.

Even though the political use of social media and the reasons for using them have been discussed in many studies, there is relative little information provided on when or conditions under which political use of social media occur (Kearney 2017:107). In previous studies to addressing this issue, Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison and Lampe (2011:9) restated the possibility for individuals interested in politics to take part in political activities that occur on Facebook. It is noteworthy that such users do not necessarily engage in the many types of political activities on Facebook most frequently (Kearney 2017:107). It is also one thing different for users having the interest in politics, and another for them having sufficient knowledge to discuss political issues with other people in public sphere (Macafee 2013:2766-2772). Even in cases where users have adequate knowledge to partake in political conversations, they could still engage in other kinds of activities other than politics.

Considering the complex nature of political engagements and interactions on Facebook and the relative short period of its phenomenon, many scholars (for example Kearney 2017; Dillard 1989, 1997, 2008) have applied interpersonal communication frameworks to shed light

on the political use of Facebook. Similarly, this study adopts the framework of interpersonal goals to demonstrate the end to which political usage and communication on Facebook is directed. Illustrating the connection between Facebook and interpersonal processes, this study reinstates the political use of Facebook through Dillard's (1989) Goals-Plans-Action (GPA) framework to discuss the purposive communication attempts at interpersonal influence. This model postulates that communication is inherently purposive, therefore, people select and structure, as well as transfer symbols for particular purposes (Kellermann 1992:288). In political communication terms, it implies that conversation motivates people, as well as shape and direct communication acts (Kellerman 1992:288-300). Therefore, for the study to explore the interpersonal influence of Facebook, it is necessary to assess how people are able to maintain and achieve their goals in interactions. Using a three step sequential procedure, Dillard (1989, 1997, 2004, 2008) propounds the Goals-Plans-Action model of interactions in the form of individuals' desire for instrumental *goals*, thus "future states of affairs which an individual is committed to achieving or maintaining". The next step after *goals* is to develop *plans* for achieving and maintaining the goals (Dillard 1990:43). This entails the cognitive representations of procedures for the achievement of a specific goal (Berger 2000:156-162). Thirdly, Dillard (2008:65-70) indicates that people *act* to achieve and maintain goals, referring to *action* as the putting in places behaviours to realise goals.

Goals are categorised into primary and secondary (Dillard 1989; Dillard, Segrin & Harden 1989). Primary goals refer to the desire of individuals to induce change in other people, which frames interactions and motivates plans and actions (Schrader & Dillard 1998:276-285). In other words, primary goals define situations of interpersonal influence, and also trigger other actions in the secondary goals (Dillard *et al.* 1989:25-32). Primary goals in the context of this study are the influence goals which draw people into political conversations on Facebook. The other category is the secondary goals, which indicate the motivations that shape and constrain how people get into interpersonal engagements (Dillard 1989:289). The secondary goals provide a number of factors that motivate people to engage themselves in interpersonal conversations. These include *identity goals*, *personal goals*, *affect management*, *interactions goals*, and *relational resource goals* (Dillard 1989:289). These goals enable researchers to determine the motivation with respect to interactions as a process, which this study adopts in discussing the goals for political use of Facebook. In similar vein, these motivation goals were also used by Kearney (2017) for his study on the political uses of Facebook as the networking site.

The first, *identity goals* illustrate the desire of an individual's self-concept, which involves standards and conduct emanating from the belief and preferences of the individual (Dillard *et al.* 1989:25-33). *Identity goals* demonstrate people's standards in relation to their beliefs and choices for political discussions on Facebook, or thoughts of politics with respect to Facebook (Kearney 2017:107). The second, *personal resource goals* show the desire for a person to maintain both tangible and intangible assets (Dillard *et al.* 1989:25-33). They involve users' psychological assets and freedom, thus safety from threats by other users which could originate from verbal attacks, ridicule and backlash, among others. The third, *affect management goals* posit the desire of individuals to maintain certain preferred arousal states, thus the desire of a person to feel comfortable during an attempt to establish interpersonal influence (Dillard *et al.* 1989:25-33). Such goals illustrate the desire of people to stay away from nervousness and discomfort in political interactions on Facebook (Kearney 2017:107). The next are the *interaction goals*, which involve social appropriateness and demonstrate the desire of individuals to create relevant and coherent messages to manage impressions. *Interaction goals* indicate people's desire to create and exchange coherent messages and information, as well as manage their impressions and expectations during political interactions (Kearney 2017:107). The *relational resource goals* could be in terms of personal rewards, emotional support and other forms of gratifications emanating from interactions. They demonstrate people's interests to access the potential rewards and benefits for maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with friends and other users on Facebook. This is because users and individuals can engage in many kinds of political behaviours on Facebook to suit their diverse interaction-related needs (Pennington, Winfrey, Warner & Kearney 2015:279-283). The last, *instrumental goals* exist in the form of political expressions to issues (Kearney 2017:107), which are discussed especially on Facebook. The various goals enumerated above provide the study with understanding of the motivation and uses for which political parties apply Facebook to engage and interact with their stakeholders.

Comparing the reasons for political "Facebooking," Kearney (2017:107) asserts that the interpersonal goals behind Facebook usage serve as a means of showing and explaining the variances in political *posts*, *follows* and *likes* to determine the interests of people and activities on the site. Given this, Facebook users including parties and politicians who are highly motivated by influence goals have to increase their engagements in opinion-seeking and interactive behaviours via political posts and follows (Kearney 2017:107). Contrary to the *influence goals*, the *interaction goals* are particularly concerned with "interaction-specific related forces," concentrating largely on people's expectations of other users and individuals

to view them positively in political interactions, and consequently leading into political posts and likes on Facebook (Kearney 2017:107). However, because users are able to follow political parties and politicians without interacting with them, serves as caution against the over reliance on *interaction goals* as the way of reaching decisions on political follows on Facebook. Inasmuch as the *interaction goals* involve external and interpersonal concerns, Kearney (2017:108) posits the *affect management goals* as most appropriate to address those (interpersonal or external) concerns relating particularly to feelings of disappointment, anxiety or discomfort. Comparing *likings, followings* and *postings* on Facebook automatically creates dialogues, which invite other users on the networking site to participate in conversations (Kearney 2017:108). Considering these evaluations, this study subscribes that, users of Facebook with strong affect management goals are not interested in political issues, or do not make posts about politics. More so, the identity goals relate negatively to some forms of political Facebook behaviours.

Generally, other scholars (for example Miller 2008; Settle, Bond, Coviello, Fariss, Fowler & Jones 2015) have situated Facebook into various political activities to suggest a number of specific roles it performs in communication. The use of Facebook in political campaigns, elections and mobilisation, programme and policy dissemination (Borah 2016), among others is synonymous to the political functions of social media, which have been extensively discussed in Section (3.7) of this chapter. Against this background, this study focuses on the *interaction, relational resource* and *influence goals* of Facebook to demonstrate its appropriation by political parties in Ghana for engaging, interacting and building mutually beneficial relationships to influence stakeholders. The next section rounds-up the chapter by situating social media in political communication research to address contemporary issues pertaining to their application to politics.

### **3.9.3 Social Media in Political Communication Research**

A number of studies that has been conducted on social media appropriation in political activities within different contexts suggest the need for more examination regarding their issues and impact on political communication practice and research (Kearney 2013:6), especially in Africa. In spite of limited access to the internet in Africa, social media are enhancing inter-connections and relationships in political spheres, serving as instruments of change by circumventing the traditional forms of media and conveying political issues and messages through conversations (Mare 2016:316). However, there is no consensus on this notion as a number of social media scholars contend that though these platforms are lubricating political

communication and activities in some parts of the world, the same cannot be said in relations to Africa. This is because most studies on appropriation of these tools in politics have focused on advanced democracies. As a result, African scholarship and research on social media are overshadowed, or perhaps relegated to the backdrop of global discourse on social media in politics. The scepticism about social media communication in Africa makes it critical for examining Ghana to draw the lines between opposing claims in literature on political usage of these tools. If indeed social media is not changing political communication, this would mean that political actors, particularly political parties and their stakeholders or voters do not take advantage of their features for engaging, interacting and converse on those platforms. Considering this statement, the study attempts to address the debate as regards impact of new forms of communication through social media.

However, disagreements about the impact of social media on politics in Africa could be pragmatic, and may not address the issues from a relationship view point. From especially political public relations worldview, this study proffers a participatory-interactive approach, requiring political parties to adopt two-way symmetric communication and mutually beneficial engagements with stakeholders to explore the effect of social media on Ghana and generally Africa. In Africa, political engagement and participation of the citizenry on these channels have been insufficient, while in many countries social media has increased the capacity of political parties and governments to influence political discourses and behaviours, or perhaps disproportionately benefited the political elites in democratic systems (World Development Report 2016:24). Conversely, the use of these new platforms for passive information and message dissemination without deliberate attempt by political parties at creating dialogues and responding to stakeholders to build relationships cannot provide a better assessment of their effects. Considering this, the study focuses on how the interactivity and political power of Facebook promotes communication between political stakeholders for relationship management and advancing political agenda in Ghana. This could address the literature and research gap between the advanced and developing democracies as regards social media effects on politics.

With the onus on interactivity, this study argues against the mere rhetorical acceptance of a two-way symmetric approach by stressing the need for political parties and their communicators to get involved in strategic conversational engagements with stakeholders to utilise social media platforms. This study is especially important for Ghana given that the internet users are increasingly becoming conversant with social media sites, and therefore suitable for assessing their impact and advancing knowledge on the subject to promote African

scholarship. There is little evidence in terms of political interactions and relationships that occur online. Even in technologically advanced countries, the engagements of citizens remain a challenge because only a small number, representing an insignificant subset of the larger population participates in politics online (World Development Report 2016:24). This means that there is difficulty in sustaining the engagement of the citizenry, resulting in the search for new ways in addressing the interests of stakeholders. There is also the question of whether social media intensify polarisation; weakens or enhances social capital; or facilitate mobilisation and organised violence (World Development Report 2016:24). These raise issues that inform this study to ascertain whether the phenomenon, experiences and outcomes from the political use of social media in Ghana are similar to what pertains in literature and practice in other countries, or otherwise.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter excavated literature and discussed studies conducted on social media. Within the chapter, this study explained the concept of social media and provided their features and categories, as well as their functions in politics and social networking in relationship building, among others. These gave an understanding of how social media are used by political parties in their communication activities. More so, the chapter reviewed literature on social media especially Facebook and their political appropriation globally and in Ghana for more conceptual perspectives. Within the framework of relationship management, this study illustrated how social media are used by political actors. The overview of this chapter also included discussions on functionality and relationship management effects of social media communication practice on democracy. The following chapter of this thesis discusses the methodology that is used for this study, the research design and strategies, as well as explanations of other applicable methods and techniques, which were used to study the appropriation of social media in political communication in Ghana.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEORISING SOCIAL MEDIA APPROPRIATION FOR POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

#### 4.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter has noted the many uses of social media and shift in political communication towards relationship management, a framework that predicated social networking as critical in the engagement of the public and stakeholders. This change is due to the quest and indeed insistence of stakeholders and followers of political parties for more connectivity, interactions and conversations on burning issues and questions, participation and feedback from citizens in decision making. In line with this, this study explores the experiences and views of officials of the New Patriotic Party and of the National Democratic Congress in Ghana as regards how social media and especially Facebook affect their relationships with their respective stakeholders. This is necessary considering the search by political parties for spaces in direct stakeholder engagements and participation to achieve their political agenda. The study is located in social media, interactivity and relationship which have become the focus of attention in political communication (Poulakidakos & Vaneti 2016). It draws from a number of areas in post-modernist studies (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt 2015; Harms & Dickens 2009). Conceptually, the phenomenon explored in this study, as well as the methodological considerations adopted in the research are in line with the radical social change approach (Dutta 2011; Gray-Felder & Deane 1999). The radical social change approach is the response to manage low-intensity violence and vigilantism that perpetuate in post-modernist perspective. This approach gives credence to the responsibility of citizens in taking their place and voice through participation in agenda-setting in politics.

Predicated on the assumption that social media and politics influence the opinions and activism of the electorates in Ghana and generally Africa, this study seeks to have understanding and shed light on the philosophy upon which research participants configure their relationships with stakeholders to achieve political agenda. From a political communication and technological perspective to relationship management, engaging stakeholders is critical because it offers political parties and members or followers the opportunities to network and interact to address issues. Hence, this study suggests Facebook as an alternative relationship management medium, to neutralise the menace of low-intensity violence and political vigilantism in Ghana (Bob-Milliar 2014:126). As a way of unpacking

how social media could promote such political purposes through engagements and conversations, this study theorises technology appropriation for relationship management in the advancement of political agenda. This central argument of the study predicated on the notion that for political parties to achieve their goals, they have to effectively manage relationships with their stakeholders via dialogue. This is especially true where giving “voice to the citizenry” in the form of feedback is gaining much significance.

In this regard, the study provides the context of how political parties use Facebook to illustrate the theories underpinning the research. It interrogates the political use of Facebook because it is a popular social networking site amongst social media users in Ghana. More so, it is an example of how technology is used to manage relationship in setting agenda. By using Facebook as an exemplar to demonstrate the political power of social media, this study is able to address the broader questions of democracy and inclusion of the electorates or voters in decision making and participation through a two-way symmetric communication. This study propagates the view that the most appropriate and useful frameworks in understanding this notion include: *Technology Appropriation*, *Agenda-Setting* and *Relationship Management* concepts. Therefore, this chapter examines theories that illustrate the relationship between these theories. Technology provides important tools and platforms for promoting communication and networking, which lubricate the building of relationship (Hung 2000a, 2001). In view of this, *technology appropriation* serves as the broad or primary theoretical framework that underpins this thesis.

#### **4.1 Technology Appropriation**

Technology appropriation shows how users make technologies their own through the process of adoption, where the individual, technology and collective practices are transformed via interactivity (De Sanctis & Poole 1994:27). Appropriation has been explored in many forms, such as technology acceptance (Davis 1989, 1993), participatory appropriation (Rogoff 1995), saturation model of technology (Orlikowski 1992, 2000), universal theory of acceptance and use of technology (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis 2003), teenagers (Carroll, Howard, Peck & Murphy 2002), education (Mendoza, Stern & Carroll 2007), organisation (Fidock 2011, 2004); and rural areas (Dey, Binsardi, Prendergast & Saren 2013), among others. Situating technology in the lens of social structures, De Sanctis & Poole (1994:128) studied how technological features transform via their *use*, *non-use* or *change use*. Users adapt to practices when the structures of communication technology are shared to generate cognitive scripts (De Sanctis & Poole 1994:128).

Other scholars (see Adams, Nelson & Todd 1992; Fidock 2011) have examined the usefulness of the appropriation concept to theorise different forms of technology and cohorts of users. As Fidock (2011:217) highlights, there are a number of elements that associates with the technology appropriation, such as “adoption and non-adoption, adaptation, appropriation or stabilisation, and dis-appropriation or rejection”. Adoption means “a decision to make full use of innovation as the best course of action available” (Rogers 1995:171). Adoption entails the initial decision to utilise an innovation, as well as the option to continue with its usage, referred to as continued adoption (Fidock 2011:218). This includes a “pre-adoption” phase which occurs before adoption and continued adoption or post-adoption (Jasperson, Carter & Zmud 2005:26-38). In other words, adoption as a notion of technology acceptance encompasses different concepts, namely “system use,” “user satisfaction” and “behavioural intention” (Venkatesh, Davis & Morris 2007; Venkatesh & Davis 2000).

The second element involves the *adaptation* to technology (Desouza, Awazu & Ramaprasad 2007:128-132) for practices and mutual transformation of the technology and practices (Carroll 2004, 2005). Illustrating this feature, Desouza *et al.* (2007:128-132) posited adaptation as personalisation, customisations and inventions. The adaptation to practices is noticed by the examination of changes regarding user patterns of technological features over time. It includes the dimensions of the usage of systems and their features over a period, as well as the shifts in pre-existing practices before the development of such technology. The third element is *stabilisation*, which Lewin (1952) described as what occurs after user’s adoption and adaptation to a particular technology. This is what Forjoun (2010:203-217) refers to as the opposite of change. This element puts forward the notion of how the patterns of appropriation become routine activities (Limayem & Hirt 2003; Rogers 1995). In this sense, appropriation is illustrated as *stabilisation* or *incorporation* (Fidock 2011:220).

Even though the different patterns and outcomes of appropriation demonstrate stabilisation, those notions are not the same because they are broad terminologies. Each of them conveys characteristics that are embedded in technology within specific contexts, described as *embedded appropriation* (Fidock 2011:222). However, this means that the thorough incorporation of communication technologies into the work and practices of users may generate adaptation and stabilisation. In contrary to adoption, adaptation and stabilisation of technology and platforms over time, there is also the element of *non-adoption* and *dis-appropriation* (Fidock 2011:22). While *non-adoption* occurs at the initial stage of exposure to a particular technology or channel, *dis-appropriation* demonstrates the rejection of a particular technology after use. This could be termed as *discontinuance* (Rogers 1995; Bhattacharjee 1998, 2001), or

in other words *abandonment* (Wilson & Howcroft 2005, 2002), or *discontinued use* (Pollard 2003:172-179). In an attempt to extend technology use beyond single-user appropriation to group appropriations, Carroll (2001, 2004) re-configures technology appropriation to the transition of *technology-as-designed* into *technology-in-use*. Within this perspective, appropriation is determined by the features that initially attract individuals to a particular technology for use and re-use (Carroll, Howard, Peck & Murphy, 2003, 2002). This study adopts Carroll's (2001, 2004) *Technology Appropriation Model* to explain how Facebook as a form of social media technology has become part of the communication activities of political parties in Ghana. The various assumptions above underpin the principles for understanding and defining *Technology Appropriation* as a concept in the next section.

#### **4.1.1 Understanding Technology Appropriation**

Many scholars have made attempts to define Technology Appropriation from different perspectives. For example, Simoes and Gouveia (2011:22) describe technology appropriation as the “use of cognitive and physical resources by individuals in their daily practices”. It is the process of incorporating new forms of technology into existing work contexts (Delaney 2010:152). On the other hand, Carroll (2001, 2004) refer to technology appropriation as how individuals evaluate technology designs over time: adopt, adapt and incorporate them into their work activities and practices, and the processes through which such technology designs become complete by their usage. In this sense, appropriation as a concept goes beyond usage to include cognitive, behavioural and contextual outcomes. This encompasses the decision of users to adopt and adapt a technology, as well as incorporate such technology into work practices. Situating appropriation into *system use*, Burton-Jones and Straub (2006:229-240) enumerated three major features such as: *user*, *system* and *task*.

However, subjecting Carroll (2001, 2004) definitions of technology appropriation to scrutiny, Fidock (2011:224) contests that even though their study highlighted *users* and *system*, laying more emphasis on practice, it failed to give significance the element of *task*. Putting technology appropriation into the lens of internalisation, appropriation cannot be the mere knowledge of using technology, but instead the ability for individuals and organisations to own such technology (Rogoff 1995, 1993). While mastering the tools of technology involves the development of skills required for using them, appropriation goes beyond mastery to include the acquisition of competence for maximising the utility of such tools and platforms in a social context (Simoes & Gouveia 2011:22). This is because the processes of appropriating

technologies allow users to develop their proficiency and capacity in handling those tools and platforms within the context of social practice (Johnson 2004:251-253).

The process of appropriation has four main components, namely “appropriation moves; faithfulness of the appropriation; instrumental uses; and attitudes” (Alberts 2013:20-21). With respect to appropriation moves, “users directly use the system, relate it to other structures, constrain its use; or make positive or negative judgment” about it (Alberts 2013:20-21). Therefore, for appropriation to be faithful, its process has to be consistent with the spirit of the technology. However, in certain cases the appropriation of technology could be unfaithful, though it does not necessarily mean it is bad, only that its uses may not align with the spirit of the technology. The next, *instrumental uses* deal with what the technologies are used for, which can take the form of task activities, influencing others and managing group processes (Alberts 2013:21). Lastly, Alberts (2013:20-21) notes *attitudes*, which demonstrate whether users are comfortable in the use of technologies, respect such technologies, or impeded from making use of those technologies.

The introduction of technology as a process into any set-up entails number of steps. These involve an organisation deciding on whether to acquire or develop a new technology with features for its task requirement; it then implements the technology by making it available to user group via testing, installation and training for users to either accept or reject the technology based upon their experiences and evaluations (Riemer & Johnston 2012:3). In their attempts to advance a framework for understanding the appropriation of technology, Carroll (2001, 2004) developed the *Technology Appropriation Model* (TAM), which Alberts (2013) reinforced in his study on technology use by organisations. In similar vein, this study uses the model to theorise the usage of Facebook in political communication in Ghana.

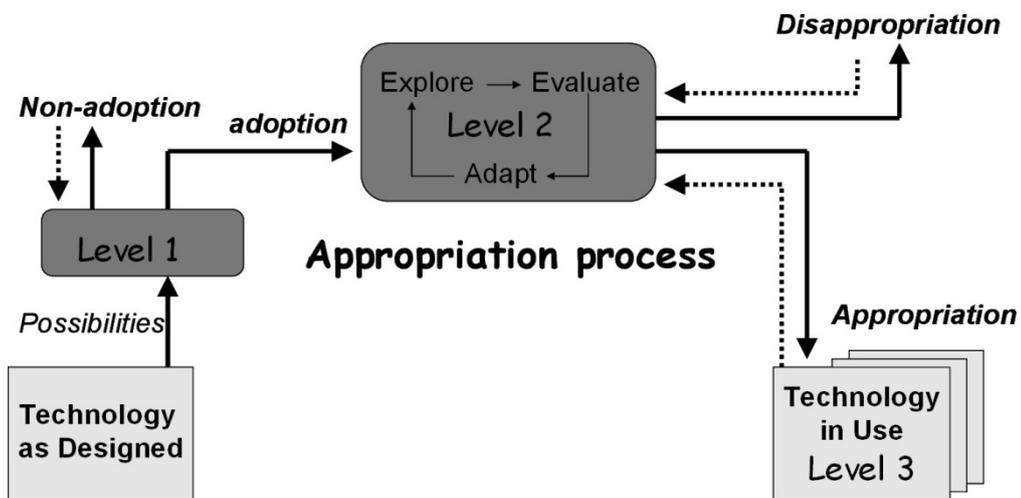
#### **4.1.2 Technology Appropriation Model**

As mentioned earlier, this study is predicated on the framework of the Technology Appropriation Model (TAM) propounded in the study of Carroll (2001, 2004) and Carroll *et al.* (2001) which differentiates between *technology-as-designed* and *technology-in-use* through appropriation. Three key notions: *technology-as-designed*, *the appropriation process* and *technology-in-use* (Carroll 2001:4) serve as the thrust and core foundation of the model. *Technology-as-designed* is the specific technology or tool produced by manufacturers, thus the specific *attractors* and *repellents* to the technology (Carroll 2001, 2004). It represents the features of a technology which encourage potential users to either engage with that technology or ignore its use. If the technology is not used or perhaps discarded, then it is described as “non-

appropriation” (Alberts 2013:24). However, if a user engages with the technology, then in that case the *process of appropriation* is activated.

Users will appropriate technology if it provides their requirements, and fits specific appropriation criteria, but if the technology does not meet such criteria, it may be disappropriated. When such technology is appropriated, then it becomes *technology-in-use* (Simoes & Gouveia 2013:24). The *technology-in-use* changes overtime, reinforced with “higher-order-drivers,” such as “power, identity and fragmentation” (Alberts 2013:24). In this sense, technology becomes consistent with power; identity; and fragmentation, which remain critical to politics because politicians exist and lead fragmented lives within the inter-play of identity and power. Revised from earlier studies, Carroll (2004:5) provides the *Technology Appropriation Model* in detailed illustrations of how people evaluate technology, adopt, adapt and incorporate it into their activities and practices.

**Figure 2: Technology Appropriation Model**



Source: Carroll 2004:5

The technology appropriation model illustrates the process of appropriation, showing the change from *technology-as-designed* into *technology-in-use*. Three phases are involved in the appropriation process namely: *initial exposure*, *adaptation*, and *incorporation* (Fidock 2011:3). A number of factors influence the decisions and actions of users at each phase of the model as they evaluate a particular technology. As Carroll (2001; 2004) explains:

At the initial exposure, users are provided several possibilities to address their needs, Level 1 evaluations influence the decision of users to adopt or avoid a

technology. These two outcomes inform the decisions of users as regards trying and eventually using such technology in their practices (adoption) or their decision to ignore the technology (non-appropriation). After adoption, users then engage in Level 2, where they evaluate the technology extensively by exploring and learning how the technology can support their activities and practices, which may result in their decision to adapt the technology and its associated practices (adaptation phase). Over the period of usage, adaptation diminishes and consequently ceases, making the practices regarding the use of such technology a routine (incorporation phase). This is how this model describes technology appropriation. At this phase, evaluations maintain and sustain the state of appropriation (thus Level 3 evaluations). However, in certain circumstances, the technology can be re-evaluated (refer to the dashed arrow moving back from technology-in-use to Level 2), which includes renewed adaptation, or dis-appropriation where users reject the technology. The re-evaluation of such technology is likely to occur where there is non-adoption and dis-appropriation as the technology gets into use (refer to the dashed arrows moving back from non-adoption to Level 1, and also from dis-appropriation to Level 2).

Four different kinds of illustrations were used by Carroll's (2004) as regards revision of earlier work on the technology appropriation model to explain its features:

With arrows, the model illustrates the processes from one state and condition to another. The solid arrows indicate the change or transition from one appropriation phase to another, and also show the outcomes in terms of users' evaluations. The bold words without boxes depict the outcomes of evaluation(s) such as: adoption, non-adoption, dis-appropriation and appropriation. The possibilities of the process have also been shown without a box, but represent an input into the first (Level 1). Technology-as-designed and Technology-in-use are located in two sharp edged boxes to draw attention towards the completion of design through the appropriation process. The initial exposure phase (Level 1) and adaptation phase (Level 2) are put in two round shaped boxes in the figure. The third (Level 3) evaluation is not shown due to its collocation with technology-in-use.

The technology appropriation model is applicable to this study because it situates how political parties have embraced and used social media in their engagements with stakeholders. Political parties are able to adopt and adapt to the changing technological and online platforms for engaging with their stakeholders. What makes new technology useful is that they are able to enhance communication, networks and interactions between many actors. Against this background, the technology appropriation model is the suitable framework for describing the meaning and use of technology (Alberts 2013:20). Because social media remain artefacts of information, communication and technology, the study draws on this model to provide insight into how these networks are utilised in politics in Ghana. Previous research regarding *Information Systems* frameworks have focused on the stages of technology and factors that impede their usage to contribute to participatory and direct conversations (Orlikowski 1996, 2000). These posit technology including the internet and social media as providing structural possibilities that promote electronically enhanced democracy, interactivity, lower costs and rapidity in communication.

By using this framework, the study is able to demonstrate how political parties have integrated social media practice especially Facebook into their communication activities. This will provide insight into their experiences of political actors in terms of appropriation, disappropriation and reinforcement of these channels in political communication. In doing so, the study adopts Carroll's (2001, 2004) model as the lens for investigating how the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress perceive and appropriate social media networking tools for their communication and mobilisation goals. This model enables the study to describe ways by which social media communication has been embraced by officers of political parties over time, and how they have consequently adopted, adapted and incorporated online engagements into their daily practices. The study uses this framework to explore how Facebook serves as *technology-as-designed* and *technology-in-use* by the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress for relationship management and advancement of political agenda.

Using Carroll's (2001, 2004) model of appropriation, this study can determine the effect of technology in political public relations to illustrate how social media platforms are extending or limiting relationships between political parties and stakeholders. It is applied to assess whether or not social media usage enhance relationships between political parties and their stakeholders. In this regard, the study is able to propose Facebook as an alternative medium that the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress can exploit in establishing mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders for dialogues, conversations and consensus

on critical matters to address political vigilantism in Ghana. The model is also appropriate because it promotes networking, hence acting as catalyst for relationship building and management through two-way symmetrical approach and engagements (Hung 2001:17).

#### **4.2 Relationship Management**

The next concept underpinning this study, thus *Relationship Management* is drawn from the public relations perspective. Public relations as a management function involve planning and solving problems (Chandler 2014; Hung 2001; Grunig & Hunt 1984; Grunig 1992; Grunig & Grunig 1992). The development of public relations theory through the lens of relationship was first propounded by Ferguson (1984), who focused on building relationships rather than the *publics*, organisation or the communication process that creates these relationships (Chandler 2014:10). Since then relationship management has become a key research area (Huang 2001; Ledingham & Brunig 2000). A number of scholars (see Brunner 2000; Ledingham & Brunig 1998) have highlighted different attributes and features of relationships which exist between organisations and their publics to give meanings, and theorise the concept of relationship management. Other studies involved evaluation of the impact of relationships on behaviours and attitudes toward organisations (see Chandler 2014), application to general theories (see Grunig & Huang 2000), community relations (see Wilson 2000), issues and crisis management (see Coombs 2000; Bridges & Nelson 2000). The concept of relationship has also been assessed in the context of their diversity and outcomes (see Brunner 2000), and online organisation-public relationship (see Len-Rios 2001), among others.

The use of *relationship* as the primary unit of analysis of engagements has been contested, which some (for example, Chandler 2014:11) argue that public relations cannot be attributable solely to the “strategic planning and implementation of communication”. With the development of communication, the management of its strategies and implementation form integral part of building mutually beneficial relationships with their publics, which extend opportunities for organisations to achieve their goals (Ledingham & Brunig 2000:57-66). This study reinforces that relationship forms a key foundation upon which organisations thrive, and therefore serves as a useful framework for evaluating their dealings with publics. Many studies on relations have largely focused on *organisation-public relationships*. In line with this, Broom, Casey and Ritchey (1997, 2000) studied the concept of relationship to highlight the properties that are measured in engagements between organisations and stakeholders. This collocates with the description by Ledingham & Brunig (1998:62) of relationship management in the form of *organisation-public relationship*, referring to it as “the state which exists

between an organisation and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political wellbeing of the other". It starts when an organisation acts in ways that affect behaviours of the "publics" toward an organisation (Hon & Grunig 1999:11-13).

In a similar explanation, Broom (2000:18) posited *organisation-public relations* as the pattern of interaction, exchange, transaction and linkage between organisations and their publics. In that sense, relationships are situated in individual perceptions, social collectivism and engagements. After the concept of relationship management gained acceptance in public relations (Ledingham & Brunig 2000), many studies (for example Chandler 2014) have identified communication as the fulcrum of relationship management. Organisation-public relationships exist and thrive on both symbolic and behavioural forms (Grunig 1993:136). This means that when symbolic and communication based relationships are divorced from behavioural relationships that are grounded in actions and events, practitioners limit public relations to the simplistic conception of image building, providing little value to their organisations (Grunig 1993:135-136). These suggests that organisations are able to address problems in relationships with their publics by using the proper messages disseminated via publicity and media relations to change or develop images of organisations (Grunig 1993:136). Those assertions regarding organisation-public relations are consistent with a number of researches in public relations (Grunig & Grunig 1992), that proffer the two-way symmetrical communication other than the press-agentry and public information approaches as most suitable to promote mutual respect and agreements, resolve conflicts and ensure understanding between organisations and their publics, as well as add value to the effectiveness of organisations (Chandler 2014:12).

Situating *organisation-public relations* in the context of three models, Grunig & Hunt (1984) outlined a framework that encompassed the *press-agentry*, *public information*, and *two-way asymmetrical* approaches to public-relations management. The goal of the *press-agentry* model as a one-way communication is to project individuals and organisations in good and respectable ways, while *public information*, which is also a one-way model concentrates on the development and distribution of relatively objective information that are favourable to organisations (Chandler 2014:13). The *two-way asymmetrical* model, on the other hand, uses research to create messages that are persuasive to convince stakeholders in forming attitudes and actions in line with the goals and objectives of an organisation (Chandler 2014:13). In contradiction to the *two-way symmetrical* approach, the *two-way asymmetrical* model does not use research in discovering how the publics of an organisation feel and think about the

organisation and issues, predicating minimal interest in the achievement of mutually beneficial goals between the organisation and its publics or stakeholders (Grunig 1992a, 1992b).

Based on these models, many scholars have also developed other frameworks. For example, Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995:48) suggested the *mixed-motive model*, which combines the two-way asymmetrical model of engagements with the two-way symmetrical approach. In the *mixed-motive model*, organisations and publics are perceived as having separate or perhaps conflicting interests, which the parties can use negotiation and compromise to reach a common ground via “win-win” situations (Dozier *et al.* 1995:48). The model postulates a number of outcomes that are possible in the *win-win* process, which may include unstable and unsatisfactory relationships existing on either side, with one of the parties exploiting the other (Dozier *et al.* 1995:49). Considering this, Hon & Grunig (1999:4) argued that organisations make better decisions if they listen and engage with the public prior to decision making rather than utilising communication tactics to persuade their stakeholders to support the decisions of the organisation after they have been made. Against this background, this study uses the *two-way symmetrical communication* as its framework for exploring how social media as a form of technology, particularly Facebook can be appropriated by political parties, thus New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Party in Ghana as a conversational platform to engage with stakeholders and followers toward the achievement of political agenda and mobilisation especially before, during and after intra-party elections.

#### **4.2.1 Management of Organisation-Public Relationship**

Based on earlier studies conducted by these scholars (Canary & Stafford 1994; Plowman 1996; Huang 1997), Hon & Grunig (1999:13) formulated a number of *asymmetrical* and *symmetrical* relationship maintenance strategies for managing *organisation-public relationships*. In this regard, Hon & Grunig (1999:14-15) listed *access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking* and *sharing of tasks* as critical to the maintenance of organisation-public relationship. The parties to the relationship need to have access to the decision-making processes of each other, respond to each other’s communication and be willing to engage in direct communication with other parties when there are issues and complaints, rather than transferring unanswered questions and unsatisfactory experiences to third parties (Hung 2001:16). This means that parties to the relationship need to engage in positive activities which make the relations between them worthwhile, as they open up about their thoughts and feelings (Canary & Stafford 1993, 1994). More so, the parties have to be able to assure each other that they have legitimate concerns and views (Jensen 1997:225-234), as well as show commitment

to building networks with groups that have alliances with the organisation's publics (Hung 2000a; Huang 2000). The organisation and its publics have to share tasks by working together in addressing mutual and separate concerns and problems (Hung 2001, 2000a).

Inasmuch as all the six criteria highlighted by Hon & Grunig (1999:14-15) in the above discussions are critical to the management of organisation-public relationships, *networking* and *interactions* are the focus of this study, given that it explores how social media networking builds relationships between political parties, thus the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress as organisations and their stakeholders. Having provided some criteria for understanding organisation-public relationships, Hon & Grunig (1999:4-5) also highlight a number of measurable predictors for assessing the quality and success of such relationships including: *satisfaction*, *trust*, *commitment* and *control mutuality*. Mutual control demonstrates the extent to which parties in organisation-public relationships exert power and control over one another. Moreover, parties in the relationship must have some level of willingness and confidence to open up to other parties. In this case, competence, integrity and dependability underline the dimensions of trust (Hon & Gruing 1999:19). More so, Hon & Grunig (1999:20) posit that in a mutually beneficial relationship, parties have to feel comfortable due to positive expectations, thus, a party believing that the other is making genuine attempts to enhance the relationship. It is noteworthy that the prominence given by parties to the development and maintenance of relationships determines their commitment to such relationships.

The relationship management concept has been rarely applied to social media culture and politics despite the role of social media networking in building relationships between organisations and stakeholders. The organisation-public relations framework is applicable to this study as it draws from the dictum of Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994:2) that public relations remains the "management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics on whom their success or failure depends". With the emergence of the internet and new technologies, the gate-keeping role of the media and control of information are eroded as relations and information are disseminated by parties directly to their publics in setting agenda through social media (Kent 2013:337). This is transforming how political stakeholders obtain and vary information, as well as the ways communication managers perform organisation-public relations functions (Kent 2013:337). The assertion is especially true given that political parties in Ghana are setting up accounts and profiles, as well as making posts on social networking sites to reach the public.

Therefore, by using the relationship management concept, this study is able to demonstrate how the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in Ghana

establish and manage relationships with their followers and stakeholders through social networking, particularly on Facebook in advancing political agenda and mobilisation. This concept helps the study to examine how relationship management informs social networking activities from the viewpoints of officers who initiate policies and manage communication and media activities of the political parties. Relationship management enables this study to determine whether officers of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress perceive social relations as the management of relationship between their parties and followers. It forms the basis for the study to advance its findings and propose a normative framework of relationship management in terms of political public relations engagements and organisation-public relationships within participatory democracy. As part of this attempt, the study locates the influence of social media networking in relationship building and maintenance in the communication engagements of the two major political parties in Ghana. This serves to illustrate how the parties can adopt, engage, manage and enhance diverse stakeholder relationships for mutual benefits and political activism to transform minimalist citizen engagements into maximalist democratic participation (Carpentier 2012; Carpentier & De Cleen 2008; Mouffe 2000). It is especially necessary given that relationship management is critical for the achievement of political agenda.

### **4.3 Agenda-Setting**

The last framework underpinning this study is the concept of *Agenda-Setting*, which describes the power and influence of the media, thus the media's ability to tell people what issues are important for consideration and discussions. As early as 1922, Walter Lippmann showed concerns about how the media exercised their power to present information and images to the public (Kamau 2014:24). In his work on *Public Opinion*, Lippmann (1922:40-48) posited mass media as the intermediary between events that occur and types of images created in the mind sets of the public. Predicated on the concerns of Lippmann, McCombs and Shaw investigated the presidential elections in the United States in 1968, 1972 and 1976. The research in 1968 by McCombs and Shaw focused on two factors: awareness and information (Kamau 2014:24-25). The study in the 1968 presidential campaign formalised and popularised the agenda-setting concept (McCombs & Shaw 1972, 1993). In their subsequent study on voters in Capital Hill, McCombs & Shaw (1972) analysed the media coverage of public issues in television news broadcast, magazines and newspapers used by voters in following elections. Putting the agenda-setting function of the media into perspective, McCombs & Shaw (1972) explored the relationship between what electorates perceived as critical issues and the contents

of messages on media platforms used in the presidential elections. They established that the media has much influence on what people and the general public considered as important issues. The time spent on issues and information relayed in news, together with the positions given to items in news demonstrates the significance of issues, and how recipients or audiences learn from such issues (McCombs & Shaw 1972, 1993). This study uses agenda-setting because it is a key framework for examining how agenda is set with respect to the media, public and policy making. Moreso, the agenda-setting framework by McCombs and Shaw (1972) has been developed and extended more recently by a number of scholars (Kaid 2004; Kent 2013; McCombs, Shaw & Weaver 1997, 2014; Guo, Vu and McCombs 2012, 2014) to demonstrate how the media and communication technologies are used in giving prominence to news and messages on different platforms. Therefore, the agenda-setting framework has contemporary relevance to this study.

The primary assumption of the concept is the public awareness creation and concerns of prominent issues perceived by the media as the news. The central idea is that there is frequent transfer of what is relevant from one agenda to another. However, Dearing and Rogers (1988, 1996) suggested the need for revision of the concept, arguing that the media and the press do not truly reflect reality in filtering and shaping news and discussions. In their view, the media concentrates on only a few issues from the many subjects leading the public to believe those issues they put forward as important than other pressing issues, which could not be part of the media's agenda. The first assumption is that: the press and the media do not reflect reality because they filter and shape the news, and secondly, the concentration of the media on a few subjects and issues direct the public and people to think that the media's choice of news are more important than others (Rodriguez 2010:300). After the initial studies of McCombs & Shaw in 1968, 1972 and 1976, scholars (Schönbach & Weaver 1985; Winter 1981; Winter & Eyal 1981) also investigated the role of agenda-setting in different contexts to postulate other properties and phases of the concept.

These studies led to the second phase (level 2) of agenda-setting framework, where the influence of the concept in terms of its salient messages, characteristics and functions were examined. At this phase, agenda-setting was extended to examine individuals, objects and tones of news. The object of agenda-setting in the second phase demonstrated how articles and news in the media influence perceptions, or induces opinions of viewers and audience (McCombs & Evat 1995:7-16). The third phase of agenda-setting concept investigated how news transferred the salience of relationship as regards elements and messages presented to the public (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver 1997, 2014). This means that the media exert influence on

specific issues and subjects in public agenda, as well as how the public and people relate those matters to others. After the initial phase of *agenda-setting* concept, several scholars conducted studies on the theory in different perspectives. The concept is made up of three forms including *media agenda-setting*, *public agenda-setting*, and *policy agenda-setting or political agenda* (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 1988). While *public agenda-setting* hinges on the agenda of the public, *media agenda-setting* has a number of dependent variables, and *policy agenda-setting* demonstrates the agenda of policy makers as key dependent variable (Dearing & Rogers 1988, 1996).

Drawn from similar perspective, Guo, Vu and McCombs (2012, 2014) outlined the *Network Agenda-Setting Model*, which posits news media as the objects for promoting their salience in the mind-set of the public. Unlike the traditional approaches to agenda-setting, the *network agenda setting* model promotes inter-connectedness to create a network-like structure within the minds of people. In this regard, the continuous mentioning of particular subjects in networks and groups over time makes audiences perceive such issues as being interconnected. The *agenda-setting* concept plays a critical function in shaping political realities, serving as a key theoretical framework in political communication and media research (Kamau 2014:26). Despite its popularity, the concept has been criticised in a number of ways as a causal theory, with some describing it as a temporal framework that only supports the media in setting public agenda. A critical aspect of the agenda-setting role of the mass media is the time frame within which the phenomenon occurs. More so, different channels of communication have diverse agenda-setting potentials, which help in understanding the role and effect of the media especially on political communication and engagements.

With the emergence of new media, the agenda-setting power of the traditional news media is changing, especially when these traditional channels are no more singular or universal as citizen media outlets. The presence of the internet and social media has become instruments for free and independent avenues to redistribute and reshape the power dynamics between the traditional news media and citizen or free media. In other words, agenda-setting on traditional media has become a mere part of competing influences (Kamau 2014:25). Contrary to traditional forms of media, social media networks are giving citizens more power and influence through a two-way symmetrical approach in the achievement of political agenda. As a result of the spread of online platforms, political agenda-setting is transforming, compelling political parties and politicians to build mutually relationships with the public and stakeholders through direct engagements and interactions. The period when traditional news media had the monopoly as the gate-keeper for what people see and think about is over, given the multiple

edges connecting people globally via the internet. Hence circumventing the power of the old media as social media provide everyone the freedom to post, interact and publish online, making traditional gate-keeping difficult. This means that social media has enhanced interpersonal communication and conversational ways of engagements that create relationships and influence people.

The agenda-setting framework is applicable to this study because it reinforces the popular statement made by Benard Cohen (1963:13) that though the media cannot tell people what to think, it can tell people what to think about. This dictum by Cohen (1963) is truly evident in social media where there are debates about daily media coverage of political information. From a careful examination of the social media phenomenon, particularly Facebook, this study observes that information about political issues is carried on these platforms. Therefore, users of these social media sites would be interested in how political actors have prioritised, shared and given meanings to issues through direct conversations by circumventing traditional forms of media as intermediary. As Kaid (2004:155-167) reiterates, agenda-setting investigations shine lights on how individuals organise and give meanings to potential issues and activities, while agenda-setting research advance interpersonal communication that could trigger behaviour change and relationships. This study draws on *agenda-setting* especially political and public agenda to demonstrate how the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in Ghana use social media networks, specifically Facebook to present issues that are prominent to them, exchange and interact directly with stakeholders and followers in the public sphere, especially without the traditional media acting as intermediary for both relationship building and political actions. It also enables the study to determine whether agenda-setting has been incorporated into online political public relations.

In other words, *agenda-setting* provides the framework for this study to illustrate how communication officials of political parties prioritise issues, and converse with online users and stakeholders through direct and interactive engagements on Facebook to advance political agenda. It allows the study to explain how social media communication eliminates traditional forms of intermediaries as the agenda-setters (Kent 2013:338). Agenda-setting provides the framework for this study to put the “burden of learning about important information and weighing sources of information,” on political parties and stakeholders rather than the media (Kent 2013:338). By the agenda-setting concept, the study is also able to determine issues that are prominent in online engagements between the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress and their stakeholders and followers. It helps the study to describe the salient subjects

that are posted by these political parties and their followers on Facebook for political communication and engagements particularly before, during and after intra-party elections.

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter situated the concepts of technology appropriation, relationship management and agenda-setting into the activities of political communication. The chapter explained these concepts including their respective assumptions and models, as well as how they apply to different contexts as regards social media appropriation in politics, communication and organisation-public relations activities of political parties especially in Ghana. These concepts enable the study to theorise technology appropriation for relationship management and political agenda. The discussions in the preceding sections of this chapter subscribe to its argument for the use of social networking sites as effective channels for political parties to establish mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders.

## CHAPTER 5

### METHODOLOGY

#### 5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter of this study explored concepts which underpin and frame the thesis to theorise technology appropriation and agenda, especially social media in political communication. This methodology chapter gives more information for other researchers and investigators to conduct or replicate the study. This chapter provides a discussion of the methodology of the research, as well as describes and elaborates on study methods and approaches that were used to gather and process data collected. Research methodology in general terms denote whatever activities that a researcher decides to involve in the chapter, where the investigator discusses alternative methodological approaches, justify the choice of research method, and also describes the participants and processes in the study. Several attempts have been made to differentiate between *methodology* and *methods* by comparing what constitutes the two notions. Methodology describes the choices that researchers make regarding cases to study, while methods form part of data analysis in the planning and execution of a research study (Silverman 2005, 2010). In the view of Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:38), methodology denotes a broad overarching concept that incorporates the methods including the techniques or procedures used to gather, analyse, and interpret the data.

It is noteworthy that methodology does not entail just techniques because it also involves the relationship that exist between thinking and researching. This takes into consideration the impact of the organisation under investigation and structure of the data on the thoughts of the researcher about the subject. On the other hand, methods indicate the particular method or activity a researcher uses in executing the methodology of the study including focus groups, interviews and video or audio recordings, among others (Silverman 2005:378). This chapter explains and rationalises the methods chosen for the research. It begins with a brief paragraph regarding the purpose and questions the study attempts to answer, followed by other subjects that constitute the methodology chapter. It describes the research philosophy and paradigm, research strategy or design, data collection methods and instruments entailing recruitment, sampling and sampling techniques and instruments, as well as the type of analysis that will be used for data in chapter six.

## 5.1 Operationalising the Study Questions

This study elicits views of officers of political parties in Ghana involved in communication and media activities on how they have appropriated social media, especially Facebook for relationship management in the advancement of their political agenda. Using an interpretive and comparative methodology to understand the perceptions and experiences of research participants, the study used the technology appropriation-centred framework of Carroll (2001, 2004), to provide meaning and understanding regarding how social media serve as tools for relationship management by political parties for achieving political agenda in communication. This model provides account of the conditions, activities and experiences in the context of Ghana. As noted previously in chapter one, the rise of vigilantism is not just a socio-political problem but a democratic challenge whose negative effect is observed in various parts of Ghana. Though other factors may contribute, the rise of vigilantism has been attributed to the lack of direct communication between political parties and their publics or stakeholders. This has occasioned the need for innovative research and interactive approaches to building relationships between political actors and stakeholders, among others. As the main objective of research is to produce and extend knowledge about a particular subject or aspect (Saunders, Levis & Thornhill 2009:5), studies in communication and media have also made attempts to advance knowledge on political public relations and its economy, as well as ways of promoting political discourse.

As a scholar of cultural studies, social media and political communication with research interests in technology appropriation for political public relations management, mobilisation and participation, the researcher is particular about the lived experiences and narratives of people regarding how their appropriation of Facebook and its challenges can be addressed. Thus, the views of officers of political parties in Ghana on what appropriation of social media, especially Facebook mean to them could provide insight into how political parties can utilise such a platform meaningfully in managing relationships in communication to advance political agenda. The study is also interested in determining the types of message, frequency of activities and interactions on Facebook in quantitative form. To understand the experiences of political parties regarding stakeholder issues, the following questions guided the study:

1. How can one distinguish between the role played in and reason for utilising and appropriating Facebook by political parties in Ghana different from other forms of communication?

2. In what ways do political parties in Ghana use Facebook to engage with stakeholders for communication and activities before, during and after internal party executive elections?
3. How might political parties in Ghana and their stakeholders interact meaningfully on Facebook to create mutually beneficial relationship to achieve political goals?
4. In the sharing of political opinions, what is the nature and overall quantitative content of messages and corresponding comments posted by political parties and their followers in Ghana on Facebook walls?

The questions above seek to offer an understanding regarding how the activities of officers of political parties in appropriating technology for building relationship with stakeholders through communication are conducted. This chapter provides an outline of the research methodology employed for conducting this inquiry, starting, by explicating major issues in terms of research philosophy or paradigm to illuminate discussion regarding the methodology. As this study was undertaken in Ghana with relatively few participants, its findings cannot be over generalised. To enhance the transparency and credibility of the study's findings, as well as promote its transferability, this chapter provides a detailed description in respect of the systematic processes by which the research was conducted. It also puts the study into perspective and explains the key assumptions of this study.

## **5.2 Research Philosophy/Paradigm**

Every research study requires a philosophical foundation and assumptions to shape the processes involved in the conduct of inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:38). The *research philosophy* also referred to as the *paradigm* provides a general or wider philosophical orientation to the study, which can be used individually or together with others in research. In their view, Guba and Lincoln (1994, 2005) situated philosophical assumption in respect of the mixed methods approach, positing it as involving a set of beliefs or ideas that guide researchers in their inquiries. Philosophical assumption informs the use by the study of a theoretical *stance* that consequently informs the methodology and strategy or research design employed by the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:38). The terms “world view” and “paradigm” have been used inter-changeably to describe these assumptions (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:39). Originally attributed to Thomas Kuhn (1970), the term paradigm denotes “a set of generalisation, beliefs and values of a community of specialist” (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:39). Many attempts have been made to explore the appropriate world views and paradigms that inform mixed methods research.

In their study, Creswell & Plano Clark (2011:40-41) highlighted that post-positivism, constructivism, participatory and pragmatism world views are key paradigms that are often used for mixed methods research. These individual world views differ in dimensions with respect to their *ontology* (the nature of reality), *epistemology* (how researchers get knowledge about what they know), *axiology* (the role of values in research), *methodology* (the research process), and *rhetoric* (language of research) (Creswell 2009, 2013). The post-positivism world view is associated with the quantitative research approaches where the researchers attempt to gain knowledge through the use of “determinism or cause-and-effect thinking; reductionism by narrowing and focusing on selected variables to inter-relate, detailed observations and measures of variables, and the testing of theories that are continually refined” (Slife & Williams 1995, 1997). On the other hand, most qualitative research has been conducted using the constructivism world view where the meaning and understanding of phenomena are generated through study participants and their subjective views (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:40). In this sense, participants provide understanding by speaking from the meanings that are shaped by their social interactions with others, as well as their personal experiences.

The third world view, pragmatism is typically involved with the mixed methods approach. In that case, the study focuses on the outcomes or consequences of the research, and attaches its main importance to the questions that are advanced by the study rather than methods, as well as the use of multiple methods in collecting data to inform the case and the problem under study (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:41). The last is the participatory world view, which is influenced largely by political concerns and in most cases found in qualitative studies that quantitative approaches. The participatory world view posits the need to improve society where the researchers collaborate with individuals to address issues in respect of *empowerment*, *patriarchy*, *hegemony* and *marginalisation*, among others (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:41). Pragmatism is the appropriate paradigm worldview for mixed methods research approach. The pragmatism world view which has been historically articulated by scholars including John Dewey and William James, among others, preceding contemporaries like Murphy (1990) and Cherryholmes (1992) draws on several ideas from different approaches to explore “what works” to add value to both subjective and objective knowledge (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:43).

In the argument of Tashakorri and Teddlie (1998, 2003), they contended that pragmatism remains the best for mixed methods research because it allows for both quantitative and qualitative research methods to be combined in a single study. In this perspective, the research questions are of primary importance than either the methods or philosophical

worldviews that underlie the method. This means that pragmatism gives the researcher a different option other than the post-positivism and constructivism world views that have characterised many studies (Tashakorri & Teddlie 1998, 2003). Instead of restricting to meta-physical concept such as “truth” and “reality,” practical and applied research philosophies have to be adopted in guiding methodological choices in the study (Tashakorri & Teddlie 1998, 2003). In similar vein, Creswell & Plano Clark (2011:45) recommended the use of more than one world views in mixed methods research. The use of multiple paradigms relies on the form of mixed methods design employed for the study, instead of a world view concentrated entirely on attempts by the researcher at knowing the social world (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:45).

In view of the above discussions, this study employed the constructivism and pragmatism world views as the philosophical foundations and assumptions for this study. This study lies within the *constructivism* paradigm because the researcher had to explore an understanding and meanings of a social phenomenon from the subjective views of participants (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:40). The epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations or stance of the constructivism paradigm allowed for interaction with officers of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress regarding the appropriation of technology, particularly social media for relationship management in the advancement of political agenda. The constructivism paradigm enables this study to make interpretations from the narratives shared by participants in the two political parties regarding their experiences in respect of social media appropriation in political communication in Ghana. This study is also situated in *pragmatism* as it focuses largely on the research outcome and study questions through multiple data collection methods, such as interviews and content analysis to inform the study (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:41). The ontological, epistemological and methodology of pragmatism enabled the study to provide multiple perspectives by combining, mixing or collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from the practical experiences of participants by *what works* to answer questions that the study addresses. In the light of deductive and inductive thinking (epistemology), the methodological approach employed for the study has been elaborated in the following sections.

This study adopts an interpretive approach to make meaning of people’s experiences and what shapes their realities (Lee & Baskerville 2003:221-230). It combines the constructivism (social construction) and pragmatism worldviews by triangulating multiple perspectives from unique cases to understand and draw subjective meanings of the experiences of individuals. The constructivist criterion posits that there is no objective truth which exists for discovery; however the meanings of phenomena are constructed through engagements with

situations and experiences in life (Patton 1990, 2002). This has critical implication on what is thought to be the nature of knowledge, as the qualitative paradigm negates the existence of objective or true knowledge. This is because meanings emerge through interactions, and therefore, not standardised or uniform (Rubin & Rubin 1995:31).

### **5. 3 Research Strategy**

The research strategy is the activity which could be undertaken in a research process to gather data to achieve the objectives of the study. There are a number of designs used for research including cases study, survey and observation, among others (Odoh & Ihedigbo 2014:16-22). This study adopted the case study design as its strategy. In this regard, the study conducts a comparative case study of the New Party Party and National Democratic Congress as political parties in Ghana. Case studies are used in researches involving organisational studies in the social sciences because they are widely accepted as a rigorous research design (Hartley 2004:323). In the view of Stake (2000:435) case studies are one of the most suitable ways of conducting qualitative inquiry. Along similar lines, Robert Yin (2014, 2009) suggested that case study research remains appropriate in social science inquiries, allowing the researcher to gather holistic and meaningful understanding of real-life events. These posit the effectiveness of the case study strategy as a process of unfolding complex social phenomena (Yin 2014, 2009). A number of attempts have been made at defining case study. A case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 1994:13). This means that the case study design involves empirical inquiries, which investigates a contemporary phenomenon referred to the “case” in detail in its real-world context (Yin 2014: 16). From these explanations posit case study an all-encompassing strategy, encompasses the logic of design and data collection techniques, as well as particular approaches to data analysis that inform the study (Yin 1994; 2009; 2014). Similarly, Hartley (2004:323) referred to it as “consisting of detailed investigation of a phenomenon with particular data collected over a period of time, within their contexts, to analyse the contexts and processes, as well as illuminate theoretical issues of the study”. In this regard, Hartley (2004:325) reinforced the ability of case studies to generate hypotheses or build theory.

Case study is the most suitable strategy when the questions of “how” and “why” are proposed in a study, especially where the researcher has little or no control over events, or when the study focuses on contemporary phenomena in real life and practical situations (Yin 1994:9).The usefulness of case study is that it allows for several methods to be combined in a

single study, which could be qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods (Hartley 2004:324). Case studies are explained in respect of theoretical interest and orientation of the particular case(s) under study, that can be mixed with other research strategies in addressing related research questions at different stage of a study (Hartley 2004:326-327). In summing up the preceding discussions, Hartley (2004:332) concludes that:

Case study research is a heterogeneous activity covering a range of research methods and techniques, a range of coverage (from single case study through carefully matched pairs up to multiple cases), varied levels of analysis (individuals, groups, organisations, organisational fields or social policies), and differing lengths and levels of involvement in organisational functioning.

Other scholars, for example, Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter (2000:43) reinforce case study as a research strategy than a method, while Stake (2000:435) also contextualised it as the choice of what is to be studied instead of a methodological approach. In this sense, cases are selected through several or any method(s). It is necessary to emphasise that case studies generate hypotheses and build theory (Hartley 2004:325). Several attempts have been made to offer typologies of case studies. For example, Stake (2000:437-438) outlined three forms of case studies, namely, *intrinsic*, *instrumental* and *collective* case studies. A case study is intrinsic when it largely focuses on a particular institution, unit or person, relying especially on the living experiences and account of such group (Stake 1995, 2000). Intrinsic case study is suitable when the researcher wants to have a better understanding of a specific case of keen interest (Stake 1995, 2000). The instrumental form involves a case that is examined purposely to give insight into a particular issue or perhaps to redraw a generalisation, while a case study is referred to as collective or multiple when a number of cases are studied together to investigate a phenomena, entity, institution, person or population or entity (Stake 1995, 2000). However, Hartley (2004:326) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies by addressing the extent to which the study focuses on the generalisable or unique features of the case research.

This research used case study because the researcher wanted to obtain not only large but detailed data from participants. The study is intrinsic because the researcher put aside other curiosities to focus primarily on the accounts and stories of the communication officers of political parties who are actually *living the case* of social media in Ghana (Stake 1995, 2000). The study involved multiple cases as it investigated jointly the New Patriotic Party and

National Democratic Congress, regarding their social media usage in political communication activities. However, this study did not intend to generalise to populations, but to address data in respect of theories; hence the case study design was appropriate. As Yin (2014, 2009) indicates case studies can only be generalisable to theoretical propositions, rather than populations or universes. This means that a case study does not represent a larger sample, hence in using a case study design, the study aims at analytical generalisation (generalising theories), but not to make statistical generalisation (enumerate frequencies) (Yin 2014, 2009).

The unit of analysis in case study varies from individuals to organisations. The case study strategy is appropriate for this research because the study intended to explore “why” and “how” political appropriate social media as parties forms of technology for relationship management and advancement of political agenda, especially when the researcher has no control over communication activities of participants on Facebook (Yin 1994: 9). This research studied multiple cases in Ghana. With regard to the case study design, data are collected through *interviews, documentation, archival records, direct and participant observation, and physical artefacts* (Yin 2003:85-97). In this study, data from the cases were collected through interviews with officers of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. Notes were also gathered from observations during the interviews in the field. By the adoption of the case study design and interviews, the study was able to make meanings from the experiences of officers regarding their appropriation of social media particularly Facebook for political communication in Ghana.

### **5.3.1 Sample Size of Case Study**

The New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress were selected as case study for this research. In choosing these political parties as the samples for examination, the study’s inclusive criteria considered parties that had participated in all general elections in Ghana since 1992; won and lost political power before, currently represented in parliament, and have presence on Facebook. The study focuses on New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress because they are the two major parties that have assumed power since multi-party democracy in 1992 (Annan 2012; Whitfield 2009). The research concentrates on these parties with the assumption that having been in existence longer than other political parties in Ghana, and participated in all elections since multi-party democracy, they could have appropriated social media for different political communication, public relations and electoral activities. The study of multiple cases made it possible for comparison of the trends, dynamics and variations regarding social media use by officers of the two political parties in communication activities.

The study was comparable in a number of ways by assessing: similarities and differences between the political communication activities of the two political parties, similarities and differences in how these parties use Facebook in their engagements with stakeholders, as well as also similarities and differences regarding two different sources of data. More so, the study's use of multiple sources of evidence, creation of a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence enhanced the benefits of case studies (Yin 2003:83-105). For Gillham (2000:20) multiple sources of evidence remain a fundamental feature of case study research because all the evidence gathered from cases are useful to the researcher in this design. Eight participants were selected to respond to questions on the semi-structured interview guide, four respondents were chosen from each of the two political parties, thus the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, sampled as case study.

#### **5.4 Research Approach: Qualitative versus Quantitative Approach**

The research approach involves decisions on how to study a topic. It is the “exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups give to social and human problems” (Creswell 2011:4). It is a plan and procedure, which comprises of the steps as regards assumptions in relations to methods of collecting data, analysis and interpretation. There have been many debates regarding the suitability of the different methods and approaches (that is qualitative and quantitative) in social research (Bryman 2004:452-454; Kelle 2001:1-5). A major feature in respect of such contestation is the different ways by which quantitative and qualitative research methods are presented, particularly the contra-position of the two approaches (Bryman 1994:7). Qualitative research portrays “many things to many people” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:8). It emanated from the phenomenological and interpretive paradigms, placing more emphasis on social construction and constructivist approach where there is no clear-cut in respect of objectivity or reality (Cassel & Symon, 1994:2). For example, Brennen (2013:4) posits qualitative research as “interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature,” in that language is used to provide understanding of concepts based on the experiences of individuals, which attempts to provide a “sense of larger realm of human experiences”. Qualitative research encapsulates studies that lay more emphasis on the qualities of individuals, entities, processes and meaning, which are not examined or measured in terms of “quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:8). Listing the defining qualities of qualitative research, Cassel & Symon (1994:7) referred to qualitative research as:

A focus on interpretation rather than quantification; an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity, flexibility in the process of conducting research, an orientation towards process rather than outcome, a concern with context-regarding behaviour and situation as inextricably linked in forming experience, and finally, an explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation.

The definition by Cassel & Symon (1994) points out what qualitative research entails, and also shows how this method or approach distinguishes itself from quantitative studies. Put into the context of data interpretation, Neuman (2000:148) explained that researchers using the qualitative approach interpret data by translating and giving them meaning to making them understandable. In this regard, the meanings the researcher provides emanate from the views of the individuals being studied. This means that the researcher interprets data by examining how the people being studied perceive the world, how they define situations, or what they mean to them (Neuman 2000:148). Qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world, meaning that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, and attempt to make sense, or interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them. In their viewpoint, Cassel & Symon (1994:5) suggested the qualitative approach as being more sensitive, allowing for detailed analysis of change, as opposed to the quantitative method which largely enables the researcher to assess changes that have occurred over time without detailed elaborations on the processes involved (how), or the circumstances and stakeholders (why) involved. The sources of qualitative data include interviews, document, artefacts and observations (Polkinghorne 2005:137). It also encompasses focus groups, collection or creation of images such as photos, videos, texts and other information from participants' diaries and business records, among others (Polkinghorne 2005:137). Against this backdrop, this study subscribes to the use of qualitative approach to provide sufficient information about how data is collected, describing the context and choice including reasons for the use of particular techniques in the study.

On the other hand, quantitative studies entail experiences with respect to surveys and randomised control trials, where the researcher uses standardised methods, namely, questionnaires and structured interviews, allowing for data to be constructed in numbers to draw statistical generalisation (Meadows 2003:520). In this sense, quantitative data are empirical information which exist in numbers and generated by measurements. In similar vein, Brennen (2013:3) explains that quantitative research involves “numbers and numerical

correlation within value-free environment to measure and analyse the causal relationship between variables. The best way to conduct quantitative research is by identifying variables and their measurement (Punch 2005:56). It is useful because it enables the researcher to familiarise with the issue or problem to be studied in order to generate the hypotheses to be tested (Golafshani 2003:597). The interpretation of quantitative data usually involves the expression of numbers in the form of statistical figures and percentages, among others or disproving specific hypotheses.

#### **5.4.1 Quantitative versus Qualitative – Similarity and Difference**

The mixed method is appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to gather data (that is views and responses) through interviews with participants, and sequentially put data from qualitative interviews through quantitative analysis in the form of triangulation. The mixed method made it possible for the study to provide descriptions of cases, as well as comparison of data from qualitative interviews with quantitative data from content analysis of Facebook posts on pages of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. This sequential triangulation makes it possible for the study to either corroborate or dispute data collected from multiple sources. Several scholars have highlighted some similarities and differences as regards qualitative and quantitative approaches. In their attempt to establish some similarities, Kreuger and Neuman (2006:434) asserted that the similarities between the qualitative and quantitative approaches are that both methods make use of reasoning in drawing conclusion based upon evidence (inference); involving a public process or method that reveal their studies in certain ways; through the identification of patterns which could be similar or different; and also striving to prevent errors, avoid false conclusions, as well as eliminate misleading information.

Contrary to their similarities, Kreuger & Neuman (2006:434-435) explained that while qualitative analysis does not follow any strict standardised framework, quantitative studies allow the researcher to select from a specialised and standardised form of data analysis techniques. In qualitative studies, researchers create new concepts and theories through the combination of abstract and empirical concepts, as opposed to quantitative researchers who manipulate numbers as a means of testing hypotheses (Kreuger & Neuman 2006:434-435). More so, the results generated from qualitative data serve as a guide to subsequent data collection, and therefore analysis is seen as a less-distinct final stage in terms of the research process, unlike the quantitative analysis where the researcher does not start analysis until data is collected and transformed into numbers (Kreuger & Neuman 2006:434-435).

The primary distinction between the two approaches in data collection is predicated on the notion that qualitative studies involve the collection of data in terms of words or pictures, while the quantitative techniques entails the collection of data in terms of numbers (Neuman 1997:30). Therefore, in attempts to reconcile the qualitative and quantitative approaches to exploit their usefulness, and draw from the productive effects of synergy or combined power of both methods (Mayring 2001:3-9), scholars (see Creswell 2003:20; Bryman 2004:45) recommend their use as complementary techniques in the form of triangulation and mixed methods instead of competing frameworks and approaches. Buttressing this assertion, Yin (2014:65-67) reiterates that the use of mixed methods makes it possible for research studies to cover a broader scope by collecting relevant data from various sources for concrete evidence to understand and address complex problems, than relying on one particular method and technique.

### **5.5 Mixed Methods and Triangulation**

Considering the strength and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this study adopts a mixed methods approach and triangulation in the collection of data process. Several scholars (see Greene 2007, 2008; Tashakkori & Creswell 2007) have provided explanations to illuminate discussions about mixed methods and triangulation. Conceptualising this approach differently as a way of exploring the social world, Greene (2007:20) explained that the mixed methods approach actively invites researchers to participate in dialogue as regards “multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world and multiple standpoints on what is important to be valued and cherished”. The mixed method approach is where the researcher collects and analyse data, as well as integrates the study findings and makes inferences using both qualitative and quantitative methods within a single study and inquiry (Tashakkori & Creswell 2007:4). In broadening the scope, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:5) also described mixed methods as:

A research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches in many phases of the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.

Similarly, these scholars (Kelle 2001; Cox & Hassard 2005) referred to triangulation as the use of multiple methods and measures to explore an empirical phenomenon. Triangulation is based on the premise of providing a more effective method for capturing and fixing of a social phenomenon to be able to give a more accurate analysis and explanation (Cox & Hassard 2005:111). Referring to triangulation as a “multi-method” approach, Jick (1979:502) noted that data collected from different sources with regard to a particular phenomenon can improve accuracy of judgments”. Therefore, converging different methods in a specific study assures the researcher of obtaining the true picture of a phenomenon (Gillham 2003:13). This study adopted triangulation on the assumption that the weaknesses that are inherent in each of the methods used in the research will be compensated through the counter-balance between their individual strengths. The study used data triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources (that is, qualitative interviews and content analysis) to provide a comprehensive view with regard to the phenomenon under study. By this approach, the study was able to conduct a holistic research and provide holistic descriptions of cases.

Triangulation is conducted at two different levels where content analysis is used in a case study research. At the initial stage (*first level*) the researcher triangulates through the integration of different materials and evidence from recorded information such as interview transcripts and discourses, notes from observations, written documents, video and audio tapes, among others (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:71). This information is usually collected through several methods and also by the integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques of analysis. To Jick (1979:608-609), the putting together of different material and evidence, as well as qualitative and quantitative techniques of analysis makes the study result credible, as it promotes the integration and synthesis of theories. This is because different methods of data collection have their inherent strengths and weaknesses (Cox & Hassard 2010:109-113). At the second stage (*second level*) triangulation is done through the application of a method of analysis that is *content analysis*, which has not been specifically designed for the study purposes, but to the research design (case study) research (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:71). At this level, the study analyses the content of messages by the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress as political parties, as well as responses to their posts on their respective Facebook walls communication platforms.

This study adopted an exploratory sequential design (Myers & Oetzel 2003:439), which allowed the researcher to begin the collection and analysis of qualitative data at the initial stage. After the initial exploratory results, the study built onto the next stage where quantitative data were collected and analysed as a means of corroborating or disputing qualitative findings

(Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:122). This study used interviews and content analysis through sequential triangulation to explore and collect data from multiple cases of political parties (New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress) in Ghana with respect to how they appropriate social media for relationship management and advancement of political agenda. In order to accomplish such purposes, the study “proceeded in two stages” (Myers & Oetzel 2003:439), it started with a qualitative exploration regarding the appropriation of social media by political parties in their communication activities. To be able to address the research questions in this study, the researcher first conducted interviews with officers of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. During this phase, the study conducted semi-structure interviews with eight participants who were selected to represent the two political parties as case study. These interviews produced two forms of qualitative data, thus interview transcripts and field notes by the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:122). The study then used thematic analysis as a procedure to identify the dimension regarding technology (social media) appropriation from the qualitative data collected. This enabled the study to elicit responses and views regarding the Facebook phenomenon in their communication activities including elections.

After establishing the qualitative findings, the study moves into the second phase. In the second stage, the study conducted a content analysis of the official Facebook accounts of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. The data gathered from contents of the Facebook walls (pages) of the two political parties are analysed using quantitative procedures to complement interviews with respondents and officers of the parties. The study analysed both messages of the two political parties and responses from citizens on Facebook. This study assumed that different forms of technology appropriation by political parties were not known and therefore needed to examine the Facebook phenomenon with respect to quantitative data. It allowed the study to corroborate or dispute qualitative findings from varied sources. In this regard, the study utilised sequential triangulation to make outcomes more credible. The study was conducted in two sequential phases. In the first place or qualitative phase, it explored and evaluated social media, while the second stage or quantitative phase was dependent on the initial qualitative phase. The triangulation of data involving interviews and content analysis made it possible for the study to gather complementary data to provide thick description of the cases under study, allowing for comparison, corroboration or dispute of the data collected from both methods applied.

## 5.6 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The literature reviewed showed the utility and drawbacks regarding the political appropriation of social media especially Facebook in communication at elections. In addressing questions as regards qualitative studies, researchers draw on interviews, observations, focus groups, historical collections, demonstrations, and notes from meetings and conversations, among others (Yin 2003:85). This study conducted interviews with participants in political parties, and content analysis of Facebook posts to collect data. These two main collection tools were complemented with observation. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix V) was developed to capture views and responses of officers of political parties regarding their experiences of social media use in communication and engaging stakeholders especially in intra-party elections.

### 5.6.1 Interviews

Many scholars have defined interviews in various ways. For example, Burns (1997:329) describes interviews as verbal interchange or exchange, usually face-to-face even though telephones could be used, where the interviewer tries to elicit opinions, beliefs and information from another person, thus interviewee through responses to questions. Interviewing is “a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007:29). This means that the value of interviewing is derived from its ability to develop a holistic picture, analyse words and report the views of informants in detail, as well as its provision of opportunity to interviewees to express their thoughts, views and feelings in their own voices (Berg 2007:96). Interview is a powerful method for eliciting narrative data, which allows the researcher to investigate views of people in greater depth (Kvale 2006:481-483). However, a “good” qualitative interview possesses two important features: first, “it flows naturally, and second, “it is rich in detail” (Dörnyei 2007:140). This implies that researchers and interviewers need to be neutral, “listen, “more than “speaking” (Dörnyei 2007:140). Many suggestions have been prescribed for conducting good interviews. Among them is the *golden advice* “that addresses all types of interviewing, encouraging interviewers to establish an appropriate atmosphere for interviewees to feel at ease and thus express themselves freely (Richards 2003:53).

Drawing from a different conceptual perspective, Barbour and Schostak (2005:42-43) identified a number of factors for consideration when researchers use interviews as data collection tool. These include *power relation*, referring to the inter-related power that exists during interviews, which could be either intentional or unintentional, and may not necessarily

arise from the interviewers' side towards their interviewees (Barbour & Schostak 2005:42-43). In this context, interviews help to balance the relationship between interviewers and interviewees. The next factor, "value" refers to the importance of the interview itself, the significance of the words of interviewees, as well as "trust," which demonstrate the extent to which the research ensures objectivity, accuracy and honesty (Barbour & Schostak 2005:42-43). While "meaning" indicates the expression and representation the interviewer intends to convey, "wording" refers to how the interviewer words and frames the questions that are asked during interviews (Barbour & Schostak 2005:42-43). It is noteworthy that "when interviewers ask shorter questions, interviewees are able to give detailed and better answers on the subject under discussion" (Barbour & Schostak 2005:43).

#### **5.6.1.1 Types of Interviews**

Qualitative interviews may be *structured*, *semi-structured* and *unstructured* (Kumar 2011:145; Edwards & Holland 2013:29). As regards structured interviews, the researcher puts together a set of predetermined questions, using the same wording and order of questions as highlighted in the interview schedule (Kumar 2011:145). In terms of semi-structured interviews, the researcher provides a list of a series of topics, or a list of questions it wants to discuss with interviewees using an interview guide (Edwards & Holland 2013:29). However, interviewees have the flexibility in terms of how questions are put and how interviewees also respond to questions. In this case the interviewer is able to probe answers provided by interviewees and pursue a line of discussion that is initiated by the interviewee to promote dialogue (Edwards & Holland 2013:29). The unstructured interviews provide complete freedom to the researcher in respect of the both content and structure. Compared to the structured interviews, the semi-structured and unstructured forms of interviews enable interviewees to have more space to respond to questions on their own terms (Edwards & Holland 2013:29). They provide some form of structure to compare the responses of interviewees in a particular study on similar research topics and questions. In unstructured interviews, the researcher aims for the study on a particular topic.

The importance of unstructured interviews is for respondents to speak from their individual perspectives in their own ideas, and meanings of frames of references which are familiar to them (Edwards & Holland 2013:30). This promotes flexibility as researchers are able to respond to interviewees in order to trace the meanings that are attached to purposeful conversation (Burgess 1984:102). In this case, the study can develop themes and improve content of interviews, as well as issues that emerge during interviews. Flexibility is a central

element of unstructured interviews and research that adopts a phenomenological philosophical approach especially through the methods of “constructivism, ethno-methodology and symbolic interactionism” (Edwards & Holland 2013:30). Semi-structured and unstructured interviews could be similar or same, however, the difference is the theoretical positions and connected these approaches for analysing.

There are different types of unstructured interviews including: focus group interviewing, in-depth interviewing, oral histories and narratives (Kumar 2011:161). From the types, this study chose semi-structured interviews, which enabled it to use responses from interviewees as descriptors in verbatim forms, and also allowed such responses to be integrated with arguments of the study, enhancing the flow of writing and also the sequence of logic (Kumar 2011:145). Semi-structured interviews were used by the study to clarify vague statements, allow exploration of topics, as well as provide an experimental or practical account of how social media is appropriated in political parties in Ghana. The study also used in-depth interviewing because it is rooted in the interpretive tradition within which this research lies. In-depth interviewing allowed the researcher to speak face-to-face with respondents on their lives, experiences and situations from their own perspectives (Kumar 2011:160). It used an interview guide, which is “a list of questions, open-ended or closed, prepared for use by an interviewer in a person-to-person interaction” via face-to-face, telephone or other electronic media (Kumar 2011:145).

This study sought to investigate social media usage in political communication and public relations contexts especially in intra-party elections. However, it acknowledged the importance of participants in the study to be given the chance to provide the understandings of concepts explored in this research (McCarthy, Rowley, Ashworth & Pioch 2014:187-189). Hence, as a point of departure from studies that have been conducted previously, in an effort to have comprehensive understandings regarding social media appropriation, which is driven by practical experiences of communication officials of political parties especially in Ghana, the researcher did not draw on previous studies in developing the interview guide and questions for this particular study. This approach is suitable when a study attempts to gather both “facts” and also to gather “an understanding of the meanings that respondents attached” (McCarthy *et al.* 2014:189), as regards concepts that are being considered.

#### **5.6.1.2 Drawbacks of Interview**

Despite the usefulness of interviews, they do have their inherent drawbacks. For example, Hermanowicz (2002:498) lamented that interviews are “deceptively difficult”.

Hence, the use of interviews alone as a data collection tool for studying a social life is not sufficient, because the interviewer and respondents may not have complete knowledge of the subject, or perhaps their responses may not be the reality (Walford 2007:147). The use of interview as an instrument involves much time for data collection and analysis as they have to be transcribed, coded and in certain cases translated (Robson 2002:94). Considering these weaknesses, this study follows the dictum of Ho (2006:11) who reinforces that although interviewing remains a useful tool for getting insights into the perceptions of interviewees, they could be combined with other instruments to provide in-depth and true information on the inner values and beliefs of study participants.

With this in mind, the study combined interviews with content analysis, which were also supplemented with observation as different sources of data collection, to minimise the risks of deception and obtain true information in the study (Hermanowicz 2002:498). The study conducted interviews because it wanted to discover information through a natural way of engagement and conversation (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 2006:177). It used face-to-face interviews in a semi-structured format to collect data from respondents. The study employed the semi-structured approach because it wanted to conduct in-depth interviews through the use of pre-set open-ended questions.

#### **5.6.1.3 Interview Sample Size**

Upon receipt of gatekeeper permission letters (see Appendices I & II) from the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, the study further investigated the structure of media communication in each of the two political parties and identified for interviews the key persons who formulated media policy and undertook the practical day-to-day media operations. This ensured that sampled participants were the best suited persons to obtain optimal responses based on their activities and knowledge of the subject under discussion. The study recruited 8 officers of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress using the judgmental or purposive sampling strategy (Meadows 2003:522). In line with the qualitative method, the study recruited a relevant sample for the study. The study considered a sample size of 8 interviews as practical, considering the limitations of this research and its viability to collect detailed and rich information on participants' experiences of social media appropriation in political communication and relationship management. The study interviewed 4 participants from each of the two political parties chosen for the case study. This made it possible for the study to avoid any superficial analysis from larger sample sizes (Boyatzis 1998; Braun & Clarke 2006; Silverman 2004). Recruitment letters with information about the study

and conditions for participation were sent by email and telephone to invite potential respondents who agreed to participate.

The study interviewed respondents at their parties' headquarters in Accra, the capital city of Ghana at their own convenience. All the interviews were conducted in English and took place from June 2018 - July 2018, with each of them lasting approximately one and half hours. In order to keep interviewees focused systematically and comprehensively to elicit information from participants, the study used interview schedule/guide (see Appendix V) to help the process (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006:315). The interview schedule/guide were developed in line with the purposes of this study, as well as theoretical framework for the appropriation of social media in political communication, relationship management and advancement of political agenda (see Chapter 4). The interviews were audio-recorded and complemented with note-taking to make it easier for the study to focus on the content of the interviews, make verbal prompts, create verbatim transcripts, code and identify dominant themes in the data collected, analysis and interpretation. The use of audio-recorder did not only allow the words of interviewees to be recorded, but also captured with accuracy than the use of only note-taking (Hermanowicz 2002:498). As mentioned in the preceding section, the study also employed content analysis and observation in addition to interviewing through multiple lenses to address research questions. This helped the study to obtain rich data and also validate the research findings. In the next section, a discussion of content analysis as another data collection tool in the study is provided.

### **5.6.2 Content Analysis**

Content analysis is another tool employed by the study to collect data. Content analysis in simple terms is “the study of recorded human communications” (Babbie 2001:304). It is a procedure for collecting and analysing the contents of texts, which could be “words, meanings, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated in spoken, written, or visual forms” (Neuman 2006:322). These include “books, newspapers or magazine articles, advertisements, speeches, official documents, films or video-tapes, musical lyrics, photographs, articles of clothing or works of arts” and online data, among others (Neuman 2006:322). Similarly, other scholars (for example Berelson 1952; Franzosi 2004b) posited content analysis as the study of a wide variety of texts, such as interview transcripts, discussions in research, narratives and forms of films, television programmes, editorial and advertising contents that found in magazines and newspapers.

Content analysis as a data collection tool has been used in a number of fields especially in communication to identify patterns of message characteristics and monitor trends (Berelson 1952; Franzosi 2004a). This is because it is able to identify research deficiencies, which serve as a means for improving the validity of research, practice and policy making (Franzosi 2004a, 2004b). Content analysis involves a coding operation to transform raw data corpus into standard forms (Babbie 2001:309). Coding enables the study to make judgments on the “meanings of contiguous blocks,” serving as the “heart and soul” of text analyses (Ryan & Bernard 2000:780). Content analysis can be done using either a quantitative or qualitative approach. While qualitative content analysis comprises of coding acts for underlying themes in materials and texts that are being analysed (Bryman 2004:392), quantitative content analysis entails “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Nuendorf 2002:1). This study uses content analysis to gather and quantify data from the Facebook posts of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, which enabled the study to assess the frequency of communication and interactions on social media. A set of codes was discovered and attributed (Ryan & Bernard 2000:785) to qualitative data, thus written texts, pictures and videos, among others on Facebook pages of the two political parties were described and put into numbers in this study.

Content analysis of Facebook walls of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress were conducted to complement interviews. In the next stage after interviews, the study analysed the contents of Facebook posts of the two parties into numbers to corroborate or dispute qualitative data from interviews with their officers who are responsible for communication and social media activities. The study used search engines and screenshot captor to capture screenshots of the profile samples of the selected political parties in Ghana as they appeared on Facebook walls to access and examine contents of their pages. This was guided by a coding schedule (see Table 4 in Chapter 8) revised by the study from the framework of Gong and Lips (2009) to assist the researcher during the coding process. The units of web content analysis were posts on Facebook walls of the two parties for 17 days. The study collected data manually by tracking and monitoring official Facebook accounts of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress to count and analyse the nature of posts, messages and information released on parties’ walls, as well as determine the number of visitors and reactions, 7 days before, 3 days during and another 7 days after the intra-party congresses and national executive elections of the two parties in Ghana in 2018.

Using a coding sheet (see Appendix VI), the study gathered the dates of Facebook posts and number of *reactions*, *likes*, *comments* and *shares* in respect of posts. During the 17 days

sampled for analysing Facebook contents, the study spent 3 hours, from 9 pm to 12 am daily on the Facebook walls of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress to record and collect data. Reproduced from the framework of Gong & Lips (2009), this study categorised data from parties' Facebook pages into *Information provision*, *Interactive chats*, *Multimedia*, and *Targeted audience*. It organised data from parties' Facebook pages into quantitative forms, using tables, figures and simple percentages for interpretation and analysis to understand and draw conclusion.

### **5.6.2.1 Sample Size of Facebook Posts**

This study used a *grid selection tool scheme* (see Appendix VI) to examine and record the patterns of Facebook posts over a total period of 34 days, 17 days for each of the two political parties (see Table 1 in Chapter 6, and Table 2 in Chapter 7). The grid shows that within a period of 34 days sampled for both political parties, a total of 25 Facebook posts (see Table 3 in Chapter 8) were recorded by the study for its content analysis exercise. In the first 17 days sample of Facebook activities of the New Patriotic Party, it made 7 posts (see Table 1) on their Facebook wall, while in the other 17 days sample of Facebook activities the National Democratic Congress, it also made 18 posts (see Table 2) on their Facebook page. The exact data collection period for sampling Facebook posts are in two folds. In respect of the New Patriotic Party, posts were collected from 29 June 2018 to 15 July 2018. On the other hand, the collection of Facebook posts of the National Democratic Congress spanned from 10 November 2018 to 26 November 2018. These samples were collected daily from the official Facebook pages (profiles) of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, particularly during their respective internal national elections and congresses to elect executive officers of the two political parties in 2018. The rationale for this study was to save time, and gather posts daily and directly as they were made by the parties to prevent the risk of losing or perhaps missing old messages and information posted by the parties on their Facebook walls during the sampled days.

### **5.6.3 Observation**

Observational data were also interpreted as an auxiliary research to supplement interviews and content analysis. Observations were made during interviews with study participants that enabled the study to take notes in other contexts that could neither be gathered via interviews nor content analysis, but occurred in the practice of respondents and their political parties. Observation “involves the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviours in a natural setting” (Gorman & Clayton 2005:40). Observation enables the

researcher to know the impact of an activity or event, as well as gaining inside views of reality by focusing on a person and the setting. Observation involves two types: (i) participant versus non-participant observation, and (ii) structured and unstructured observation (Kumar 2011:141). From another angle, Baker (2006:174-178) posits observation in terms of the different roles that a researcher plays. These include “non-participation, complete observer, observer-as-participants, moderate or peripheral membership, participant-as-observer or active participation or active membership, complete participation and complete membership” (Baker 2006:174-178).

As the trend of qualitative research has changed in the twenty-first century, researchers have been largely involved in observations through membership role (Alder & Adler 1994:379). This means that in maintaining a balance between participation and observation, the researcher engages and interacts with study participants, but does not take part in the core activities of the membership and identification of the group (Baker 2006:176) through the peripheral membership approach (Adler & Adler 1994:379). The study chose to complement interviews and content analysis with observation as a means of safeguarding against responses that may be inaccurate. The study observed to provide brief accounts regarding the context of the sources of the data to be able to have understanding of the setting within which the participants who responded to the interviews work, as well as provide some information regarding the climate under which the various interviews were conducted (Miles & Huberman 2002; Creswell 2003, 2009). Specifically, observation allowed this study note visual clues and describe the locations, environments, receptions and impressions of office settings, as well as activities, behaviours and relevant comments made by participants during the visits to the premises of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress during the interviews and content analyses of Facebook walls.

The study observed what was done in social media communication with the unit of observation being political party (communicator)-stakeholder (followers) conversations on Facebook. The study assumed peripheral membership observation approach because the researcher wanted to limit his involvement in the activities of the participants of the study to prevent any influence in the interpretation of data (Baker 2006; Adler & Adler 1994). On a frequent basis, the researcher sat and interacted with communication officers of the political parties. In doing so, this study was able to strike a balance between observation and participation; hence the researcher did not become member or staff of any of the political parties selected as case study for collecting data. During the visits of the study to the offices of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in Accra, Ghana from 20 June 2018

to 18 July 2018, a number of scenes, activities and behaviours were observed at the respective locations and during the interviewing process. Using a field-notebook, the researcher noted interesting things that were observed, looked out for evidence and asked people to confirm things at the research site for analysis to draw conclusion.

### **5.7 Population, Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

The population indicates all the cases in a research to which the study wishes to apply its conclusion, or in other words, the sum of all cases to which a study wishes to make generalisation (Riege 2003:77-79). It is the subset of the population target or the study population that a researcher draws its samples. The population is the aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications (Polit & Hungler 1999:37). In this study, the target population includes all registered political parties in Ghana as of January 2018, while the accessible population is the officers of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. Officials who were responsible for formulating communication and media policies and engaging in social media activities in the two parties could be reached by the study.

A sample refers to the subset of a population that is chosen to participate in a study, or a fraction of the whole that is selected to take part in the study (Polit & Hungler 1999; Brink 1996). It entails a group of people, behaviours, event or any other elements with which a study is conducted. The process of choosing a portion of the population as representation of the larger population is described as sampling technique or procedure (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber 1998:250). It is the method by which a sample is chosen from a study population. The probability and non-probability sampling are the categories of sampling (Singh & Mangat 1996:6). The non-probability sampling entails the selection of samples that are not so much of a representative of the study's target population, based on the characteristics of the population (Meadows 2003:522). It is the determination of a representative segment of a bigger population of the study. While probability sampling uses random sampling techniques in determining samples, non-probability sampling uses non-random approaches, such as researcher's convenience and judgment in selecting samples. Non-probability sampling techniques include convenience sampling, snowball sampling, judgmental or purposive sampling and quota sampling (Singh & Mangat 1996:7).

The non-probability sampling method is flexible, allowing for less even representative samples to be chosen as opposed to random sampling. This means that in non-probability sampling, not all elements of the population have the chance for been chosen to participate in

this study, hence procedures, such as: convenience or accidental, judgmental or purposive, networking, snowball and quota sampling are employed in this procedure (Burns & Grove 2001:804). While judgmental sampling allows a researcher to choose a subset of the study population that has some unique backgrounds, experiences and skills regarding a phenomenon as samples, convenience sampling also refers to a subset of a study population that is sampled because it is accessible to the researcher (Meadows 2003:522). This study employed judgmental sampling as a form of non-probability sampling in selecting interviewees, cases and contents of data, among others. It uses non-probability sampling due to its applicability in both qualitative and quantitative studies, ensuring the flexibility to choose samples in a purposive way to represent and reflect the views and experiences of participants with regard to a phenomenon (Meadow 2003:522).

### **5.8 Data Analysis/Interpretation/Presentation**

In his definition, Bernard (2006:452) described analysis as the process of searching for patterns of data and ideas to explain the existence of such patterns and phenomenon. There are various techniques for analysing qualitative data (Saldana 2009:3). However, this study used thematic analysis to analyse data collected in the research. “A theme captures something important about the data collected in relation to the research question and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke 2006:82). Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method used for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes data set in (rich) detail, but quite frequently moves further, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke 2006:79). In conducting thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke (2006:87) propose six phases to guide the researcher’s activities, such as “becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report”.

Thematic analysis provides the study the theoretical freedom, flexibility and useful research tool to provide detailed accounts of data (Braun & Clarke 2006:78), and allows for explicit assumptions (Holloway & Todres 2003:347). A key technique for conducting thematic analysis of qualitative data is through analytical coding, where the study assigns words and phrases, usually summarising the evocative attributes and essence-capturing parts of language-based and visual data (Saldana 2009:3). In other words, coding makes it possible to arrange things in a systematic way, make something part of a classification or system, and to categorise (Saldana 2009:3). Similarly, Charmaz (2006:45) reiterates that coding “generates the bones of

analysis, while integration assembles those bones into a working skeleton”. Therefore, it is a good tactic for organising data during and after collection for analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994:56).

This study chose thematic analysis because it wanted to code and categorise data from the research. Thematic analysis enabled the study to organise and group coded data that were similar into “families” and “categories” because their characteristics were similar (Saldana 2009:8). Data including interview transcripts, Facebook posts and literature were coded into categories and themes by the study. It employed thematic analysis to qualitatively analyse interviews by identifying, analysing and reporting the main themes which emerged from the data collected. In doing so, the study organised data in minimal contexts and described data corpus in detail, as well interpreted different aspects of the topic of the study (Braun & Clarke 2006: 79). The study read field notes and transcripts several times to immerse itself into the data collected for wider overview of the contents of the interviews conducted. This made it easier for the study to familiarise with the qualitative data. This was then followed by an iterative coding process after immersing itself into the data. The study initially identified descriptive names for specific units of meaning (consistent themes and posts) with respect to research aim and objectives in search of major themes. The labelled units of meaning were further evaluated for coherence and relevance to generate a list of codes that are of interest to this study. The categories were systematically labelled according to their relevance to data, theoretical framework and literature review for the research. Upon review of several potential themes, the study narrowed its definition and naming to 4 major themes and 17 sub-themes (see Chapters 6 and 7) as the basis in analysing interview data and writing the report. The units of meaning generated from notes and interview transcripts were systematically assigned to the final list of categories that emerged. The study then provided briefs and discussions of major categories using quotations and verbatim responses of interviewees to substantiate their opinions and views where necessary in producing the report.

The study also used content analysis to put data into quantitative formats. Contents of Facebook pages of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress were analysed to determine the frequency of activities and interactivity. The quantitative analysis of Facebook data of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress enabled the study to corroborate or dispute qualitative responses from interviews with participants. Reproduced from the framework of Gong and Lips (2009), this study categorised data from parties’ Facebook pages into *Information provision*, *Interactive chats*, *Multimedia*, and *Targeted audience*. These categories of quantitative data from parties’ Facebook pages were organised

into visual forms, tables, figures and simple percentages for interpretation and analysis to understand and draw conclusion.

The study analysed data from observation qualitatively by giving descriptions in the form of writing what was observed or seen at the time of visits by the researcher to the research site (that is the national headquarters and offices of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, as well as their officers). When the researcher arrived at the national secretariat of the New Patriotic Party at Asylum Down in Accra, which is a storey building painted white, he reported at the security point. Upon introduction, the researcher was introduced to the reception of the main building where a staff directed the researcher to the communication outfit of the party. The communication department occupies rooms on the ground level of the party's storey building. In the communication department, there were 7 desks and chairs for officers, 6 of these were located in an open office for subordinates and 1 in an adjacent office for the director of communication. Each of the desks had a computer connected to the internet that officers use for their communication and monitoring activities. The setting of the communication department was professional even though most of the officers were not professionally trained communicators. There was team work as members were seen as a cohesive group, providing support and interactions with one another in a number of communication activities especially related to their intra-party national executive elections during the visits of the study.

As regards National Democratic Congress, the researcher first reported at the security post when he visited the secretariat. The researcher was directed to the administration section, where a secretary introduced the study to the communication department at the second level of the party's white storey building at Adabraka in Accra, Ghana. The communication department occupied an open space on the second floor of the building, which was partitioned into three rooms: one for the communication officer, and the others for the two deputy communication officers. Each of the 3 rooms had desks and chairs, but had no computers, internet nor equipment for communication, making it difficult for officers to conduct their activities and monitor the media. There were no other permanent officers apart from these three elected officers for communication activities. However, the department was managed daily by the communication officer. In contrary to the New Patriotic Party, there was lack of cohesion within the communication outfit of the National Democratic Congress. The study observed that officers of the communication team of the National Democratic Congress were blaming each other for their party's defeat in the 2016 general elections in Ghana. Other items, such as messages and information observed in social media communication, particularly Facebook

walls of the two political parties including visuals, pictures, texts and views, among others were also counted and reported quantitatively as an inherent concomitant of content analysis, which has been discussed (see section 5.4.2) of this chapter.

Once data is collected there is the need to process them for meaning-making. In this regard, raw data corpus and results were analysed and interpreted. Basic statistical calculations through Microsoft Excel were used to calculate totals, percentages and averages, among others of data collected from content analysis of Facebook posts of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. These data were put into tables and visuals. On the other hand, the results from thematic analysis of qualitative interview data were presented in narratives. The qualitative and quantitative data from the political were compared.

### **5.9 Validity and Reliability**

Issues regarding the validity and reliability of the instruments employed are critical to the findings of the study. Validity describes the degree to which a research reflects the particular concepts that the study attempts to investigate. It is the measurement of truth or falsity as regards data collected via the use of research instrument (Burns & Grove 2001:226). It is comprised of two types, thus *external* and *internal* validity (Berg 2007:110). While internal validity shows the extent to which a study actually measures what it intends to measure, external validity provides answers to questions for measurement (Alshenqeeti 2014:43). Internal validity addresses the difference found in measurement, as external validity considers how findings can be generalised. In this study validity, describes the measurement of truth or falsity of the perceived or assumed usage and experiences of social media and Facebook in relationship management and advancement of political agenda as reported by officers involved in communication and media activities of political parties. The validity of instruments posits how “the instrument actually reflects the abstract being examined” (Burns & Grove 2001:814). A number of factors influence the external and internal validity of measuring instruments that is the semi-structured interview guide that is used to collect data on the appropriation of social media in political communication and elections. This concept shows how the factors, identified as the utility and challenges by officers of political parties, truly depicts what prevents the effective appropriation of social media, instead of attributing to variables that are not connected or related to the aim of the study (Burns & Grove 2001:800). In order to enhance validity and minimise potential bias, Cohen *et al.* (2007:150) suggest a number of factors that have to be considered, such as:

The attitudes, views and prospects of the interview, a tendency for interviewer to see the interviewee on his or her own merits, a tendency for interviewers to seek answers to support their preconceived notions, misconceptions on the part of the interviewer with regard to what the interviewee is saying, and misunderstanding on the part of the interviewee with regard to what is being asked.

On the other hand, Alshenqeeti (2014:44) referred to reliability as the extent to which a particular research instrument produces the same result and outcome when repeated. It is the level of consistency with which the instruments adopted for the study measure particular attributes. Similarly, De Vos (1998:85) posits reliability as how the independent administration of the similar instruments generates the same results under similar conditions. Considering reliability in the context of interviews, Brewerton and Millward (2001:74) asserted that interview as a data collection tool faces the challenge of validity due to its openness to many biases, making it unreliable when researchers intend to make comparison between data corpus. In other words, the reliability of interviewing is “elusive” (Creswell 2009:153). As a remedy to this challenge, Alshenqeeti (2014:44) recommended a number of techniques that can help researchers to enhance the validity and reliability of interviews and qualitative research. These include: “avoiding asking leading questions; taking notes not just depending on tape recorders, conducting a pilot interview, and giving the interviewee a chance to sum up and clarify the points they have made” (Alshenqeeti 2014:44).

Against this backdrop, this study ensured that it put its personal attitudes, views and perspectives aside during the interviews. This gave participants the chance to provide responses to question on their own merits rather than influencing respondents to follow any preconceived notions of the researcher. Such neutrality made it possible for any potential misconception and misunderstanding between the researcher and respondents to be avoided in this study to enhance validity. More so, the study avoided asking interviewees leading questions which could direct them towards particular responses, combined audio-recording and note-taking, and provided participants the opportunity to sum up and also make clarifications of points and answers they give. These techniques were adopted by the study to ensure the validity and reliability of data collection instruments employed in eliciting information from participants.

### **5.10 Comparative Approach**

The comparative approach is adopted to highlight the similarities and differences between activities and practices of political communication in two different parties in Ghana.

This study attempted to point out similarities and differences between officers and communicators who are involved with social media communication in the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. In doing so, it is critical to examine the relevant aspects of the political parties, which could help the study to illustrate how political communication is practiced in the individual cases. Comparative research examines “patterns of similarities and difference across cases and trying to come to terms with diversity” (Ragin 1994:401). Conceptualising from another context, Hantrais (2009:2) described comparative research as:

The term widely employed to describe studies of societies, countries, cultures, systems, institutions, social structures and change over time and space, when they are carried out with the intention of using the same research tools to compare systematically the manifestations of phenomenon in more than one temporal or socio-cultural setting.

This study is a comparative case study research and uses some elements of the cultural-context research approach. The case study focuses on a few cases and examines them in detail. It does not generalise, but makes comparison of cases within society (Burns 1997:364). As mentioned earlier, case study is helpful to identify factors which are constant or varies among a limited number of cases (Neuman 2000:403). This study sought to determine how social media especially Facebook promotes two-way symmetrical communication and relationship, as well as how it is perceived and practiced for the advancement of political agenda especially intra-party elections. In this sense, the appropriation of social media as an interactive form of communication is assumed to be a factor, which could either remain constant or change in the activities of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. Within the cultural-context approach, a researcher explores studies which are surrogates for a certain society or unit. In this regard, countries or societies serve as the “backdrop for examining a common social process” (Neuman 2000:403). Hence, this study sees it critical to investigate and compare many aspects of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, as they appropriate technology that is Facebook in managing relationships with their stakeholders and advancement of political agenda in Ghana. This study involves an interpretive approach because it analyses semi-structured interviews in relation to the concepts of the *Technology Appropriation Model*, *Relationship Management* and *Agenda-Setting*. It also uses mixed methods especially content analysis and observation in making meaning and analysing online content quantitatively. This study is case-oriented because it analyses semi-structured

interviews from eight participants in two political parties, and uses a *single-country* research design (Lor 2010; Landman 2008), focusing on the environmental variables in Ghana.

### **5.10.1 Methods of Agreement and Difference**

Developed in the 1800s by John Stuart Mill, the methods of *agreement* and *difference* are used for comparison (Neuman 2000). The method of agreement enables the researcher to focus attention on common features across cases, the researcher attempts to establish how cases bear similar outcomes, and then tries to identify common causes of such outcomes, though other characteristics of the cases could differ (Neuman 2000:428). With this in mind, the study adopted this method to explore many similarities to provide explanations for any common outcome in cases (Drageset 2014:59). Conversely, the method of difference is considered as *double application* of the method of agreement. As regards the method of difference, which has been widely used together with the former (that is method of agreement), the study locates cases which are similar in several ways but differ in few dimensions. It “pinpoints features whereby a set of cases is similar with regard to an outcome and causal features” (Neuman 2000:428). These two methods (that is difference and agreement) discussed above provide a useful tool for analysing the similarities and difference between the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress regarding their political communication activities in Ghana.

### **5.10.2 Equivalence**

Before moving to the next section, it is necessary to briefly discuss the importance of equivalence as part of the subjects under this chapter. This is because without “equivalence,” a researcher cannot use the same measures and concepts in different cultures or contexts to make comparisons (Neuman 2000:409). This is especially true considering the different roles of the various participants in the study play in their respective political parties. It is ideal that all participants in the study held the same positions in their respective political parties. However, it was not possible for the study to recruit eight participants and respondents with similar positions because of the different organisational structures and prominence given to communication and media activities by the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. It is noteworthy, given its impact on data. Nonetheless, this study contends that the research is valuable because it investigates and highlights an area and group of people that lack adequate empirical evidence.

### **5.11 Ethical Consideration**

An ethics application is required for research projects where the subjects of the study are not already available in the public domain (Drageset 2014:51). This is because without ethics the integrity of academic research is affected or perhaps compromised (Bryman & Bell 2011; Dragaset 2014). In order to ensure that this study was carried out in accordance with the University of KwaZulu-Natal's procedures on ethics, it was reviewed and examined by the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). Upon all ethical considerations were met, the University of KwaZulu-Natal approved the study and issued protocol / ethics clearance certificate (see Appendix III) on January 8, 2018. Before obtaining approval and clearance for the study to be conducted, the researcher received gate-keeping permission letters (See Appendices I and II) were received by the study from these two parties. They were attached to the researcher's application to the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) for the study's ethics approval. This gate-keeping permission granted the study access to personnel of the two political parties for interviews. The participants and interviewees who responded to research questions were given detailed information about the study. The interview schedule was given to them sometime before the interviews and intra-party elections took place, so they could have ideas about the kind of questions to be asked.

As scholars (see Brennen 2013; Silverman 2010) suggest, it is necessary that researchers secure informed consent from study participants and interviewees. Informed consent is the means or process of providing relevant information on the research to inform the decisions of the interviewees about whether to participate in the study or not (Silverman 2010, 2011). This ensures that participants have better understanding of what is presented to them, and also enables participants to confirm their voluntary participation in the study (Silverman 2010, 2011). This thesis is a case study of two political parties, and therefore personnel who participated were made to understand that their identities would not be explicitly documented, which they agreed. Therefore, to protect the identities of the respondents in the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, data collected via interviews (see Chapter 5) were analysed by themes. Similarly, data collected from content analysis of Facebook (see Chapter 8) were analysed by themes, codes and meanings. The participants in this study understood the purposes of the research, as were explained to respondents and informed consent (see Appendix IV) were obtained. At the beginning of interviews, the interviewees in the study completed and signed Informed Consent form, which provided details regarding the conditions and process involved in this thesis. This was to indicate their willingness to participate, as well as understanding of the terms and conditions for participation in this study.

The informed consent made interviewees aware that they could make contacts with the researcher anytime during the study for any question(s) until the researcher finally submits the thesis. It also indicated that the interviews would be recorded or audio-taped and transcribed for analysis, and that such recordings and quotes from interviews and the full thesis will be made available to them after completion upon request. The informed consent also made participants aware that the study was for academic purposes and therefore no financial payment or reward would be made to them should they decide to participate. It stated that participants had the right and option to withdraw their participation from the study at any time, and could also amend or retract any comments they make during the study. As part of ensuring confidentiality, the informed consent indicated that no personal information would be made public unless otherwise authorised by participants for publication. In this regard, the study used pseudonyms to replace the true identity and the names of respondents. It also showed that data collected would be kept in the Centre for Communication, Media and Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa for a period of five years. It also confirmed that participants had read and understood the information on the Informed Consent form with particular regard to their role and contribution to the study.

### **5.12 Conclusion**

The spread of social media is transforming communication in a number of ways, making it an area of study which practitioners and academics are seeking to understand their impact in diverse forms. This chapter provide the research methodology adopted for this study and gave detailed descriptions regard the research context. The rationale for adopting a mixed method approach by using qualitative and quantitative techniques were discussed (Cameron 2011:246-250). The study focused on interviews and content analysis of posts regarding their meanings and frequency as opposed to broad patterns. More so, a single method approach would not be suitable in addressing the research questions identified by this study, which sought to investigate, more specifically, how political parties (that is New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress) use Facebook as a social media communication tool and how they reflect Carrol's (2001, 2004) model of technology appropriation. The research questions also sought to understand how the interactions (if any) and posts of the two political parties on Facebook reflect relationship management and agenda-setting as concepts in political communication.

## CHAPTER 6

### NEW PATRIOTIC PARTY

#### 6.0 Introduction

This study employed a mixed method approach through interviews and content analysis to collect data required to show the findings of this thesis. In this chapter and the next, the data collected from interviews with respondents and contents of Facebook pages in the cases of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress as political parties is analysed. The chapters on data analysis and findings begun with the New Patriotic Party because it conducted its congress and internal elections for national executives in July 2018 before the National Democratic Congress held its intra-party elections in November 2018. These chapters engage in analyses by grouping participants in the study by cases. This is to demonstrate how the contexts, situations and experiences of respondents, as well as their narratives are representatives of the appropriation of social media in political communication and intra-party elections in Ghana.

The data is subsequently analysed to show commonalities and differences within and between the two political parties under study. These enabled the study to present findings, as well as discuss and compare the data obtained with previous research and literature. This type of analysis allows for holistic and comparative approaches to the study findings, which is significant to narrations including thematic analysis (Kim 2015; Cresswell 2009). The first parts of the chapters present findings from interviews with participants in the two political parties. These results are illustrated in descriptive formats which include using direct quotes from participants in the study, as well as the interpretation of the researcher. Such an approach is consistent in terms of practice in research involving qualitative studies (Caelli, Ray & Mill 2003).

Inasmuch as data collected was done via interviews that were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed, the study makes use of excerpts from the audio transcriptions to give evidence of themes that were identified in the data. This serves as a way of giving explanations and reports in respect of data analysis. With regard to data from content analysis, the study provides samples of screen shots of Facebook pages of the two political parties to give evidence of the contents, nature, number and frequency of posts. In respect of findings from interviews, each of the excerpts contains reference to the participant whose interviews it emanated from. For the purposes of confidentiality, which was agreed in the informed consent form, this study uses pseudonyms in the form of letters. As thematic analysis was used in the framework of the

research, the study was also guided by the themes that are inherent in the questions of the research. However, it is noteworthy to indicate that any themes which emerged via the analysis process, were also added in the report, irrespective of whether they formed part of the initial research focus or not.

In the second part of the chapter, data collected from the Facebook walls via content analysis are presented in quantitative forms using tables and figures. This data analysis and findings are presented in themes and codes which were identified in the data collected, as well as their relevance with respect to the framework of the research in general. The initial research questions provided opportunity for the study to discuss several areas within the research interviews, which highlighted a number of themes to explore. The first of these questions addresses how participants distinguish between the role played in and reason for utilising and appropriating Facebook by political parties in Ghana as different from other forms of communication. Secondly, the perspectives of officials of political parties regarding how they use Facebook to engage with stakeholders for communication and activities before, during and after internal party executive elections.

Thirdly, the research questions in the study focused on exploring how political parties and their stakeholders interact meaningfully on Facebook to create mutually beneficial relationship to achieve political goals; and the fourth initial question identifying the nature and overall quantitative content of messages and corresponding comments posted by political parties and their followers on Facebook Walls in the sharing of political opinions. Four major themes emerged that were common across the data collected from interviews with participants in both New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. These main themes include:

*Understanding political communication, Understanding social media, Facebook in political communication, and Facebook engagement and relationship management.* Under these salient themes are a number of sub themes that are discussed.

### **6.1 Qualitative (Interviews) Data Analysis**

This chapter specifically provides data analysis and findings with respect to New Patriotic Party. Four respondents who were involved with communication and social media activities in the New Patriotic Party were recruited and interviewed. In the case of New Patriotic Party, the first respondent is referred to as *Participant A*, second as *Participant B*, third as *Participant C*, and the fourth as *Participant D*. Details regarding when interviews were conducted with participants in New Patriotic Party are as follows: (Participant A, interview,

29/06/2018), (Participant B, interview, 27/06/2018), (Participant C, interview, 25/06/2018) and (Participant D, interview, 26/06/2018).

The narratives of participants are read comparatively to demonstrate how social media have been appropriated by the New Patriotic Party in political communication, with particular focus on how Facebook is applied by the party before, during and after intra-party elections to elect national executives. These offer a picture of the utility of social media communication in politics. The data from interviews with participants in the New Patriotic Party is analysed in respect of the main themes highlighted above.

## **6.2 Understanding Political Communication**

Participants in the New Patriotic Party demonstrated considerable understanding and knowledge of political communication. These key considerations from participants are interpreted as follows: *meaning of political communication, characteristics of political communication; role of political communication; and political communication challenges*. These will now be discussed.

### **6.2.1 Meaning of political communication**

One way of understanding political communication, as expressed by participants, was situating it in the context of political actors. Participants explained that the sending and receiving of message between political parties, citizens and the media were what they considered to be political communication. In the view of participant A, *political communication represents any form of communication that is meant to elicit the support of citizens and to mobilise the support of citizens for national development*. This understanding puts political communication from the perspective ruling party. However, considering it from the perspective of an opposition party, Participant A clarified:

*I guess that if we were in opposition, I will define political communication in a different way, as any communication that is meant to mobilise and galvanise the support of the people for the visions and aspirations of the party for political power.*

This understanding is not much different from how Participant B put it in a general context, describing it as any form of communication that is political in nature or focuses on politics. *These include political manifestoe, parliamentary proceedings, and campaign messages, among others, all constitute political communication*, Participant B elaborated. Drawing from similar thoughts to extend these understandings, Participant C posited political communication

as *involving political actors, particularly political parties sending messages across social media and traditional media in the form of press releases to targets, electorates and the general public in return for votes or any other motivation*. However, from a nuance perspective, the last respondent from the New Patriotic Party, Participant D, referred to political communication as:

*Getting to know what is happening in the country, the environment and conditions, as well as challenges we are experiencing as a country and making them known to the public; or perhaps giving them the voices in the state of affairs.*

The various understandings provided by the four participants of the New Patriotic Party concur on dissemination and exchange of information and messages that are aimed at political goals as critical to political communication. Therefore, as a follow-up, the study attempted to identify some of the characteristics that distinguished political communication from other forms of communication.

### **6.2.2 Characteristics of political communication**

Demonstrating their knowledge, participants discussed a number of features that make political communication distinct from other types of communication. They identified some of the features of political communication as ways of indicating their understandings of the various dimensions of communication. Participants acknowledge the ability of political communication to trigger some form of reactions or behaviours from recipients of the message. For example, Participant A reported:

*My understanding of political communication is embedded in how they evoke some kind of action from those who receive such communication. Therefore, if you call it religious communication, for instance, it will be meant to illicit allegiance by the recipients of the information towards either to God or a deity, or certain religious values. And so, in the same sense a piece of communication we call political communication is meant to illicit a certain purpose or galvanise support for a political idea or project.*

Other participants focused their distinctions of political communication on how these forms of communication are tailored toward addressing the political needs of citizens and political parties with respect to policies and interventions, among others. Putting it into the context and source of communication, Participant C said:

*The content and source of the information or the sender of the message in political communication has to be a politician or any other political actor, and geared towards amassing votes or trying to get political power from the electorates, or perhaps trying to get them for votes.*

These responses are not very different from the other two participants, especially Participant D, as he acknowledged the characteristics of political communication in terms of their *ability to set and execute agenda in politics especially in electoral processes and competitions*. Moving further from their features, participants enumerated a number of roles and opportunities political communication brings to the New Patriotic Party as a major political party in Ghana.

### **6.2.3 Political communication in politics**

As identified by participants the role of political communication cannot be underestimated, given that it serves as the vehicle for engagements between political parties and their stakeholders. In this regard, they enumerated a number of functions that political communication enables them to perform. For his part, Participant A signalled that political communication is very central to all political activities because it is critical to the operations and survival of political parties. Participant A underlined:

*Everything about politics rests on communication. Especially, if you want to win elections; after selecting a candidate, your business as a political party including its communicators is to communicate the values of your candidate to minimise his or her weaknesses as much as possible to prevent criticisms. This means that whether a party or candidate wins or loses elections actually depends on how well it has communicated its values, programmes and most importantly its candidate. So for me, everything about politics is communication, communication and communication.*

Other participants reconsidered the role of political communication in their party's activities and programmes to highlight the opportunities that such communication provide to them. Participant B underscored:

*Through political communication, we are able as a party to craft messages that appropriately target and influence electorates towards our political goals and agenda since a large number of the population are uninformed about issues.*

These assertions are not far from what the other participants in the New Patriotic Party, especially Participant C who noted the role of political communication as significant. In the view of Participant C:

*Political communication allows the party to engage in political marketing and advertising, which provides the opportunity to relay the party's philosophies, ideologies, policies and plans to the citizenry. Therefore, if you want the electorates, audiences or delegates to know more about your party, then obviously it can only be possible through communication.*

Throwing more light on the responses given by the other respondents, Participant D also posited political communication in terms of how such activity allows the party and its communication personnel to let Ghanaians including its members and the general public to know and understand what is really happening in government as a ruling party. *Through this, we are able to make people appreciate how our party is working hard to meet their aspirations and expectations*, Participant D testified. The responses given by participants demonstrate how important political communication is to the New Patriotic Party, as well as the opportunities they present to them as they rely on these activities in its attempts and process to win and maintain power, and also govern the country. Given the various descriptions, there is consensus by participants in New Patriotic Party that many benefits are derived from political communication activities. Participants situated these benefits in the kind of support that the party is able to galvanise over time through communication, as well as the opinions that are elicited from citizens through the process. For example, Participant A appraised the benefits as follows:

*If we put it in the general context of elections, then we can say the benefits and dividends of political communication will be if we won political power. If this happens, then we can say that we have succeeded in convincing the people through our communication and messages that are put out for them to be able to vote for our party.*

These assertions highlight that communication lubricates the activities of politics in the sense that it remains the fulcrum of political activities. It lubricates politics because its absence keeps political activities and programmes silent and away from the citizenry; hence providing opportunities for the party to sell itself to public and voters.

#### 6.2.4 Political communication challenges

It is important to acknowledge that though political communication serves as the vessel of politics, providing many benefits and opportunities for the New Patriotic Party, participants identified a number of challenges that impede such activities. According to participants the challenges with respect to their political communication relate to lack of training, education and professionalism in the delivery of such activities. Participants indicate that inasmuch as communication depends on *who, where, whom, why* and *how*, the political party could go wrong in its communication with people. Participant A described:

*Sometimes we send the wrong person to talk to the wrong audience, and we get backlash from the public, criticising us for not sending the right people to particular areas and programmes to speak on behalf of our party. For example, if you go the Northern part of Ghana and you begin to speak "Twi," which is largely the language of the people in the South for engagements and mobilisation of Northern people who may not understand that language, it obviously drives a lot of people off. This will be problematic to your political communication, as the people in the North may perceive you as positing the speakers of the "Twi" language (that is people from the South) as superior, which can limit the potentials and outcome of your communication. This challenge could also arise in terms of religion, among others.*

These responses emphasise the need for political parties to be strategic in political communication by factoring the geographical, gender and religious consideration before the selecting specific officials to represent and speak for the party at different occasions to achieve positive outcomes. As a way of addressing such issues, Participant A pointed out that the New Patriotic party has created special wings and branches in the party that engage and communicate with specific stakeholders including ethnic and religious groups, among others in Ghana. Another challenge is in respect of the levels of education, which Participant B expressed in his words as follows:

*My party has a large number of intellectuals and enlightened people in its fold and this sometimes make it difficult for our members and communicators to relate and communicate well with the masses who are mostly not literate. Therefore, sometimes when they get access to the television and radio stations they fail to make meanings of issues to audiences. Instead of establishing*

*rapport with the people on the ground at the grassroots level, they speak big English and jargons. I agree that sometimes it is good, but sometimes you reckon that it is one thing talking logically, and another thing speaking to the understanding of your listeners, viewers or recipients. And this affects meaningful political communication.*

The third issue that emerge is the lack of trained communicators and professional development for officials who communicate on behalf of the New Patriotic Party. Participant B lamented:

*We do not have the kind of training required by our communicators to speak for the party. People think that once a member of the party has completed university or any tertiary institution, or perhaps once anybody can speak, then that person has to be given the chance to represent the party in political communication. I beg to differ because communication is a science and an art that is learnt, so for any member to be chosen as a communicator for the New Patriotic Party, he or she must have knowledge of the intricacies of political communication. Unfortunately, this is not the situation with our party.*

This assertion reinforces the claim by Participant A that there are many party members who are untrained and do not have communication skill, but because politics remain a mass event, or perhaps deals with the masses and numbers, the party welcomes everybody and anybody who wants to belong and contribute to the party. This means that inasmuch as the party is open to all, members with the zeal to communicate and canvass for vote for the party at certain times end up annoying listeners and electorates because they are not able to convince people. This is what Participant A referred to as the problem of miscommunication, stressing that though the party receives backlash from such challenges, it tries to manage them and weather the storm. The challenge of meeting the expectations of audiences in political communication appear to be compounded by the inability of communicators of the political party to study the psychology and environment of the communication targets to capture the mind-sets of people to political messages. Laying more emphasis on this, Participant B noted that:

*Politics is all about society, so when you know and understand the norms, language and needs of a particular society, then you will be able to understand and appreciate what the people want to hear. However, we do not seem to give any huge currency to these factors as political communicators of our party.*

These issues in respect of understanding the context of society to which messages are sent draws in the challenge of language barrier as an impediment to effective political communication. As Ghana is a country made up of people from diverse cultures with different languages, Participant D signalled that it was difficult to reach many people who are not conversant with particular languages in communication and campaigns as also highlighted earlier by Participant A. These and related issues including the lack of uniformity in political communication messages therefore provide space for media outlets to interpret, phrase or frame communication from the political party in different ways to seek their interests and influence opinions. According to Participant D, these issues raise questions regarding the sources of political information, especially where the public and media have relied on grapevine, eavesdropping and rumours from unofficial mouth pieces of the party. The next drawback emanates from the alternate roles that political parties experienced in Ghana, in terms of being in government and opposition at different times. Participant B classified:

*When you are in opposition, it is easier to manage and rely on political communication as a party because it is not too difficult to control your communicators and communication activities, such as press conferences, political speeches and releases, among others. However, when you are in power everything becomes complicated given that communication activities then go beyond, from the party to government. This is because the information minister then takes up the leading role because the management of communication of the president, vice president, ministries and other state agencies, as well as the party come into play. Therefore, political communication becomes cumbersome due to the duplication of roles and conflict of duty when the party is in power.*

Drawing from the alternate positions of the party in different time, Participant C sums up the drawbacks by situating the challenge of political communication in respect of access to the media. Participant C recounted in the following lines:

*It is very difficult for you as a party to get the media platforms for your political communication activities. It is not easy getting the media especially the state-owned outlets like the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and their networks for your communicators to spread your political messages. This is because these state-owned media outlets are particularly interested in showcasing what the ruling party and government are doing at every time. Therefore, when you are*

*competing with the party in government for space to cover and propagate your messages, it becomes difficult because you get limited time and consideration for communication in the media. And it is very expensive for a political party to buy airtime and space in private traditional news media in Ghana for your political communication activities.*

### **6.3 Understanding Social Media**

The participants of New Patriotic Party were aware of the social media phenomenon. The communication personnel of the party are familiar with these new platforms. They gave evidence to demonstrate their awareness and understandings of the phenomenon especially in politics. The various considerations by participants are interpreted in terms of the definitions of social media, features and functions, as well as political appropriation including opportunities and challenges.

#### **6.3.1 Meaning of social media**

One of the meanings of social media, as expressed by participants was their representation of the virtual world, especially how it links people across boundaries in interactive ways. For example, Participant A defined: *Without quoting anybody on it and from my own understanding, social media is a virtual world that connects millions of people across boundaries in a very interactive way that other traditional forms of media cannot.* This definition is not very different from the understanding of Participant C who also described them as being internet-based communication in virtual space. Participant C signified that:

*Social media are internet-based networks that operate in virtual space where one can send messages across to many targets. They aid communication and enhance a two-way symmetric communication whereby the sender sends the messages instantly and they easily get feedback from recipients and audiences, despite that sometimes it is difficult to identify the senders of messages on these social media channels.*

Other participants posited it in other contexts. Buttressing the views of the two, Participant D restated that social media primarily serves as medium of sharing and exchanging information and messages. This assertion does not seem to distinguish social media from other media because just like these new platforms traditional news media are also used for sending and receiving information. However, unlike the other participants, although Participant B was also aware of social media, he could not provide concrete meaning of the concept of social media,

except to concede his lack of understanding from his statement. Participant B said: *I must admit my deficiency here, my knowledge and understanding of social media is limited. But all I know basically is that social media is the link or connection between the media and society. I am putting it in social perspective.*

### **6.3.2 Social media features**

The participants in the New Patriotic Party concurred on the characteristics of social media by enumerating similar examples of social media. All the participants mentioned *websites, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapshots, You-Tube and Telegrams as different forms of social media that are available for communication and engagements.* Participants were aware of the distinctions between the different types of social media. Given this, Participant C specified that:

*Social media are made up of different sorts. For example, as you may know Facebook is a social networking site, as Twitter also remains a micro blogging site, while the likes of WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Snapshots, among others also belong to their respective families.*

However, highlighting on the features that make social media different from other forms of communication tools, Participant A summarised:

*Social media are unique in a number of ways, but the interactions that these platforms permit are basically what make them different from the traditional and other forms of media. Apart from these interactions they provide in communication, they are free or perhaps very cheap to use, not restricted or controlled making it easier for anyone anywhere to communicate and have feedback as quick as possible.*

### **6.3.3 Social media functions in political party**

From the New Patriotic Party, one of the key functions that social media play in the party and democracy lie in how they are able to create deliberations. Participants indicated social media provided them convenient ways to deliberate with their members and other stakeholders in democracy. Specifically, Participant D identified: *one function of social media is that they enable the party to share news within and outside the party; we share different forms of information and messages about our political activities and events, among others.* The assertion is not different from what Participant B posited by recounting that with the emergence

of social media the New Patriotic Party could easily access and provide information about government to the general public. Extending the discussion, Participant A reinforced:

*Without a doubt, I can say that social media is a major part of every political calculation we make as a party because the young people of the world are now virtually social media animals, if I may put it that way. Therefore, if you want to catch them as a political party, you have to dwell on the functionalities to reach and interact with them.*

The assertions of Participant C were not anything different from the other participants, except to note that the functionalities and utility of social media cut across political parties. Participants emphasised that the functions of social media vary depending on the purpose and outcome the communication by the party intends to achieve at particular times. The functions of social media appear to have changed the political communication landscape and offered new opportunities for the party to leverage social media for advancing political goals.

#### **6.3.4 Social media appropriation in politics**

Social media has become an integral part of the communication activities of officials in the New Patriotic Party. This is because personnel of the party have appropriated social media as tools in their political communication activities. The participants narrated a number of ways by which the party has used these platforms. From the standpoint of a party in government, Participant A illustrated:

*Being in charge of government and party communication and information, we use social media so much. In my ministry, for example, we have an official website and Facebook page. Then we have the official Facebook pages of our ministers, as well as their personal pages, so you can imagine one has virtually over three social media platforms and pages to manage and work with, depending on which one of them is used for, and so on, The party, which is the mother of government, as well as the presidency also have social media accounts on a number of platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, among others.*

This underscores the appropriation of social media by communication personnel, showing how the party has tried in several ways to integrate and maintain its presence on different types of social media to communicate with people. These efforts to make social media part of the party

activities emanate from the fact that they provide alternatives to the traditional ways of reaching out to people and audiences. Buttressing the observation, Participant C outlined:

*We have not only created accounts and profiles, but continuously maintain our presence on several social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and the rest. These channels serve as alternatives to the traditional news media for our broadcast and publications because it is comparably cheaper and faster in the sense that we virtually pay nothing for their use to achieve results.*

On the other hand, Participant D put the appropriation of social media by New Patriotic Party in the context of elections through this illustration:

*Social media has become part of our daily life as a political party. For example, we have used Facebook as part of our communication tools in various elections, where the party and its candidates have used their pages to campaign, shares information in general and internal elections. These platforms enable us to monitor our members and their activities and programmes, which could not have been possible for us to do through the traditional ways, considering our logistical constraints as a political party.*

These expressions draw in the motivation behind the attempts at making social media a core part of the communication activities of the party. A number of factors appeared to motivate the New Patriotic Party in embracing social media as part of their communication activities. As Participant D amplified:

*We are motivated to use social media because it is economical and cheaper to use, apart from their interactivity and other unique features. More so, with the growth and popularity of these new platforms, as well as a stakeholder-centric view, we had to foray into these social media. We needed them as a political party to be able to monitor our members, stakeholders and largely reach many people wherever they are.*

Additionally, Participant B indicated that the commitment and support from the party encouraged them to explore and focus more readily on the use of social media, stressing that: *unlike other political parties that are frightened by the risks posed by these platforms, the New Patriotic Party recognise social media as needed resources and so the party is very supportive*

*of their use in communication.* Against this backdrop, participants argued that the New Patriotic Party recognised social media activities as a serious venture rather than an ad hoc practice. In demonstrating how serious the party took social media activities, Participant A reflected:

*Certainly, social media activities are not run on ad hoc basis in our party because we have people who run those social media including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages, among others. As you know a minister is usually too busy to be sitting on social all the time, so we have party communicators who are tasked with the responsibility of managing the social media, such as daily uploads; informing the people of what are doing everyday as a political party in government; and putting press releases on our various pages. So really and truly, social media is an all-round activity in our party.*

In concurrence with Participant A, another respondent, Participant B also posited social media activities as serious and well planned through his narration as follows:

*We see social media as a serious business. You could see before you got into my office there were some young men in the main office. Some of these communication personnel are graduates in communication and are specifically tasked to handle social media as a specialised area because of their significance to the party. These guys are well versed in information, communication and technology, who handle social media as their full time roles.*

These two respondents Participants A and B emphasised that as a way of demonstrating how important social media mean to the party, the leadership tries to engage experts in the field to provide training and lectures on the development and effective use of the platforms. However, the responses of the two other participants appear to contradict the narrations given by Participants A and B. For example, Participant C disputed:

*As the communication outfit of the party, we do not have well-structured programmes and activities in our department. We only have one or two members of our communication team who sometimes post information about the party as and when activities take place, but these are not regular.*

This revelation was corroborated by Participant D who claimed that the New Patriotic Party delivered social media activities as an ad hoc process because activities and tasks related to

these forms of communication are not particularly assigned to any personnel identified in the communication department of the party. Participant D revealed:

*I do not know if we have any of us in the communication department who is specifically charged with social media functions. I must be frank with you because we do not have that. What I know is that some party communicators who do not directly work in this communication department undertake these social media activities for the party occasionally.*

### **6.3.5 Opportunities and challenges of social media**

The participants in the New Patriotic Party acknowledged that there a number of opportunities and challenges that were associated with the use of social media for political communication. With regard to the benefits, Participants highlighted the chance to make their information and messages easily and quickly accessible to the public. This is what Participant B reported:

*The benefits of social media to us as a political party are enormous. For example, at the moment, we have over thirty-seven (37) ministries and many other state agencies. So if as the communication director I am to go to each of these institutions for information and attempt to use the countless traditional media outlets to disseminate, it will be a challenge. However, with the use of social media communication, I just call for or send this information and it is spread all over within a twinkle of an eye.*

This demonstrates how social media break the barriers of traditional news media and eliminate the burdens of communication, such as cost and distance, which has transformed the world into an information and global village. Similar to this perspective, Participant A provides an illustration of the transformation of the media in Ghana to demonstrate the opportunities presented by social media. Participant A recounted:

*When there was no social media, we largely depended on newspapers as a political party, which could not sell as many copies. It was difficult for people in the Northern Region, for example, to get these newspapers to buy and know what the party sent through these papers as there were no airplanes connecting the South to the North. Therefore, it took some time for people in the North to get first-hand information and know what was happening. Now, with social*

*media like Facebook and Twitter, I can post on the official page of our party and I am able to reach as many people instantly irrespective of distance and location, than I could have done with newspapers at even little or no cost. So truly, social media has provided opportunities for our party in terms of reach and the speed of reach.*

The opportunities social media offers to the party have also been put into the context of the reactions and comments, with Participant D acknowledging that social media provide the party avenue to engage with the public and audience from all over the world for their comments, which serves as means gathering feedback to determine how Ghanaians feel about the New Patriotic Party, as well as its programmes and activities. These emphasise the extension of global audience and the opportunities to send any messages without restrictions due to the emergence of social media. Participant C testified:

*Through social media we have the opportunity to send whatever we want to send to whoever without any unnecessary restrictions. With the traditional media we could not just send anything just like we do with social media because the traditional media has gatekeepers that sieve our messages and whatever news and information they want to publish or broadcast. But with social media we just do it; put out whatever we want to send about our party to advance of political objectives to the general public and audience without restricts nor control at any time.*

Giving a practical example to give evidence to his assertions, Participant C demonstrated how social media contributed to the party's campaign in the 2016 general elections. Participant C identified:

*One unique opportunity we had on social media was in respect of the 2016 general elections, when we used designs and art works in the form of pictures on these platforms. During the campaign period, we initiated the Kalypo Challenge where we continuously posted pictures of the president who was then our candidate drinking Kalypo, sipping the Ghanaian made drink on social media. These pictures were posted on all the party's social media accounts to project our candidate as a leader who believes in locally manufactured goods. This became a subject of ridicule by the then government and now opposition, which propagandised these pictures as infantile. This was because the Kalypo*

*drink is for toddlers, and therefore for our candidate to be drinking that at his old age was an indication that he was not matured to lead the nation. However, we ignored them and kept on spreading our Kalypo campaign and the pictures all over on social media. Soon Ghanaians all over bought into our concept, and it marketed our candidate Nana Akuffo Addo because the Kalypo drink is very popular with many children and parents. So we took the opportunity in social media by connecting Nana Addo to the Kalypo brand and we won the 2016 by a landslide victory.*

Inasmuch as social media provide a number of opportunities to the New Patriotic Party for political communication and elections, they also have some inherent challenges. Participants enumerated a number of risks that social media put to them in different ways. The freedom and uncontrolled communication that social media could also have some negative effects. Participant A lamented:

*Well the biggest problem is that in the same way social media including Facebook allow people to say what they to say, in the same way it also allows people to come to the pages and tell you anything they want. And so most often, people especially political opponents will come and say negative about other people and the party.*

This draws in the polemical issues in respect of social media, which discourages many people and organisations from exploring the opportunities that emanate from these platforms. With the large numbers of social media users, the problems with polemics in the form of negative attacks online are difficult to address. Participant A decried that it is impossible to address such questions, attacks and attempts to defame and insult the party or its leaders and members because in many circumstances the sources of those messages and attacks are faceless; attackers impersonating others as a way of hiding their identities.

This is compounded by the large numbers of people on social media, which makes it extremely difficult to answer and correct all the wrong perceptions and misinformation created in the mind-sets of recipients to the view of everyone. Similarly, Participant C was worried about the situation where information and statements from the political party on social media platforms are in a number of cases twisted; doctoring and editing original messages to suit the mischievous intentions and propaganda of political opponents to confuse and influence public opinions. Participant B regretted:

*When these kinds of propaganda, fake news and other manipulations are done, it is difficult for the party and other people who are affected to disclaim because such corrections might not get to all the people who originally had received those bad or negative propaganda. More so, it is very difficult to verify the authenticity of information and messages, as well as their sources due the large volumes of fake news on social media.*

#### **6.4 Facebook in Political Communication**

In spite of the many forms of social media, Facebook appeared to be a popular social networking site among communication personnel in New Patriotic Party. Participants were much aware of Facebook as a social media communication tool, and provided different understanding of the social networking site. A number of sub-themes are discussed with respect to the activities of the communication personnel of the New Patriotic Party in terms of Facebook in politics. These comprise of the background to its introduction into the party's communication, reasons for appropriation, use in political agenda, and evaluation of impact in political communication.

##### **6.4.1 Background to Facebook in party political communication**

In an attempt to ascertain when Facebook was introduced into the political communication activities of the New Patriotic Party, a number of views were given by participants. However, the participants could not be certain on when their party initially used Facebook for its activities. In his attempts to trace the antecedent of Facebook in the party, Participant A guessed: *ooh... as for as I can remember but my mind is a bit hazy, but I am thinking that active Facebooking by our party might have been in 2007 thereabout, if I can remember correctly.* For Participant B, this is how he put it: *well, I cannot recall, but if my memory serves me right, the very time it became more effective was somewhere in the year 2010 upwards.* However, unlike these two respondents, both Participant C and D stated that they could not provide specific information about how the party started using Facebook. The lack of information on the beginning of Facebook in the New Patriotic Party made it difficult to further explore who and how the practice was infused into the party's communication strategies. For example, Participant A recounted:

*I am not sure about who and how Facebook started, but the party has always had a communication director who may have initiated such process. However,*

*I will not remember who was in charge of the party's communication around the time Facebook was introduced.*

In the same vein, Participant B also attributed to commencement of Facebook communication to the former communication directors of the party. Participant B reconsidered:

*Credit should be given to my predecessor Nana Akomea who drew our attention to the benefits and opportunities associated with Facebook and social media. This gave prominence to these forms of communication. However, our former general secretary Dan Botwe was also very instrumental in the introduction of these platforms into our party's communication activities.*

With regard to where Facebook and social media communication are situated in the party's structures, all the participants concurred that those activities are under the domain of the communication department of the party. The department is headed by a communication director and assisted by several deputies who are responsible for different forms and aspects of the communication programmes of the party.

#### **6.4.2 Motivation for Facebook appropriation**

There are a number of reasons why the New Patriotic Party appropriates Facebook in its communication activities. Participants saw the use of Facebook as a trend in social media communication because many young people are on the site. Unfolding the motivation, Participant A signalled:

*We are using Facebook because a large number of the youth are using the platform; hence, the party had no choice, but to follow the trend. This means that as a political party, if you want to talk to the youth, then you must go there, maintain our presence and engage them.*

The party is also motivated to use Facebook due to its efficiency and cost effectiveness. This was evident in the response of Participant B that:

*Through Facebook, we are able to reach as many people using less resources, which we could not have done on radio because just like a number of traditional news media, radio are mostly local and are not able to reach all the regions and parts of the country, considering several regulations and restrictions on*

*transmission, among others. However, using Facebook as alternative, we are able to get to everyone whenever and wherever they are.*

The party is motivated to use Facebook because of its ability as a forum for connecting, communicating and conversing with stakeholders to become involved with the party activities and be heard. In consistent with these observations, Participant C reflected:

*We are encouraged to use Facebook because when we send messages and information on the site we get feedback through comments, likes, shares and update, among other features. It promotes two-way communication for the party, unlike the usual press releases and statements through the traditional news media, where information may just be read from the party without direct communication with the public and audience. With traditional media, the recipients could neither comment nor give us feedback directly, but when we post our messages on Facebook, people can express their views and opinions to us without intermediaries, so we can react directly to address the issues and expectations.*

Extending the discussions further to ascertain the activities that the New Patriotic Party uses Facebook for, participants provided a number of things. Facebook is basically used by the party to provide information to members and the general public; hence enhancing dissemination and information flow. In his assertion, Participant C signalled:

*When we issue statements and other communication, we post them on Facebook page and then our various communicators also pick and share them through their individual walls with friends, families and electorates who may not be aware of these party messages and information.*

Providing specific examples to illustrate how Facebook contributes and executes the activities of the New Patriotic Party, Participant A illustrated:

*In our party we have a group called Facebook Army. This is an army of many young people and members of the party across the country. So if there are issues that the party wants to spread out, we first send them to the Facebook army people; educate them on the issues through meetings and briefings by the party and government, including how they should address those issues. As they are*

*equipped with these pieces of information, they then blast out the messages across the various Facebook pages and they go viral.*

### **6.4.3 Facebook as a tool for political agenda**

A number of examples in the political communication activities of New Patriotic Party demonstrate how Facebook as a popular form of social media has been used to advance political agenda especially elections. Facebook has been used by the party to promote and achieve its political goals and objectives, as well as influence the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of electorates and stakeholders. This was evident in how the communication personnel of the party attempt to influence; and how they decide issues and stories that have to be promoted by the party as topical for presentations and discussions on Facebook. In the words of Participant A, this is how he put it:

*By briefing our Facebook army (group) as I mentioned earlier, and equipping them with particular messages to propagate across the entire Facebook platform, we are manipulating politics and political thoughts through social media communication. This is because we inundate the whole place with our stories and messages via Facebook and ensure that we populate the atmosphere with them for our political agenda.*

This is especially true because when posts are made on the Facebook page of the party, many people who read them may be convinced to accept particular decisions and get on board to support the party's ideas, policies and programmes. From another context, this is what Participant C said:

*You know, when we have specific activities and functions; whether we are introducing a policy or launching a programme, we normally use Facebook to draw the attention of the public to them for their support to realise our goals. Mores so, through our Facebook page we get the opportunity to address issues and provide relevant answers to the public, so that they are informed about what we are putting across and how we are achieving our agenda by fulfilling our promises as a party.*

For Participant B, the fact that the New Patriotic Party used Facebook to extend press releases and statements, as well as publicise the party's event and activities including press conferences, demonstrations and elections, among others to many recipients to rally behind the party is an

indication that his party is able to shift the focus of public attention towards its political agenda. In other words, Participant D reckoned:

*We are able to set, shape and pursue our agenda on Facebook because we are able to have ideas about how people feel about our governance as a ruling party. And once we know that, we are able to devise strategies to influence and manipulate their thoughts and expectations, so that they can continue to have confidence in our party and vote for us in elections. Sometimes, as a means of affecting perceptions and per our calculations, we even make our own versions of election results public before official declarations by the Electoral Commission. This makes our supporters confident, comfortable and more ready for our cause when they hear that they party is winning.*

The opportunity to influence through Facebook provides the tendency to change political attitudes and behaviours of users and stakeholders on the site. Participants acknowledged how this could occur in their various responses. For example, Participant D stated:

*As we engage people on Facebook, we get the chance to respond to their comments; and through these responses and reactions to their feedback we are able to disabuse the mind-sets of any propaganda from our opponents by explaining the realities on the ground. In our efforts to give them the right information they may not have known, our stakeholders, other people and the public change their attitudes and behaviours toward the party.*

This evidence suggest that because many people use Facebook, the New Patriotic Part gains some form of acceptance and understanding from people especially users as the party posts its policies and success stories on the site. Throwing more light on how the site changes attitudes and behaviours, Participant A narrated:

*Without doubts I can say Facebook influence political attitudes. It does especially among the youth; among young people, but it is very difficult to measure. You know effect studies are very different and difficult to conduct and so quite frankly I will not be able to tell you the specific effect. However, the extent that we want a certain issue to become topical and influence the world via the virtual space, then we will be satisfied that it has some effects.*

Participants revealed that when the party starts to hear the public asking questions about what it puts on Facebook, then there is an indication that its messages are influencing the attitudes and possibly the behaviours of stakeholders and electorates.

#### **6.4.4 Facebook impact on political party**

Participants acknowledged the impact of Facebook on the communication activities of the New Patriotic Party. In an attempt to determine whether Facebook as a social networking tool actually provide the results that the party envisages for using the platform, a number of responses were elicited. The responses are evident that the New Patriotic Party uses a manual approach rather than technology in the form of software for monitoring Facebook and social media activities. This was confirmed by all the participants. For example, Participant A said:

*One of the deputies of the director of communication of our party is always responsible for social media, so he will constantly monitor the trending issues on social media especially Facebook. He always seek to push our issues as a party to the platform and see how they are discussed on Facebook, And so when you know and hear many people say the New Patriotic Party is trending, the it means not only that party messages are trending, but are making impact on people.*

This implies that the party attempts to use conscious efforts to make sure that at all times it is in the news by monitoring issues that are trending about the party around the country on Facebook and other social media. Buttressing this observation, Participant C expressed:

*Yes, when we post things about the party and we start receiving feedback through messages from people in terms of reactions on Facebook and social media platforms, then it tells us that the party has really gone viral. More especially, we get to know the extent of reach and impact when the traditional news media outlets including radio and television pick up information from our official Facebook page as authentic sources of their news items for publication and broadcast. Therefore, when we see all these indications, then as communication personnel of the party we realise the messages from the party are making impact on the public through viral space.*

Reinforcing the assertions above, Participant D added that: *the more the party received many comments, likes and shares, then we get to know that a lot of people are either following what*

is happening, or perhaps they are in support or against what is happening. However, Participant B seemed to contradict the responses of the other participants when he pointed out that the party has software for monitoring the impact and assessing how the party's messages are doing on Facebook. This is how participant B disputed:

*I think we have software for monitoring how good or bad our activities and messages are doing on Facebook and other social media. However, I think I need to confirm from the former deputy communication director, Perry Okudzeto, who was in charge of the social media activities since 2016. I am treading more cautiously, but looking at our activities over the years and nature of our party, it should not be a surprise if we have software for monitoring and evaluating our social media activities and engagements.*

A number of challenges are encountered by the New Patriotic Party that prevents the success of its appropriation of Facebook in political communication. One key challenge was the poor technology infrastructure in Ghana. For example, Participant C lamented:

*In our part of the world and in this country, the internet is not accessible everywhere, so when your targets in communication are living in rural areas, they will not be able to get internet access, making it difficult for us to communicate, engage or interact with them on Facebook.*

The other factor that challenges the use of Facebook by New Patriotic Party was the inability for people to authenticate the genuineness of news items and messages that are posted on Facebook. There was agreement among participants that fake news, polemics, misinformation, disinformation and cyber-crimes, among others challenged the party from using Facebook for communication. Participant C revealed that there are many occasions that communication personnel of the party visit our Facebook and see things posted there, only to be told in the end they were just hoax. From the perspectives of Participant A, this is how he discussed it:

*Well, part of the problems we have as a party with Facebook as I have already mentioned is in respect of how people visit Facebook pages and insult; and how you cannot also insult because you are a political party or politician, and perhaps you will not be able to answer every negative comment that is made against the party on Facebook.*

Another impediment to “Facebooking” by the party is in respect of people cloning Facebook pages and using them for mischief. Participant D reported that: *people hack the Facebook accounts of others, and post things from their own sources to project the original owners of such pages in bad light. Hackers may post nude pictures of persons in demand for money, among others.* Giving a scenario to buttress his point, Participant A illustrated:

*Some weeks ago I was told that apparently somebody had cloned my Facebook account and was using it dupe people; extorting money from people to be recruited into government intuitions and agencies; that because of my position in the party and government I had the opportunity to secure them jobs and all kinds of things. However, I had no idea about anything of the sort.*

These show the extent to which Facebook could deter political parties and other users from its appropriation. Participants did not mention financial constraints as a challenge to their Facebook activities. Against that backdrop, attempts were made to probe whether there was financial allocation for Facebook and social media communication activities by the New Patriotic Party. All the participants acknowledged that the party had no specific financial allocation for Facebook and social media activities. In his assertions, Participant A noted:

*I am sure that we have a budget for communication, but I do not think we have a budget as such for social media. Therefore, the director of communication of the party at any point in time determines, depending on the need of the time how much of it should be allocated to one activity or another. However, frankly and truly, our budget for communication are more appreciable in election years.*

These assertions are an indication that though funding is allocated to communication, many resources are invested in these activities particularly when there are elections in the country. Generally, after elections funding, some of which are appropriated for social media communication including Facebook are relaxed because the party does not continue to intensify its campaign, advocacy and engagements.

## **6.5 Engagement and Relationship Management**

All the participants in New Patriotic Party acknowledged that there were many benefits and value which their party may accrue from utilising social media in political communication, engagements and relationships with stakeholders and the public. These were analysed in respect of their opportunities and challenges to stakeholder engagements, effects on

relationships, appropriation in intra-party election, and forms of posts including the frequency of interaction on Facebook.

### **6.5.1 Social media opportunities and challenges to stakeholder engagement**

Though the benefits of social media for stakeholder engagements could not be quantified, participants provided some examples to illustrate how their party was using Facebook to communicate with the public and engage stakeholders and followers. Participant A asserted:

*I will not be able to discuss all the benefits that we have accrued from using Facebook to engage the public and our stakeholders. However, to the extent that in the 2016 general elections in particular, we attracted many young people on Facebook should tell you how we develop relationships through the platform. In 2016, we had a number of groups, such as Loyal Ladies, Nana Addo for President, Professionals for Change, Young Professional Network and Kayaye Associations, among others that were formed by different people to campaign and mobilise for our presidential candidate. We engaged them mostly on social media especially Facebook, and so to that extent I will say we have benefited as a party from relationships on the Facebook site and social media buzz, which helped us to win the 2016 elections by that huge margin against the National Democratic Party that was in government.*

These assertions were also reiterated by Participant C who noted that that the quick feedback that can be obtained from the use of social media and cost effectiveness enabled the party to have some form of direct interpersonal engagements, and interactions with stakeholders and audiences. Similarly, Participant D suggested:

*As we post and get comments from friends of the party and other users of social media platforms; and they continue to like and share our messages with other friends, we create some form of connection and relationships with them. This makes it easier for us to engage them once the party establishes such links online.*

In concurrence, Participant B also remarked that the deliberations that social media platforms enhance create a sense of co-operation and friendship between the party, stakeholders and other political actors.

With respect to how interactive the New Patriotic Party has been in its engagements with internal and external stakeholders, some participants stated that regular visits and posts made on the party's Facebook and other social media pages contribute to the enhancement of their party's relationships with stakeholders and the general public who are present on those platforms. Participant A posited: *we are very interactive on Facebook and others especially during election times. We organise live social media and Facebook encounters where, for example, our presidential candidate engages directly and chats with the public on these platforms.* However, the participant was quick to add that Facebook communication was not done regularly by the party. Participant A was emphatic that "Facebooking" was not a regular feature, saying: *I am sure it is once in a blue moon activity but I agree that the party has to be more frequent on these sites.*

### **6.5.2 Social media effect on party-stakeholder relationships**

There is an awareness and acceptance by communication personnel of the New Patriotic Party. Participants in the party attested to this notion, and gave different narratives to illustrate how social media including Facebook has drawn their party closer to its stakeholders and the general public. In the words of Participant A, this is what he observed:

*When people see the page and profile of our party and members on social media, such as Facebook, the younger generation especially feels that the party is part of them. They feel the party is trendy and resonates with them, which creates some kind of bond and good vibes between the party and the youth.*

Buttressing this claim, Participant C reinforced how social media has improved the party's relationships with stakeholders. Participant C narrated:

*From the feedback we gather through comments, likes, shares, among others on these sites, the party is able to determine whether people appreciate what the party does or not, so quickly we change when things are going wrong. For example, if our targets, stakeholders and audiences are not happy about a policy that we want to implement; via observation from their expressions and opinions on Facebook and others gives our party the chance to either modify or perhaps withdraw. And this strengthens our relationship with the electorates and the public as a political party.*

Another participant provided an example from previous elections to demonstrate ways that social media communication helped the New Patriotic Party to develop relationship and engagements with stakeholders in Ghana. Participant B signalled:

*In 2016, we made good use of social media so we were able to widely reach and establish relationships with first time voters who had never voted in elections on these platforms. And through such relationships on these sites we marketed the party's free education policy and reintroduction of trainee allowances for student nurses and teachers, which got down with the electorates and they voted massively for the party for victory in 2016.*

Contextualising these new forms of media in terms of both positive and negative effects to the relationships between the party and its stakeholders, Participant D clarified:

*For those who are the party's friends, followers or like its pages on social media, they are likely to be attracted by its messages and posts. However, for those who are neither friends nor followers or do not like the party's social media pages could attack or be repelled by the party's posts and messages. Therefore, the extension or limitation of relationships on social media is premised on several considerations.*

The discussions conjure how social media serves as a tool for promoting and sustaining relationships through engagements in political communication on those channels.

With particular regard to what prevents the New Patriotic Party from being more interactive and regular in social media communication and relationship maintenance on Facebook, a number of revelations were noted. According to Participant B, the high level of illiteracy does not make it easy for the party to engage and interact with as many people as possible on Facebook. Participant B highlighted:

*You must not lose sight of the fact that most of our stakeholders and audience like other political parties are not educated, so when you talk of relying largely on social media communication to engage them, it will be like 'casting a pearl before a swine'.*

In addition to illiteracy, participants identified other issues relating to hacking, language and lack of skills, among others as some of the bottlenecks to their party's interactions and relationship nurturing through social media particularly Facebook. Participant C reported:

*In order to be able to interact effectively and sustain relationships through social media, one needs to have the internet. And because we do not have this technology and service widely across Ghana, it is sometimes problematic trying to build and continuously maintain our relationships with the numerous stakeholders of our party spread all over the country through Facebook and other social media. It is also noteworthy to point out that as a party, not all those who communicate for us have better understanding and skills in public relations to converse in ways that cultivate relationships during interactions in political communication with stakeholders and audiences on the avenues.*

Social media especially Facebook provides users including political parties the chance to either form groups and network, or engage and converse directly with them to build relationships for the advancement of particular agenda and goals. Against this background, this study made attempts to probe into how the communication personnel of New Patriotic Party have used Facebook as a networking site to create and engage with groups for their support in elections and for the party's governance, leadership and political goals. Participant B narrated that various groups and organisations within the party had their individual social media platforms, but indicated that the party has relied largely on WhatsApp other than Facebook for such direct communication and engagements with internal groups. Participant B stressed: *for example, our secretaries, organisers, women and youth organisers, serial callers, Nasara club and other internal wings of our party all have their presence on social media.*

These assertions are indication of gaps in terms of how social media specifically Facebook is used by the New Patriotic Party to engage, interact and converse with their affiliate groups and associations for feedback in mutually beneficial relationships. This is because the lack of group engagements could contribute to misunderstandings including political vigilantisms among the party's supporters and followers. This observation is further attested by Participant A, who underlined in this context:

*Well obviously, we are not able to engage and converse with all our internal and external groups and affiliates collectively on Facebook. This is because when you are in government you are too busy running the affairs of state. You*

*are busy and always on the move because there are copious materials to read through and other activities to attend to, so virtually we are not able to do it. However, when you are in opposition, there is a lot of time on your hands to be able to engage these interest and stakeholder groups meaningfully than you would do in power. Each of the leaders and executives of the party is running the affairs of government, which accounts for why interpersonal and direct engagements with groups and stakeholders on Facebook and others have been low whiles we are in government.*

This acceptance demonstrates that Facebook is useful for the political party to interact, establish and enhance relationships. Though Participant C reinforced this notion, he cautioned that the use of social networking sites like Facebook to address issues and grievances of stakeholders and members could have some negative implications for the party. Participant C signified:

*As a political party I do not think it is advisable for us to rely on Facebook to address our internal issues publicly because the party's page could be porous. We cannot post our grievances for discussion on Facebook; it is not healthy for us. However, on WhatsApp we are assured that all the members on the platform are party people, as opposed to Facebook which is more in the public space for everyone to access.*

This revelation is interesting in that the participant lost sight of the fact that not all stakeholders of the New Patriotic Party are party members or supporters, but they form part of the general public. Therefore, Facebook is unique given that it provides everyone including members and non-members of the general public the interactive space to engage and relate with the political party. In terms of privacy, as mentioned in the response of Participant C, Facebook has features that allow for public, closed and secret groups and associations, as well as private conversations through Facebook Messenger, among other features that the party can explore to restrict activities and discussions to particular users and members if the party prefers

### **6.5.3 “Facebooking” in intra-party elections**

Facebook has been used by the New Patriotic Party at elections, especially in general and presidential elections in Ghana. It was evident that Facebook communication activities were more intensive in general polls than at intra-party elections. Participants pointed out a

number of ways Facebook has contributed to the party in terms of elections, with particular reference to the 2016 general elections in the country. For example, Participant C posited that:

*We use Facebook for a number of things particularly related to our internal party elections, such as announcing dates of polls, vetting aspiring candidates, opening and closing of nominations, venues and other necessary information about the contests and the party, among others.*

This response is not different from what other participants posited. However, Participants suggested the need for their use to be strategically directed at promoting development, unity and fairness in the party at times of intra-party elections. This could be the premise upon which Participant D argued that the party did not get involved so much on social media communication through Facebook during internal elections. Participant D explained:

*We do not undertake so many activities on Facebook during intra-party elections because we do not as a party want to be seemed to be implicitly promoting or campaigning for any of the candidates in our contests. That is why you see the aspirants rather do more Facebook activities than the party during these elections.*

Providing more evidence on the categories of aspirants who utilise Facebook more in internal elections, participants highlighted that most aspirants who use Facebook for communication and campaigning at these intra-party contests are the youth. This is how Participant A signalled:

*You know we are going for national executive elections soon, so now if you go to our Facebook you will see young men like Nana Boakye, Dominic Eduah, and Kamaldeen, among others whose supporters are trolling at one another and teasing one another with the hope of winning.*

These assertions emphasised not only the political party, but also its members particularly candidates and their supporters in elections largely display various forms of posts to inform, attract and convince delegates who vote at congresses of the party to elect leaders. Moving further to explore how the New Patriotic Party uses Facebook specifically before, during and after intra-party elections in 2018, this is what Participant D unfolded:

*As you may know we are having our national delegates' congress in Koforidua from 5<sup>th</sup> July to 7<sup>th</sup> July 2018 to elect new national officers. So before the actual*

*election days, we are sharing information and developments in relation to our congress and the contest with the general public on Facebook and other social media. During the elections too, we will use Facebook to give them updates on what is happening in terms of who is winning and who is losing the contest. And after the entire electoral processes, we are using it to share declaration of results, announce and congratulate winners and losers.*

These elaborations are not much different from what other participants espoused. Participant A also remarked that:

*Mostly when our members gather especially like what is happening soon in Koforidua for our internal elections everybody is active on their Facebook walls, and so the party Facebook page will be showing live the arrival of delegates from the various constituencies and regions in the country, as well as candidates for the race, among others. During the congress, we will give live transmission of events and proceedings of the elections on the party's Facebook page. However, once these elections are over the attention of the party on Facebook will be turned against the opposition rather than sustaining relationships and keeping political momentum with our stakeholders and the public.*

The various activities enumerated in the responses by participants give evidence that Facebook has brought some form of change as regards intra-party elections. Participants concurred that social media networking especially Facebook has transformed electoral processes and campaigns within the New Patriotic Party. It has impacted elections within the political party in a number of ways. For Participant A:

*Facebook has changed how the party used to transmit information and engage with the general public including its members especially aspirants in internal elections in cost effective and efficient ways. Extending it to our members and contestants, I can say that they are able to sway supporters and voters into particular directions by what they post and display on the Facebook site to attract them.*

With regard to the use of Facebook in internal elections, Participant D argued that certain propaganda and perceptions about the party and members are quickly and easily debunked

because there is the opportunity to directly react to criticisms instantly irrespective of time, location and distance. From another angle, Participant B retorted:

*In the past when there was no Facebook and social media, it was easier for people to spread propaganda; sometimes there are rumours that the party prefers particular candidates to others in elections, and it was difficult for us to refute those accusations before they got across the country because we had to rely solely on the traditional news media to diffuse those false information. However, with Facebook and other social media we are able to counter those mischievous practices soon as they come up during internal election campaigns. This helps in creating equal playing field for all party members aspiring for positions in the elections.*

Participant C summarised the discussion of the impact of Facebook in internal elections of the New Patriotic Party by laying more emphasis on political participation noting that:

*Because we can get the events and programmes involved in our internal elections widely spread to our members and the general public through Facebook, there is full participation and large turn outs during our intra-party congresses and elections. That is why our internal elections have always been popular and successful.*

#### **6.5.4 Nature and frequency of posts on Facebook**

The New Patriotic Party posts different forms of messages on Facebook in their social media communication activities. This information is mostly news and information about the party particularly about policies, programmes and development. Participant A expressed:

*On Facebook we post whatever we have done and achieved, for example, our Planting for Food and Jobs policy and reduction of inflation and interest rates, among others. We put all the successes that the party and government are chalking in terms of improving the lives of people on daily basis on Facebook. Most key actors of the party also have Facebook pages where managers post texts, pictures and videos of events and activities to complement what the party does in the mainstream.*

Subscribing to those assertions, the other two participants also re-echoed the diversity of contents of post on the party's Facebook page, with the reinforcement by Participant D that:

*As you know, our posts on what is happening in the party on Facebook; who is going for what position,... as chairman, general secretary, organiser; and who has been reshuffled by the president from what ministry to where, among others all involve pictures, press releases, sounds, short video and the rest of them.*

The response from Participant C is not different from the above claims as he also mentioned videos and jingles as some forms of messages that the party posted on Facebook. Participant C stressed that: *especially during political campaigns and other programmes that we have had since we won the 2016 general elections, we used jingles, songs, videos on Facebook, and played them on radio and television, as well.*

With respect to the frequency of posts and interactions by the New Patriotic Party on its Facebook page, some participants revealed that the party posted and responded to feedback regularly on the site. For example, Participant A insisted that ‘Facebooking’ was done by the party every day. Participant A was emphatic that:

*Facebook is a daily affair. There is a young man in the communication department of the party at the headquarters called Kofi Agyapong who is responsible for that matter. When you talk to him he will tell you how frequent we update the party’s official Facebook and all that.*

Even though Participant C could not identify who was in charge of the daily activities of the party on Facebook, he buttressed the statement that Facebook was an everyday activity. Participant C noted that as party communicators go on television and radio on daily basis to speak for the party, we also communicate and exchange information with our stakeholders and the general public on Facebook every day. However, the other two participants gave contradictory statements to what Participants A and C provided, arguing that inasmuch as the party envisages Facebook and social media communication to be regular, it has not been able to post and conduct activities on the site as frequent as possible. In short, Participant D said: *we post as often as possible but not on daily basis, maybe we can say we can say we do them weekly.* Similarly, Participant B noted:

*Well it may be regular in the sense that messages could flow sometimes on Facebook, but it is not something that we continuously do, despite that we try to be consistent when there are many events and programmes. In most cases,*

*we post on Facebook when we feel there is something to communicate to the public.*

### **6.6 Quantitative (Facebook) Data**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the second part of the chapter presents data collected from content analysis of posts on the Facebook walls of New Patriotic Party. Content analysis allowed the study to put data into numbers to determine the frequency of interactions between the party and its stakeholders on Facebook as a social networking site. The study discusses the table below in greater detail in Chapter 8.

**Table 1: Showing daily Facebook posts by New Patriotic Party in intra-party national executive elections in July 2018**

<b>Dates (Day/mm/year)</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Number of likes</b>	<b>Number of comments</b>	<b>Number of shares</b>
29/06/2018	-	-	-	-
30/06/2018	-	-	-	-
1/07/2018	-	-	-	-
2/07/2018	2	64	22	1
3/07/2018	-	-	-	-
4/07/2018	-	-	-	-
5/07/2018	-	-	-	-
6/07/2018	-	-	-	-
7/07/2018	3	689	57	31
8/07/2018	1	150	4	11
9/07/2018	-	-	-	-
10/07/2018	-	-	-	-
11/07/2018	-	-	-	-
12/07/2018	-	-	-	-
13/07/2018	-	-	-	-
14/07/2018	-	-	-	-
15/07/2018	1	92	5	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>43</b>
Average daily post(s)	0.41	-	-	-

Source: Thesis Research Data

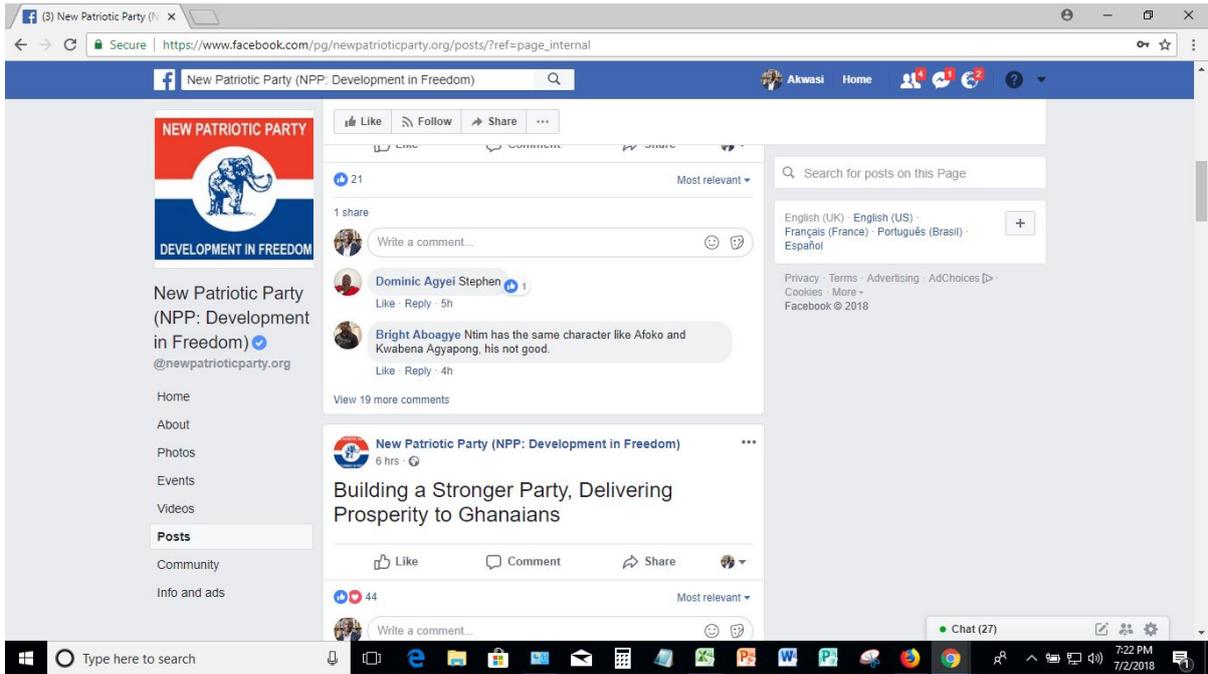


Figure 3: Sample of Facebook post on 2 July 2018

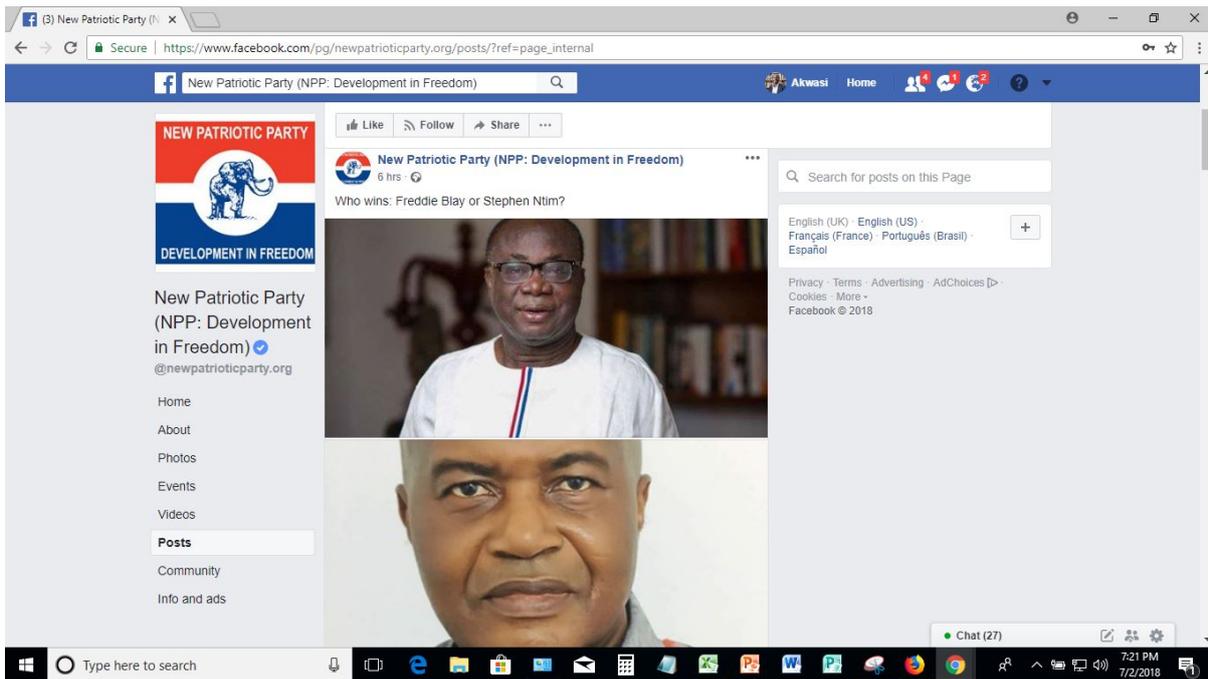


Figure 4: Sample of Facebook post on 2 July 2018

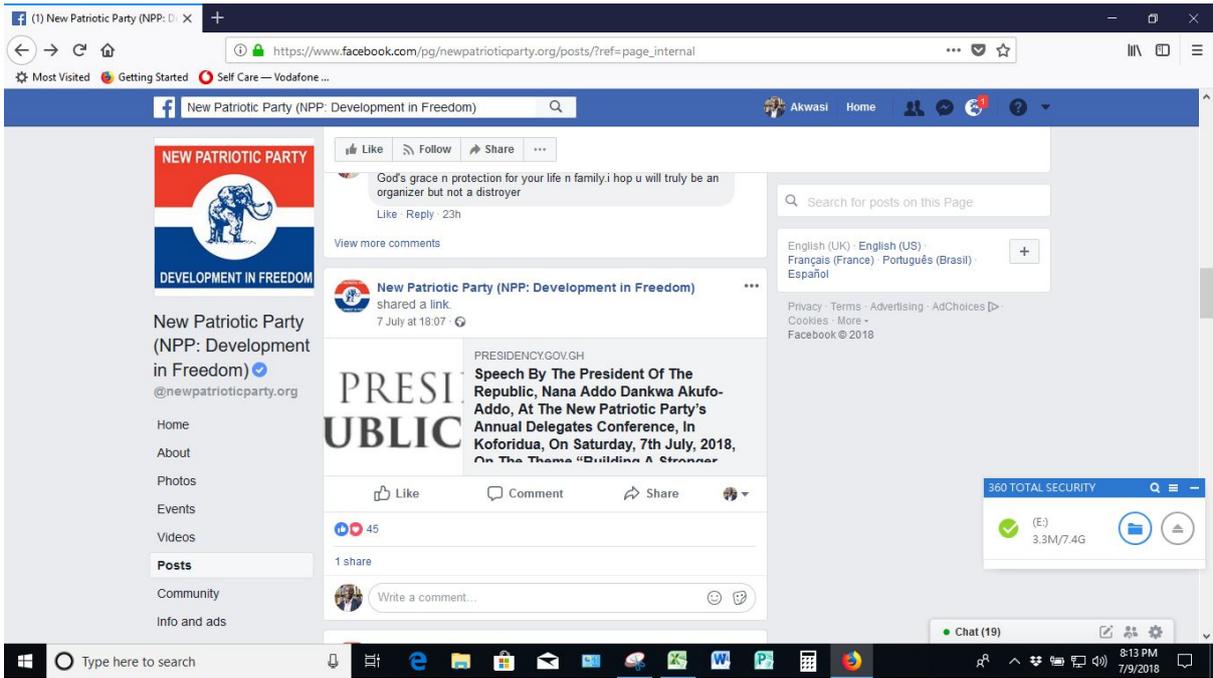


Figure 5: Sample of Facebook post on 9 July 2018

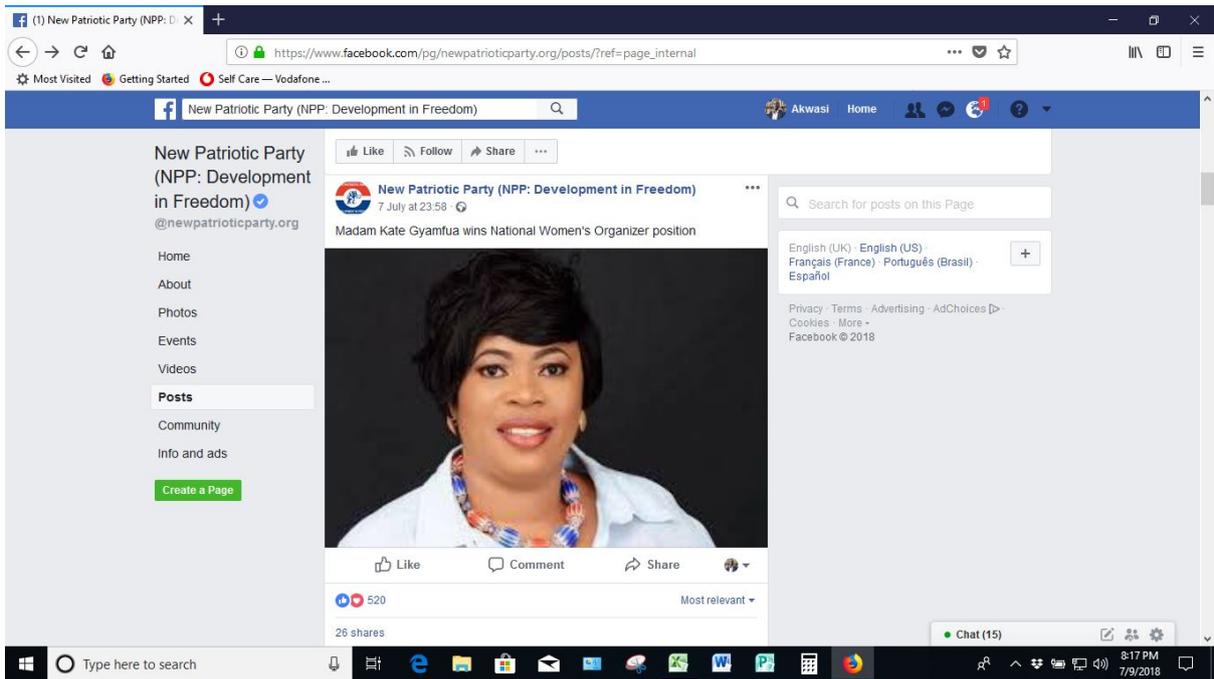


Figure 6: Sample of Facebook post on 9 July 2018

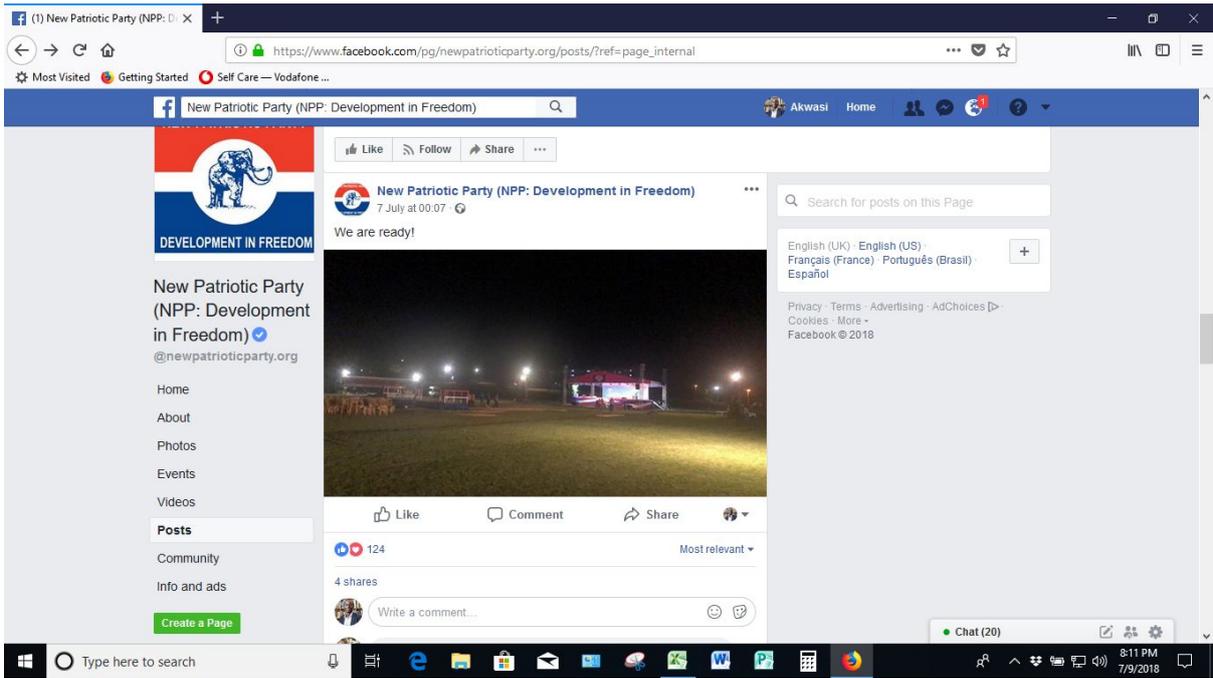


Figure 7: Sample of Facebook post on 9 July 2018



Figure 8: Sample of Facebook post on 9 July 2018

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter presented the data analysis and findings from data collected in the study with respect to Ghana's New Patriotic Party through qualitative and quantitative techniques. It provided descriptions of responses given by officials of New Patriotic Party who are involved with communication and social media activities by thematically analysing interviews. The chapter also conducted content analysis of Facebook posts before, during and after intra-party elections of the party. The data from interviews were put into themes and sub-themes, while Facebook data were put into tables, numbers and figures. Chapter 7 completes the data analysis and findings chapters of the study by providing data collected from the National Democratic Congress.

## CHAPTER 7

### NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS

#### 7.0 Introduction

In this chapter data analysis and findings with respect to the National Democratic Congress as a party are presented. Similar to the preceding chapter relating to the New Patriotic Party, Chapter 7 analyses findings from the National Democratic Congress in respect of themes from interviews, coupled with content analysis of Facebook. This is to determine the quantity and frequency of posts within the sampled period, as well as corroborate or dispute findings from interview data. As mentioned earlier, the same salient themes: *Understanding political communication, Understanding social media, Facebook in political communication, Facebook engagement and relationship management* emerged in respect of National Democratic Congress. Similar sub-themes also emerged from the data from participants in the party. Four communication officials, who had considerable experience in social media activities in the political party were recruited to participate in the interviews.

With regard to the National Democratic Congress, the pseudonym for the first respondent is *Participant E*, second is *Participant F*, third is *Participant G*, and the fourth is *Participant H*. Details regarding when interviews were conducted with participants in National Democratic Congress are as follows: (Participant E, interview, 3/07/2018), (Participant F, interview, 14/07/2018), (Participant G, interview, 16/07/2018), and Participant H, interview, 2/07/2018). These participants shared their narratives and experiences as regards the National Democratic Congress' appropriation of social media in political communication especially Facebook at intra-party national executive elections.

#### 7.1 Understanding Political Communication

Participants had many understandings of political communication. To give evidence of this, the respondents provided their perceived meanings, features, opportunities and challenges as regards political communication to demonstrate their understandings of the concept.

##### 7.1.1 Meaning of political communication

Participants attempted to define political communication by distinguishing it from other types of communication. This is because unlike corporate communication, political communication largely deals with or focuses attention on political opponents. For example, Participant E explained that:

*In the case of political communication, you are looking at your message and how you can set agenda with the message. Therefore for me, political communication is more about agenda setting and being ahead of the game, as opposed to fire-fighting.*

This involves an understanding of the psychology of the nature of politics and opponents, as well as having knowledge of the philosophy of the political party. These skills could then be transformed into forcing political opponents to pay attention to the party's messages. In other words, Participant F referred to political communication as: *selling the political position, views and political agenda as a party to potential voters for them to understand, accept and agree to be part of the party's set-up*. For Participant G: *political communication is the passing of political information to people with the view of getting response or feedback, and some kind of reaction towards a certain result or goal*. This implies that political parties require feedback from their communication activities to be able to influence and shape political agenda.

Political communication may be interpersonal, through traditional and social media, as well as other direct political forums. However, summarising the discussion on the understanding, Participant H posited political communication as: *involving activities of political parties that are geared towards winning more votes from the strength of the party, and taking advantage of the weaknesses of opponents through communication with the populace*. The focus of interest at this explanation is on the contestation of ideas within the political sphere, where comparison of policies and programmes of political parties are made by them for the introduction of superior alternatives to government and opposition.

### **7.1.2 Characteristics of political communication**

Evidence from officials of the National Democratic Congress showed that they had understanding of what make political communication as an activity different from other types of communication. Participants discussed a number of things that characterise political communication. For example, Participant F highlighted that: *political communication is goal-oriented, persuasive, and resolute with the view of imposing the communicators' views on recipients of information and messages, especially the electorates*. This emphasises the primary objective of political communication as a means of drawing audiences into the folds of political actors in the form of persuasive messages. In these attempts, political communicators portray opponents in negative light to make them look unattractive to the electorates by promoting the superiority of their party. In other words, Participant E explained:

*In the game of politics it is obvious that if you communicate and your opponents do not react to what you have said, then you have not communicated. So for me, the key characteristic of political communication is to be able to get your opponents to react to what you have said.*

This is an indication of the need for political communication to focus on invoking a lot of reactions from opposing views. Laying more emphasis on these observations, Participant E held the view that:

*Political communication messages have to engage the media and the general public because if the media does not pay attention to the contents of such communication for wider dissemination to the public, political opponents will not be compelled to react to them.*

From another perspective, Participant G situated the features in the context and actors in political communication. According to Participant G these communication messages could be on any issues, such as health, education and finance, among other issues, but so far as they are said by a politician or political party, then it automatically becomes political communication. In this instance, communication may not be politically inclined; however, the context from which it is communicated transforms it into political communication. Concluding the characteristics, Participant H expressed similar views, indicating how the sources of messages also determine whether communication is political or not. Participant H summarised that: *once the information emanates from a political party and related actors; then obviously messages are featured as political communication.*

### **7.1.3 Political communication in politics**

The role of political communication could not be underestimated by the National Democratic Congress as the party posits it as the fulcrum of democracy. This is observed from the assertions by Participant E who remained emphatic that: *political communication is the main life-line that drives political agenda of political parties including the National Democratic Congress.* Similarly, Participant G subscribed that political communication is *the life-blood of political parties, without it we have no future because we cannot survive.* These are very true in politics and democracy, given that the inability of a political party to communicate and fashion out attractive and meaningful messages makes it difficult to attract

voters. In this regard, Participant E suggested that political communication messages need to be researched-based. Throwing more light, Participant E stressed:

*Through political communication the National Democratic Congress is able to research and target specific segments of stakeholders and audiences. Therefore, as a political party we are able to know and understand our strongholds and non-strongholds or marginal areas. And by doing this we craft specific messages for different groups and populations, bearing in mind the different levels of intelligence of the public.*

The above assertions are not much different from what other participants suggested. In the words of Participant F, this is how put it:

*As a political party, it is the only way we can advance and make our cases out and understood, the only means by which you can sell your messages to the electorates is via political communication. This is because there is no way anyone out there especially potential voters will know anything about the National Democratic Congress, our manifestoes, programmes and activities if we do not communicate. And so political communication plays the critical role, serving as the pivot upon which everything including organisation and mobilisation revolves.*

This gives much currency to the ultimate aim of these forms of communication at putting messages across to convince the citizenry, address social and economic issues, among others as a political party. However, Participant H indicated that apart from communicating to win votes, such communication creates political awareness and deepens the culture of democratisation and tolerance.

As a result of the numerous roles, political communication has provided a number of benefits to the National Democratic Congress since its formation as a political party. Some of these benefits are illustrated from the differing viewpoints of the four participants in the party. Situating it in the general context of democracy in Ghana, Participant H narrated:

*As a nation, we enjoy free speech that guarantees the right for Ghanaians to communicate. If Ghanaians were not enjoying freedom of speech, our party and others could find it difficult to communicate, criticise and expose the ills of government. In this sense, political communication conjures free speech in our present multi-party democracy as a country.*

The benefits of political communication are discussed by Participant E with respect to how the National Democratic Congress has won elections over the years. Providing examples, Participant E illustrated:

*Out of the seven elections in Ghana since multi-party democracy in 1992, our party, the National Democratic Congress has won four times and our main opponent the New Patriotic Party has won three time. I believe that in all the four elections that we won, it is because we had effective political communication and superior messages to our opponents.*

In order to maximise the positive outcomes from political communication, it is important for political parties and communicators to understand the psyche of the electorates and communicate effectively by crafting messages that fit into the thoughts, expectations and aspirations of the citizenry and voters for support. This is very true as Participant F argued the need for his party has to seize opportunities in political communication to propagate what the National Democratic Congress stands for, as well as market messages consistently to capture the mind-sets of electorates. Participant F noted:

*We have achieved these communication benefits over the years through radio, television, social media and other inter personal engagements that allow us to tell our stories, policies, programmes, among others so that we can win or perhaps hold on to political power.*

However, positing it from a nuance angle by discussing how political communication is changing dynamics and trend of activities in the party, Participant G reported:

*Communication has always been part of the activities of National Democratic Congress. Even after we lost political power since 2016, we have been seeking and getting feedback, grievances and recommendations from members and the general public from all parts of the country through political communication and engagements on the way forward for us in 2020. The different views, opinions and suggestions are helping us a party to re-strategise and re-organise for victory again in future elections.*

These assertions reposition the utility of political communication in activities, including research and development of the National Democratic Congress, as it gives the party

opportunity of reviewing their political and electoral campaigns and processes for appropriate remedy, as an attempt to recapture power in future elections.

#### **7.1.4 Political communication challenges**

Inasmuch as political communication presents the National Democratic Congress with many opportunities and benefits, the party encounters a number of drawbacks that limit the activities involved in its communication processes. Participants from the party enumerated several challenges that make political communication activities difficult for their party to undertake. For example, Participant E subscribed that like every endeavour, political communication faces several challenges, and the National Democratic Congress is not immune to those drawbacks. This participant draws it from the perspective of political opponents attempting to massage and twist political messages communicated by the party and its key members. Participant E argued further by narrating a situation that occurred in the party:

*One unique example was in the 2000 general elections, when the late President Mills was chosen as flag bearer and successor to former President Rawlings. At the coronation of the late President Mills as the party's flag bearer having served as vice president under President Rawlings, he indicated his readiness to consult President Rawlings at all times. The rationale for President Mills' statement was that having being president of Ghana over nineteen years the country was not going to do away with the former president, especially where his knowledge, expertise and experience were relevant in government and equation of our party. However, the opposition capitalised that 'buy Attah-Mills; get Rawlings free'. This slogan simply implied that a vote for former President Mills was a vote for the return of former President Rawlings. We could not fashion out good communication strategy to counter that propaganda at that time, and so we lost to the opposition in 2000.*

The narration demonstrates how, through political communication, the opposition was able to conjure that the candidate of the National Democratic Congress was not going to be his own man, and therefore using it against the party by making Ghanaians believe that voting for the National Democratic Congress meant giving power back to his predecessor who had ruled the country for many years.

Issues as regards inadequate funding and expertise in political communication, as well as lack of consistent and uniform information from party sources also challenge these activities of the party. These are evident in the responses from participants. Participant F reported:

*Aside the fact that we do not control the television and radio outlets because we do not own them, which makes these media outlets hostile to us as opposition party sometimes because they may have their own interests. As you know we are now in opposition, and so we do not have the financial muscles to buy time and space on these channels to communicate our political messages because it very expensive.*

These expressions are not different from what Participant H indicated that the party enjoys limited opportunities from the media for its communication activities. Participant H decried:

*Even when we have some chance to communicate our messages on these traditional news media, those outlets hardly put our information and programmes out there to the public, unlike those in government who always enjoys the news headlines and front pages. We suffer some kind of discrimination and unfair coverage, representation and treatment of our political messages because editorial decisions may not be balanced.*

Participant F also pointed out how problematic it is for the party to coordinate its communication activities, given the many channels, platforms and communicators that are involved in such engagements and conversations. This makes it difficult to communicate information and messages down to the various actors in communication. For example, Participant F lamented that:

*Because we are not able to channel our messages and information in a uniform manner, members of the party attempt to communicate for the party without knowledge about the party's positions and views, ending up to create problems than trying to promote solutions to problems.*

There are also drawbacks in terms of training and competence for conducting professional political communication activities in systematic ways especially on social media. This is because a number of communicators of the party may not have any background or training in communication and relationship management skills to relate meaningfully in the processes of engagements. Subscribing to the challenges enumerated by these three respondents, Participant

G added a nuance lens by considering the bottlenecks from how the National Democratic Congress has not been able to effectively monitor its political communication activities in different forms. In his disgust, Participant G wobbled:

*As the communication outfit of our party, we are not resourced to perform political communication functions well; monitor the several programmes; and assess the performances of our communicators. Therefore, we cannot determine what and how these officials are communicating on daily, weekly and monthly basis on different media channels and platforms for corrections where and when necessary to safeguard the party's political agenda. These are compounded by lack of rewards and opportunities for communicators particularly at the lower levels to develop, which de-motivates them from their regular communication and contribution to political programmes.*

## **7.2 Understanding Social Media**

Social media can be significant tools in political activities with particular regard to parties. This is acknowledged by National Democratic Congress whose communication personnel provided a number of explanations in respect of the phenomenon.

### **7.2.1 Meaning of social media**

The understandings of social media are situated in diverse forms as regards their virtual, uncontrolled and interactive features, among others. From the view of Participant H:

*Social media deals with the virtual world that provides unlimited opportunities through the support of the internet. These social media tools enable people to engage in interpersonal, but faceless discourses where discussants hardly see one another, but use interactive features like video conferencing and calls, among others to engage.*

These expressions posit how social media creates interactive and unrestricted space to provide some form of interpersonal relations irrespective of distance and location. For Participant G, social media is the realm where people basically communicate with one another either formally or informally through electronic means. This understanding demonstrates social media as not anything especially different from old media as traditional forms of media also enable users to send and receive information. However Participant E clarified that:

*Social media are basically new media, and not similar to traditional media. Perhaps, social media is more like the softer side of the media; not the hard side of media, which promotes communication in real time especially like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram, among others.*

This definition highlights how these platforms allow information to be exchanged (sent and received) in communication within the shortest possible time unlike the old forms of media. Summing up on the definitions, Participant F concluded that social media are new platforms that make interpersonal communication easier even though there is no direct interface or face-to-face interactions.

### **7.2.2 Social media features**

With regard to examples of social media, the participants provided similar platforms. These platforms include: Websites, Instagram, You-Tube, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, among others. These observations were confirmed by Participant G who emphasised that:

*The major social media examples are the likes of Twitter, You-Tube, WhatsApp and Facebook. At least these are what many people especially in Ghana know about, but the most popular one at the moment where most people and political parties including the National Democratic Congress use a lot is the WhatsApp platform.*

This statement was buttressed by Participant D who reiterated that the party uses WhatsApp largely for intra-party communication, and focus more also on the party's official website and Facebook for canvassing for votes outside the party and reaching out to the general public. *We have and use WhatsApp platforms for communicating with members internally, and Facebook for engaging the public as a whole*, Participant D clarified.

### **7.2.3 Social media functions in political party**

Like other political parties, the National Democratic Congress uses social media for its activities. The participants in the party enumerated a number of functions that social media performs in its communication activities. For example, Participant F reported that:

*Social media helps the party to widely disseminate information very quickly. When we develop speaking points as communicators, we put them on social media and quickly everyone in the party, country and the world who is on these platforms access the information. In the particular cases of Facebook and*

*Twitter, they allow us to post pictures, so we are able to show images of our party and candidates and sell them to the public without being too expressive in words.*

This implies that because social media are interactive, they enable the National Democratic Congress to engage many people on issues at the same time and obtain feedback in no time. Participant E noted the role of social media in the party with respect to how these platforms have enabled the party to communicate with large audiences, members and the general public, and engage them in diverse ways. These responses are similar to the reports from Participant H who signalled that:

*Social media serves as useful tools for our internal and external activities as a party. It is easier for our organisers and groups to engage meaningfully despite their different locations for decisions and actions. While externally these platforms give us the chance to brand, market and advertise our party, programmes and policies globally. More so, they function as unrestricted and uncontrolled avenues to criticise and put pressure on government for its unpopular policies and programmes.*

The illustration by Participant H exhibits how social media provides free and cheap means of communication to promote democracy and participation. In other words, Participant G sheds more light on the functions of social media in National Democratic Congress by concurring with other participants. In his elaboration, this is what Participant G discussed:

*Social media gives our party the space to set our own agenda in political communication, discuss our policies and programmes, as well as lead conversations in the public sphere. For example, when we post events and news about our leaders, particularly former president John Mahama on our social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, many people follow the information and conversations that go on there. In some cases, such messages and conversations are even picked up by the television and radio stations for further public discussions.*

The responses above show how social media are functioning as new communication technologies and platforms in transforming activities and engagements in political

communication and democracy. Given this, attempts are made at knowing how the party appropriates social media platforms in their political communication practices.

#### **7.2.4 Social media appropriation in politics**

The National Democratic Congress has made use of social media in several ways to demonstrate their appropriation and integration of these platforms into its communication activities. These were revealed by participants in their responses who acknowledged their integration and illustrated how the party has appropriated social media activities in communication. As Participant E stated the party has been using its official website and other platforms including Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp since their emergence and inception as social media communication tools. As a result social media have become critical elements in communication activities of the party. Laying more emphasis, Participant F buttressed that:

*Social media are platforms we cannot ignore, and therefore our party has tried over the years to take advantage of them. And now all our communication activities are also done there, where we leverage and highlight our messages for long time to the electorates in Ghana and beyond.*

Considering how the National Democratic Congress undertakes social media activities as serious component or ad hoc in its political communication, a number different revelations were provided by the participants. Of the four participants who responded, two of them signalled that the party recognised social media activities as critical and well planned components for successful communication engagements. These participants indicated how the party was investing into creation and maintenance of their presence on many social media platforms. The two concurred that the party has communication personnel who are on social media, collecting and sending information about the party to many people across the globe. Giving evidence for this revelation, Participant E said:

*Looking at the scope, there is still more to be done, but we have a dedicated team that is responsible for the social media activities of the party. Just as it is done at the national level, our constituencies also have social media teams monitoring what we do as a party on these platforms, so it is not something ad hoc, it is well planned and organised strategy.*

This report implies that the party uses a conscious effort to ensure that once new forms of media emerge the party is not left behind as regards taking advantage and maximising their potential benefits. For Participant F, this is how he discussed:

*We have trained people managing our communication on social media, and also provide continuous training regarding developments relating to these new technologies and online platforms so that they are able to professionally handle social media activities as specialised area of our communication activities as a political party. With such trainings we are able to engage in cyber wars on various social media platforms and also conduct meaningful debates and discussions.*

This evidence could posit social media activities as a serious activity within the communication set of National Democratic Congress, given the efforts by the party at making sure that as new forms of media come up they attempt to appropriate them as a means of exploring and maximising their potential benefits. However, contradicting these responses, other participants provided different revelations, lamenting over a lack of planning and effective delivery of social media communication activities of the National Democratic Congress. For example, Participant H unfolded that social media activities are not well organised, noting that: *it is just in opposition that we are as a party trying to give critical attention somewhat to social media.* Amplifying this observation, Participant G also lamented by saying that:

*I want to be sincere with you. As we speak our communication in terms of social media is more ad hoc because the party is not particularly committed to these new ways of communication and so the party does not resource us to get committed people with the social know-how to guide and deliver these activities according to well organised strategies and structures.*

Against this background, it is observed that the National Democratic Congress is making some attempts to integrate social media and streamline them in their communication; the processes involved in these social media communication activities have a number of issues that need to be addressed to enable the party to prosecute its political agenda on these platforms.

### **7.2.5 Opportunities and challenges of social media**

The opportunities presented by social media have also been enjoyed by National Democratic Congress in different ways. Particularly, social media provide avenues in the

public sphere for the party and its members to transmit and exchange information widely. This allows the party to have some form of control over the media space to directly reach and engage the public. This notion was given credence in the response from Participant G who posited that:

*Controlling the messages in communication is very important. How much people talk about your party in the political and public space reflects how your policies and programmes are getting closer to the people. And as social media give us bigger platforms and opportunities to create our own content and send our messages without any control and intermediaries, they promote our success.*

The evidence postulates direct engagement as an opportunity for the political party, stakeholders and other actors in setting and achieving agenda. Participant G stressed that over the years a number of messages and information that are put on the party's social media platforms have become topical issues, in many cases highlighted into major news in the media. Such opportunities are not restricted to the political party as an organisation, as many of its leading members and executives also use social media as reference sources to update themselves on trending issues to address questions and discussions in political programmes on traditional media channels, such as radio and television. Social media have also assisted the National Democratic Congress in protests and demonstrations, among others. Participant F revealed that:

*With social media it is easy for us to trigger activism because once we put announcements and information on our Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter, indicating the meeting point and time, among others, our members, followers, sympathisers and the general public converge to support us in our plans and actions.*

These assertions are not much different from the views expressed by Participant H who also corroborated that social media platforms make it possible for the party and its members across Ghana to congregate and share information that enhance internal and external networking for actions. Inasmuch as social media come with many opportunities, some still assume that traditional media remains the best way for political actors to reach out to the public and stakeholders.

Aggregating social media opportunities in comparison with traditional media, Participant E was of the view that: *the traditional forms of communication, such as word of mouth; visiting the markets, churches, funerals and meeting voters, among others are the best ways to communicate politically.* Given examples to buttress his claims, Participant E contended that: *If you rely solely on social media, you are going to be in trouble because I can tell you that in 2016 elections, those in our party who thought that social media was going to do the magic were very disappointed.*

It is important to note that for social media to deliver its potentials, activities involved need to be well planned and implemented consistently and continuously to be able to develop and translate into mutually beneficial relationships, and consequently into votes. More so, social media communication helps to achieve maximum results when they are used in juxtapose with other forms of communication and media.

In spite of the opportunities that social media have presented to the communication activities of National Democratic Congress, they expose the party to several challenges and threats, which were signalled by the participants in their responses. Some of the main challenges that impede social media communication by National Democratic Congress relate to issues of resources, half-truths and untruths that are spread on these platforms. For example, Participant G explained:

*One key challenge that draws us away from social media as a political party is the lies and un-truths that are in many cases circulated on these channel. Apart from these fake news and untruths, people also attack us on the platforms if and when they are not happy with the messages and information we put across on these sites. And by the time we are able to counter and correct the negative impressions created in these untruths and fake news, we are already in trouble because the stories would have already gone viral and all over the place.*

Giving another perspective to the issues of fake news and untruths on social media, Participant H narrated an incident that occurred in the 2016 general elections as an example of how social media was abused for negative campaigns against the National Democratic Congress and its flag bearer. Participant H decried:

*Before the 2016 general elections, the former president John Mahama who was also the party's candidate for presidency in that election was negatively targeted in social media by our opponents and mischievous individuals. People*

*who could not be bold to show themselves hid their identities and posted many bad stories to portray our flag bearer on social media platforms in negative light. Former president Mahama was associated with everything bad, from pornographic videos to tribal or hate speeches, corruption and a whole lot of falsities, which the public and voters became confused as to whether those stories were true or not because people did not know who were churning those issues out on these platforms. This did not help the party and our candidate because countering and diffusing these lies and concoctions on social media were very difficult. All these affected us and we lost the elections.*

Concluding the discussion on challenges, Participant F highlighted another drawback that the party encounters. Participant F signalled that:

*For a party to remain relevant and constantly active on social media it certainly comes with cost. It means we always need to have access to the internet and data to communicate on these platforms. Therefore, when we do not have these catalysts, communication on these platforms becomes difficult for us to embark upon. This is because these forms of communication require the party to be trending at all times with the right personnel and skills to commit and engage users meaningfully on these channels. These involve professionalism and costs.*

### **7.3 Facebook in Political Communication**

Facebook is not a new phenomenon to officials in National Democratic Congress who are responsible for communication activities of the party. In this regard, Facebook has the potential to be critical to political communication programmes and activities, allowing them to extend their engagements and networks.

#### **7.3.1 Background to Facebook in party political communication**

Participants in National Democratic Congress could not trace when their party practically began to use Facebook as part of its communication channels. However, they attempted to provide some antecedents regarding how the platform may have been introduced into the party's communication activities. For example, Participant F asserted that the party developed interest and started using Facebook when it became a popular site for communication, because the trend in its usage turned to be a global phenomenon. Participant F amplified:

*I think before 2008 elections, it was just text messages because some of the platforms we have today were not popular in the world, so we could not have used them. Beyond 2010 was when these platforms especially Facebook started becoming very popular in the world and I think that is when our party started taking advantage of it.*

The response is not different from what Participant E said. This is how Participant E put it: *certainly, I do not think we used Facebook for the two elections in 2004 and 2008. When it comes to Facebook, I am sure the time that practically involved the use of Facebook mostly must have been in the 2012 and 2016.* The narrations could trace the commencement of Facebook communication in National Democratic Congress to the period from 2009 and beyond, when the number of users of the platform and access to the internet were expanded, with many mobile phone users in most parts of Ghana.

The party has a number of reasons for undertaking Facebook communication. With regard to how “Facebooking” started and the reasons for undertaking such communication, a number of responses were given. For example, Participant E reported that the party had to begin using Facebook when it realised that many of the youth of National Democratic Congress were on the site. Therefore, it was necessary for the party to get onto the site and engage them. This was coupled with the need for the party to *look for a wider public space to address and counter issues that were raised by our opponents, particularly New Patriotic Party that heralded the use of Facebook from such useful drive,* Participant E elaborated. These assertions posit Facebook and social media as a generational phenomenon largely reserved for young people, despite that many old people could also be found on these platforms.

With the shift of communication trend to social, the National Democratic Congress could not have been left out, Participant H pointed out, given that many trending news stories were emanating from social media. Therefore, according to Participant H, it was imperative for the party to have an account on Facebook. In an attempt to identify who actually initiated the use of Facebook by the four participants in National Democratic Congress were not sure about who initially introduced this form of communication into the party’s activities. For example, Participant G purported: *I am not too sure of who might have started the party’s Facebooking activities because things were not documented and organised, but I can guess that the communication director of the party at that time started it.* In the same vein, Participant F also stated that: *officially I cannot confirm, but I think it was one of our former communication directors Mr. Asante who initiated and created the page for the party on Facebook.*

“Facebooking” as social media communication falls under the activities of communication department of the party. The four participants agreed that social media communication including Facebook activities are performed by officials in the communication outfit of National Democratic Congress. This observation was validated by Participants E and F. For example, Participant F recounted:

*Facebook just like all other forms of social media are handled by the communication department, although as much as possible the research department of the party also holds onto these communication modules for conducting other activities including studies on events at the national level, as well as sampling political opinions and data from the general public.*

These activities are replicated at the regional and constituency levels of the party. Reinforcing the evidence given by other participants, Participant H clarified:

*There is a special body, that is, the Social Media Committee set up by the party that works under the supervision of the communication department. This committee comprises of members selected from the rank and file with experience in communication, who are involved in party communication and policy decisions. This committee specifically carries out Facebook activities to engage members and stakeholders of the party internally and externally.*

### **7.3.2 Motivation for Facebook appropriation**

The National Democratic Congress uses Facebook in communication programmes and activities for a number of reasons, with particular regard to information dissemination and mobilisation. Participant F signalled that it was cheaper for the party to use social media especially Facebook as compared to other forms of media engagements. Participant F stressed:

*If we use mobile phones to call people we pay so much for air time; and we also need to buy enough fuel if we decide to drive to all places for political engagements and communication. However, when we use Facebook we spend less money because Facebook and others similar to it are somewhat virtually free.*

For Participant H, Facebook has been appropriated by party because it helps communication to target electorates, where various associations, wings and regions of the party are segmented

and encouraged to use the site to form strategic groups in discussing issues that are particularly related to them. In the words of Participant G:

*The large number of young men and women on Facebook, as well as its extensive use all over motivate us as a political party to appropriate Facebook, among others in our communication activities. Moreover, because there are elections every four years and many people turning eighteen years making them qualified voters, we could have been on the losing side if we had not made Facebook a priority in our communication. We might not have been able to attract the number of youth we have in our party today.*

Similarly, Participant E summed up the discussion by reiterating to testify that:

*Inasmuch as Facebook does not solve all our communication challenges, we can also not ignore it because it is a new phenomenon or new media with many people hooked onto it. And because so many people especially the young generation are found there almost every hour, it is a key vehicle for reaching out and communicating to and with them.*

### **7.3.3 Facebook as a tool for political agenda**

The National Democratic Congress uses Facebook in agenda-setting by fashioning out and putting its ideas and stories in good light, as well as counter negative things that opponents churned out against the party. Probing into specific ways of using Facebook to manipulate and influence politics and attitudes, a number of responses were gathered as evidence. Participants emphasised on how the party attempts to craft messages to influence the public space on Facebook and other social media platforms. Participant E reported:

*Of course, let us not deny that in this world and age where people are putting out untruths and fake news and stories about our party, there may be some communicators within our midst who believe that the best way to fight back is to also craft some propaganda about our opponents on the platform to disabuse what have been said against our party.*

This posits political manipulation and influence as psychological; it is a mind game that makes political communicators to think about how to develop messages to seek political gains. Other participants also cited particular cases where the party has used Facebook to push political agenda. For example, Participant G reflected:

*In opposition we have used Facebook as alternative platform to the traditional media in addressing critical issues bothering on illegal small scale mining, free senior high school education policy, rising cost of living and inflation, among others. We posted information and programmes about what we did in government regarding those sectors, and tried to look out for gaps in the present government's policies and address them on Facebook. We tell Ghanaians how we intend to improve situations when we recapture political power. And by doing that on Facebook we are drawing the electorates closer; influencing their decisions, behaviours and attitudes toward the party for its political agenda of recapturing power in the 2020 general elections.*

Similarly, Participant F was of the view that the party uses Facebook on many occasions to influence the agenda and voting attitudes and patterns of users and the public because it addresses dominant issues on the platform. Participant F unfolded:

*Recently, when the president appointed four new supreme court judges, we argued that because two of them were also part of a committee of inquiry that recommended the removal of the former commissioner of the Electoral Commission and her two other deputies, their appointments to the supreme court were an appreciation by the President of their support for him and the ruling party. We used Facebook and other platforms, and fed into the thinking of many Ghanaians to convince them to accept why our party believes those judges were only appointed to the Supreme Court due to their links, connections and affection for the ruling government.*

#### **7.3.4 Facebook impact on political party**

Facebook has made a notable impact on National Democratic Congress. Probing into the impact of the social networking site on activities of the party, participants outlined a number of evidence to reinforce how Facebook is changing the political communication dynamics. The responses elicited prove that the National Democratic Congress assesses effect of Facebook activities manually, where communication personnel monitor and observe what happens on the platform. All the participants revealed that there was no particular technology or software used by the party for such monitoring and evaluation. For example, Participant F said:

*Some of our officials in the communication department are in charge of monitoring and evaluation of Facebook communication because it is strategic*

*to our party. They are always tracking what is happening and trending about the party on social media particularly Facebook. So from these tracking of reactions from the general public and stakeholders on what we post on Facebook, we can determine whether we are making impressive strides in our social media communication or not.*

This means National Democratic Congress as a party was aware of the need to ensure that information and messages they communicate on Facebook were achieving the intended goals for putting them on the platform. Stressing on this observation, Participant H concluded:

*Any time we made our posts, those members of our communication team responsible for tracking and monitoring will be checking how people are receiving the stories by looking at the number of likes, shares, comments, among others. When the impact is high we normally see more likes, shares, and comments, but if these characteristics are low then it means the impact is not huge or perhaps people and the general public are not showing keen interests in them.*

Summing up, Participant G signalled that: *when we start getting phone calls from the radio and television stations for interviews on the posts we have made on Facebook, then we know we have made inroads and gains.*

With regard to challenges to Facebook communication, participants enumerated many bottlenecks. For example, all participants in the National Democratic Congress revealed that the communication outfit of the party was not adequately resourced in terms of finance and human resources to effectively manage Facebook communication for the best of results. Participant F wobbled:

*Even though the party acknowledges that communication is very key in all we do, we have no budgetary allocation for social media communication including Facebook because of our financial constraints. However, when it comes to political organisation and mobilisation, there are huge budgets for all the divisions, such as the youth and women's wings, among others, but when it comes to communication especially social media and Facebook activities, there is no clear cut budget for us. Frankly, I cannot give any estimate on how much the party allocates to social media communication.*

For his part on the challenges that drawback Facebook communication, Participant G purported that:

*You would expect that as a communication department we should have a budget for social media and Facebook activities, but I am sorry to say we do not have. This could be the reason that these new forms of communication technology especially Facebook have not extensively spread and reached most Ghanaians across the country.*

The National Democratic Congress does give significant focus of interest at Facebook communication and engagements. This was noticed from the assertions of Participant E who said:

*I cannot talk about budget allocation because we do not have it. So you can understand why the party still believes that it must hold on to the traditional modes of communication. As you may know Facebook is more of a cosmopolitan thing largely done by city folks as opposed to the rural folks, and you know as a social democratic party, bulks of our votes are in the rural areas. So perhaps if the party spends too much funds on Facebook and similar modules as our core means of communication, we will be dealing with people who are mostly in the cities without communicating to the grassroots, which could affect us in elections for leaving out the critical mass.*

In addition to these impediments that challenge Facebook communication, the National Democratic Congress was not immune to issues regarding fake news, untruths and polemics. For Participant H, one of the things that discourage the party from “Facebooking” is the high rate of fake news, attacks and insults, among others on the site. Participant H signalled:

*In many instances, we have had situations where mischievous users create false news, and false representation of their identities under the guise of our political party and some of its key functionaries and leaders to spread stories that have put the party in bad light.*

Participant F also pointed out another challenge in respect of lack of expertise of the party’s communicators especially at regional and constituency levels in social media communication. Participant F stressed:

*Inasmuch as many of our people communicating on our behalf as a party do not have the skills to put Facebook into good use, most of our members are not literate and so do not have any ideas about Facebook and the likes, or perhaps they cannot read, write, access and participate in what is happening on Facebook.*

#### **7.4 Engagement and Relationship Management**

The National Democratic Congress appears to be using Facebook for engaging the public and stakeholders in a number of ways. The responses from participants were indication that the party uses the social networking site to connect with friends, followers and the general public, which enabled them to establish some form of relationships with them.

##### **7.4.1 Social media opportunities and challenges to stakeholder engagement**

In terms of how National Democratic Congress as a political party uses social media to enhance political communication and engagements, a number of revelations were made regarding how these platforms are used for such purposes. The participants illustrated different ways by which the party achieves these gains. According to Participant F social media enable the party to segment its publics, making sure that those on the platforms, such as Facebook, among others are reached and engaged in meaningful relationships. Participant H expressed that:

*Social media have created and enhanced relationships between the party and the general public. This is in the form of how the party has made these platforms open spaces, where we converge with our members and followers on issues, decisions and their implementation as a political organisation.*

This posits relationship in the form of stakeholder participation and activism that promote mutually beneficial engagements. From a more illustrative perspective, Participant G provided examples of how social media activities affect their relationships with the public and consequently voters. Participant G decried:

*In 2016 when our party, which was then in government scrapped the allowances of nursing and teaching trainees, many people spoke against this policy on social media especially Facebook. There were a lot of messages posted on our Facebook and other social media accounts that we could have critically examined to predict how Ghanaians were feeling. However, we could*

*not really engage them to explain for Ghanaians to understand why we needed to do away with those allowances to pave way for admission of more students. The propaganda from our opponents continued massively on all social media platforms. The main opposition then, New Patriotic Party took advantage because we were not rationalising our decisions regarding that policies to our stakeholders and the general public. So because we were not there to explain, our main opponent used these platforms to spread that we were greedy and insensitive to the plights of ordinary Ghanaians. They spread the propaganda on social media that our party did not care about the citizens especially the youth from under privileged families who relied so much on these allowances to struggle through education. This negatively affected our relationships and support from the masses and general public with the electorates branding us as corrupt. However, that benefited and enhanced the chances of our opponent, as New Patriotic Party was now perceived as more human-centred, particularly with the promise to restore all those allowances and more if they were voted, and sadly we lost the 2016 elections.*

The responses and illustrations are indication of how social media could enhance and transform engagements and relations with the public and electorates for the advancement of agenda in political communication and elections.

#### **7.4.2 Social media effect on party-stakeholder relationships**

Participants in the National Democratic Congress did not dispute that the presence of social media has affected how the party relates with its stakeholders in both positive and negative ways. For participant E:

*Social media makes communication with stakeholders and the public interpersonal even though there are no face-to-face meetings, with distant locations because they are able to respond and get back to us directly unlike in the past when traditional media were the only channels available.*

This notion emphasises how interactivity as a form of interpersonal engagements lubricates relationships in communication. This is what Participant G also said:

*Unlike in the past when we only relied on traditional means for face-to-face and community-to-community interactions before we could send or exchange*

*messages and mobilise people into the party and for its activities, situations are now changed. With the spread of social media, we are able to embark on membership drives and gather opinions from our friends, followers, and non-followers who access our platforms and pages on social media to comment, like or share our messages with other friends. This is because we have connections with them online through social media, which makes it easier to get our messages to them and listen to us, and consequently allowing the party to influence and draw them into our folds.*

Not much was reported by the other two participants regarding how social media have affected the relationships of the party with stakeholders, except that Participant F signified:

*Sometimes users who visit our party's social media platforms post insults and other negative things because of misinformation and misunderstanding. And in a few cases, some of our communicators who manage these platforms could react unprofessionally or unpleasantly to those kinds of posts and comments from users and the public, which in one way or the other may push some people away from the party.*

In an attempt to identify what impedes the party from engaging and interacting regularly with stakeholders through social media platforms, participants provided several reasons. Among others, these include the high level of illiteracy on the part of users, friends and followers of the party on social media platforms. Many users could not make immediate meaning meanings of messages communicated for their thoughts and feedback to the party in terms of interactions, to promote participation in political discourses and decision making. The other challenge emanated from the response of Participant G who signified that:

*Because Ghana's information, communication and technology infrastructure is not well developed like the advanced countries, sometimes our stakeholders and audiences, as well as the party do not have stable internet facilities and connections to log onto social media and interact with our stakeholders to meet their expectations and sustain our relationships with them.*

In other words, Participant E also highlighted that because some of the party's communicators are not trained and do not have public relations skills in the area of political communication,

they are not able to communicate in ways that generate interactions to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

With many individuals and organisations forming groups on social media platforms, the utility of these tools particularly Facebook for engaging many people has become a common practice in social media communication. Given that participants mentioned in their responses a number of internal and external wings and associations in their party, it was unfolded that National Democratic Congress has a number of groups that help the party in many ways especially in elections. For example, Participant G retorted:

*Yes, we have the various tertiary groups, which are the Tertiary Education Institutions Networks (TEIN), Young Professional Forum and Azorka Boys, among other groupings in our party. However, we usually communicate and engage them through phone calls and WhatsApp. All the groups I am sure also have accounts and pages on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.*

On the other hand, Participant E reconsidered the party's activities with its various groups on these new forms of communication to accept the gaps in the party's engagements. Participant E admitted:

*I know that we have not done too well in engaging our stakeholders especially the many groups in our party on Facebook and other platforms even though most of them have accounts and pages on these social media. It is something I think we should be looking at critically because the lack of more direct and interactive spaces for discussions to address issues can generate misunderstandings between stakeholder groups and the party.*

This demonstrates the acceptance that social media platforms including Facebook provide some sort of direct and interpersonal engagements, promoting mutually relationships between actors in political communication. The response also shows that the National Democratic Congress as a party is not immune to political vigilantisms and protests by internal and external groups that could arise from misunderstandings with the party especially leaders. Extending the discussions, Participant H lamented:

*The reason why we have not been engaging and interacting with our various groups on social media especially Facebook is that as a political party we have not practically noticed how they can transform our relationships with users and*

*our friends and followers on these platforms. Perhaps, we do not know the impact of such communication tools for group mobilisation for advancing political agenda.*

These assertions posit the National Democratic Congress as not using Facebook as an avenue for mobilising groups and facilitating the exchange and sharing of information and messages about the party's programmes and activities for participation and mutually beneficial relationships with them. This could be attributed to the fact that: *the party and some of its officials prefer the traditional way of personally travelling to the polling stations, constituencies and regions to interact with groupings, affiliates and members as a way of securing their votes*, Participant F expressed. It is however noteworthy to highlight that networking with groups; developing and sustaining relationships on Facebook enhances the possibility of mutual understanding and cooperation even before personal contacts and physical meetings are held.

#### **7.4.3 “Facebooking” in intra-party elections**

The National Democratic Congress has used Facebook for many things since the introduction of social media communication platforms in a number of elections in Ghana. Participants responded in many ways that showed that the party uses Facebook in elections with particular respect to the 2016 general elections. In elections the party communicated through Facebook with users, stakeholders, friends, followers and the general public in both intra-party and inter-party electoral processes and events.

However, the party used the Facebook extensively in general elections despite its role in internal contests. Inasmuch as the party uses other social media including Twitter and Instagram, it generally uses Facebook for disseminating information to the public, campaigns and canvassing for votes. With regard to internal elections, Facebook campaigns and information provision are largely done by candidates aspiring for various positions in contests than the party. These observations were made from the views of participants. For example, Participant E stated:

*We have our official Facebook account and page, where the party puts messages and the necessary information about our internal elections and activities involved in the electoral processes. By posting information in the form of announcements, the general public, our members and other stakeholders on Facebook are able to follow these intra-party elections. This means that whether*

*you are a member of the party or not, because information is open to the public sphere users, friends and followers of the party page can access information about the elections on Facebook during such political events.*

From a similar perspective, Participant F was of the view that because National Democratic Congress has representation and memberships in all the two hundred and seventy constituencies in the country, Facebook was largely used in addition to other forms of communication to spread the information and programmes of internal electoral processes at varied levels. The political use of Facebook is also posited in respect of political marketing. This is evident in the assertions by respondents, especially Participant H who suggested that:

*Facebook allows us to market and advertise our party in times of internal party elections, where traditional media outlets and journalists have sometimes resorted to for the latest developments and news about these elections to choose leaders for our party every four years.*

Aside the use of Facebook by the party itself for information dissemination and feedback from stakeholders and the general public especially in intra-party elections, the party gives opportunities for members who are contesting for different positions in internal elections to campaign and canvass for votes from delegates of the party's electoral college. This is how Participant G put it:

*Contestants in our internal elections advertise their posters, pictures and audios to convince delegates on how they can contribute to the success of the party if elected into aspiring positions. Aspirants also share their experiences and profiles, among others. So in a nut shell, the use of Facebook has become a significant part of our party especially during our internal party elections.*

With respect to how the National Democratic Congress appropriates Facebook, particularly before, during and after their intra-party elections, participants provided evidence regarding ways by which the party used Facebook communication in its national elections. Participant E signalled:

*We are almost done with our constituency elections, so we are moving to the regional level soon before the end of this year. However, before the national elections we are using Facebook in several ways, particularly providing information in the form of announcements about dates of the elections,*

*nomination and vetting processes, as well as advertisements of candidates who are able to contest.*

These uses signified in the above response were not different from what the other three participants suggested that Facebook largely helped them in marketing and advertising the party's internal elections to the public and stakeholders of their party. Participants also highlighted how Facebook is used by the party when the internal elections are going on. Participant F discussed:

*Whilst our elections are going on, we use Facebook to monitor the results as they come in by collating from polling stations to have an idea of who is winning even before the Electoral Commission officially declares the results of the polls.*

Following-up to this observation made in the responses above, Participant G also explained that:

*When the elections and collations are going on, the party updates the public on the Facebook platform as regards what is happening, and as soon as the Electoral Commission declares the results officially, we put all of them on Facebook showing who has won and lost, and the margins of votes, among others.*

In addition to these assertions, Participant H underlined: *sometimes we have also been showing live videos as the processes of our internal elections are taking place during the election days to choose our national executives.*

The impact of Facebook communication on activities of National Democratic Congress could not be ignored. In this regard participants in the party agreed that Facebook has changed communication engagements of the party at elections in many ways, even though there were arguments that the party has not done so well to that effect in intra-party competitions. This is how Participant F responded:

*The impact of Facebooking could be tremendous especially in the party's internal elections if our party is able to manage it effectively because majority of our people including our delegates and other key stakeholders use it or perhaps have created pages on the site.*

However, Participant H cautioned that the party could not limit itself to Facebook as that would mean cutting off many other people and stakeholders who might not be on the platform. On the other hand, Participant E signified:

*Because Facebook allows us to put our information and messages in different contexts and forms, it has contributed to bridging the relationship gap between our party and stakeholders especially during our intra-party elections. This has changed our ways of engagements and encouraged them to be part of the party's internal processes because they react and participate in decisions and other activities through Facebook.*

The implication of this evidence is that apart from disseminating information widely to the public and stakeholders about internal electoral processes, Facebook as a social media communication has extended relationships and promoted inclusion of among stakeholders towards the party's election agenda, specifically intra-party elections. The responses of the other participants were not different except to concur that Facebook is changing and boosting the interests of members and the general public in intra-party competitions because it gives them a chance to follow, like and react to what happens in these internal congresses through efficient communication.

#### **7.4.4 Nature and frequency of posts on Facebook**

Like other political parties that communicate through Facebook, the National Democratic Congress also make diverse forms of posts and information on its official page. The contents of social media communication of the party on Facebook revolve around the party and activities of its members, as well as political opponents. According to Participant F, posts are largely campaign messages, news and information about different activities of the party. Participant H clarified:

*They are not only texts, but in many cases messages appear on Facebook in the form of videos, pictures and cartoons, among others. These are particularly done when the party holds events that are captured in pictures and videos for streaming on Facebook.*

Providing more emphasis on the assertions, Participant E elaborated that:

*Apart from pictures and videos, the National Democratic Congress, as well as its members especially contestants in internal elections for the various positions*

*record slogans and songs about themselves and the party, and post them on Facebook so that the public can listen to the content, and also watch what events are happening for their political decisions.*

Concluding the evidence regarding the forms of posts made by the party especially at internal elections, Participant G disclosed:

*If you go to our Facebook page, you could see a number of videos and pictures about how the party and aspiring national executives are campaigning vigorously in the constituencies and regions in relation to our congress and elections that would be held soon.*

A number of responses were given by participants in National Democratic Congress with respect to how often the political party posted on its Facebook page. While some participants insisted that the party made posts as frequent as possible, particularly on daily basis, others disputed that posts were made as and when communication personnel of the party thought something or particular event(s) has to be put out there. For example, Participant F wobbled:

*We do post on daily basis because as our elections are going on, we are not able as communicators to be in all constituencies and regions at a time. Therefore, we post every day to update the public, members and other stakeholders on developments through Facebook.*

There was a contradiction to these assertions, as Participant E argued the responses given by Participant F. Conversely, Participant E stated:

*Making posts on our Facebook page depends on the activity, so we do not do them every day or regularly. However, as soon as an important programme, news or event comes up, such as press conferences, rallies, elections, among others, we immediately put them out on Facebook for our stakeholders and the general public by way of information.*

In other words, Participant G also subscribed that though “Facebooking” could be used to enhance relations if done as regular social media communication practice, the National Democratic Congress as a political party has not been able to regularise activities in respect interactions and conversations through posts, updates and feedback on the Facebook site.

### 7.5 Quantitative (Facebook) Data analysis

The second section of this Chapter presents data collected from content analysis of posts on the Facebook wall of National Democratic Congress. Content analysis allowed the study to put data into numbers to determine the frequency of interactions that occur between the party and stakeholders on Facebook. The study provides detailed discussions of the table below in the following chapter.

**Table 2: Showing daily Facebook posts by National Democratic Congress in national congress and internal party elections in November 2018**

Dates (Day/mm/year)	Posts	Number of likes	Number of comments	Number of shares
10/11/2018	-	-	-	-
11/11/2018	-	-	-	-
12/11/2018	2	577	30	20
13/11/2018	3	67	8	43
14/11/2018	3	108	5	10
15/11/2018	-	-	-	-
16/11/2018	2	42	10	2
17/11/2018	2	452	32	58
18/11/2018	3	334	21	30
19/11/2018	1	15	4	11
20/11/2018	-	-	-	-
21/11/2018	-	-	-	-
22/11/2018	1	45	2	2
23/11/2018	-	-	-	-
24/11/2018	1	157	9	14
25/11/2018	-	-	-	-
26/11/2018	-	-	-	-
Total	18	1,797	121	190
Average daily post(s)	1.06	-	-	-

Source: Thesis Research Data

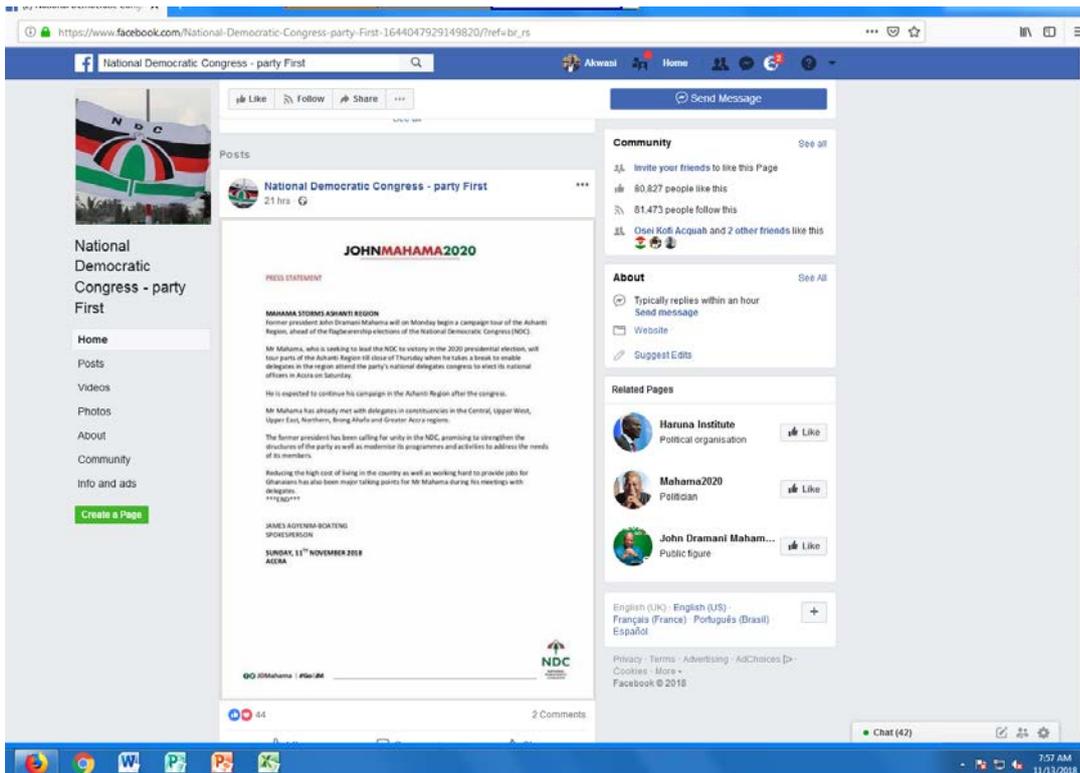


Figure 9: Sample of Facebook post on 13 November 2018

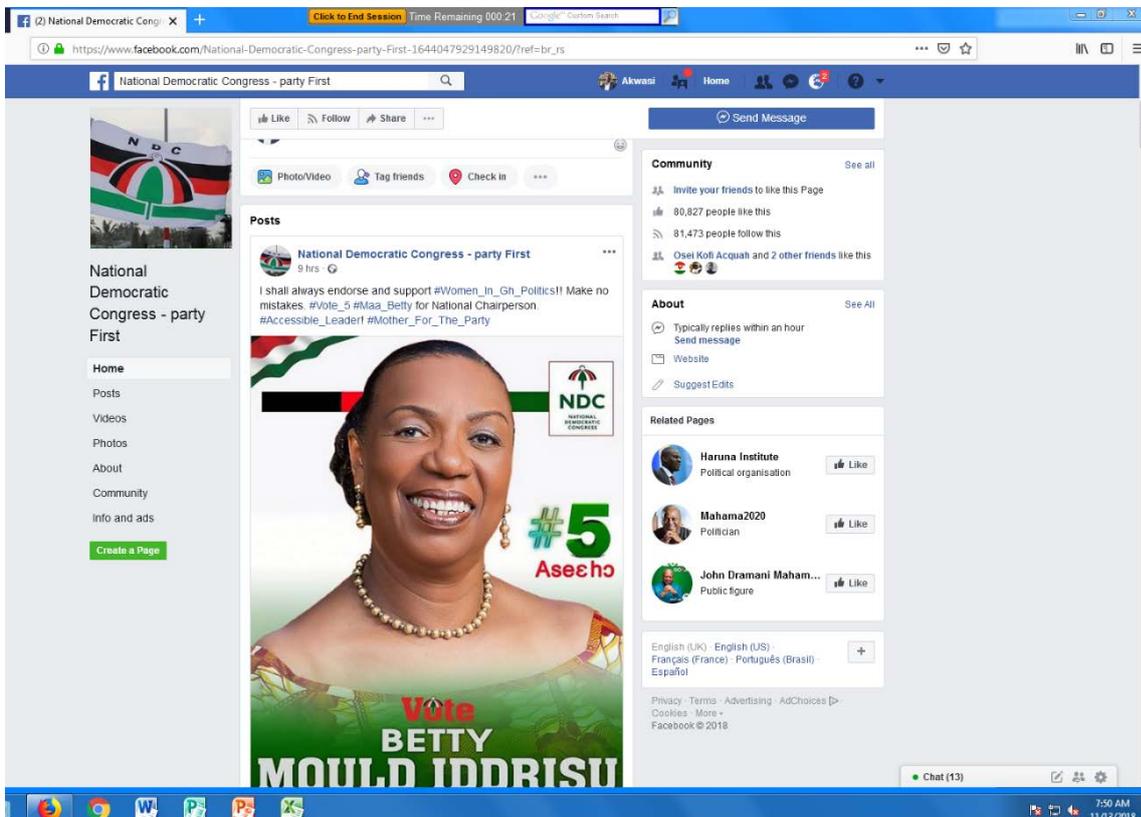


Figure 10: Sample of Facebook post on 13 November 2018

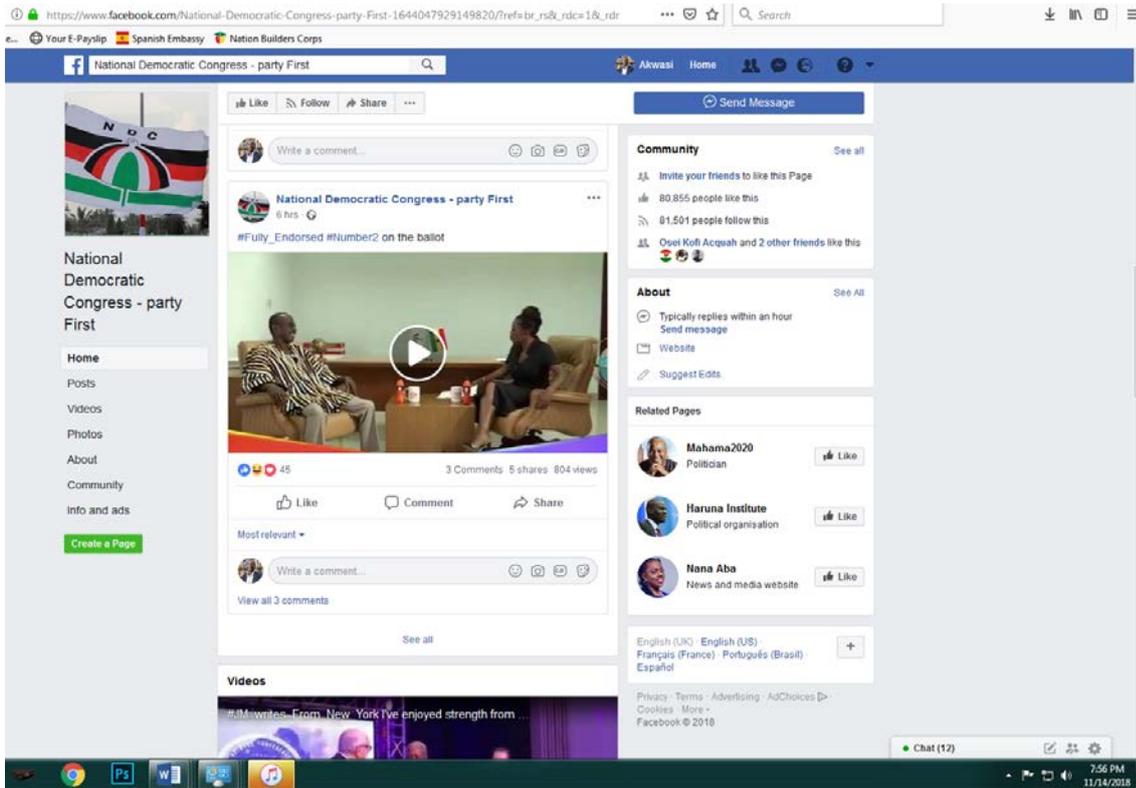


Figure 11: Sample of Facebook post on 14 November 2018

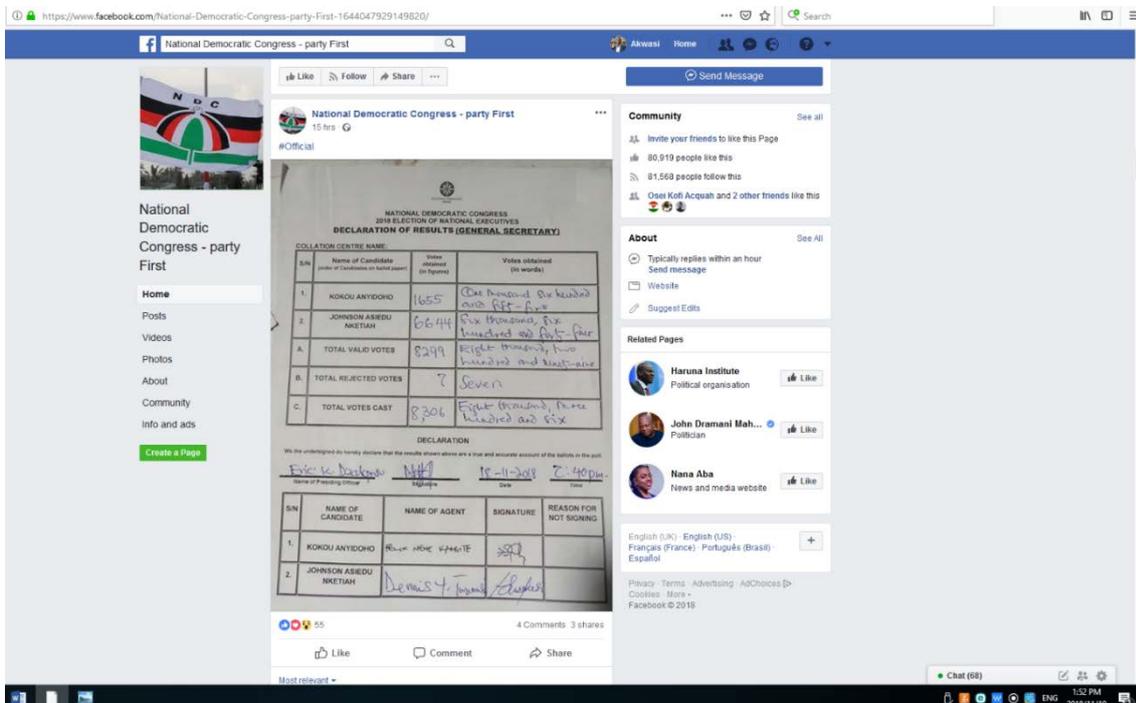


Figure 12: Sample of Facebook post on 19 November 2018

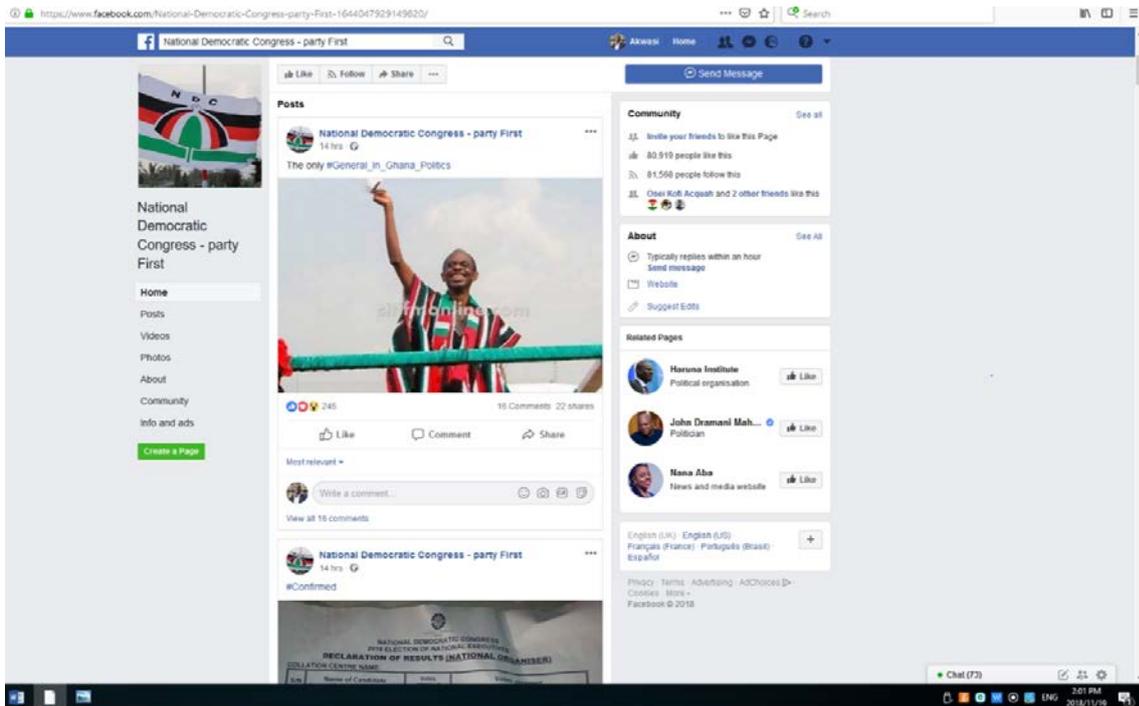


Figure 13: Sample of Facebook post on 19 November 2018

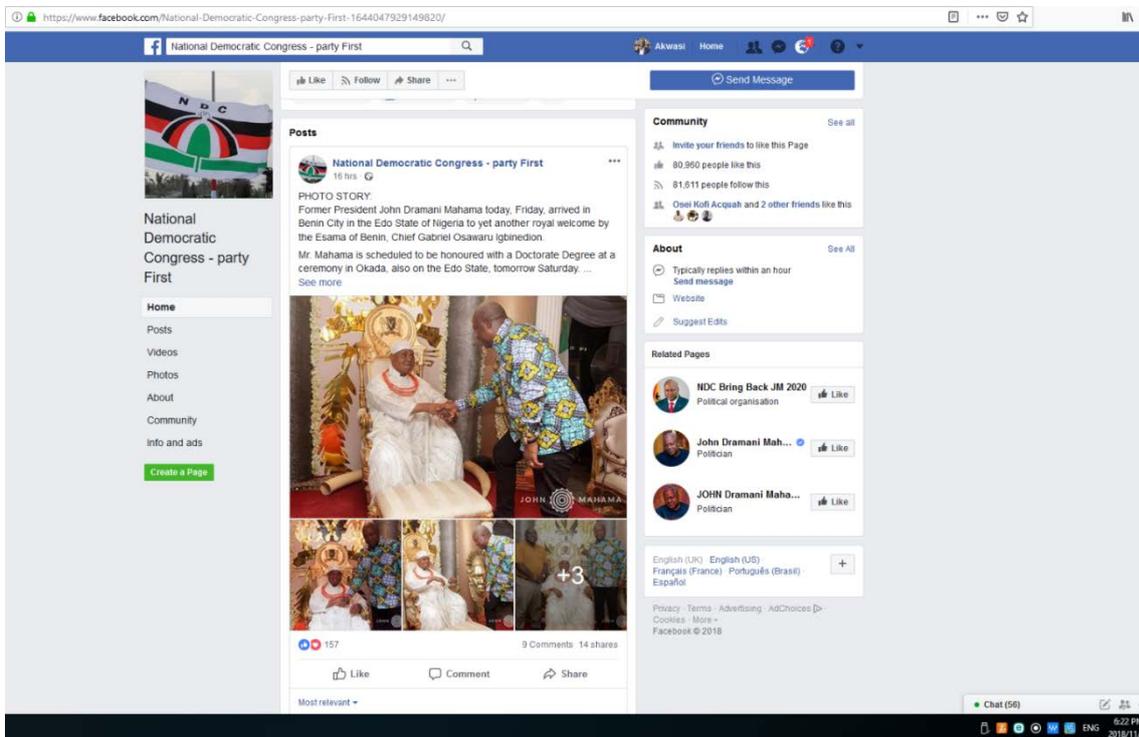


Figure 14: Sample of Facebook post on 24 November 2018

## **7.6 Summary**

This chapter presented the data analysis and findings with regard to National Democratic Congress. The chapter provided detailed descriptions of responses provided by communication officials of the party regarding social media activities in political communication through thematic analyses of interview data, as well as content analysis of Facebook posts before, during and after internal elections of the party. Qualitative data were put into themes and sub-themes, while Facebook data were also organised into tables, numbers and figures. The next chapter provides discussions of the findings from both National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party.

## CHAPTER 8

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 8.0 Introduction

This study used qualitative interviews and content analysis to collect data which was required to establish the findings of the research. The major findings within the preceding chapter were informed by two cases, each comprised of a political party in Ghana. The responses and findings from the four interviewees from each of the two political parties, that is, the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress, as well as content analysis of Facebook posts were combined into a single study. After comparing the sample size, this chapter evaluates findings relating to the literatures and theoretical frameworks that have been discussed in the study. The comparison is also done for the purposes of seeking agreements with the existing findings of the study, or indeed disagreements that are encountered in this study sample. Following the comparison of the sample size, and findings in respect of literature and theories, this chapter thence discusses the findings with regard to research questions.

This thesis adopts *technology appropriation model* (Carroll 2001, 2004), *relationship management* (Grunig & Hunt 1994; Grunig 2001, 2009) and *agenda-setting* (McCombs 1972, 1993; McCombs 2014) as its theoretical unpernning for the study of social media use in political communication and intra-party elections in Ghana. These theories have underpin the following discussions to demonstrate how the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress use social media particularly Facebook in the management of relationships and advancement of political agenda especially in their internal national party executive elections.

**Table 3: Showing a summary of contents of Facebook posts of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress during their national congresses and internal party elections in 2018**

*\*Reproduced from the framework of Gong and Lips (2009)*

Political Party	Content categories										
	Information Provision			Interactive Chats			Multimedia			Targeted Campaigning	
	IP1	IP2	IP3	IC1	IC2	IC3	M1	M2	M3	TC1	TC2
NPP	4	2	-	-	1	-	4	-	-	-	-
NDC	4	3	-	-	-	-	12	-	2	-	2

Source: Thesis Research Data

**Table 4: Showing a comparison of the degree of dominance of contents of Facebook pages of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in national congress and internal party elections in 2018**

<b>Dominance</b>	<b>New Patriotic Party (Number / %)</b>	<b>National Democratic Congress (Number / %)</b>	<b>Total (Number / 100 %)</b>
Information provision	6 (46.15%)	7 (53.85)	13
Interactive chats	1	-	1
Multimedia	4 (22.22%)	14 (77.77%)	18
Targeted campaigning	-	2	2
Total (Number / %)	11 (32.35%)	23 (67.65)	34

Source: Thesis Research Data

**Table 5: Showing interpretation of codes**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Key Contents</b>
IP1	News
IP2	Press Release
IP3	Policy statements
IC1	Interactive chats
IC2	Question and answer sessions
IC3	Response to enquiries
M1	Pictures
M2	Audio content
M3	Video content
TC1	Targeting specific voter segments
TC2	Targeting opponents

Source: Gong & Lips 2009

**Table 6: Showing a summary of membership and followers of Facebook pages of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress**

<b>Political party</b>	<b>Founding date</b>	<b>Party membership</b>	<b>Facebook likes of official party page</b>	<b>Followers / fans of official party Facebook page</b>
New Patriotic Party	28 July 1992	800,000 (approximately)	337,997	439,503
National Democratic Congress	28 July 1992	650,000 (approximately)	81,703	84,455

Source: Thesis Research Data

### **8.1 Discussion of findings with respect to literature**

The findings are discussed with regard to literatures that have been reviewed in this study. This study assesses its findings on the major themes which emerged from analysis of interview data, as well as content of Facebook activities in intra-party elections of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress during the sampled period.

#### ***Understanding political communication***

Participants appeared to have considerable understanding of political communication. They provided similar definitions that revolve around how political actors, especially political parties, media and citizens disseminate and receive information, among others. There was consensus that political communication is the means through which political actors and their stakeholders disseminate and exchange information for the purposes of influencing and achieving political goals. In line with previous research defining political communication (Perloff 2014; McNair 2012; Emmer *et al.* 2006), the explanations of the concept in this study conform with the Graber's (2005:479) definition that "political communication is the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages" that directly or indirectly influence politics. Against this backdrop, officials of political parties should be able to distinguish between political communication and other types of communication in appreciation of their knowledge, understanding and activities to reach out extensively to their stakeholders and audiences. This is especially true as political communication has been previously identified by Denton & Woodward (1998:2) as the "vehicle for political thought, debate, and action," as well as the means by which political parties and politicians can spread their messages including motives, interests, ideas, ideologies and values, as well as policies to their members, supporters and stakeholders to influence actions (Crozier 2006:2).

In this regard, a number of characteristics associated with political communication were identified by participants. Participants discussed these characteristics in terms of the political actors, intentions, purpose and goals of this type of communication. The features highlighted were consistent with (Ball 2014; Perloff 2014; Schudson 2003) who note that communication that could be referred to as political are usually organised and backed with steps and actions for achieving political motives.

Participants were cognisant of the role of political communication in the activities toward the achievement of the goals of their parties. Comments from the party officials resonate with research which focuses on the opportunities provided by communication in politics (for example, Asah-Asante 2015; Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011). These findings conform to the views that political communication provides diverse opportunities through strategic ways of building relationships in public sphere (McNamara 2018; Blumler & Gurevitch 2000). Participants further acknowledged that such communication enabled them to package the messages of political parties to be able to market and advertise them to the electorates in drawing support for their agenda. This aligns with research that has situated political communication as a way of marketing and advertising parties, as well as their members, policies and programmes, among others (Kaid 2004; Lock & Harris 1996).

Despite the opportunities provided in political communication, there are a number of drawbacks that challenge activities. Participants' acknowledgement of challenges associated with these communications are consistent with previous literature on contemporary political communication (for example, Tuman 2008), and highlights that several factors impede the sharing of information in political communication. This also resonates with issues identified by Tuman (2008:10) as preventing objective political communication, therefore describing it as something of a misnomer and machinery for propaganda, distortion, half-truths, fake news and exaggeration, among others to unethically manipulate and influence citizens and voters.

### ***Understanding social media***

Participants gave many descriptions of social media, situating the concept in terms of their virtual, interactive and cost effective features, among others. They shared similar understandings and views regarding how social media allow their parties to send and receive messages in the form of interpersonal communication. Political parties particularly New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress are appropriating social media communications to connect and allow people to connect with them, as well as provide information. Consistent with prior research that address the different forms of the social media

phenomenon (Carr & Hayes 2015; Mandiberg 2012; Jacka & Scott 2011; Kaplan & Haenlin 2010), the explanations and usage of social media in this study resonate with Fuchs and Trottier's (2015:5) definition of social media as platforms that provide opportunities for users in establishing communities online to connect, communicate, interact and exchange ideas, messages and contribute to contents and participation.

Hence, political parties need to capitalise on the opportunities presented by social media platforms to broaden their horizons, knowledge and understanding of the expectations of stakeholders and the general public, especially as this has been highlighted in previous studies as important tools in relationship management (Volders 2013:10). In demonstrating further their understandings of the social media concept, participants recounted a number of features and examples of social media communication. These align with (Gyampo 2017) and Carr & Hayes (2015) who note that it is through the features of immediacy, interactivity and user-generated content, among others that make social media like *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *WhatsApp*, among others useful and unique from other forms of communication.

Participants highlighted a number of functions of social media in communication especially in their practice as political communicators. For them the functionalities of social media lie in their ability to promote the exchange of information and create instantaneous responses and reactions through interactions with stakeholders and audiences. The acknowledgement of this major function conforms to what has been noted in prior literature on the interactive and conversational features of social media (for example, Howard & Park 2012; Volders 2013). This suggests that party officials recognise the roles social media play in political communication activities. Such functions enable political parties to communicate and converse with the public to draw support for their political agenda. These align with prior studies that have identified social media as forms of communication that allow political parties to build relations and advance their goals (Kamau 2014:10).

Participants demonstrated how they have appropriated social media in the communication activities of political parties. They have established accounts and profiles on a number of social media platforms where they put information and messages about their political parties. The value of the communication and connection between political parties and their stakeholders on social media provides the chance of developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships through interactions and conversations to promote agenda (Kiranda *et al.* 2016; Cap & Okulska 2013; Beciu 2011). This underpinned the political parties' willingness and creations of presence on social media channels, indicating their readiness to establish relationships.

Social media provided political parties many opportunities in communication, given their several features. Participants in this study confirmed that social media gave their political parties the opportunity to enter into interactive engagements and seek opinions, as well as connect with the many unconnected members, stakeholders and the general public. This is particularly important considering the need to widen their reach to the many audiences and stakeholders, and resonates with the views of Tayeebwa (2016:17) and World Development Report (2016:6) that highlighted the potentials and opportunities, regarding appropriation of social media in creating networks and different forms of communities and organisations to develop beneficial relationships and understanding in engagements.

Along with these identified opportunities, participants in the political parties pointed a number of factors that challenged their parties in social media communication including fake news, disinformation and misinformation, as well as other online crimes. Consistent with extant literature, these acknowledgements suggest that political parties appeared not to be giving wide attention and currency in social media communication, which could serve as avenues for long term mutually beneficial engagements and relationships in advancing agenda. This contradicts the suggestions (for example, Blumler & Kavanagh 1999; Norris 2000) that social media has to be taken serious and delivered in concerted ways at all times to promote stakeholder-engagements toward the attainment of political goals. This drawback was anticipated, given that some scholars (see Windeck 2011; Riaz 2010; Albirini 2008) had in previous literatures contested that social media and other forms of new media have not changed political communication, engagements and participation in African contexts, making it difficult for their impact on democracy to be assessed through politics.

### ***Facebook in political communication***

Facebooking has now become an integral part of the communication activities of the political parties. Participants provided antecedents of the party's Facebook activities and the motivation for its use in their communication. Participants acknowledged that they were motivated to use Facebook for its trend as a new phenomenon for engaging many people at cheaper cost. In this regard Facebook is a unique social media networking platform that enable political parties to show case a sense of personality as brands, making it possible for them to create contents, designs and pictures, among others to market themselves in the public sphere. This aligns with the studies of Kaid (2004) and Lock and Harris (1996) on political marketing, which postulate the need for political parties to market and develop their brands to attract voters. It also provides them an avenue for interactive engagements. Resonant with

Macnamara's (2018) and Kearney's (2013) studies, the utility of Facebook in political communication was thought to enhance the usefulness in the promotion of mutually beneficial relationships. More so, party officials noted that *Facebooking* offered them the chance to engage with many young people. This is also in line with Kamau's (2017) view that because there are many youths on social media including Facebook, it has become necessary for political parties and politicians to create and maintain their presence on such platforms to attract them. This suggests that it is very important for parties to focus more attention on social networking activities.

Participants acknowledged how Facebook enabled them to advance the agenda of their political parties. They established that Facebook as a form of social media communication and networking tool gave them direct control over contents to influence the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of their members, stakeholders and the general public for the achievement of their political goals especially in elections. These acknowledgements are consistent with previous research conducted by Bond *et al.* (2012) and McLeod & Shah (2009) regarding the impact of Facebook on politics, who indicate that Facebook provides free, uncontrolled and unrestricted avenues for political parties to manipulate their messages with respect to their activities, policies and programmes to suit the interests of the public and electorates. This is especially important during elections because it could serve as strategic avenue to inform and engage the public, as well as mobilise supporters for electoral processes and campaigns.

The political parties appeared to be monitoring the effects of their *Facebooking* activities by observing what activities occur on their Facebook pages after they have put messages and information on their walls. This shows attempts by political parties at ensuring that they keep abreast of trends, developments and issues on Facebook. This resonates with the observation made by Kosinski *et al.* (2013) from prior research that Facebook enables organisations and individuals to examine activities and reactions from posts and predict potential actions from the public.

In the appropriation of *Facebooking* into their communication activities, political parties have encountered a number of drawbacks as regards delivery. These include issues of polemics and fake news, financial constraints, lack of education and social media communication skills, among others. These challenges are not different from the impediments enumerated in a number of researches (for example, Waisbord 2018; Wasserman *et al.* 2018; Nnanyelugo & Nwafor 2013), which include fake news, propaganda, polemics and resource constraints, among others. Hence, there is the need for innovative approaches in addressing these issues that impede *Facebooking* communication activities by political parties.

### ***Engagements and relationship management***

Participants appeared to recognise the value of social media, particularly what Facebook can provide them in their engagements to help them develop and manage mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and the general public. Comments from the party officials are in resonance with emerging research focused on social media in political public relations (for example, Mare 2016; Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011; Moloney 2006). These findings conform to the notion that political parties and politicians may accrue potential benefits and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and the general public via the utilisation of social media in concerted ways. In this sense it promotes cooperation and friendship in political public relations and communication (Goncalves 2014:101).

The acknowledgements by communication officials of political parties regarding the opportunities presented by social media for stakeholder engagements align with previous literature regarding social media and new forms of communication (for example, Kaplan & Haenlin 2016; Hellweg 2011; Boyd & Ellison 2008). This suggests that party officials were aware of the opportunities that are provided by the interactive nature of social media, especially Facebook for enhancing mutually beneficial engagements and relationships in politics. However, this study extends the discussion by explicitly positing the two-way conversations as requirement from both political parties and their stakeholders or audiences for relationship building on the Facebook site. These opportunities serve as the basis for two-way symmetrical communication in the development and sustenance of mutually beneficial relationships between parties and their stakeholders, as well as the general public. This is consistent with Kearney's study (2017:107) that social media including Facebook should be used to promote the exchange and sharing of information through update of profiles, message postings and responding to comments, and also chatting and liking posts, among others.

On the other hand, there are a number of factors that participants pointed out as challenging their engagements and relationship building on Facebook, which were not different from what pertains to other forms of social media. Participants recounted drawbacks, such as cyber-crimes, impersonation, fake news, disinformation and misinformation, among others as the bottlenecks to the *Facebooking* activities. These are similar to the challenges highlighted in the study of Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2018), Waisbord (2018) and Kalsnes (2016).

Participants conceded that they were not engaging with groups and affiliate institutions of their parties on Facebook in communicating and addressing issues. This could result in misunderstanding and disagreement between political parties and stakeholder groups, which has the tendency of breeding insecurity and violence including misuse of political vigilantism,

among others. This acceptance contradicts the notion of Facebook allowing organisations and individuals who have common interests to gather and form groups and relationships on the site to share information and messages, as well as engage and collaborate towards achieving goals (Bosch 2009; [www.facebook.com/policy](http://www.facebook.com/policy)). These are among the challenges identified in previous study conducted by Zang *et al.* (2010:75-80), which highlighted many issues and posits *Facebooking* as mere representation of online political discussions that do not transform engagements and relationships between political actors and groups as compared to face-to-face communication.

However, participants generally acknowledged that Facebook communication had enhanced relationships by getting stakeholders and the general public much closer to them. This is because it provides them the chance to directly engage and gather feedback through interactions and conversations. This is in line with the observations by Halpern & Gibs (2013:1160) who noted in prior research that Facebook enhance relationships and connects users with accessible profile information to promote active and sociable discussions. This facilitates mobilisation and organisation (Goncalves 2014:100-101). Participants acknowledged the importance of Facebook in terms of its capability of sustaining interactions and conversations with stakeholders and the general public on the site. Yet, evidence in this study from Facebook contradicts this acknowledgement, which revealed that political parties were not using the platform to build relationships through interactions and conversations on the site. Political parties only made a few posts once in a while and did not respond to feedback, comments and questions from other users, stakeholders and the general public. The New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress use Facebook as a one-way passive and top-down communication approach, which is, disseminating messages and information from the parties via public information without interactive engagements. This is in spite of the fact that Facebook has many unique features for such purposes as highlighted in Kearney's (2013) previous study.

### ***Facebooking in intra-party elections***

With regard to how *Facebooking* impacts politics and electoral processes, participants commented on how their political parties use Facebook communication in intra-party elections. The political parties generally put information about their parties especially concerning activities regarding internal electoral processes, which have been in the form of pictures, audios, videos and texts, among others. These posts give details about nominations, vetting and declaration of results, among others. These are not different from the various what (Kearney

2017; Borah 2016; Dillard 1989, 1997, 2008; Kellermann 1992) highlighted in their studies regarding the political use of Facebook especially in communication, information, election campaigns and mobilisation, among others.

As regards the level of engagements and interactions, as well as the frequency of posts made by the political parties, communication officials argued that they made different forms of posts on regular basis. Participants underpinned their arguments by noting social media and *Facebooking* as very critical in the daily communication activities of their parties. However, evidence gathered in this study from their Facebook pages contradicts their claims as these parties were not using Facebook in that regard. This is because for the number of days sampled for data collection and analysis of Facebook data of the political parties, they could only make a few posts on the site. In all the cases, the parties were not posting frequently nor on daily basis; neither did the parties engage in any form of interactions with stakeholders and the public on Facebook. These show that political parties are not making good use of the communicative, interactive and relationship features of Facebook. This contradicts the previous studies (for example, Fuchs & Trottier 2015; Beciu 2011) who highlight the need for continuous engagements with stakeholders and consistent postings of messages and information on Facebook by political parties to yield positive results. This has the tendency of promoting understanding and sustaining mutually beneficial relations for the advancement of communication, as well as the achievement of political goals.

The recognition of the utility of social media, particularly Facebook by the political parties has encouraged them to establish profile accounts and walls that have attracted large followings on their pages. The New Patriotic Party has over 439,503 followers of its Facebook page while National Democratic Congress has over 84,455 followers of its wall. During its internal party elections in July 2018, the New Patriotic Party communicated seven times through multi-media formats such as text, audio and video. Together, the posts which had different communicative purposes (see different content categories in Table 1 below) attracted 995 likes, 88 comments and the posts were shared 43 times. This is close to half of the posts by the National Democratic Congress which posted 18 times during its national congress and internal party elections in November 2018. These posts attracted 1,797 likes, 121 comments and 190 posts were shared by the followers.

The insignificant number of posts and activities on Facebook particularly during intra-party elections could be as a result of several reasons, including naivety on the part of the political parties. This is especially true given that some communication officials recounted how and why their parties are rather more particular about traditional forms of communication than

social media. They insisted that since many of their supporters and electorates were found in rural locations, and mostly uneducated, the political parties could reach their stakeholders more easily through traditional channels, particularly radio and television for mass communication with the public. This might be a reason why political parties have adopted ad-hoc and lackadaisical attitudes towards Facebook communication. Political parties do not critically recognise the essence of prioritising social media activities and political public relations. The insignificant amount of *Facebooking* attests that the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress are merely undertaking social media communication occasionally for the sake of following the trends regarding the new phenomenon.

Comparatively, the National Democratic Congress did better in respect of “Facebooking” activities than the New Patriotic Party; per the data collected from Facebook pages during their respective intra-party elections in 2018. From the overall Facebook activities by both political parties during the combined sampled periods (34 days) of data collection, the New Patriotic Party did 28% of *Facebooking*. While the National Democratic Congress did 72% of the activities. Functionally, both political parties used Facebook for the purposes of public information, as opposed to the usage for the promotion of direct engagements, interactions and two-way symmetric communication. Inasmuch as users of Facebook especially political parties are motivated by influence goals to extend their engagements through opinion-seeking and interactive approaches in the form of political posts and follows (Kearney 2017:107), New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress are not using the platform for *interaction goals*.

It can be said from how the two political parties communicate and post relevant messages to enhance their images and impressions on Facebook that these parties have some desire for *interactive engagements*. However, their inability to exchange coherent information to conversationally and politically engage and manage stakeholder expectations via interactions has prevented the political parties from achieving *relational resource goals* that exist in the forms of personal rewards and emotional support, as well as other sources of gratifications that emerge from interactions (Kearney 2017:107). This is because they are not specifically concerned about “interaction-specific related forces,” hence they do not focus on the expectations of their stakeholders and individuals, or perhaps they have not been able to use social media to engage people to perceive them positively through political engagements and interactions, and eventually resulting into political posts and likes on the Facebook site (Kearney 2017:107). The relational resource goals entail the interest to access the potential rewards and benefits of promoting mutually beneficial relationships with other users and

friends on Facebook. In respect of this, the political parties have not taken advantage of the political power and potentials of Facebook in promoting mutually beneficial engagements and relationships with other political actors and users especially followers on the site because they neither interact, converse nor respond in the form of feedback to messages and comments which are posted by their stakeholders.

The political parties relied on Facebook as a public information tool largely for spreading information and messages to stakeholders and the general public. Practically, these parties are not using Facebook for sustainable engagements and conversations, as their focus of attention has been on traditional news media using the passive communication in reaching out to political stakeholders. This means that these political parties in Ghana are more interested in hegemonic use of communication to attract political interests for power rather than giving priority to direct engagements, interactivity and conversations in their communication with stakeholders. This demonstrates how these parties have relegated the instrumental goals of using social media in politics, which posit “Facebooking” as tool for involving stakeholders and users in political expressions to issues and messages that are discussed on the platform (Kearney 2017:107). However, political parties have failed to interact on Facebook as a social networking site. Hence, Facebook has not been used to address the grievances and challenges of their stakeholders because political parties do not interact, converse nor give feedback or perhaps take the responses and comments to their posts, as well as messages and issues from stakeholders to their Facebook pages as critical to address.

Considering the foregoing, the end for which political parties in Ghana use Facebook include the presentation of individuals, especially party members and followers, making updates of postings and drumming up support for the achievement of party activities and leadership especially in elections. This implies that political stakeholders do not directly influence the activities, programmes and debates on Facebook as regards electoral processes because the Facebook usage by political parties in Ghana has been unilateral, which does not favour nor promote conversations and interactions. The political parties are particularly appropriating social media including Facebook for one-way passive communication, rather than the two two-way symmetrical communication and engagements with stakeholders to enhance interactions and address issues as a way of establishing and managing relationships with stakeholders, which this study proposes for adoption about political communication. The two-way model and approach to communication enable political parties to gather the views of stakeholders on critical issues affecting stakeholders that need to be addressed.

This study concurs with the claim by Gyampo (2017:193) that political parties in Ghana are aware of the usefulness of social media especially Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter, among others as avenues they could use to communicate their party positions and policies on political and socio-economic issues. However, this study contradicts Gyampo's (2017:193) observation that parties in Ghana communicate their party policies on key issues on Facebook, as shown in the content category (see Policy Statement Table 1 above). The parties have not attached significant attention to social media because they do not have the outfits, as well as the requisite and professional staff and understanding of political public relations to manage social media communication as a two-way symmetrical engagement and concerted activity rather than ad-hoc and occasional events to derive its potential benefits.

The finding of this study supports the assertion of Gyampo (2017:196) who reckons that social media provides opportunity for people who cannot contribute to radio discussions during their "phone-in sessions" in the traditional media to directly contribute their views and opinions. However, considering the categorisation as shown (see Interactive chats, Question and answer sessions and Response to enquiries Table 1 above) political parties are not engaging stakeholders and users on Facebook in discussions, as well as soliciting voices and opinions regarding matters affecting the country and their parties, as Gyampo's (2017) previous study highlighted. It is especially true that social media provides millions of people, supporters and undecided voters the chance to express their opinion or voice their views as regards national issues in the form of discussions and conversations.

On the contrary, the situation is different in the case of political parties in Ghana. For the 17 days sampled for each of the two political parties, the New Patriotic Party posted only one live interactive chat. The National Democratic Congress did not post any interactive chats. This shows the lack of two-way symmetrical approach and public relations tact on the part of the political parties for mutually beneficially engagements with stakeholders via interactions and interpersonal communication especially in intra-party elections. This was evident in the study, given that most of the communication officials of the political parties had neither professional background nor training in communication, or perhaps expertise in public relations. However, these personnel were performing social media and political communication functions and activities just because they have the passion or desire to communicate for the parties, but not for their knowledge, competence and skills. As a consequence, there is a missing public relations understanding and cognisance of interactive chats as ways of shifting communication between political parties and the general public especially stakeholders into direct engagements.

The data gathered in this study from responses provides evidence that the political parties use social media including Facebook in communication, organisation of members and mobilisation of support especially in elections. This concurs with Gyampo's (2017) finding that political parties in Ghana mobilise support and members on Facebook pages as platform for a number of activities that may include registration of members and potential members nation-wide, among others. Given the categories in (see Specific voter segments and Opponents Table 1 above), these parties do not particularly use Facebook for target campaigning, which makes it difficult them mobilise voters and supporters into their parties through social media. During the 17 days sampled in the internal elections of the two parties, the New Patriotic Party did not post any message that targeted specific voter segments nor their its opponents. This is not especially different from the National Democratic Congress that posted no message targeting specific voter segments, but made two posts against the political opponent.

From the above, it can be seen that the political parties have largely focused on the use of social media as information provision channels, particular news and press releases and multimedia. The New Patriotic party posted four news items and two press releases during the sampling period. On the other hand, the National Democratic Congress posted four news items and three press releases. Their multi-media posts have been in the form of pictures and videos. The New Patriotic Party posted four pictures and no video content. The National Democratic Congress posted 12 pictures and two video contents. The National Democratic Congress had a high degree of dominance of contents on Facebook than the New Patriotic Party. Put together, the National Democratic Congress had 23 posts in respect of all content categories, representing 67.65% of dominance. The New Patriotic Party on the other hand made 11 posts in all content categories, representing 32.35%. From *Table 4* showing content categories, the New Patriotic Party made six posts (46.15%) of information provision; as compared to seven posts (67.65%) by the National Democratic Congress regarding dominance in "Facebooking" activities. With respect to multimedia, the New Patriotic Party did four posts representing 22.22%; while the National Democratic Congress which had 14 posts, representing 77.77% of this category. Only one interactive chat was made by the parties, particularly the New Patriotic Party; while the only two targeted campaigning posts were done specifically by the National Democratic Congress in their *Facebooking* activities.

However, the data and statistics in this study to a large extent demonstrate a lack of drive on the part of political parties in making use of social media to generate excitement, controversy and debate, as well as denouncing their opponents, among others, as shown in

Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4. The gaps in social media appropriation especially *Facebooking* during such key events as the internal national executive elections in 2018 confirm that social media is still in its infantile stages in the political parties. It is a reflection that political parties are still in the learning process of social media use, and therefore require transformation to improve and mature in the use of these new tools. Perhaps political parties are not much enlightened in social media communication. In other words, these parties do not have enlightened communication policies for improving the use of social media and Facebook as interactive avenues engaging electorates and the general public, as well as mobilising support in electoral processes.

## **8.2 Discussion of findings with regard to theories**

Consistent with Carroll's (2001, 2004) model of technology appropriation, this study found evidence of technological appropriation of Facebook in the examination of social media communication of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress. The key elements of the technology appropriation model in terms of *Technology-as-designed* and *technology-in-use* (Carroll 2001, 2004) characterise the *Facebooking* activities as networking technology. In the context of this study, Facebook as an application is a representation and artefact of social media, that is, *technology-as-design* that possess a number of communication features including the ability to post, comment, like, share, follow and update status, among others, attracting the political parties into making use of this new media technology. These attributes and features of Facebook as a technological design attract political parties to adapt and adopt the platform, and subsequently transforming the site into *technology-in-use* as these parties continue to use Facebook for their communication needs (Carroll 2001, 2004).

In confirming the appropriation of social media by New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress as a process, two emergent stages of their Facebook appropriation were noted by this study. These were also consistent with previous study by Fidock (2011) on appropriation of technology. The first to be observed was the *experimentation* stage in which communication officials of both political parties identified and accessed Facebook as a technology (Fidock 2011), thereby exploring its potential fulfilment of their communication needs, that is, both perception and orientation of the parties. The second is in respect of *adaption*, which involves activities and how parties have adapted Facebook as an artefact of technology in their social media engagements, as well as how such practices have reshaped or transformed into appropriation and embedded in the communication structures of the political parties (Fidock 2011).

Relationship management remains critical in political public relations and communication with stakeholders (Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011). Hence, building on the early public relations role models propounded by Grunig & Hunt (1984), this study illustrates that the political parties appear to be using Facebook as a form of social media site to communicate and connect with their stakeholders and the public. The creation of profiles on Facebook is an indication of the parties' willingness or readiness to create relationships. However, the political parties have mostly made posts on their Facebook pages without responding to feedback from recipients, illustrating the top-down relational approach and one-way passive dissemination of messages from the parties to stakeholders and the public. This exemplifies the *press-agentry model* of Grunig & Hunt's (1984) public relations framework. This implies that parties are using Facebook as social media communication to maintain their presence, as well as to send out messages about their parties, members and leaders in projecting them positively in the public eye.

From another angle, the political parties use their Facebook pages as credible sources of information to the public. In setting political agenda and engagements, the social media communication activities of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress on Facebook have largely depicted the public information model of Grunig & Hunt's (1984) communication relations. In this regard, the political parties use Facebook to report programmes, news and press statements and releases, among others from their parties to the general public to inform them about events, activities and decisions that are taken by the parties and leaderships.

On the other hand, the two-way asymmetrical framework of Grunig & Hunt (1984) was not particularly evident in social media and Facebook activities of the political parties, as they are not using the Facebook site as an avenue for conducting research, gathering public intelligence, information and expectations of their stakeholders and the public in addressing issues. Facebook has not been practically used by the political parties to gather what opponents and stakeholders have been postings onto their profile pages to craft and send political messages about their organisations that address public expectations. These parties are not exploring the use of Facebook as an opportunity for citizens and stakeholders to identify with their interests, preferences and agenda via feedback and inclusion. This is especially true given that data collected from Facebook pages of the parties did not record posts or research activities for opinion polls and survey, among others by parties to pick intelligence within the public sphere.

The lack of interactions and conversational engagements on Facebook makes it difficult for the political parties to adopt the two-way symmetrical way of communication, as suggested by Grunig & Hunt (1984) and Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011) for political public relations. In this regard, the communication practices observed in this study is inconsistent with this framework because New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress are not directly engaging and relating with their stakeholders in terms feedback on the input and comments from the public. This challenges the ability of the parties to nurture mutually beneficial relations for the promotion and achievement of political agenda. In other words, the political parties are creating identities by profiling their organisations, members and leaders on Facebook.

Particular to this study is ways by which political parties use social media, such as Facebook for setting and advancing political agenda especially in intra-party elections. Inasmuch as these political parties post information and activities on Facebook to draw the attention to information and stories they see as prominent about their activities for the public and stakeholders to know and think about (McCombs & Shaw 1972), they perform agenda-setting functions. The evidence that parties are able to select from many issues and determine which of those items to be posted on their Facebook pages demonstrate how the political parties are circumventing traditional news media to present their political and news agenda to the public and recipients. On the Facebook site there are no intermediaries and gatekeepers to either restrict or control their information, unlike traditional media. In this regard, the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress are engaging stakeholders on Facebook in agenda-setting through interactive, uncontrolled and unrestricted public space. This could promote mutually beneficial relationships, agreements and support from stakeholders of political parties for the achievement of agenda especially in elections. The agenda setting roles of the parties in this case, go beyond the media in the sense that the traditional media outlets do resort to information and messages that parties put forward as agenda on Facebook and social media.

This study particularly posits that Facebook as a unique social media site, which could be used for advancing the agenda of political parties because it allows them to exercise control over content and direct provision of information via postings and interactions with stakeholders and the public. These promote feedback on subjects and issues that political parties deem to be important and topical for citizens and stakeholders to know, discuss and think about (McCombs & Shaw 1972). However, the lack of interpersonal engagements in the form of interactions and conversations and discussions with stakeholders on the social media prevents the parties from executing their political agenda through Facebook. This could challenge the ability of social

media to circumvent the traditional agenda-setting and gate keeping functions of the old media, such as radio, newspaper and television for direct engagements in determining, advancing and addressing major issues.

### **8.3 Discussion of findings in respect of first research question**

*How can one distinguish between the role played in and reason for utilising and appropriating Facebook by political parties in Ghana as different from other forms of communication?*

The narratives provided in this study indicate that the role played by social media, particularly Facebook is considerably significant in the activities of political parties. The opportunities that Facebook provides for networking and interactive engagements in the public sphere motivate the political parties in Ghana to utilise and appropriate Facebook as a more cost effective and efficient means of communication as compared with other forms of communication (Gyampo 2017).

Instead of drawing a definitive conclusion about Facebook appropriation in political communication, this study aimed at extending the scope, depth and framework to promote further research regarding the impact of Facebook and social media on politics with a focus on the communication practices of officials of political parties in Ghana. What has come out from the findings in respect of this study is that this new form of communication requires its role in politics to be exploited through concerted efforts by parties for engagements directed at political public relations, which may be difficult to achieve through other forms of media (Goncalves 2014:99-108). The role Facebook plays in the political parties as provided in responses, coupled with what was gathered from the site include forming relationships and groups, sending messages, performing searches and queries, setting-up events, as well as transmission of information via various channels.

Facebook is projected as a key factor in improving communication, interactions and relationships toward the advancement of political agenda in spite of being economical. This has been discussed by this study in detail with respect to Ghana, as data give evidence that New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress as the two major political parties regard Facebook as communication activity they need to be undertaken strategically to inform and interact with the public as a way of taking advantage of the growing phenomenon and trend.

#### **8.4 Discussion of findings with regard to second research question**

*In what ways do political parties in Ghana use Facebook to engage with stakeholders for communication and activities before, during and after internal party executive elections?*

The responses gathered in this study show that Facebook is used by the political parties to communicate with stakeholders, especially in intra-party electoral processes. The unanimous responses and emphatic recognition regarding the usefulness of Facebook in electoral campaigns before, during and after internal party elections demonstrate its significance in political activities. Political parties and data from the site showed a number of activities for which they used Facebook in intra-party elections, such as putting out announcement about the electoral processes, campaign messages and marketing their members through the use of pictures, texts, audios and videos, among others. However, the level to which these political parties considered and appropriated Facebook communication for engagements in internal elections differed fairly.

What can be said by this study about how Facebook is used by the parties to engage stakeholders in internal party executive elections is that, the Facebook phenomenon has widened their communication horizons as far as possibilities, message dissemination and public information are concerned. More so, the participants in this study acknowledged that Facebook has become a critical social media tool, transforming political communication, activities and campaigns in intra-party competitions of the parties especially before, during and after internal national executive elections.

#### **8.5 Discussion of findings as regards third research question**

*How might political parties in Ghana and their stakeholders interact meaningfully on Facebook to create mutually beneficial relationship to achieve political goals?*

It is suggestive for this study to highlight that while participants spoke generally about social media use in their activities, political communication and engagements, they were careful to avoid information about how the party used Facebook for two-way symmetrical communication, interactions and mutually beneficial relationships, even when the study encouraged them to provide more evidence for their assertions. Among the participants, the communication practices on Facebook by the parties have created varied perspectives regarding their political public relations activities and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders for the achievement of political goals.

Upon consideration and careful treatment of the content of responses, this reluctance give support to the argument that the political parties in Ghana are not using Facebook and

social media for leveraging mutually beneficial engagements and relationships through direct communication, interactions and conversations. This study considers then that inasmuch as Facebook has opened up many opportunities for political parties and politicians to shift the dynamics of their communication and relations from the one-way passive approach to the two-way symmetrical engagements, they have not taken advantages of its potentials. In terms of two-way symmetric communication and mutually beneficial relationships, these are still in their early stages of the political parties.

There were general acceptance and expression of admiration as regards Facebook's potentials as a useful social media communication tool for connections, networking and developing mutually beneficial relationships in the advancement of political agenda. There is this suggestion that Facebook presents new forms of communication, where its abilities and potentials come to the fore, as well as where relationships and agenda can be advanced because it opens up new public space for mutually beneficial engagements through feedback from direct and inter personal communication.

#### **8.6 Discussion of findings with respect to fourth research question**

*In the sharing of political opinions, what is the nature and overall quantitative content of messages and corresponding comments posted by political parties and their followers in Ghana on Facebook walls?*

Identifying the nature and content of messages, as well as the frequency of Facebook activities in the form of posts, comments and other reactions was a key consideration in this study. Many participants were not sure about the frequency of messages and level of interactions in the parties' *Facebooking* activities. While others were emphatic that their political parties engage the public regularly on Facebook, other participants disagreed. With regard to the nature of messages that are posted on the Facebook site, the parties had similar items and information, usually in the form of news, programmes and activities of these parties. These messages have been in the form of videos, audios, pictures, announcements, press statements and releases, among others. In terms of quantity, the parties made a number of posts and received comments and likes from users and followers on Facebook. The quantitative details of activities on Facebook have been provided in *Table 1* in Chapter 6; *Table 2* in Chapter 7; and *Table 3* in Chapter 8.

## **8.7 Summary**

This chapter provided discussions of findings with respect to literature, theory and research questions in relations with samples compared and *Facebooking* in electioneering. The next chapter concludes this thesis. It provides a summary of all the findings discovered by the research during its examination of Facebook usage in political communication activities and intra-party elections in Ghana.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

#### 9.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter surveys the primary purpose of this research. It synthesises, the various findings and draws conclusions of this thesis. In addition, this chapter discusses the study's implication, and provides recommendations for practice and policy, among others. The work seeks to shed new light on the debate with respect to the effect of social media on political communication in Africa by examining how Facebook is appropriated by political parties in Ghana as regards relationships, communication and intra-party elections. In view of this, the study situates technology appropriation in relationship management and advancement of political agenda, which seeks to argue for direct engagements and interactions on social media for campaigns and goals. It addresses current political communication issues and social media practice in Ghana with particular regard to how Facebook is used in politics especially at intra-party elections. Importantly, this study set out to examine the application of "Facebooking" in political parties in Ghana regarding the practices of communication officials in their engagements with stakeholders and with the public.

This study draws on existing literature and research on social media and political communication to provide insights into literature in the particular context of Ghana. The research aims at discovering new information and reaching new understandings of political appropriation of social media. Hence, this study contributes new knowledge and information to existing literature on social media, political communication and public relations in Africa, which could be compared with the appropriation of these new forms of media in the Global North. More so, the findings of this thesis could assist political parties, communication practitioners, politicians and policy makers. This is because the research situates how social media communication especially Facebook could be utilised in political public relations in building mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and the general public in advancing specific agendas at political elections.

This study was conducted to achieve the following:

- 1 To examine how Facebook has transformed the political communication and information activities of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress.

- 2 To interrogate how Facebook is used for various activities before, during and after national executive elections of New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in 2018.
- 3 To determine the ways in which New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress use Facebook to engage and interact with stakeholders and followers, and highlight how such engagements-if ever, have optimised the relationship and understanding between them.
- 4 To reflect on the nature and purposes of messages posted on Facebook accounts by New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress and their audiences to describe the content of information and level of activities on pages and walls.

### **9.1 Implications of the study findings**

Political parties in Ghana are cognisant that political communication makes it possible for them to get their messages, information, programmes and activities closer to stakeholders and the general public. However, the political parties have focused largely on traditional forms of media, such as radio, television and newspapers, among others for communication activities (Asah-Asante 2015). This focus of attention of political parties on traditional engagements restricts them to the press-agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical forms of communication, which are passive following top-down approaches.

Political parties recognise social media communication as valuable and cost effective ways of connecting and providing information to their stakeholders and the general public, as well as allowing followers to provide them feedback through interactions (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010; Jacka & Scott 2011). Inasmuch as the significance of social media particularly Facebook was highlighted by political parties in this study, these parties were not making good use of Facebook communication in spite of its diverse features and capabilities in politics. The evidence is shown in *Table 2* (Chapter 7), and particularly *Table 1* (Chapter 6) of this thesis.

Political parties do not frequently conduct social media communication activities on Facebook, even in times of intra-party elections and congresses when competitions and campaigns are intense. The political parties used Facebook on a few days with no regular posts throughout the periods of internal elections for national executives, despite the intensity of the competitions. This is because these social media communications are performed by political parties as ad-hoc activities rather than concerted approaches. Hence, hindering the interactive and relationship building effects that are associated with *Facebooking*.

This study shows that social media especially Facebook has extended how political parties in Ghana communicate with stakeholders and the general public. As a result of the increasing numbers of users of the internet, political parties are taking advantage of Facebook to transmit instantaneous information and messages of different sorts from the party to stakeholders and the general public (Kearney 2017; Gyampo 2017). Stakeholders and recipients of messages on the platform could also instantaneously react and give feedback to parties in the form of comments, likes and shares, among others. In that regard, social media platforms are changing political communication in Ghana, and by extension Africa.

The communication activities of political parties have been enhanced, given that stakeholders of political communication are able to quickly send, respond and deliberate on issues of mutual interests and benefits through social media (Macnamara 2018; Kearney 2013). This critical note addresses how social media particularly Facebook communication could transform into two-way symmetric engagements and continuous interactions, which foster mutually beneficial relationship between stakeholders (Grunig & Hunt 1984; Grunig & Grunig 1992) in politics and democracy in Ghana

As the political power of Facebook continues to spread, its uses address the communication needs of political parties. Political parties in this study use Facebook for public information in spreading information about the party to stakeholders and the public. However, in practice the parties were not using the platform to engage in conversations, interactions and feedback to establish and enhance mutually beneficial relationships for political agenda. The communication activities of these parties through Facebook is lacking in two-way symmetric communication and relationship building with stakeholders and the public (Data Research).

Political parties illustrated their communication with their stakeholders on Facebook. The forms of posts that parties made differed as each of the parties represents different traditions, ideologies and positions on issues, among others. However, the models by which these parties engaged and sent out posts to their stakeholders were same usually one-way passive and top-down approach.

The spread of social media including Facebook in Ghana has increased with political actors exploring new interactive avenues for engaging political stakeholders and remaining abreast with technological trends. As political parties search for innovative methods of direct engagements other than the traditional ways of communication, this study used a number of factors in determining how they engage and relate with stakeholders on Facebook especially during intra-party electoral processes, as well as the nature of posts that parties made.

The primary features that were found by the study were identified from messages posted by political parties, and their concomitant followers, comments, shares and likes. It was the posts of parties on Facebook and corresponding followings and reactions that were found to be the essential factors to determine the forms of communication, as well as how interactive parties were in their communication (Kearney 2017; Kosinski *et al.* 2013).

Social media have many advantages as compared to traditional forms of communication, which include cost effectiveness and efficiency, as well as direct and interpersonal engagements in the form of interactivity (Jacka & Scott 2011; Kaplan & Haenlin 2010; Boyd & Ellison 2008). In this sense, traditional media outlets are no longer the only sources and intermediaries between political parties and stakeholders as these actors are able to communicate and exchange messages and information directly without control, restriction nor interruption from traditional news outlets, therefore, circumventing their traditional roles in agenda setting.

Political parties were not making concerted efforts at building networks and extending relationship especially with internal and external stakeholder groups. The use of Facebook for engaging groupings and associations within and outside the political parties was not evident in this study. This is in spite of the awareness of political parties that the establishment and connections with groups provide opportunities for organisations and individuals to exchange information, form and regularly maintain mutually relationships with stakeholders (Macnamara 2018; Kearney 2013; Bosch 2009). This allows for grievances to be addressed and potential issues to be predicted for solution before they escalate into tension and public violence (Kosinski *et al.* 2013).

## **9.2 Recommendations**

There is much to be done in terms of social media by parties before they can improve their use of social media and especially *Facebooking* for political communication and mutually beneficial engagements with stakeholders and the public. This is because the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress lack the professional hands in communication and political public relations acumen, tact and orientation in promoting relations through the two-way symmetric approach and mutually beneficially engagements with stakeholders and the public. From the minimal use of Facebook communication by the political parties especially in intra-party elections, this study can say that the parties are not much enlightened about the political power of these new forms of communication. They are not making adequate use of this social media platform to get their messages to the public, as well as drumming up support

and mobilising stakeholders, and denouncing opponents in transforming political communication (Windeck 2011; Riaz 210) on these relationship building platforms. Political parties have particularly limited themselves to traditional forms of communication and engagements.

Hence, political parties need to explore enlightened communication policies that will balance their orientations and practices for improved use of social media as interpersonal tools for engaging the electorates and general public directly, as well as mobilising stakeholders and support for participation in elections. To be successful in political communication, these parties in Ghana need to strike the right balance between traditional and social media. Against this backdrop, political parties have to re-consider their communicative policies and strategies for engaging and relating to the public. They should give wide currency to interactivity, conversations and deliberations in their communication with stakeholders and citizens.

In this regard, the parties need to focus on two-way symmetrical approaches, even though this study supports the blend of various communication models (Grunig & Hunt 1984; Grunig & Grunig 1992; Grunig 2001) to advance political agenda and goals. With many political stakeholders now interested in making input and obtaining feedback in public sphere, political parties have to combine varied models in their relations with the electorates and general public. However, giving priority to the two-way symmetrical engagements through social media will enable parties to strengthen relationships with stakeholders via continuous engagements and influence their decisions especially at elections (Macnamara 2018; Kearney 2017; Beciu 2011). To this end, political parties have to attach a lot of importance to social media communication and networking in their activities.

Political parties have posted messages about their organisations as regards programmes and events, among others on Facebook to attract stakeholders and the public, which establish some forms of relationships through public information. Relationship development and management are necessary for parties in their quests for political power and votes from the electorates. Therefore, political parties should shift to participatory-interactive platforms and ways of democratic engagements via two-way symmetrical communication and conversational approaches with stakeholders for inputs and feedback from the public.

If political parties in Ghana could use direct engagements and interactive strategies rather than passive dissemination of message and information to the public, they will take advantage of social media appropriation (Gonçalves 2014; Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011). This is especially true given that when political parties utilise the functionalities of Facebook, for example, posts and replies, to promote engagements, interactions and conversations, they have

the chance of benefiting from valuable and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. This will consequently transform into understanding and support for the advancement of political agenda. In view of this, parties have to aim their practices at fostering relationships in social media spaces.

Political parties will be creating opportunities for themselves, as they can receive views and opinions regarding activities through conversations and dialogues with stakeholder groups on Facebook. Therefore, political parties must connect, network and form alliances with internal and external groupings and affiliates to engage, discuss and address issues of mutual interests and concerns for understanding and beneficial relationships (Kosinski *et al.* 2013). This could serve as early warning system for political parties to determine if they are heading towards bad relationships with their stakeholders to address any differences to prevent public disorders, such political vigilantism and protests, among others in Ghana.

With the shift of attention towards direct engagements and relationship building, the significance of Facebook in mobilisation and electoral processes cannot be ignored (Borah 2016; Beciu 2011). Hence, political parties need to make improved use of Facebook for communication, campaigns and mobilisation in intra-party elections. As a social networking site, Facebook has to be appropriated in internal electoral processes of parties not merely for occasional publicity and information, but persuasions through win-win situations and mutually beneficial engagements (Grunig 2001; Grunig & Grunig 1992).

To promote the drive in making improved use of social media, the parties need enlightened policies on social media communication that will enable them to relate more closely with stakeholders and citizens in drumming up public support for specific agendas. The political parties require professional hands and public relations tact in their communication activities. Given this, it is appropriate for parties to establish political public relations units with professional communication personnel, or assign specific teams of practitioners with expertise, skills and advice in public relations to manage social media communication as specialised activities for mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and the general public.

Generally, communication officials of parties have to be trained in political public relations and social media technologies to equip them with evolving knowledge and understanding of the opportunities, challenges and repercussions of these new forms of communication in stakeholder and public engagements. This is because without professional running of social media communication especially *Facebooking* activities, these sites will deteriorate into something very amateurish. These will enable them to improve the use of social

media in the communication activities of the political parties for positive returns on their appropriation in politics (Gonçalves 2014; Strömbäck & Kiouisis 2011).

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### **Primary Sources**

Interview with Participant A of the New Patriotic Party in Accra on 29/06/2018.

Interview with Participant B of the New Patriotic Party in Accra on 27/06/2018.

Interview with Participant C of the New Patriotic Party in Accra on 25/06/2018.

Interview with Participant D of the New Patriotic Party in Accra on 26/06/2018.

Interview with Participant E of the National Democratic Congress in Accra on 3/07/2018.

Interview with Participant F of the National Democratic Congress in Accra on 14/07/2018.

Interview with Participant G of the National Democratic Congress in Accra on 16/07/2018.

Interview with Participant H of the National Democratic Congress in Accra on 2/07/2018.

## APPENDIX I: GATEKEEPER PERMISSION (NEW PATRIOTIC PARTY)



# NEW PATRIOTIC PARTY

## HEADQUARTERS

PRIVATE MAIL BAG, ACCRA - NORTH, GHANA

FAX: 030-227905

[www.newpatrioticparty.org](http://www.newpatrioticparty.org)

25<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

Akwasi Bosompem Boateng  
Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS)  
School of Applied Human Sciences, Howard College Campus  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 4041, South Africa

Dear Mr. Akwasi Bosompem Boateng (student),

**RE: AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT STUDY ON OUR POLITICAL PARTY  
(GATEKEEPER PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH)**

This letter serves to grant you Gatekeeper's permission to conduct your research on our political party as a case study, and interview officers providing that ethical clearance and consent forms are obtained.

We notice that the working title of your doctoral (PhD) thesis is: *New media usage and political communication in Ghana: The case of two political parties*. We also note that you will be collecting data from your sample by audio-recording the interviews of two (2) to three (3) participants (party officers) on the basis of judgmental sampling. We acknowledge that the interviews will be conducted over a period of four (4) weeks.

You shall collect and treat data with confidentiality, as stipulated in the Informed Consent forms provided to interviewees. It is also expected that you provide feedback on your research findings to our institution.

We wish you the best in your research journey.

Yours sincerely,



JOHN BOADU  
GENERAL SECRETARY (AG)

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**N.P.P: DEVELOPMENT IN FREEDOM**

**APPENDIX II: GATEKEEPER PERMISSION (NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS)**



**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS**  
NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

Our Ref: NDC/HA/99/488

Your Ref .....

P. O. Box AN 5825  
Accra-North, Ghana  
Tel:  
Fax:

**Mr. Akwasi Bosompem Boateng**  
Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS)  
School of Applied Human Sciences, Howard College Campus  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 4041,  
South Africa

24<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

Dear Mr. Akwasi Bosompem Boateng (student),

**Re: Authorisation to Conduct Study on our Political Party (Gatekeeper Permission to Conduct Research)**

This letter serves to grant you Gatekeeper's permission to conduct your research on our political party as a case study, and interview officers providing that ethical clearance and consent forms are obtained.

We notice that the working title of your doctoral (PhD) thesis is: *New media usage and political communication in Ghana: The case of two political parties*. We also note that you will be collecting data from your sample by audio-recording the interviews of two (2) to three (3) participants (party officers) on the basis of judgmental sampling. We acknowledge that the interviews will be conducted over a period of four (4) weeks.

You shall collect and treat data with confidentiality, as stipulated in the Informed Consent forms provided to interviewees. It is also expected that you provide feedback on your research findings to our institution.

We wish you the best in your research journey.

Yours sincerely,

  
**Johnson Asiedu Nketiah**  
(General Secretary)  
020-161 0594

## APPENDIX III: ETHICS/RESEARCH PROTOCOL



08 January 2018

Mr Akwasi Bosompem Boateng (217010993)  
School of Applied Human Sciences – CCMS  
Howard College Campus

Dear Mr Boateng,

Protocol reference number: HSS/2319/017D

Project Title: Facebook usage in political communication in Ghana: The case of two political parties

### Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 15 December 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shami'a Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisors: Professor Donal P McCracken and Dr Musara Lubombo  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Jean Steyn  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



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## APPENDIX IV: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### Details of the researcher and institution of research:

	Address	Phone Number	Email address
Researcher	Akwasi Bosompem Boateng	+27-634-262-151	<a href="mailto:beebeeboateng@gmail.com">beebeeboateng@gmail.com</a> or <a href="mailto:217010993@stu.ukzn.ac.za">217010993@stu.ukzn.ac.za</a>
Department	Centre for Communication Media and Society (CCMS)	+27-31-260-2505	<a href="http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/Homepage.aspx">http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/Homepage.aspx</a>
Institution	University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Howard College Campus, Mazisi Kunene Ave, Glenwood, Durban,4041, South Africa.	+27-31-260-1813	<a href="http://www.ukzn.ac.za">www.ukzn.ac.za</a>
Supervisor	Prof. Donal Patrick McCracken	+27-31-260-3809 / +27-31-260-2006	<a href="mailto:Mccrackend@ukzn.ac.za">Mccrackend@ukzn.ac.za</a>
Chair, UKZN Human Sciences Research Committee	Dr. Shenuka Singh	+27-31-260-8591	<a href="mailto:singshen@ukzn.ac.za">singshen@ukzn.ac.za</a>
Committee Clerk, UKZN Human Sciences Research Committee	Mr. Prem Mohun	+27-31-260-4557	<a href="mailto:hssrechumanities@ukzn.ac.za">hssrechumanities@ukzn.ac.za</a>
<i>Please do not hesitate to contact any of the above persons, should you want further information on this research, or should you want to discuss any aspect of the interview process.</i>			

<b>Signed consent</b>		
• I understand that the purpose of this interview is for solely academic purpose. The findings will be published as research project/dissertation, and may be published in academic journals.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I may choose to remain anonymous. (Please choose whether or not you would like to remain anonymous.)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I may choose whether or not my name should be quoted in remarks and / or information attributed to me in the final research documents.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I choose to use a pseudonym, not my real name.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I will not be paid for participating in the study.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I reserve the right to discontinue and withdraw my participation at any time.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I consent to be frank in giving information.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I consent to the use of audio-recorder during the interview.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand I will not be coerced into commenting on issues against my will, and that I may decline to answer specific questions.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I reserve the right to schedule the <i>time</i> and <i>location</i> of the interview.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>* By signing this form, I consent that I have duly read and understood its content.</b>		
_____	_____	_____
<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Name of Researcher</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

## APPENDIX V

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE/GUIDE

The study will conduct semi-structured interviews with respondents from New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress in Ghana. The purpose of the interviews is to explore how officials of political parties have used social media in political communication and intra-party elections in Ghana.

The discussions in the interviews will focus on establishing how Facebook is used by political parties in Ghana for engagements and interactions with their stakeholders, as well as the internal national executive elections in 2018. The interviews will cover various topics to elicit responses and understanding of the practical experiences and usage of Facebook by party officials in their communication programmes and activities. The major topics to be discussed in the interviews include:

#### *Understanding of political communication*

Discuss definitions; elements; roles; opportunities; and challenges of political communication, among others with respect to political parties in Ghana.

#### *Understanding of social media*

Discuss definitions; major features; and examples of social media; as well as its functionalities; roles; benefits and challenges of social media appropriation in the activities of political parties in Ghana.

#### *Facebook usage in political communication*

Discuss the introduction of Facebook into political and communication activities; role and purposes of its usage by political parties, monitoring *Facebooking*; level of interactions; as well as other issues regarding opportunities; repercussions; and budget, among others.

#### *Engagement and relationship building*

Discuss how Facebook affects relationships between political parties and stakeholders towards agenda; barriers to mutually beneficial relationships; level of engagements on Facebook before; during and after intra-party elections; as well as evaluation by communication personnel of political parties, among others.

## **Interview Guide**

### ***Background of Interviewee***

- (i) Could you please tell me something brief about yourself and background? [Name will be withheld]
- (ii) For how long have you been working with this political party?
- (iii) What position do you currently hold and how long have you held this role in your political party?
- (iv) What are the function(s) of your role in the political party?

### ***Understanding of Political Communication***

- (i) How do you define political communication?
- (ii) What do you think are the characteristics of political communication?
- (iii) Which role does political communication play in your party in Ghana's democracy?
- (iv) Could you share the opportunities and challenges your party encounters in political communication activities?

### ***Understanding of Social Media***

- (i) What do you understand by social media?
- (ii) Could you provide examples and characteristics of social media?
- (iii) Could you explain the functions of social media in political party and democracy?
- (iv) How has your party appropriated and integrated social media in its communication activities? In what ways do you do them as a serious or as an ad hoc activity?
- (v) What opportunities and challenges does your political party experience in the usage of social media platforms? What evidence do you provide for your answer?

### ***Facebook in Political Communication***

- (i) When did you begin to use Facebook in the communication activities of your political party; how did it start; who initiated it; which department is responsible for it?
- (ii) What are your reasons for appropriating Facebook in the communication activities of your political party?
- (iii) In what ways do you use Facebook in your communication activities, and how is the impact of Facebook monitored by your political party?

- (iv) How do you use Facebook as an alternative media to manipulate politics, set agenda and influence political attitude?
- (v) Could you describe the challenges that impede your appropriation of Facebook, and your budget allocation to social media activities?

***Engagement and Relationship Management***

- (i) What are the opportunities of using social media for engaging stakeholders by political parties?
- (ii) How has social media appropriation affected the relationship between your political party and its stakeholders?
- (iii) Could you highlight the challenges faced by your party regarding interaction and relationship building with stakeholders on Facebook?
- (iv) How do you use Facebook before, during and after intra-party elections for engaging stakeholders to achieve your political agenda?
- (v) What impact do you think Facebook has on intra-party elections?
- (vi) What forms of message do you post on your Facebook wall and how often do you make those public posts?

**APPENDIX VI**  
**FACEBOOK SAMPLING / CODING INSTRUMENTS**

**Table A: Showing daily Facebook posts by political parties in intra-party elections**

<b>Dates (Day/mm/year)</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Number of likes</b>	<b>Number of comments</b>	<b>Number of shares</b>
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				
Day 8				
Day 9				
Day 10				
Day 11				
Day 12				
Day 13				
Day 14				
Day 15				
Day 16				
Day 17				
<b>Total</b>				
<b>Average daily post(s)</b>				

**Table B: Showing summary of contents of Facebook posts of political parties during intra-party elections**

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Content categories</b>										
	<b>Information Provision</b>			<b>Interactivity Chats</b>			<b>Multimedia</b>			<b>Targeted Campaigning</b>	
	IP1	IP2	IP3	IC1	IC2	IC3	M1	M2	M3	TC1	TC2
NPP											
NDC											

*\*Reproduced from the framework of Gong and Lips (2009)*

# APPENDIX VII

## TURN-IT-IN

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<a href="#">"Social Media in Politics", Springer Nature, 2014</a>							
<1% match (Internet from 05-Oct-2010)							X
<a href="http://www.thestatesmanonline.com">http://www.thestatesmanonline.com</a>							
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<1% match (publications)							X
<a href="#">"Political Marketing and Management in Ghana", Springer Nature, 2017</a>							