The Participation of Young Adults in Ghana's Democracy Online: An Exploratory Study

By

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To the almighty God, the creator of the Heavens and earth

I dedicate this research project to my dear sons, Jude and Levi

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been authored by myself, that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a higher degree, that the work of which it is a record has been performed by myself, and that all sources of information have been specifically acknowledged.

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Hayford Baah Tawiah

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ABSTRACT

While there is a vast corpus of research on young adult's use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and their involvement in democratic processes, little is known about this subject when it comes to the Ghanaian context. The participation of young adults in Ghana's hybrid democracy (forged from liberal and deliberative values) has been dwindling after a surge in the 1950s. In contemporary times, events in the socio-cultural, political and the traditional news media environments that take their sources from practices in the colonial era, continue to influence public spaces designated for talking politics in Ghana, and have been observed as some of the factors that impede the participation of young adults. These events include intermittent traditional news media censorship by both military and civilian governments; marginalisation of dissenting views through the ties between government and media owners, as well as the significant cultural and social values placed on respecting people in authority and elders in general. In essence, young adults cannot freely express their opinions in offline contexts because of concerns of society's unacceptance of them questioning the status quo and offering alternative ideas.

Using qualitative research methods for the collection and examination of the motivations and experiences of young adults and politician samples, this thesis establishes that experiences and awareness of the restrictive offline public spheres motivate the sample of young adults to adopt SNSs for the purpose of talking politics. Data from the in-depth interviews conducted in this study suggests that SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter may be safe spaces that limit the society's ability to practice its exclusionist culture against them. While SNSs offer the young adults a way to escape the exclusionist dictates of an age-sensitive society, they also allow politicians to preserve their social statuses and authorities they hold in the real world (save faces), making way for free speech to gain roots in Ghana's democracy in the process. This finding indicates that Spiral of Silence and Willingness to Self-Censor due to shyness appear reduced in this context of political communication in Ghana.

This study demonstrates the various ways in which the interconnected issues of state online surveillance, concentration of online platform ownerships and monetisation of user-generated contents (which represent the backbone of tensions in power contestation between governments, ordinary citizen users and online platform owners) seem not to be deterring factors of SNSs use among the sample of young adults in Ghana.

Further, the use of SNSs enables the young adults to add value to their political voices by accessing and utilising transnational flows of political information and cultures in their political interactions. As the political voices of young adults are undervalued and unheard, SNSs help the young adults to amplify their voices through online and offline protests, which is a constitutional and democratic right. Thus, this study contributes to a growing body of literature through a re-conceptualisation of the relations of dominance and resistance online. Building on John Suler's Online Disinhibition Effects, the study further shows that online verbal abuses violate the rights to free speech and equal political voice of victims in theory. In practice however, the high frequency of online abuses means a loss in their potential to cause harm. Given these findings, the public spaces on SNSs such as Facebook can be said to resemble public spheres that support Ghana's democracy.

This study, therefore, offers policy makers concerned with the use of SNSs as means of addressing the inequalities that young adults face in their bid to publicly talk politics a new understanding of the political communications dynamics. This new understanding can help formulate policy and provide support initiatives to create the appropriate online environment for talking politics.

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CHAPTER ONE

Overview of thesis

1.0 Introduction

The participation of citizens in the act of talking politics (informal political conversations and the more formalized type considered to be deliberative) and elections has for some time been observed to be generally low in many countries, including Ghana (Grauenkaer and Tufte, 2018; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; 2011; Resnick & Casale, 2011; Mutz, 2006; Hassan, 2004; Putnam, 1995). Even societies considered to be the mainstay of democracy, such as the United States and Britain, have experienced this democratic drought. Tellingly, scholars and observers alike have consistently described this trend as a potential threat to the continuous practice of democracy (example Resnick *et al*., 2011; Banaji & Buckingham, 2010; Mutz, 2006; Putnam, 1995; Habermas, 1989; 1992). In the light of these low levels of citizen participation, serious concerns have been expressed about the levels of participation among young adults (Grauenkaer and Tufte, 2018; Gyampo, 2012b; Resnick *et al.*, 2011; The Ghana National Youth Policy, 2010; Banaji & Buckingham, 2010). As a result, the interests of academics, policy makers, media and communication practitioners have been aroused, leading to a vast body of literature devoted to the subject of participation in political talks about public issues and elections. Many explanations, among others, have focused on certain practices of the traditional news media and politicians, which have repelled young adults, in particular, away from talking politics publicly (Grauenkaer and Tufte, 2018; Resnick *et al*., 2011; Banaji *et al*., 2010; Wattenberg, 2003; Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002; Dahlberg, 2001; Blais & Dobrynska 1998; Nie *et al*., 1974).

In recent times however, the use of online social networking sites (also known as SNSs or social media) has become a popular culture among young adults (Grauenkaer and Tufte, 2018; Banda, 2010; Gyampo, 2017; Bode, Vraga, Borah, & Shah, 2013; Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). Subsequently, a number of studies on the subject of political participation report varying degrees of a reverse of disaffection with these types of democratic processes

(Grauenkaer et al., 2018; Banda, 2010; Gyampo, 2017; Bode *et al*., 2013; Bakker *et al*., 2011; Collin, 2008). For example in Ghana, Grauenkaer and her colleague find a causal relationship between media use (especially social media) and activities of young adults that bring about social and political changes in Northern Ghana (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018). Despite a vast body of literature on SNSs and participation in talking politics and elections, most studies have based their analysis on the European and American contexts (for example Bode, *et al.*, 2013; Emmer, Wolling, & Vowe, 2012; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Bakker *et al*., 2011; Collin, 2008; Kissau & Hunger, 2008; Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006). Ownership and use of mobile phones, the internet and social media is also increasing in Africa (Internet World Statistics, 2017) amid dramatic transformations in political and social movements for democratisation (Goggin, 2011; Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018), yet there is only a few empirical studies focusing on the African and the Ghanaian context in particular (example Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Gyampo, 2017; Sika, 2012; Ali, 2011). By this omission, scholars and observers alike tend to overlook the heterogeneous nature of societies in the different regions of the world when discussing and analysing the subject of political participation and online social network sites. The Works of Gyampo (2017) as well as Grauenkaer and her colleague's indicate some transformations in Ghana politics as a result of social media usage by young adults, but these studies do not explain the motivations behind the usage.

In Ghana, 17 million people (67.6%) have access to mobile data, as of 2016 (National Communications Authority, 2016). Beside this high ownership of mobile phones and internet use, the use of social networking sites is also prevalent (Gyampo, 2017), and it is becoming a common culture for political leaders and young adults in Ghana to use social networking sites to communicate on national policy issues (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Gyampo, 2017). By this trend, Ghana has joined the league of countries (including the United Kingdom and the United States) that have stationed some of their political communications online. Although it is the same internet and associated platforms which are used in expressing political opinions in these countries, it is imperative to note that its applications to democracy in practice may differ. This is because the socio-political and economic settings in each country vary (Nisbert, 2008). In view of this, it is necessary that the specific manner in which SNSs are applied to democracy in each context be examined (Just, Latzer, Metreveli, & Saurwein, 2013).

Studies that explore this subject in African contexts are crucial to an understanding of the ways in which SNSs and talking politics interact in different socio-political settings. As Curran and Seaton (2010) note 'it is not the technology of the Net but the interaction between technology and context, that is key to understanding the nature of the Net's impact' (p. 280). For this reason, this current study seeks to extend the body of research on SNSs and political deliberations in a context that draws from the socio-cultural practices and political culture of Ghana. It considers the motivations and user experiences of young adults (age 18-37) and politicians, as they use SNSs for the purpose of talking politics. It investigates how and why they use SNSs for this purpose and how that can (de)motivate young adults to participate in national elections.

Apart from the short supply of studies on this topic in Ghana, there is also a lacuna in existing literature where analysis are based on data collected from only user group, despite a growing use of SNSs amongst politicians and the public (see Gyampo, 2017). This thesis fills the gap by including politicians' perspective in the analysis. Thus, this study is unique and innovative as it provides a more balanced and wider frame of perspectives for analysing the nuances in the two set of user experiences. The group of politicians interviewed in this study were those in public offices, such as members of parliament (MPs), government ministers, municipal and district chief executives. Politicians in public offices were used in the empirical study because, in national democracies, they are the set of politicians who have the responsibility to implement policies on behalf of the rest of the citizenry. The duty of rendering national accountability to the rest of the citizenry, therefore, rests on them. Put differently, the main public deliberations that influence public policies in deliberative democratic theory are the ones between public officials and citizens (see Gutmann *et al*., 2004).

In Ghana, political talks on public issues among citizens and with politicians in power have been variably restrictive from the period of colonial rule in the 19th century, through the military regimes, and even during some of the intermittent democratic phases of the 20th century. Talking politics publicly were either barred using unrepresentative legislation, or inhibited as a result of fear and low self-esteem (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Kraus, 1969, p. 113; Tettey, 2001). In periods when such talks were liberalised, it was done in such a way

that the political elite could dictate what could be heard, read or viewed on state-owned media (Heath, 2001).

This practice extends even to the private media after over two decades of 'media freedom' has been attained and guaranteed in the 1992 constitution (Tettey, 2001). Non-office-holding young adults, in particular, are expected to adhere to the value of respecting elderly people, including those who have occupied, or occupying leadership positions in the Ghanaian society (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Gyampo, 2012; 2015). Within such a context, young adults in Ghana, like their counterparts in western countries, participated less in talking politics publicly even as of 2008, although there were situations where they were deployed in pre-independence protests by nationalist politicians (Resnick *at al*., 2011). Apart from such protests, politicians use young adults, commonly known as 'party boys', for similar political activities that require physical power than the power of the brain, such as to harass members of the opposition (Driscoll, 2017). This practice provides fertile conditions for patronage-clientelistic relationships in which the party boys are able to solicit material gains from the politicians and in turn pledge their loyalty (Driscoll, 2017). The way political institutions function and the structure of political systems impact participation decisions (Resnick *et al.,* 2011). Thus, given this hostile political environment offline, the expression of political views on public platforms can be a venture for only the brave.

So, while most of the existing studies come from contexts in which non-participation in talking politics publicly and elections are determined by traditional media use, age, race, occupation and social status, the Ghanaian context is shaped by additional circumstances, including the nature of political regimes and associated practices, socio-cultural values and institutions. As a result of these differences, the importance of studying such a context cannot be underestimated. Secondly, the result of this current study can be used by policy makers and other stakeholders of democracy as a starting point when considering the potential impacts of SNSs on Ghana's democratic processes. This can then lead to the design of policies and strategies that reflect current media culture among young adults in the country.

Young adults defined

The term ‘young adults’ is used in different societies and it represents a similar age group. In the United States for example, it has been used in socio-economic studies to represent people in the 18-37 age category (see Pew Research Centre, 2018; 2014). In the UK, a study in the field of medicine classifies them as persons in the 18 to 45 age range (see Egred, Viswanathan & Davis, 2005). In Ghana, there seems to no official age classification linked to the term. The closest equivalence to this age group is represented by the term ‘youth’ as can be seen in the National Youth Policy 2010 and working documents of the main political parties. To avoid ambiguity however, this thesis will use the term ‘young adults’ to represent people in the 18-37 age group.

1.2 Aims of the research

The main aim of this research project is to investigate the motivations and user experiences of young adults and state-office-holding politicians (such as Members of Parliament and government ministers) as they use SNSs and related online news media platforms to talk politics. This thesis has the particular objectives of understanding the motivations for such SNS usage in the Ghanaian society that used to be characterised by restrictions on political activities; a culture of silence and fear; young adults’ disaffection with the political processes in general; and where cultural and social barriers to the participation of young adults persist. Secondly, it sought to investigate the experiences of these two user groups in terms of fulfilling constitutional rights to be involved in public deliberations as they use such online media. Thirdly, it examined whether these cyber platforms facilitate public political deliberations and how this is possible or not. Fourthly, it examined whether and how talking politics online influences decisions of the young adults’ involvement or exclusion in national elections? Finally, the thesis sought to investigate whether there is any difference between the views of the young adults and that of the politicians on this subject, in order to draw conclusions on the perception of SNSs for political deliberations. The thesis draws on qualitative research methods (details in Chapter Five) that enable participants' experiences to be analysed in the context of existing social, cultural and political structures in which these modes of participation are embedded, and allows for an exploration of the meanings that the participants attribute to it.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

There are nine chapters in this thesis. This current chapter introduces the study and outlines its importance and objectives. It further outlines the structure of the thesis and follows on to offer brief discussions on some of the key constructs and concepts applied in this thesis. These key concepts include liberal and deliberative democracies, where pivotal ideas such as freedom of speech, equal political voice, the public sphere and deliberative requirements are explored. These discussions are important theoretical frames used in analysing primary data in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Chapter Two traces the subject of political participation and explores major determinants of an individual's participation level from two conceptual paradigms. The aim is to explore the value of these two paradigms by evaluating them against the Ghanaian context and the growing use of SNSs. Here, the chapter reveals that the individualistic view of political participation, where socio-economic status (SES) and psychological variables are basis, has theoretical, practical and analytical limitations. This is because, drawing from the concept of social capital and Charles Taylor's concept of the 'self', the social context also account for political participation levels of individuals.

The chapter sets the scene for the understanding of how political participation has theoretically and practically evolved, and lays a foundation for the introduction of the 'media' as another determinant of an individual's political participation level. The discussion and conclusion in Chapter Two therefore give basis for the analysis of the media's influence on talking politics publicly in Chapter Three, as well as its flaws in creating and sustaining active public spheres for democracy. To achieve this aim of Chapter Three, a multi-contextual discussion that illustrates the theoretical role of public sphere (discussed in Chapter One) as well as the practical ways in which it functions is offered. The chapter also examines the Ghanaian traditional news media landscape in relation to the tenets of liberal democracy and the public sphere criteria established in Chapter One. The scope of this examination also covers the conditions of other offline public spaces for talking politics, such as public forums, focusing on how they encourage the involvement or otherwise of young adults in talking politics publicly.

Discussing the contributions and limitations of the traditional news media, with regards to its influences on the public sphere, provides grounds for the theorisation of SNSs usage in Ghana's democracy in Chapter Four. As such, Chapter Four seeks to explore the fit between SNSs and the hybrid (liberal and deliberative) democracy in Ghana. The discussion in this chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section generally focuses on the fits and misfits between the public spaces on SNSs and deliberative democracy in different contexts, where (i) transformations in ways of linking and networking widely dispersed individuals; (ii) technology is enabling members of the public (citizen journalists) and online news media organisations to inter-depend on each other's news productions, resulting in a revolution in the way news is produced, consumed and distributed; and (iii) ease of monetization and state surveillance, representing complex issues of power relations, seem to be dominating recent debates. Ghana-specific cases are highlighted where relevant.

The second section of Chapter Four narrows the discussion to consider the potential impacts of SNSs and related online platforms in the Ghanaian democracy. Here, contrasting the bureaucratic and fairly one-directional nature of the offline public spheres in Ghana, the section crystallised the ultimate argument of the chapter by arguing that SNSs and online news media could be offering young adults in Ghana the opportunity exercise the right to free speech and a political voice by (i) equipping them to jointly produce political media contents, share information of interest, and thereby enabling access to political information and processes; (ii) offering a relatively liberalised media landscape and the opportunity for an individual to belong to multiple online groups at the same time, which could potentially reduce fear to comment on social issues; and (iii) enabling transnational flows of political information and cultures which provide the force and will required to globalise local politics through political benchmarking. Online verbal tolerance may be a rare feature on SNSs due to lack of the opportunity for communication partners to see each other face-to-face, thereby appearing as a tool for violating people's right to a political voice. But using SNSs can potentially prevent instances of physical violence and therefore achieve tolerance in the long run. These arguments are based on the notions that: online SNSs allow young adults of Ghana to generate their own content in a political environment where there is yet to be government retributions linked to online comments; SNSs can potentially offer a user an extensive network of other users home and abroad,

making the sharing of political information and cultures transcend national borders; and that online communications lack physical presence of participants, hence, incidences of physical violence are unlikely.

Chapter Five discusses the research methods and the rationale for employing them in collecting the empirical evidences needed for analysis. It also considers some foreseeable concerns of research ethics that pertains to this research project in accordance with the ethics framework of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as well as the University of Stirling's policy on research ethics. Further, the chapter talks about how field data was collected and analysed and recounts some specific field issues pertaining to this current research. Chapter Six and Seven bring the reader to the findings of online political communication practices amongst the sample of young adults and politicians respectively. The discussions are organised thematically in relation to key issues from the literature review. The discussions in each chapter present an account of their experiences of and motivations for using SNSs for political deliberations. In Chapter Eight, the two sets of findings in Chapters Six and Seven are compared and synthesised in relation to the theoretical framework laid for the study. Undertaking this comparative analysis and discussions throw light on the differences and similarities in the two sets of findings, making clearer the holistic perceptions of the use of SNSs for the purpose of talking politics in Ghana.

Conclusions and achievements of this thesis are presented in Chapter Nine, by summarising key findings and a report on some limitations of this research. It further discusses the implications of the study for research on SNSs and public talking of politics in Ghana, and for national policy. As such, it seeks to make clear the important contributions of this thesis to our understanding of an area of knowledge that has hitherto been neglected.

As mentioned in the outline of the thesis above, it will be helpful to discuss the concept of democracy and some of its typologies. The aim is not to offer an over-elaborated detail of democratic variations but rather to map out some distinct characteristics. This discussion is imperative as this thesis recognises the existence of democratic variations; therefore, until

there is clarity on which type(s) of democracy is being considered in the analysis of political interactions among actors, the exercise may not lead to logical conclusions.

1.4 **Conceptions of modern democracies**

Democracy is an age old system of governance with its meaning derivable from its etymology. From the Greek words *dimus* and *krato*, democracy, in general terms, means a concept of governance in which *the public rule* (Papacharissi, 2010). This notion of democracy depicts the ancient Athenian type of democracy, but it is imperative to note that many contemporary democracies are still inspired by it (Held, 2006). A recent survey of 165 countries reveals that more than half of the world is under some sort of democracy (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012), indicating that democracy is a predominant form of governance at a global level.

Democracy in the sense of national politics may involve but not restricted to groups such as politicians (referring to those elected to pursue the interest of the people) and the ordinary citizens who place confidence in the elected through elections. Although they are theoretically distinct, politicians who establish governments and the rest of the citizenry interact with each other in modern democracies (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Gyampo, 2017; Hassan, 2004, p. 102). In fact, one of the key bases on which the quality of governance is measured in any democratic society rests on the presence of engagement between governments and their citizens and among the citizens (Putnam, 1995; The Economic Intelligence Unit, 2012). However, scholars frequently report a decline of this imperative democratic spice (for example Grauenkaer et al., 2018; Gyampo, 2012b; Putnam 1995; Mutz, 2006; Hassan, 2004). The effects of apathy and political ignorance on the part of citizens might potentially hold negative consequences for society therefore (Grauenkaer et al., 2018). Individuals who are politically apathetic and ignorant tend to know little about political happenings (Grauenkaer et al., 2018), and/or may lack capacity to effectively scrutinize the activities of politicians (Leeson, 2008, p. 156). In addition to the monitoring purposes, the inputs, in the form of suggestions, alternative ideas and criticisms (democratic capital) that might be needed may also get to levels not ideal for democracy, as it is imperative for elected representatives to formulate policies which reflect the interests of a broad section of the public (Visser, Holbrook & Krosnick, 2008).

Generally, the concept of democracy is pivoted on central ideals including equality of citizens, liberties, justice, and respect for law (Held, 2006). This is essentially to say that all forms of democracy, in practice, have commonalities when it comes to these tenets. For example, is it unlikely to consider a governance system as a democracy without the presence of respect for human rights and a functioning system for justice delivery. That said however, different countries have adopted various forms in which some of these democratic tenets are operationalised. These differences stem from the uniqueness of social, economic, cultural, political and technological conditions pertaining in each society, which inform the interpretations of these ideals and how they are practiced in nation-centric political systems (Papacharissi, 2010). These divergent interpretations also underpin ideas of how the interests of citizens should be organised and pursued. Concepts such as deliberative democracy, liberal democracy and representative democracy are therefore reflective of these variations of democracy in practice. Thus, to avoid ambiguity, a thesis like this present one needs clarity on which type of democracy it is working with. To this end, a discussion of some forms of democracy is therefore imperative at this juncture. To do this, I will first discuss two similar models -liberal and representative democracies- on one hand and on the other hand discuss deliberative democracy.

Liberal democracy was conceived from liberal individualistic notions that support the promotion of unitary ideas. It upholds the idea of securing some fundamental liberties for the people who are governed, as was the case in the days of absolutism of monarchs and religious powers (Held, 2006). In the said era, this governing system was designed to restrict the controls of monarchs and the church, by defining a private sphere independent of these institutions (Held, 2006). Its relevance was due to some actions of the monarchs and church leaders considered to be excessive abuse of powers and encroachment on the rights of the governed at the time (Pilkington, 1997). Liberal democracy in our modern times is not too different. It is focused on securing for the governed population the liberties to be able to exercise freedom of speech, assembly, worship and also the freedom to venture into legal economic enterprises (Meyer, 2020). Wolterstorff (2012) forcefully shows that 2 main principles form the core of this governance system. The first is the need for each citizen to have equal right to political voice. A political voice does not only refer

to verbal expressions such as advocating for and against candidates vying for public office, supporting or refuting issues that are being contested in a referendum or expressing support for or dislike of government activities. A political voice also refers to participating in elections to vote for or against candidates for public office (Wolterstorff, 2012), and this explains why every person of voting age in Ghana (18 years and above according to the 1992 constitution) is entitled to just one vote in an election.

The second principle is the need for this right to political voice to be enshrined in a legal document to protect and morally guide against any form of infringement by the governing elite or one's fellow non-governing citizens (Wolterstorff, 2012). The constitution is technically a moral guide in a democracy because it is often a result of synthesising what is generally agreed as good for regulating and judging behaviours and intents (Wolterstorff, 2012). Thus, constitutions (whether written or unwritten) are framed and used in many democracies as a way to legally preserve this tenet. The 1992 constitution of Ghana, being the third since 1969, is an example, and it instructs, in article 21, that no citizen of Ghana should be denied the right to free speech. Therefore, any member of the citizenry or the governing elite who act in ways that deny a fellow citizen this right to political voice can be said to have wronged the other person by suppressing his or her will. Some actions that can deny a person from exercising his or her right to a political voice include bullying, threatening, bribing, withholding information and denying people the right to basic education to prevent them from expressing informed opinions (Wolterstorff, 2012). Others are discriminating on the grounds of age (Gyampo, 2012; 2013), gender, race, religion, social economic class (The 1992 Constitution of Ghana; Fraser, 1992). On the basis of the fore-going logic, if a person(s) also takes power to rule without the voice of the governed expressed through the act of voting, he or she can be said to have robbed the political will of the people and therefore wronged the rest of the citizens.

In terms of participating in decision making on a national scale, emphasis on the need for citizens to actively get involved is minimal in liberal democracy theories, and is considered over burdening the governed. This system is primarily concerned with creating conditions for individuals to lead 'autonomous lives' and its rationale stems from an inherent assumption of the possibility and desirability of idealistic self-determination (Doppelt, 1989). It appears to be designed for a talk-precluded citizenry, a society in which much talk about public affairs is undesired by the governed. Democracy in this way can be

viewed as one that creates fertile environment for competition between pre-determined interests. Representatives or people who aspire to be the new representatives mainly pitch their pre-determined positions on issues to citizens, and in so doing avoiding scrutiny possibly in a public discussion.

Representative democracy is similar to the liberal model described above, and is a blend of two distinct, and in some senses, alternative political traditions. As seen above, democracy stands for getting things done by the people. Representation, involves carrying out a delegated action on behalf of someone else. A crucial aspect of this form of democracy is to ensure that all areas of a country are formally defined into territories, called constituencies, and then represented (Pilkington, 1997). In contemporary representative democracies, most representatives run for election on the ticket of a political party. A few also run as independent candidates. In many of the societies where this system is practiced, such as in Britain, the party that wins the majority of seats in the legislature during an election secures the constitutional mandate to form a government. This system ensures that members of a constituency have someone to turn to when they need solutions to their problems, but as in the liberal model, it alienates them from the process of problem solving. The function of the constituents is to come up with their problems and the discussions that lead to the problem solving are largely left to the representatives (Urbinati, 2011). The concern here therefore is how representative 'problem-solving' decisions made by the elected will be, with regards to the interest of the ordinary citizens.

Deliberative democracy is next at this point. This governance model transcends notions stemming from voting-centric view of democracy, towards one which is more talk-based, where communications amongst actors shape opinions and can develop political desire to vote in an election (Chambers, 2003). To politicians in public offices, these communications are expected to shape political will and policy development (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Gyampo, 2017; Dahlberg, 2001). In practice and particularly in offline modes, such communications occur in different official arrangements such as consultative and deliberative assemblies (Dahlberg, 2001; Abdulai, 2009). In Ghana, official consultative assemblies have been deployed to help formulate various national policies, including a 25 year national development plan (Alhassan, 2005) and a policy to regulate radio and television media for effective and efficient allocation and management of frequencies (see Heath, 1999).

More recently, similar arrangements have been used to help advise government on a policy on church governance and their relationship with government (Graphic Online, 2017), and to seek solutions to the depreciation of the country's currency against the currencies of some major trading partners. There are also unofficial consultative forums with the same mandate of shaping national policies, such as those convened by the National Union of Ghana Students (see Gyampo, 2013). Whilst these show that Ghana practices deliberative democracy, it is imperative to note that there is also a degree of representative democracy (and for that matter liberal democracy) through the establishment and functioning of the Ghanaian parliament (see the 1992 Constitution of Ghana).

Essentially, deliberative democracy is "a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives) justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible. The aim is to reach conclusions that are binding, in the present, on all citizens but open to challenge in the future" (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p. 7). As mentioned in section 1.3, it is worth dwelling on this definition for a while as it captures key issues that are relevant for data analysis and discussions in this thesis.

One of the premises of this idea of democracy is that reasons are given by both citizens and the government in justification of their ideas. This makes the need for a two-way sort of communication in public spaces imperative, and that is the deliberative type of communication. A tone of deliberative democracy is set when there is disagreement over perceived problematic claims put forward (Dahlberg, 2001). In a democracy, this deliberative process results in consensus to guide national decisions (p. 616), but it is sometimes considered as a process that is guided by a set of communication requirements in its strict sense. To shed light on these requirements, there is a need to holistically look at the public spaces -better known as public spheres- where decision-relevant communications occur, as they are intertwined (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 38). Thus, the discussion that follows highlights what the public sphere is in a democracy; how it should be; and the nature of communications that should take place in this public sphere in offline and online contexts.

Habermas' conception of the public sphere, originally developed in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (*STPS*) book, in which he undertook a historical analysis of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century European Bourgeois public sphere, serves as a starting point for this discussion. According to Habermas (1989), there was no public sphere, and by inference, no private sphere in the 17th and 18th centuries. The term 'public' referred to a document that detailed state authority over individuals with economic interests. The authority in this document was later personified and became a status conferred on private individuals with state power, and they were to be a non-conflicting 'appendages' of the state. Criticisms against the state in this realm however began as certain activities of the private individuals became targets that state policies sought to scrutinize. A public sphere of private individuals, at this stage, had emerged. To Habermas therefore, an authentic public sphere develops from the private realm rather than from the state. It is the realm that symbolises the public face of private individuals who do not necessarily accept all state actions and inactions, but rather challenge state activities where necessary. Rational criticism is the accepted mode of discussion in this public sphere and Habermas regards this realm together with its critical mode of discussion and the 'public opinion' that results afterwards as 'ingredients' of a modern democratic political structure. A semblance of this public sphere idea is instituted by the 1992 constitution of Ghana by way of giving some powers to the media body in article 162. For example in article 162 clauses 3 and 5, private persons are empowered to create media spaces that organises other private persons to scrutinise the actions and inactions of public office holders.

Further details in Habermas' account however suggest a homogenizing, exclusionary and singular public sphere which discriminates on topics for discussion. For example, matters such as domestic affairs are deemed unworthy for discussion (see also Fraser, 1992). In his book '*The theory of communicative action'* however, Habermas has revised this notion of a public sphere that is exclusionary and topic-discriminating and turned to one premised on a form of communication. It is also now about a public space created any time and place where matters concerning society are debated characterised by divergent views. By this, a public sphere is a whole collection of various but intersecting system of publics formed through rational and critical communication all manner of persons.

This rational and critical communication in a public sphere is based on the following conditions: (i) e*xchange and critique of reasoned claims* :– referring to communication partners engaging in evidence-based critique of ideas rather than conjectures; (ii) *reflexivity*:– a requirement that demands that communication partners re-think and revise their stance on a given topic of discussion when challenged by a better idea proposition (iii) *ideal role taking*:– respecting participants' opinions without explicit abuse; (iv) autonomy from state and economic power - deliberations are centred on public interests rather than being driven by private benefits or administrative power; and (v) *sincerity*:– requiring participants to disclose information such as their identities and interests on a given subject (Dahlberg, 2005).

These requirements are considered standard measures of online deliberation (Friess *et al*., 2015; Graham, 2010; Dahlberg, 2005) and have been used exclusively or together with other related measures to examine a number of online platforms to ascertain their closeness to a public sphere. These platforms include Usenet newsgroups (Papacharissi, 2004), the comment sections of news media (Graham, 2010), blogs (Kaye, Jonson, & Muhlberger, 2012), platforms sponsored by political parties and government institutions (Desquinabo, 2008) social networking sites such as Facebook (Valera-Ordaz, 2017) and Twitter (Balcells & Padró-Solanet, 2015), and the Minnesota E-democracy project (Dahlberg, 2001). Dahlberg (2001) for example reports that the Minnesota E-democracy project was successful, as at the time, in overcoming many of the impediments seen in less structured online interactions, but failed to attract a representative sample of the population and is increasingly marginalized by commercial sites.

Although widely used, this set of communication requirements is problematic in the sense that they reflect the communication style of already powerful social groups (Bickford, 2011). A continuous adherence to these requirements therefore implies that people who use other naturally-occurring ways of self-expression (known as aesthetic-affective styles of communication) such as rhetoric, emotional speaking, myth, metaphor, poetry- should be considered irrational (Dahlberg, 2005), and be discounted. Such people need to adapt to the ideal style of communicating listed above if they seek acceptance into this kind of public sphere, or find alternative platforms for the expression of their opinions. Aesthetic-affective forms of communication can nonetheless contribute to democratic communica-

tions. For example, speaking with passion drives political communications to establish truth by providing the compelling force that shreds false claims in order to establish the truth. It may be expressed as hate, love, and hopefulness in order to sustain an important truth in the face of weak views.

The public sphere can also be a space where communications that resemble individual libertarianism and/or communitarianism are expressed (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019). Again, these communication characteristics may weigh low on the quality scale if evaluated against the ideal deliberative requirements, but they have democratic relevance outside the ideal scale (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019). A communitarian feature takes the form of people clustering around views that correspond to their personal opinions (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019).
Indeed online platforms promote homophily groups (Camaj et al., 2009; Dahlberg, 2001), resulting in the expression of homogeneous views within these groups (Ancu & Cozma, 2009). In Ghana and Spain for example, like-minded individuals, government institutions and political parties create online groups to share homogeneous views on public issues (Gyampo, 2017; Valeria-Ordaz, 2019). Although interactions in these groups can be seen to be diversity-deficient from a deliberative perspective (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Sunstein, 2001), their relevance to democracy can be attributed to their potential in building group cohesion towards the forming of group identity, thus helping to strengthen political organisations and encouraging pluralism in a long run. In Chapter Five, we shall also learn that online platforms facilitate user anonymity to some extent. What this relative anonymity can potentially mean for a pro-communitarian online group is that there could be other users who do not share in the general opinions expressed and can challenge popular claims put forward, which can generate critical political talks.

Recall from the last paragraph that a public sphere online can also feature talks that conform to liberal political ideals (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Dahlberg, 2001). Such kind of communications can be identified when political talks satisfy individual purposes (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019). An example is a user seeking information from political leaders and using the platform as means of self-expression (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Dahlberg, 2001). A social media user may also express a personal opinion on a public issue that features links to political information or interactions from different online forums on their own page (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019), and this can potentially generate a string of talks among the user's

immediate contacts, and depending on the privacy settings of each contact in the network, these political talks can be shared with or seen by decision makers of a country.

In section 1.4 of this chapter, I indicate that the forms of democracy share the central ideals of freedom of speech, equal rights, respect for a common law and justice. It is thus imperative to review the identified deliberative requirements in this section with the aim of aligning them to the respective central tenets of democracy. Doing this will help to achieve clarity at the data analysis stage in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Securing liberties in a sense means ensuring freedom of speech in any form of democracy (Meyer, 2020; Wolterstorff, 2012). There may be many ways of achieving this aim but four of the identified deliberative requirements lend themselves towards this end. These are (i) *ideal role taking*, which refers to respecting participants' opinions without any form of abuse; (ii) the acceptability of less formal communications in public spheres; (iii) the requirement to free all public spheres from state and economic power; and (iv) the acceptability of multiple public spheres instead of a single overarching space. Respecting opinions can create an environment where communication participants are enabled to contribute their ideas. The use of only formal type of communication precludes others who may have ideas but cannot conform to the style (Bickford, 2011). Liberating all public spheres from state and economic power ensures that people talk without having to serve the interests of the powers that be (Leeson, 2008; Dahlberg, 2001). Finally, having multiple public spheres provides freedom to choose platforms to express opinions and possibly abolishes the controls of platform owners who may dictate what is communicated and how it should be done.

Equal right to political voice can be achieved in a political communications setting by respecting views without any form of abuse (Wolterstorff, 2012); according all communication participants equal statuses and by accepting formal and informal ways of talking without discriminating (Bickford, 2011).

In spite of the criticisms that have led to the expansion of our knowledge about the public sphere, there is at least one view in Habermas' (1992) revision that can be agreed upon.

There is a view of a 'public sphere' infrastructure built on traditional news media platforms that largely succumbs to the interests of capital on the one hand, and the state on the other hand (as will be discussed further in Chapter Three), though there is admittance that the public can be 'pluralistic, internally much differentiated' and can resist the collusion of media owners and politicians (Habermas, 1992, p. 438).

Indeed the media (especially the traditional ones) have been regarded as a realm that is supposed to help build democracy of all kinds. For example, with the goal of advancing Ghana's hybrid democracy, which has been indicated above as a blend of liberal and deliberative governance systems, the 1992 constitution guarantees for a media environment free from state control or manipulations. This constitutional aspiration has been firmed by entrenched clauses in chapter 12, meaning therefore that it will require a national referendum to amend these clauses and 75 percent of the votes casted must be supportive of the proposed amendment(s). One of the important roles that media organisations are expected to play in a democracy is to be the critical eye of the governed public in the scrutiny of public issues and amplify related public concerns to the reach of the duty-bearing public officers (Asamoah, 2020; Nyarko & Teer-Tomaselli, 2018; Habermas, 1989). But do the media organisations in Ghana live to the advancing expectations of the 1992 constitution? This question, amongst others, is at the heart of Chapters Three and Four, and will be explored in detail. In Chapter Two however, it is imperative to trace the origins of political participation, as has been deployed in this chapter, so as to understand the differences there are in its meaning, which will help us to further understand the democracy systems discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Determinants of political participation and the context of social networking sites

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to trace the roots of political participation as a concept in modern democracies. It highlights how political participation has been conceptualised, including the key determinants of an individual's participation level. The chapter synthesises two major theoretical traditions of political participation and evaluates their relevance against the Ghanaian context, as well as online and social media use for political deliberations. Although it is a secondary conceptual framework, such a discussion is significant to this thesis as it will help situate the roots of the media and political participation in relevant theories of political participation. Further, it will bring out the understanding of how political participation has evolved over time and how online and social media could be changing the ways in which citizens now engage with the processes of democracy.

2.2 The politics of the paradigms and the way forward

The subject of political participation has long received the attention of many researchers who attribute its importance to its role in democratic legitimisation and growth (for example Gyampo, 2017; Grauenkaer & Tufte 2018; Papacharissi, 2010; Hassan 2004; McLeod, Scheufele & Moy, 1999; Putnam 1995; Habermas 1989; Nie, Powell & Prewit, 1969). Similar to the concept of democracy, political participation has been discussed by researchers using several dimensions. Some authors have treated voting at local and/or national levels as a mode of political participation (for example Nie, Powell & Prewit, 1969; McLeod, Scheufele & Moy, 1999). Others have also linked it to donating money to a political cause; getting people to vote; taking part in online and offline public forums where issues of importance to citizens are discussed; contacting political party officials; writing letters to a newspaper editor; taking part in protests; contributing to radio and television discussions of political issues; canvassing for votes for a political candidate by means of volunteering; interpersonal discussion of politics; attending a political rally or speech, as well as serving on a committee of some local organization. (for example

Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Gyampo, 2017; Scheufele, 2002; McLeod, Scheufele & Moy, 1999; Putnam, 1995; Huckfedt, 1979; Finkel, 1985).

In consonance with the various modes of political participation, its meaning has also come to bare from divergent perspectives. The subject was pioneered and initially dominated by the idea that individual level characteristics such as socio-economic status (SES) and psychological variables (interest, attitude and beliefs) are better predictors of a person's level of political activity. These SES variables include an individual's education level, income level, and occupation. Others also connect variables such as race and ethnicity (example Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999), as well as age and gender to political participation (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Abramson, 1983; Conway, 1991; Verba & Nie, 1972). In fact, there is uniformity of evidence suggesting that younger people in industrialised countries -including where the voting age was lowered- vote less than their older compatriots (Wattenberg, 2003; Blais & Dobrynska, 1998; Nie *et al*., 1974; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). This is also true in many parts of Africa, including Ghana (Resnick *et al*., 2011). A significant number of early thinkers and researchers from psychological, sociological and economic perspectives have also modelled different but complementary ideas to demonstrate the potency of this individualistic view of participation (for example Campbell *et al*., 1960; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980; Milbath & Goel, 1977; Rosens & Hassen, 1993; Beeghley, 1986).

In Indianapolis (United States) and Singapore, empirical evidences suggest that there is a relationship between interest in politics and voting (Olsen, 1972, p. 328; Vedlitz & Veblen, 1980), as well as between interest in public affairs and engaging in public conversations (Willnat, Lee & Detenber, 2002). From social psychology and interpersonal psychology perspectives, specific personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, consciousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience have also been used to predict varying levels of involvement across various modes of participation (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, Raso, & Ha, 2011). Among all these individual-level attributes however, education, income level and occupation which are correlated in some cases, are predominant in the pro-individualistic models of the participation literature, with education outnumbering all.

Education is often argued to be the best individual attribute that can be used to explain the different levels of political participation of persons in a given society (Lake & Huckfedt, 1998, p. 567; Putnam, 1995, p. 3). Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995) argue that the level of education of an individual is positively correlated with the skills and informational resources necessary for political participation. People who are better educated are more able to process complex political information according to (Dalton, 2008) and have a greater sense of citizen responsibility (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). The inference here is that the higher an individual's level of education, the better he/she is able to cognitively process and understand 'complex' political information to inform participation and non-participation decisions.

Whilst it is recognised that information is central to political participation (Mcleod, 1999), this notion portrays participation as a complex venture that requires specific individuals with high intellect. Perceived this way, political participation should then be a mystery to people with low or no education. While all these studies are important contributions that illuminate our understanding of political participation, there is inherent overemphasis on individual characteristics. People in society are grossly portrayed as 'atomistic beings' insulated from events surrounding them, and therefore unresponsive to their environment (see Taylor, 1989, pp. 82-193). This atomistic idea suits an individual in a liberal democratic society, discussed in Chapter One. Although there are measures, such as citizen responsibilities that seek to foster social bonds and appreciation of other people's feelings, liberal democratic societies favour the rights of the individual, sometimes over the needs of society. Scholars who defend the liberal political traditions, like John Rawls, ascribe to the ideology that individuals have ultimate interest in shaping and pursuing their own life-plans without any external influences from the social context.

On the contrary, there are some level of interactions between individual characteristics and the social environment in the processes of undertaking many modes of political participation. For example, an individual's social status (education) and the neighbourhood context (places of residence) interact to predict the extent of political activities or participation (Huckfedt, 1979).

According to this study, individual status (level of education) affects activities which do not involve social interactions (for example writing letters to a newspaper editor). The social/neighbourhood context however affects political activities which involve social interaction, such as getting people to be registered to vote. The relevance of Huchfedt's study to the discussion of participation is the highlighting of education as an insufficient variable in the explanation of participatory behaviour in different neighbourhood contexts. It can therefore be argued that the collective interests and influences of people supersede individual characteristics in many practical instances of life. This communitarian-based idea, of which Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, Amitai Etzioni and Charles Taylor share similar views, therefore departs from the atomistic modelling of individuals. This tradition of thinking highlights the importance of the bonds in communities in forging and sustaining societies (Abbey, 2000, p. 102). Human beings are social animals to a large extent, as we are not self-sufficient in many contexts of life, and politics is not an exception (Taylor, 1985, p. 190). For example, the pursuance of one's right to education can be realised if his or her compatriots honour their tax obligations to provide the necessary pool of resources (p. 102). Even in liberal societies, there is an extent to which values such as freedom and individual diversity are promoted and ascribed to (Bell, 2013).

Human beings continuously conform to laid-down norms of society without being aware (Bell, 2013). When people live their lives according to laid down norms of societies, they are effectively drawing from what the collective sees as good. Indeed, the individuality of people comes to play when their sense of support received from society temporally diminishes but the occurrence of such a circumstance is negligible compared to the opposite scenario (Bell, 2013). In the event of a social detachment as pointed out, the individual seeks to separate him/herself temporarily from the collective and sees the world as an external part of himself which he has to deal with, by devising ways and means of pursuing his own goals. To illustrate this further, Taylor's (1989, pp. 112-113) scenario of a mammoth chasing two individuals (A and B) is a case in point. In the cause of the chase, the individual-'A' fears that the mammoth will devour him. But the fear turns to become a relief when the mammoth turns to the other person 'B' and thus spares 'A'. The individual 'A' now regrets that the other person has been eaten by the mammoth but then begins to have a sense of himself as being separate from others.

This can also be illustrated from another perspective. Although an individual may interpret his personal identity by himself, this is not complete without also considering what others think of him/her, and how the individual relates to other people (Abbey, 2000, p. 56). There is the incorporation of thoughts of external perception into the formation of people's identity in varying degrees. The individual in this way cannot extricate himself from the larger context of society but rather draws, at least, some of his/her identity from the wider societal context. Proponents of the atomistic ideology tend to argue from the individualistic point of view because the rare moments where people feel separated from others are what get recorded on their minds (Bell, 2013). The more frequent moments where the individual draws from society go unregistered as they become part of everyday life. As in the example of writing a letter to an editor of a newspaper (see Huckfedt, 1979) therefore, the individual in some circumstances, and to some extent, may be self- reliant, but may require the support of others in his society for many other activities.

This elaboration reveals the practical and theoretical limits of the individual characteristics approach to participation in that, the interaction of individuals, whether in a group or just one-to-one interaction in some cases, results in the sharing of ideas that supersede the limits of just one individual (see also McClurg, 2003; Mcleod *et al*., 1999; Lake & Huckfedt, 1998; Kenny, 1992; Huckfedt, 1979; Olsen, 1972). To this extent, another strand of studies is thus being influenced by this shift in approach to political participation, changing the theoretical and analytical focus of the subject. At this juncture therefore, it is imperative to explore the link between the social context and political participation in more detail.

The social context mobilises what is called 'social capital' to support members of society in many ways that includes political participation (Putnam, 1995; Lake *et al*., 1998). A social capital is thus 'a resource embedded in a social structure which is accessed and mobilised in purposive actions' (Lin, 1999, p. 36). This social structure represents institutions such as community sport clubs, religious societies, youth associations, political groupings, labour unions, professional societies, fraternal groups (Putnam, 1995). The inference in Lin's (1999) definition is that the resources are 'invested' by members with expected returns.

These returns could be an action or decision taken by the individual(s) after accessing the embedded resources. At least, three explanations account for the reasons why embedded resources in a social structure enhance actions (Lin, 1999). One is that the embedded resources facilitate the flow of information. In business contexts for example, an individual's social connections can present him/her with information that leads to opportunities otherwise not available (Lin, 1999). Second, the social ties in a social structure may exercise influence on the individual to act in a way that satisfies the group norms (p. 31). The individual surrenders his/her personal stance (which may be non-involvement in a given action) and gives in to the influence of the group. Third, an individual's social ties provide the necessary assurance of credentials to access resources. For example, membership of an association of reputable exporters can be used by an individual to access credit from a bank. The credentials of the association serve as the needed guarantee that is beyond the individual's personal capital. Not only can an individual utilise such an embedded resource, the entire association can also use the credibility in the association's reputation to access credit for its members, which would not have been available to any single member on their own. In all scenarios, these social capitals are the bonding agents that keep the individuals together as a unit (Bourdieu, 1985). In real life, social capitals manifest in various forms such as trust, information, dependency, and norms (Putnam, 1995, p. 2).

In the context of political participation, the crucial issue is whether these social capitals can mobilise and propel individuals to be active politically. This means not all social capitals will result in making individuals politically active. The production of a politically relevant social capital is a function of political expertise within an individual's network or relations; the more a particular network of people has personalities who are politically knowledgeable, the higher the probability of creating a politically-relevant social capital (Lake & Huckfedt, 1998). High level of politically-relevant social capital increases the chance of an individual to be engaged in politics (Lake *et al.,* 1998). And as political activity cannot be meaningful unless it is informed (Mcleod, 1999), information becomes a primary capital needed for political participation. Individuals will seek answers to questions such as; why must I take part in citizen forums with the government - how will it benefit me? What makes a particular candidate fit for the position? How does a candidate's policy compare with others? What are the voting procedures?

What are the issues at stake and how do they affect me? In the process of answering these questions, an individual may rely on his personal characteristics or attitudes towards politics. Alternatively, he or she may also fall on the information extracted from group interactions, or a combination of both. Social interactions, however, are likely to expose the individual to different politically-relevant information that can be more than what he/she possesses (McClurg, 2003, p. 449). This is because group interactions can be rich with people from diverse backgrounds, resulting in influences that draw the individual into public affairs and political activity (Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998; Olsen, 1972, p. 318). The incentives and resources to participate may therefore be provided in part by the group interactions. Thus, the possession of individual expertise necessary for political participation may not be acquired simply in isolation, but by their recurrent interaction with others. Another important influence that interpersonal interactions can potentially have on political participation is that, it offers the opportunity for in-depth discussion of political issues as a follow-up on some information gathered from media outlets (Shah,Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Mcleod *et al.*, 1999).

Apart from the above elaboration of the social paradigm of participation, other circumstances also throw more light on the weaknesses of the pro-individualistic tradition of political participation. For example, formal education may be relevant to participation, as has already been discussed above, but trends in recent democratic processes reveal that, access to information from diverse sources online (as we shall soon see in Chapter Four), and the opportunity to engage with political processes in a more direct manner may be more imperative for political participation than formal educational grades people attain. For example, in spite of consistent rise of education levels in the United States, especially, citizens' participation in politics remained low (Putnam, 1995, p. 3). And as pointed out in the discussion of the public sphere and its relationship to political participation in the previous chapter, political deliberations can be artificially restricted to individuals who have formal education and financial means (see Thompson, 2010, p. 253; Fraser, 1992). The languages for political deliberations can deliberately be 'codified' to keep some class of society away. The implication is that the research practice where formal education (primary school, diploma level, bachelor's degree) is used to determine levels of participation is insufficient.

Alternatively, it can be argued that the ability of an individual to access and utilise information when the time comes for a particular political action is what must be of importance.

Further, political ideas and messages which have been previously perceived to be complex -and which would have needed a certain degree of cognitive capabilities to understand- seem to be broken down into bits for easy consumption. For example, in Ghana, as we shall see in Chapter Three, talking politics in a public context used to be low when English-speaking radio stations were the only available public platforms (Health, 1999). Using formal education to measure participation levels in such a circumstance would have revealed results in favour of those who have had access to education. This is because only those who were formally educated could speak the English language. Since the introduction of local languages into the programming of Ghanaian radio stations however, people from diverse backgrounds exhibit a higher level of enthusiasm to join national deliberations (Heath, 1999). Moreover, a research in 19 African countries, including Ghana, found no significant association of education and voter turnout (Resnick *et al*., 2011).

In the online contexts, attaining a particular social status (age, income, and occupation) may play a passive role rather than active as status-based restrictions that characterised political participation (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Thompson, 2010, p. 253; Fraser, 1992) are blurring out. In the online domains, a person's social status can be concealed to his or her communication partner (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Suler, 2004). During the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections of the United States, deliberations about national issues were sustained by young adults who would have previously refrained from political conversations publicly. Even those who were below the age to vote were talking politics that has consequences online (Dalton, 2009). A similar trend is seen in the case of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum where the voting age was reduced to 16 years. 75% of the 16-17 year olds turned up to vote according to the Electoral Commission. Young people who are, or were below the voting age are less likely to have attained educational qualifications which are above what their older compatriots would have had. They are also less likely to have high-earning jobs, let alone having higher social statuses.

2.3 Conclusion

Whilst the factors of the individualistic tradition of political participation help in our understanding, they fail to do so in some recent contexts. The discussion has laid bare the understanding that most forms of political participation are not only determined by individual characteristics, but by social contexts also. In the contexts of online and social media use for political communications in general, education, age, social status, occupation may potentially play minimal roles. Likewise, evidence from the Ghanaian context seems to be blurring the impact of education on talking politics in public. Having drawn these conclusions, the scene is now set for the discussion of the relationship between news media use (which is variable founded in the social context) and political participation.

CHAPTER THREE

Media use and political participation

3.1 Introduction

The media "connect people to the world and our environment, allowing us to make an impression upon it and vice versa" (Hassan, 2004, p. 35). In sync with this media notion, the traditional news media (news media and related current affairs programmes from offline mainstream radio, television and newspaper sources) are associated with a significant amount of the information that flow to people for their daily conversations (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018; Banda, 2010; Hassan 2004, p. 3; Herman & Chomsky, 1994). This suggests that traditional news media play roles in fostering sociability, a behaviour which has been discussed in Chapter Two as a potential fosterer of political participation (see also Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018).

Of equal relevance is the fact that news media organisations are considered highly important. For example, they are essential in Ghana's democracy to the extent that 12 constitutional articles (articles 162 to 173 of the national constitution of Ghana) are devoted to their protection. Theoretically, the media are expected to scrutinize the actions and inactions of public officials mainly for the benefit of the governed population (Asamoah, 2020; Nyarko & Teer-Tomaselli, 2018; Habermas, 1989; 1992). Further, they are also expected to help achieve some democratic ideals, such as freedom of speech, by advancing plurality of opinions on a given public issue, as in the case of Ghana, instructed in article 163 of the 1992 constitution. These functions of news media organisations, therefore, plunges them into a trust position whereby unbiasedness must characterise their activities if they are to function as expected.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explore the effect(s) of such news media on the act of talking politics on public platforms and whether they contribute towards the building of public spheres or its decadence. Undertaking this discussion is imperative as the public sphere represents a fundamental requirement of deliberative democracy (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 38). It is an attempt to find answers to questions such as:

1. What is the relationship between traditional news media use and talking politics publicly as well as participating in elections?.
2. Are there differential effects of traditional news media on talking politics publicly and participating in elections?.
3. Is there a relationship between activities of traditional news media and disaffection of young adults with political processes?

Answers to these questions will underpin theories that seek to explain why young adults in Ghana adopt social networking sites (SNSs) to talk politics in Chapter Five. The discussion will be contextually general in section 3.2, shifting focus on the Ghanaian context in subsequent sections in this chapter. In addition to the traditional news media, the sections on the Ghanaian context also examine the conditions of other offline public spaces for talking politics, such as public forums, focusing on how they encourage the involvement of young adults (18 to 37-year-olds) or otherwise.

3.2 The traditional news media and political participation

At the introduction of this chapter, media are conceptualised as "that which connects people to the world and our environment, allowing us to make an impression upon it and vice versa" (Hassan, 2004, p. 35). This view portrays a coupling and symbiotic relationship with society and therefore provides a fertile premise for discussing the social context of political participation. Papacharissi (2010) highlights a general relationship between the traditional news media and political participation further when she wrote that "if we accept that democracy as a concept is evolving and fluid, then the public or media (dis)engagement with the democratic system becomes consonant with that fluidity" (p.11). The inference is that the evolution of democracy negatively or positively depends on whether and how the public engages with it through available media platforms. It is not surprising, therefore, that the subject of media and political participation receives the attention of media and communication scholars (example, Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Banda, 2010; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Moy *et al*., 2004; Scheufele, 2002; McLeod *et al*., 1999).

The relationship between media and political participation can be looked at in a multi-dimensional manner (Boulianne, 2011, p. 148; Moy *et al*., 2001). For example, the media can potentially draw people's attention to issues; shape people's sense of civic duty; generate interest in public affairs, provide motivation to get involved in political processes as well as making people to interact back with available media platforms (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; King, Schneer & White, 2017; Conroy-Krutz & Moehler, 2015; Boulianne, 2011, p. 148; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). The media also play crucial roles in audiences' opinion formation and fluctuations on a range of issues by setting agendas for public discussion (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Moy *et al*., 2001).

The processes involved in all these functions of the media lend support to the social perspective of political participation discussed in Chapter Two. To understand this relationship, there needs to be clarity on how the media affects users. The processes begin with political knowledge through interpersonal communications in which politics is discussed and further on to political participation (Moy *et al*., 2004, p. 536). The idea that traditional news media affect people's political behaviours through interpersonal discussions presupposes that those conversations use mass media content relating to politics. It further suggests that interpersonal discussions are the main conduits through which the media's influence on political attitudes and behaviours occurs in a one-directional manner. That said, the notion of media effect (whether one-directional or having mutual reinforcing relationships with other variables) is problematic to some academics. Gauntlett (2005) emphasises that in the violence and media literature for example, the effects model studies narrow the narratives on individuals involved in violence and the media, instead of considering other broader social factors such as unemployment, poverty, and behaviour of family and peers. Further, he argues that such studies blur the existence of media's effect on the public as they ignore the intended positive morals in screen movies, but instead link violent contents to social instability.

Gauntlett's perspective has been influential in some fields of study and may be applicable in some contexts of political participation, but it seems to lack large-scale support among the media and political participation body of literature. For example, in a study to investigate whether news media coverage and the tones used in Denmark and the

Netherlands matter in opinion formation about European integration, De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) find that biases (favourable in tone) and extensive news media coverage led the audiences to endorse the enlargement of the EU. In Ghana, exposure to partisan media outlets belonging to various political parties shaped listeners' attitudes towards presidential candidates and reduced extreme political views in the run-up to the 2012 general elections (Conroy-Krutz & Moehler, 2015). In the US, news media consumption influences Americans to take public stands on specific issues, join national policy conversations, and express themselves publicly more often than they would otherwise (King, Schneer, & White, 2017). After King and his colleagues jointly set media agendas with 48 news media organisations on specific national policy issues, public discussions about each policy area increased by 63% on particular dates. As can be seen, especially from King and his colleagues' study, these media effects occur through agenda-setting and framing activities of the news media.

Agenda-setting theory suggests a correlation between the emphasis placed on issues in media spaces and the importance attached to these issues by the audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). For example, if the issue of EU integration is not featured frequently in news broadcasts, it is expected that the issue will not be considered necessary by the audiences. The framing base is on the assumption that the character and tone used in news reports can influence how it is understood by audiences (McCombs *et al.*, 1972). The focus of this thesis is not to add to the media effects studies, but it is worth noting here that the fact that there could be other variables to be considered in violence and media studies, as suggested by Gauntlett (2005), does not mean that there is no occurrence of media effects on audiences. It rather means that there could be other variables, in addition to media use, in studies that look at violence and media use, for example.

Exposure to traditional news media and levels of political knowledge, for example, are mutually reinforcing variables (Conway, 1981). A person’s knowledge about politics can increase as a result of accessing the news media. In a reverse manner, a politically enlightened person will be more likely to use the news media (Conway, 1981). But there is a medium-specificity dimension to the argument here. Each form of media brings its unique quality to the consumer experience. For example, television and internet-based media feature visual images, while other traditional news media types are largely restricted to verbal modes.

The print and online media allow users some considerable control over what information they select and process, requiring some level of motivation and attentiveness. Those that are sender-controlled are broadcasted through transmissions require relatively minimum effort from their audiences (Chaffee & Tims, 1982). Owing to these inherent differences in the various forms of traditional news media, their potential effects on political participation also vary (Moy *et al.*, 2004; DeVreese & Boomgaarden, 2006), which can be argued to have different effects on one's level of interaction with a specific media.

In the light of this perspective suggesting varying media effects, attention to the newspaper is strongly related to interpersonal discussion (Scheufele, 2002) and general participation (Moy *et al*., 2004), but less so when it comes to attention to news television. For example, in Western countries, people who watch more television demonstrate lower levels of political activities than those who read newspapers (Milner, 2002; Putnam, 1995). This is plausible as there is a tendency to acquire political knowledge from newspapers than from television, bearing in mind that political knowledge is often associated strongly with participation (see Newton, 1999; Neuman *et al*., 1992). Similar trends are observed in Denmark and the Netherlands (see De Vreese *et al*., 2006). These media differential effects may be partially responsible for the differences in political participation levels between older citizens and younger ones in the US and Europe (Wattenberg, 2008). Wattenberg (2008) observes that younger citizens in the US and Europe read newspapers and watch television news much lesser than their older compatriots. It may be difficult for news media organisations to attract young adults in Ghana (Fosu, 2016). The question of why young adults repel from traditional news outlets then comes into focus. In Ghana, the English language is not indigenous, but the major newspaper organisations use it in ways that preclude young adults. For example, the presentation styles and vocabularies used by these organisations are above the comprehension levels of young adults (Fosu, 2016), and this yields to a level of public information denial, which can render some members of the public incapable of exercising their political voice as discussed in Chapter One.

The traditional news media can be linked to many more ways of suppressing plurality of opinions and decadence of public spheres. The one-directional manner in which traditional news media disseminate information into society is one way.

In practice, this one-directional flow of information is carried out by journalists who conform to internally-coded newsworthy criteria (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), in line with their agenda-setting style to satisfy media entrepreneurs (Bruns, 2011, pp. 132-134; Herman & Chomsky, 1994). Factors of newsworthiness from the perspectives of traditional news media operatives include the frequency of discussion of the news item; when the story is about 'elite' nations or 'elite' people, or when the report relates to something negative (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). One argument that can be put forward against this agenda-setting practice in the context of democratic development is that the approach can amplify the 'voice' of the rich against the poor if newsworthiness is based on the elite for example. Although these newsworthy factors have been argued to be applicable to international news production and not daily home-based news (see Harcup, & O'neill, 2001), most other newsworthy factors that have been added to the list as a result of the criticisms have been in-ward looking as well.

Another concern worth highlighting is the phenomenon of constraining public spheres on traditional news media platforms through the joint activities of media organisations, politicians and commercial entities. This is carried out by crowding media spaces with information that satisfies the interest of politicians and commercial entities more than the general public (Herman *et al*., 1994; Habermas, 1989). This space encroaching phenomenon is traced to the 13th century (Habermas, 1989), and it does not appear to end any time soon (Luco-Ocando, 2015). It must be acknowledged, though, that in more recent times, traditional news media have been associated with some landmark achievements such as increasing literacy and civic education (Conroy-Krutz & Moehler, 2015) and helping to make the right to education constitutionally backed in many jurisdictions. That notwithstanding, media coverage on elections portraying negative comments by politicians are known to have negative consequences on political knowledge and participation due to its potential to reduce media use (Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998, p. 44). In extreme cases, citizens may completely dissociate from political processes. In circumstances where the latter happens, such a citizen could become a characteristic of media malaise, with symptoms such as political apathy, alienation, distrust, cynicism, confusion, and even fear (Papacharissi, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Newton, 1999, p. 579).

Further, sensational approach to news presentations and less-critique of the rich and powerful are also associated with the practice of journalism (Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Newton, 1999; Cappella & Jamieson, 1996). By so doing, the core function of the media as a public organ with the role of providing communications that echo public views (Curran et al., 2010; Habermas, 1989) is compromised. Media spaces are also being monetized (Bruns, 2011, p. 132), and this may be defended with the argument that media operatives require funds to sustain their operations. However, losing a segment of their audiences due to their actions could also eventually mean that they may become less attractive to businesses that are likely to consider audience size as media selection criteria. The net result could be a reduction of qualitative public concerns in public decisions, which may be contrary to the needs of the people, resulting in rampant protests (Visser, Holbrook & Krosnick, 2008). The 1999 protest against the World Trade Organisation (W.T.O) in Seattle is a case in point. Before the protests, public sentiments were against the dominance of corporate entities like Microsoft, Starbucks, and McDonald's in public policies (See DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). The interests of corporations and politicians were perceived to be promoted in the guise of fair trade and at the expense of citizens on matters concerning the environment, economy, politics and other social related issues.

There is, however, some evidence from a recent study disagreeing with this media malaise theory and forcefully emphasise that not all the negative media perceptions will lead to non-participation. Arguing based on the Corrective Action hypothesis, Barnidge & Rojas (2014) show that people with higher levels of hostile media perceptions and yet perceive the media to be influential will be engaged in political conversations more often with the aim of seeking to correct the perceived wrongs in media coverage. While this intervention is relevant, the critical question is, to what extent can such persons go with this 'correction-seeking drive' in what seems like centrally-controlled traditional media platforms, in terms of access to information and the opportunity to express personal views? Contrary to Barnidge & Rojas' (2014) study, political knowledge and participation levels are likely to increase when there is more free media ecology without the control and manipulations of the state (Leeson, 2008). In addition to the activities of politicians highlighted above, these state controls include state collusion with rich corporations and individuals to monopolize media ownership, which tends to marginalise dissenting views (Herman & Chomsky, 1994).

Analysis by Herman *et al.* (1994) and a more recent study by Castells (2009) indicate how the US and British media landscapes for example, are tiered, with the top tier (measured by resources and audience size) in some sort of alliance with the governments to define news agenda for the lower tiers.

Governments also control private media operators when they are financially induced to report news in a particular way (Leeson & Coyne, 2005). What is more, corporate organisations also discriminate when allocating advertising funds. This is done to sideline, and in some cases, close down dissenting media outlets whose programs seek to benefit the larger population but potentially damage the corporate sponsors' reputation, profit interests, and political ties with governments. This sort of discrimination naturally stimulates competition for advertising revenue amongst traditional media organisations, culminating in corporations gaining remote control over what is broadcasted as public information (Herman *et al*., 1994, pp. 14-18). Thus, if political knowledge and participation levels are likely to increase in a free media ecology without such controls and manipulations of the state (Leeson, 2008), then people may not necessarily be uninterested in politics. It may be that they are not given the opportunities to participate in the ways they expect. Although the traditional news media organisations have responded in some ways to address a lot of these concerns highlighted above over the last decade, such as the springing up of smaller and more localised community radio stations, television and newspapers (Downey & Fenton, 2003); the deployment of mobile phone technologies in the distribution of news to make sure news is accessible to people anywhere (Goggin, 2011); and having online presence (as will be discussed in Chapter Four), the main concern is whether these changes translate into a media environment where freedom of speech, equality of opinions and opinion plurality are guaranteed - will the public be able to determine what they want to listen to, read, and watch on these media platforms? And more importantly, how can this media usage experience influence people's political participation behaviours?

3.3 The political landscape, traditional news media and the involvement of young adults in Ghana's democracy

This section is a follow-up on the relationship between the traditional news media and the public sphere in the Ghanaian context. In addition to the traditional news media, this section will also feature an examination of the conditions of other offline public spaces for talking politics, such as public forums, focusing on how they encourage the involvement or otherwise of young adults (18 to 37 year olds). Putting the Ghanaian context into perspective requires analysis of the socio-political realms and the functions of the traditional news media along historical timelines chronologically. Doing so will shed light on the current state of the social and political environments and some of the cultural-specific issues that intersect with intergenerational political dynamics.

Available studies covering the period of Ghana's colonial era in the 18th and mid-19th centuries suggest government systems and structures that do not conform to the liberal and deliberative democracies discussed in Chapter One. The suppression of the political voices of young adults and the violation of their right to free speech was prevalent (Apter, 1963; Simensen, 1974). Local traditional authorities (then hierarchically made up of kings, paramount chiefs, and their sub-chiefs) together with colonial officers, used legal and social arrangements such as the Chief's Ordinance of 1904; the constitutional reforms of the 1920s and the Native Administrative Ordinance of 1927, to prohibit the participation of young adults in politics during that period (Apter, 1963, p. 165; Simensen, 1974, p. 32). These arrangements ensured the procedures for effecting change in policies became bureaucratic. Political talks that criticised actions of traditional authorities were also seen as acts of disobedience, punishable by increased prison sentences (Simensen, 1974). The young were not to question those in authority, regardless of the impact their policies and actions may have had on the non-office-holding population. This practice resulted in a cultural order that ensured respect for those in positions of authority and the older generation (Ofosu-Appiah, 1967).

Young adults were treated as 'instruments' who could be manipulated by the chiefs to serve different purposes at different times. For example, they were mostly mobilised for wars and for manual farm labour. Their leaders were appointed at the instances of the

chiefs. Such groups of young adults were dismissed after performing their assigned duties or when seen to be acting beyond their designated roles (Kraus, 1969; Simensen, 1974).

The manipulation of the young adults in such a manner can be considered a means that removed checks on the activities of the traditional and colonial authorities. It appears to be a regime of absolutism where views and actual needs of the young folks were not consulted at the grassroots but rather conjectured by the chiefs and the elders. The absence of communications between the young adults and the authorities became prevalent to the extent that it resulted in the 28th February 1948 disturbances, which represents a concurrent protest march by 1000 World War II veterans and an estimated 9,000 young adults at the crossroads of the Osu Castle (Israel, 1992). While the ex-soldiers were fighting for what they were entitled to, for participating in World War II, their younger counterparts, on the other hand, were seeking reforms to trade policies that imposed unfair import restrictions in favour of foreign merchants (Israel, 1992, p. 363).

In the process of suppressing the political voices of the governed, the colonial administration, in particular, did not miss the opportunity to misapply the power of radio broadcasting and print media in their activities. The first newspaper, *The Gold Coast Gazette* was published from 1822-25 by Sir Charles MacCarthy, the then British governor of the Gold Coast. As a partial official organ of the colonial administration, the newspaper was used in attempts to influence the political aspirations of the growing young elite by trying to make them conform to the colonial system (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998). In the late 19th century however, the commercial success of a native-owned print media, *The Accra Herald,* gave rise to other native-owned newspapers such as *Gold Coast Times, Western Echo, and Gold Coast Express,* most of which were critical of the colonial government, and frequently demanded self-rule amid frequent intolerance from the administration (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998). In sharp contrast, however, the *London Daily Mirror Group* established *The Daily Graphic* in 1950 with a policy of political neutrality.

Radio broadcasting also emerged modestly but dictatorially as the *Empire Service*, which transmitted radio programmes directly from London to Accra. It became *Station ZOY* in 1935 and focused on providing some sort of education to school children, as well as spreading propaganda messages about the significance of the British Empire and the policies of the colonial administration (Ansah, 1985a; Alhassan, 2005, p. 212).

Radio technology in the country was modified in 1952 to extend its reach across the country (Alhassan, 2005), but that did not bring about improvement to the conditions in which critical public spheres will thrive in the media spaces. The control of the colonial administration over what must be broadcasted remained resolute (Alhassan, 2005). This controlling practice persisted even after placing *Station ZOY* under the management of the administration's public relations department and changing its name to Gold Coast Broadcasting Services (GCBS) in 1953 (Alhassan, 2005). Just like the print media, it was a situation in which the audiences had to listen to what was broadcasted if they tuned in, as the programming style was more informative than interactive (Alhassan, 2005).

3.4 The political system and the media in post-colonial Ghana

Amid what seems like bureaucratic governance administered by the colonial administration, with its attendant protests, were burgeoning political parties such as the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.) and the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). These political parties capitalised on the prevailing unrest at the time to galvanise grass-root support for political power (Kraus, 1969; Israel, 1992). Consequently, the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.) gained the country's political independence and established the First Republic (first attempt at using a constitution to guide its democratic governance) in 1957 and 1960 respectively (Gyampo, 2013; Israel, 1992).

Becoming a politically independent state was anticipated to bring about democratic institutions and conditions that would permit more participation (Alhassan, 2005). In line with this popular expectation, the C.P.P. government established some sort of democracy and dramatically transformed how people engaged in political processes. Power was transferred from the kings and chiefs to elected officers through the Local Government Ordinance (Kraus,1969, p. 113; Simensen, 1974, p.39) as the new government perceived the traditional authorities as catalysts of bureaucratic colonial rule (Azarya *et al*., 1987).

The power transfer meant that the people who wished to hold political positions had to seek the mandate directly from the rest of the citizenry.
Power appears to have been shifted to the people for the first time by exercising their political voices to determine public officeholders. With this arrangement established, political participation proceeding independence received a boost and carried on into the immediate years after independence (Azarya & Chazan, 1987). The public must have had a renewed sense of confidence in the state to channel their needs into the national agenda at the time. Young adults, in particular, were mobilised to participate in several government-controlled economic and social groupings such as Workers Brigade, Young Farmers League, Young Pioneers, Trade Union Congress and Rural Producers, to help reintegrate them into the national agenda (Kraus, 1969).

What began as a nationwide enthusiasm towards national affairs was short-lived, however. In 1960, the C.P.P. government declared a one-party state where other political parties were outlawed, causing a decline in political participation among the grassroots where young adults were the dominant population segment (Kraus, 1969). The C.P.P. government, like the colonial administrators, also saw the media as instruments for state authority rather than an opportunity to flourish mediated public spheres where public opinions drive national policies and decisions. The government used newspapers to attempt building ‘national unity’ and popular support for its ambitious development projects. But this idea of national unity systematically developed into a single-party state that was supposed to forge national integration through a ‘stronger’ state-civil society relation (Azarya *et al*., 1987). According to Azarya *et al.* (1987), a highly centralised political and economic system was woven into the Ghanaian society to enforce this single-party state idea. Everyone had to be a member of the governing party (C.P.P.) to derive some benefits.

The state-owned Gold Coast Broadcasting Services (GCBS) was considerably developed, but that upgrade was to boost the communication strategy of state bureaucracies (Azarya *et al.,* 1985; Alhassan, 2005) and to further deteriorate essential conditions that facilitate the flourishing of public spheres. For example, to prevent attempts at undermining the supposed 'national unity' agenda, the private sector was barred from participating in the country's communication sector. Two inferences can be made from this policy of exclusion

in the media sector at the time. First, and from a conceptual perspective at least, this move can be argued to have delegitimised the constitution of a formidable media public sphere, given that a public sphere has to be controlled by private people and not by political power (see Dahlberg, 2001). Secondly, barring private individuals from operating in the sector effectively ensured that criticisms of state policies from the private realm did not become widespread. Therefore, complaints that could have dented the government's preferred image were rendered ineffective.

The Gold Coast Broadcasting Services (GCBS) was also forbidden to generate revenue through commercial means in order to control its activities (Alhassan, 2005) fully. With this financial policy enforced, the government can be said to have assumed overarching dominance of the mediated public spaces for talking politics. This is because crippling the financial sources of media organisations and ensuring that they depend on governments is one of the effective ways to ensure control over media public spaces (Leeson & Coyne, 2005; Herman & Chromsky, 1994, pp. 14-18). In 1958, the state-owned Gold Coast Broadcasting Services (GCBS) was transformed into the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) and became an established channel for propagating government policies and objectives unilaterally to the people, who remained passive audiences (in terms of interactivity) between 1957 and 1985 at least (Alhassan, 2005; Ansah, 1985a).

The idea that broadcasting must be a tool to forge national unity, maintain political stability through unilateral ideas and promote national development underpinned all broadcasting policies. These included policies concerning language, decisions regarding the type of transmission, and the nature of news (Alhassan, 2005; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1992; Ansah, 1979, 1985a, 1985b; Twumasi, 1981). The media landscape was coerced to the extent that even the Legal Instrument that gave legitimacy to the operation of GBC was literally under the influence of the president. For example, the instrument of incorporation, Legislative Instrument (LI) 472 (1965), which defined the administration of the GBC, was heavily influenced by the president, who had the sole authority to appoint board members. The president also determined the length of their term of office and could even dissolve the entire governing board. The grounds on which the president could disband the governing entity, for example, were put as follows: ‘if he is satisfied that it is in the national interest to do so’ (LI 472, 1965, p.5).

The C.P.P. government eventually purchased the *Daily Graphic* in 1963 to add to its list of apparatus. In 1965, the government, in collaboration with Sanyo of Japan, introduced a television service. But this advancement in the country's media infrastructure was also placed under the control of G.B.C. to augment the government's information activities (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998), placing restrictions on its scope and capacity like the remaining state-owned media machinery. This restriction also meant that another opportunity for the young adults and the rest of the citizenry to participate in decision-making was blocked. Opposing opinions were suppressed, and when occasionally expressed, they were easily viewed as rebellious and attracted severe repercussions (Gyampo, 2013). According to Gyampo (2013, p. 53), the Preventive Detention Act 1958, which was used to detain suspected political opposition for up to five years without trial, made expressing dissenting views a dangerous activity for the general public. The wholesale promotion of unilateral ideas of governance in the guise of national unity and integration ultimately severed political ties, stemming from widespread discontent whereby many non-state actors felt some loss of self-autonomy and choice (Nunyonameh, 2012, p. 8; Alhassan, 2005; Azarya et al., 1987, p. 112).

In the case of the young adults, the combined effect of these prison sentences; the societal value placed on acts of respect to authority; and the practice whereby access to formal education and jobs are rewards for obeying the status quo, particularly made their involvement in politics undesirable (Gyampo, 2013). In a culture in which the opinions of the older generations are preferred, a restrictive political and media system ensured no place for the opinions of young adults. Thus, it appears that young adults at the time would not have been able to demand accountability from public officials in offline contexts of talking politics.

3.5 The media and the involvement of young adults in contemporary Ghana

The social and media practices in the colonial and post-colonial eras still underpin contemporary political and media environments in Ghana but manifest in different forms. As in the previous eras, these practices affect many of the citizens, but it can be argued that young adults are the most affected (The National Youth Policy, 2010). Since the end of the First Republic in 1966, the nature of Ghana's political landscape has been characterised by a mixture of varying forms of democracy and military rule. The interludes of civilian governments under the Second Republic (1969-72) and Third (1979-81) have been short-lived, barely surviving three years without being taken over by the military (Abdulai, 2009). The military rule, therefore, dominated the majority of the period between 1966 and 2000, with the longest occurring between 1981 and 1992.

In the midst of this political fluctuation, the involvement of young adults in the democratic processes, the news media and public opinion in general, were mostly subjected to authoritarian policies. Much like the colonial regime and the First Republic, policies regulating the involvement of young adults, the media landscape and its regulatory policies were until 1996 continuously shaped by the dictates of governments whose primary desires were to remain in power (Gyampo, 2013; 2014; Heath, 1999; Alhassan, 2005). People who expressed opposing views to the government's policies were put in jail without trial. The operations of private media were outlawed, leaving citizens with no alternative views to what was being propagated by the government. Not even did the National Development Planning Committee (NDPC) which was tasked in April 1990 to formulate a 25 year national development plan, recognised the need for a diverse media environment and public opinion in general (Alhassan, 2005). According to Aidoo (2006), the Provisional National Defence Council (a military government) which came to power in 1979, justified its dislike of an opened political space and talks on the grounds that 'such a political culture was not only alien to the culture of Ghanaian society, but also had the tendency of reinforcing ethnic differences that could undermine national unity' (p.7). The opinions of young adults were reluctantly considered when they occasionally participated in non-state sanctioned national deliberations (Aidoo, 2006). The violation of the political voices of young adults perhaps reached its peak when the national constitution of the Fourth Republic was drafted and came into force in 1992 without their input (Aidoo, 2006; Nisin, 1996; Gyimah-Boadi, 1993).

What is more, the position of the president has been effectively distanced from them, as the 1992 constitution bars people below the age of 40 years from this position.

In spite of these omissions, the framers of the constitution dedicated a whole chapter to the cause of free media and the expression of independent opinions to all the voting public (people above 18 years). In chapter 12 of the constitution, detailed provisions in the form of entrenched clauses have been designed to also shield the state from interfering in independent publications of the press, including the state-owned press. The entrenched clauses mean that their amendment would require a national referendum in which 75 percent of the votes casted should be supportive of the change, making freedom of speech and the media firmly placed in the constitution and also highlighting the relevance of such values to the development of Ghana's democracy. Further, Article 162 forbids any law requiring a person to obtain a license before establishing a media organisation. However, a consensus between the government, parliament and stakeholders of the Ghana media industry, tasked the Ghana Frequency Regulation and Control Board (GFRCB) to regulate radio and television media for effective and efficient allocation and management of frequencies (Heath, 1999, p. 515).

Despite these constitutional and extra-constitutional arrangements, actual liberalisation of broadcasting that permits private players was not of interest to the government at the time. According to Heath (1999), a series of national conferences, and later, a government-sanctioned 'Bonsu-Bruce committee' promoted the idea further by coming up with a revised National Communication Authority Act (524) 1996. But what actually caused government to open up broadcasting more to private organisations was after it lost a legal case that started in 1994 with an umbrella body called the Independent Media Corporation of Ghana (IMCG). The IMCG was pursuing the interest of its member radio station (Radio EYE), which the government alleged to be unlicensed and therefore ordered its closure. Since 1995 therefore, the media and political environments have been transformed from state dominance to the re-introduction of privately owned radio, television stations and newspapers (Gyimah-Boadi, 2008). The media have also become platforms for the media-starved public who were silenced in years of repression. Available data as at 2017 reveals that, the National Communication Authority (NCA) authorised 505 active radio stations (National Communications Authority, 2017). Out of this figure, almost 90 percent are commercial or privately owned stations.

Around the same period, 75 TV stations were registered with majority being privately owned (National Communications Authority, 2016).

The state-owned broadcasting corporation (GBC) has also extended its presence across the country by establishing at least one FM station in each of the 10 regions of Ghana (Alhassan, 2005). In a sharp contrast to the previous legal regime that regulated the media industry however, the 1992 Constitution, through the National Media Commission, forbids the practice whereby the president and his ministers had dictatorial powers over its operations. The National Media Commission (NMC) is made up of 15 members. Membership is via nomination, with majority members (10 out of 15) being nominees from civil society organisations, including media professional associations. Three members are nominated by parliament and the remaining two seats being nominated by the President. The chairmanship of the commission is via election by nominated members without intervention of government. The NMC also retains the singular power to appoint the Chief Executive Officers and their Board of Governing Directors of the state-owned GBC (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, p. 12).

The dominance of private individuals and media organisations in the Ghanaian society between the period of 1996 and 2000 depict a democracy set to usher in the culture of free speech and plurality of opinions, but there were other legal impediments in the forms of the Criminal Libel and Sedition Laws (CLSL) that were at odds with these imperative democracy tenets. For example, these laws made reporting false information a crime, and were used to imprison several journalists and coerce the media (Crawford, 2004; Darkwa et al., 2006, p. 25; Freedom House, 2002). In July 1998, two well-known journalists, Haruna Atta and Kweku Baako Junior, from *The Weekend Statesman* and *The Guide* respectively, were jailed for 30 days on charges of criminal libel (Freedom House, 1998). The New Patriotic Party (NPP) government, after winning popular votes in the 2000 general elections, however repealed these laws in pursuance of freedom of the media and speech that the 1992 constitution guarantees (Freedom House, 2002).

According to Freedom House (2016), Ghana has one of the freest media environments in the Sub Saharan Africa, whilst Reporters Without Borders (2019) also rank the nation 26th out of 180 nations in press freedom. In practice, these developments have contributed to the creation of public spaces for talking politics, mainly taking the form of radio call-in programmes. These platforms have given politicians some opportunities to debate their various policies and programs to the listening public. The public in turn interact with this process by calling in to shows to share their views on various policies, express their needs, and comment on wide-ranging issues (Selormey, 2012, p. 2). These radio programmes seems to have become the main channels through which some members of the Ghanaian society seek to express their views on national issues apart from violent protests which young adults sometimes use as an alternative (See Heath, 1999; Gyampo, 2014). For example, prior to national elections, television and radio programs called the Morning Shows, stir up some level of interaction between political party candidates and the general public (Selomey, 2012; Tettey, 2011; Yankah, 2004). Such programmes are broadcasted at prime times to maximise the chance of people listening and encourage their participation. Members of the public who are unsuccessful at getting their calls through the programmes interact using other means such as text messages via their mobile phones (Heath, 1999; Selormey, 2012). Joy FM's '*Feed Bac*k', '*Ghana Speaks*' and '*Total Recall';* Radio Gold's '*Ka na wu'* (literal meaning '*say it and die'!*), and Peace FM's *Kookrokoo* (the sound of a cock crowing), '*Wo hao ne sen'* (translated as '*what is your problem?')* are some of the many examples of radio programmes that directly engage the public and government on politics, policy and democratic developments (Selomey, 2012).

This growth of what seems like a relatively free media environment, however, does not suggest that the environment within which young adults in Ghana participate in national political talks is absolutely conducive, as there are a number of constraints that persist in the face of a national constitution that guarantees their right of involvement. Poor access to critical information and inadequate platforms are setbacks that weaken their capacity to engage state institutions in decision making processes (Gyampo, 2013; National Youth Policy, 2010, p. 17; United Nations Development Programme, 2007, p. 171; Akwetey, 2005). Much like the exclusionary eighteenth century European public sphere (Habermas, 1989), the English language vocabularies used in content presentation by the major newspaper organisations are incomprehensible to the average secondary school graduate for example (Fosu, 2016).

On the radio and news television platforms, the time allocated for the Morning Shows and the call-in segments can be argued to be insufficient if a fair percentage of the public are to participate, and this has implications on serving the right to equal political voices to all. The shows are characterised by a few people whose opinions dominate and are recognised during the programs, making the chances for young adults to get involved even narrower. Further, the operations, contents and posture of some media organisations also tend to promote causes that advance the interests of their proprietors (Conroy-Krutz, & Moehler, 2015). Loyalty to and endorsement of a particular political agenda are also characteristics of some media organisations (see Conroy-Krutz, et al., 2015; Tettey, 2001; Dare, 1996; Heath, 1999, p. 519) instead of being neutral or focusing on the wider public interest. Thus, under such circumstances, the functionality of the media regarding the promotion of plurality and media neutrality could be said to be somewhat diluted. The public spaces on the traditional news media platforms can also be said to be inaccessible to many of the audiences, further implying that young adults stand a low chance of being involved in public deliberations as acknowledged in the National Youth Policy 2010.

The fact that there was no ACT of parliament that addressed issues of young adults until 2010, and governments' delay in ratifying the current youth policy in parliament further emphasise the lack of interest by politicians and the society in factoring the opinions of young adults in decision making. Even issues that affect the young adults are mostly dealt with without their input (Gyampo, 2012b), much like in the situation before attaining independence. What seems to have become the trend however is a phenomenon whereby governments brand themselves as friendly to the young adults, by appointing a few to serve in government positions. In the 2012 general elections for example, the two major political parties for the first time contributed to 44 young parliamentarians, but they have also followed the non-consulting style of governance (Gyampo, 2012). Recognising this sort of alienation, the current National Youth Council (NYC) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) have devised plans "to institutionalise the participation of more young people at all levels of the decision making to ensure the nurturing of democratic culture" (National Youth Policy, 2010, p. 7).

A few more young adults are elected through the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) to other public offices, such as the board of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFUND) and the National Youth Council (see National Youth Policy, 2010). Although delegates of the NUGS make this happen constitutionally, they have for decades also gained the reputation of being appendages of politicians and ruling governments (Gyampo, 2013). Being aware of the NUGS' contribution towards making governments unpopular under the Fourth Republic (through protests), politicians have intervened in their activities by ensuring that the outcomes of their elections are influenced (p. 59). Age-sensitive politicians ensure that NUGS leaders are either financially corrupted or are members of the ruling government (p. 59). Such political strategies ensure these young leaders do not overly criticise and promote political ideas dissenting to the ruling government's policy (Gyampo, 2013). This kind of patron-clientele relationship is not peculiar to only the members and delegates of the NUGS. It appears to be a popular practice in Ghana and manifests in different forms. Putting this practice into a better perspective is therefore vital at this juncture. Such a venture requires a more detailed account that highlights the role of affiliations to political parties.

Alignment to political parties in Ghana's democracy can be traced back to 1951, at least, when the struggle for political independence was at its peak. In that year, two political traditions (the Danquah-Busia and the Nkrumahist) contested in the elections leading to Ghana's independence (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). On the one hand, the Danquah-Busia tradition identified with the educated and business elites whilst the Nkrumahists represented urban workers and rural peasants on the other hand (Lindberg *et al*., 2008). Since then, this political dichotomy has deepened among voters, with electoral victories becoming a swinging but competitive affair between these two blocs and even seen as an active catalyst in various military governments overthrowing each other in Ghana (Lindberg *et al*., 2008). I contend that the period in the political history of Ghana where patron-clientele relationship first became popular, at least, is when the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.) centralised the country's political and economic systems such that people had to be members of the party to derive some economic benefits (see Azarya *et al.,* 1985). This is because such a system encouraged the patronage of acts that support the ruling political elite, including reporting people who expressed opposing views (Goody, 1968).

> "There was simply no community of dissent, as` the network of paid informers, the preventive arrests, above all the desire for a peaceful life, meant that open discussion of disapproval took place only between foreigners or between very close friends, if at all" (p. 339).

In contemporary times, the two major political parties, in terms of the total number of votes obtained during national elections, align with either of these political blocs. The National Democratic Congress identifies with the Nkrumahists tradition, while the New Patriotic Party is a product of the Danquah-Busia bloc. Although this political rivalry gives choice to voters, it also ensures that the legacy of political clientelism remains by setting conditions for young adults who are aligned to these parties (known as party boys) to trade their abilities to stage protests and harass members of the opposition for personal gains from their respective political leaders (Driscoll, 2017). Politicians become vulnerable to this practice when a pending electoral competition is keen, therefore placing the young adults in advantageous positions (Driscoll, 2017). The politicians, in turn, actively involve them in acts of violence against their opponents (Amankwaah, 2013; Bob-Milliar, 2014), which occur mainly during face-to-face talking of politics before and after general elections (Amankwaah, 2013).

All forms of democracy require an environment where dissent can be freely expressed. Thus unleashing violence on persons who express divergent views can bring about a culture of fear and political silence as experienced in the early 1960s. Another potential consequence of such a political climate is creating an artificial 'majority' whose views on issues can forcibly influence expressed public opinions, thus activating a spiral of silence phenomenon in the political realm. Although this kind of violence is less severe than situations in many other countries (Amankwaah, 2013; Bob-Milliar, 2014), its legacies on the public spheres in Ghana cannot be ignored as it can deter many young adults from talking politics in offline public forums.

The same can be said about the practice of political mobilisation on the basis of local ethnic groups. Ghana is made up of 16 regions (The Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2020), serving as melting pots of a number of ethnic and cultural groupings. Some of the large ethnic groups are the Akans, Ga-Adangmes and Ewes, who are originally settled in the middle and southern areas of Ghana. There are also the Mole Dagbanis, who are located in the northern part.

Although these ethnic groups have been relatively successful at living harmoniously for some time, they display their opposing 'political colours' during national elections especially. This ethno-regional colouration of politics in Ghana also dates back to the 1950s when political parties emerged with strong ties to the regions they were based. For example, the Northern People's Party emerged from the northern part; the Togoland Congress Party affiliated with the Ewes in the Volta region in the south and the National Liberation Movement also from the Ashanti region (Gyimah-Boadi, 2003). These names of political parties are now extinct, but ethno-regional cleavages still characterise politics in Ghana and are important determinants of political affiliation. For example, voting data compiled by the government-owned *Daily Graphic* newspaper consistently indicate the Ewes and Ashantis unanimously rally behind their home-based political parties (the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party respectively) and therefore portraying political rivalry between these 2 ethnic groups.

On the students front, there is a rise in secessions of member institutions from the National union of Ghana Students (NUGS), and this phenomenon has also been encouraged by politicians to steer the political participation and activism of young adults in their favour (Gyampo, 2013).What is more, politicians under the current Fourth Republic have established divisions for young adults on the campuses of various tertiary institutions, but have succeeded in limiting their activities to the canvassing of votes, leaving little space and time for deliberating about national issues (Gyampo, 2013). The National Democratic Congress (NDC), for example, has established the Tertiary Institution Network (TEIN) while Tertiary Education and Students' Confederacy (TESCON) and Tertiary Students' Charter (TESCHART) are products of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) respectively. The critical question however is, should the election of leaders and their removal from power through protests be the only usefulness of young adults in Ghana's democracy?

Within the context of public information and communications programmes, governments have since 2001 resorted to organising events where the president or public officers meet the public and journalists to interact on prevailing policies and programmes, in pursuance of a more open door policy.

Such programmes are anticipated to offer politicians increased opportunities to interact with the public with a goal of collecting their concerns and needs, as well as receiving feedback on various policies (Ministry of Information and Media Relations, 2014). Since their introduction however, the public perceive such programmes to be somehow dishonest, and their integrity of being interactive opportunities to dialogue with political leaders is questionable (Abdulai, 2009). There has been noticeable discrimination in the way information is made available to the various participants, making the process of inviting participants also becoming a subject of criticisms (Abdulai, 2009, p. 29). As discussed in Chapter One, denying people such public information amounts to denying them the right to a political voice as no information can impair their abilities to participate meaningfully (Wolterstorff, 2012). It is therefore logical to ask whether these programmes were established as genuine ways of promoting participation of the public, or they are mere public relations mechanisms aimed at enhancing the image of governments. In the sense of the public sphere ideals also discussed in Chapter One, the fact that these forums are state-sponsored and participants are hand-picked by partisan actors also indicate a paled version of a public sphere.

3.6 Conclusion

The key questions addressed in this chapter are; (i) what is the relationship between traditional news media use and talking politics publicly as well as participating in elections?; (ii) are there differential effects of traditional news media on talking politics publicly and participating in elections?; and (iii) is there a relationship between activities of traditional news media and disaffection of young adults with political processes?

The key questions addressed in this chapter are: (i) what is the relationship between traditional news media use and talking politics publicly as well as participating in elections?; (ii) are there differential effects of traditional news media on talking politics publicly and participating in elections?; and (iii) is there a relationship between activities of traditional news media and disaffection of young adults with political processes?

This chapter has revealed the place of traditional news media in political participation in general. Supporting the media effects theories, traditional news media use can potentially encourage people to participate in many modes of politics in various ways. In the process, however, many of its activities fall short of the requirements of an ideal public sphere discussed in Chapter One. Their agenda-setting style of news production (which can be described as a top-down model) coupled with the controlling forces of politicians and commercial entities have adverse consequences on citizen engagement with political processes. The public shy from talking politics because of the constriction of spaces for the expression of their concerns and the unilateral manner in which agenda are set when talking about politics. The public may participate more in political deliberations where media platforms are perceived to be free from state control and their associate media platform owners.

Although there is a strong relationship between media and political participation in general, there are qualitative differences that each news media type brings to the consumer experience. For example, continuous exposure to newspapers appears to influence participation more than any of the traditional media types. Such knowledge overcomes the gross relationship between the media body in general and political participation (example, Habermas, 1989: 1992).

There are also variations of traditional news media use across different age segments of citizens. Specifically, young adults pay less attention to news presented in the traditional media than their older compatriots. This trend is due to many factors, including differences in expectations between young adults and news producers of what news should include and how it should be presented. This indicates that different media types may have various appeals to different population segments in a given society. This set of preliminary findings suggests that it is possible to associate SNSs with talking politics publicly and participating in elections.

In Ghana, the traditional public spheres are fraught with many setbacks spanning colonial periods in the 18th and mid-19th centuries up to modern times.

Political actors in state offices have been controlling the focus and capacities of public spaces for talking politics, skewing issues to serve their interests. The young adults in this period appeared to be aware of political issues and had interest in participating, but there were more socio-cultural barriers in their way. These inhibitions comprise of age discrimination as a societal value, political bureaucracies, legal impediments, government retributions, and limiting platforms of the media even when there was media freedom after the 1992 Constitution. As a result, young adults were alienated at all levels of governance only to be manipulated by politicians in pre-independence nationalistic protests and post-independence demonstrations against military governments.

In recent times, the constriction of media spaces and dominance of other traditional public realms by politicians affect all categories of non-governing citizens of Ghana. But as young adults are the dominant population segment (Ghana Statistical Services, 2016), it can be argued that they are the most affected. Young adults have other platforms, such as the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS), but all these platforms have also been fraught with a re-packaged version of old participation barriers. The lack of information and spaces for adequate involvement of young adults; the use of incomprehensible terminologies and languages; and the alignment of media organisations and the NUGS to certain political ideologies without consideration given to the interest of their audiences and members respectively, continue to impede effective participation in Ghana's democracy. The attempts to control public spaces and political talks can be said to be signs of politicians' dominance in setting the agenda for public political communications, similar to what pertains in other societies as discussed in this chapter.

Given the above observations, there is a limited chance of featuring public interest when talking politics as a collective, as the public spaces appear overly politicised. As the opinions of young adults continue to be relegated on the grounds of cultural and social beliefs, and the traditional news media use confusing languages, fair accessibility and equal status also continue to be questionable. The verbal abuses and evidence of the violence that occurs when young adults talk politics offline due to political clientelism and ethno-regional cleavages arguably create conditions that discourage free expression of political voices.

CHAPTER FOUR

Online media culture and the public sphere

4.1 Introduction

The concept of society within which the public sphere (discussed in Chapter One) is embedded has for a long time been portrayed in ways in which geographical demarcations are central to its understanding (Lessig, 2008; Castells, 2001). Recently, as usage of online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has become popular global cultures however, it appears the physical society is being knitted with these online platforms (Curran & Seaton, 2010). These online platforms are collectively labelled as social media (SM) or social networking sites (SNSs). Although the definitions of SNSs have been both overlapping and sometimes contradictory in critical academic literature, Meikle's (2016) reflects the current socio-cultural, technological and the political economy phenomena associated with the term. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the similarities and distinctions of the many definitions, the focus here will be on the key dimensions of Meikle's, as it also embodies the integration of the physical world with these SNSs.

According to Meikle (2016), "social media are networked database platforms that combine public with personal communications" (p. 7). This definition suggests that SNSs, in their default settings, potentially offer users fluid connecting capabilities, and this reveals the socio-cultural and technological dimensions that the term embodies. A user's profile on Facebook for example is digitally linked to the profiles of other users who may or may not be known in the real world, and who may share common contacts and interests with one another. This fluid feature of SNSs is also competently captured in boyd and Ellison's historical (2008) definition which reads: SNSs are "web-based services that allow individuals to (i) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (ii) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (iii) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system'' (boyd & Ellison, 2008). It is through such fluid connecting capabilities that SNS seems to be facilitating the extension of the physical society where new kinds of relationships and networks are being formed (Papacharissi, 2010) and also transforming public spaces designated for talking politics in terms of location, number and nature of participants.

The former place-based features of public spheres in the forms of town squares and traditional news media platforms are being replicated in fluid digital forms as discussed in Chapter One (see also Meikle & Young, 2012). As such, various social media platforms have been examined to ascertain the extent to which they resemble the conceptual public sphere (for example Valera-Ordaz, 2017; Balcells & Padró-Solanet, 2015; Desquinabo, 2008). Drawing from this foundational understanding of public spheres on SNSs (which will be detailed in the sections that follow with the inclusion of the political economy dimension of the term SNSs) this chapter ultimately aims at exploring potential ways in which public spaces on SNSs facilitate political deliberations at the national level in Ghana. This chapter discusses the fits and misfits between the public spaces on SNSs and deliberative democracy, where (i) there are transformations in ways of networking widely dispersed individuals; (ii) technology is enabling members of the public (citizen journalists) and online news media organisations to inter-depend on each other's news production, resulting in transformations in the way news is produced, consumed and distributed; and (iii) ease of monetization and surveillance, representing complex power relations (in the sense of controlling the SNSs) are dominating recent divergent debates (for example Meikle, 2016; Picard, 2015; Fuchs, 2012; Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2012; Fuchs, 2011).

As a way of differentiating online public spaces from offline ones, this chapter offers a multi-contextual discussion of this set of three main issues in relation to how they influence public talking of politics that can influence national policies. This discussion is then utilized in theorising the potential impact of such usage of SNSs and related online news media on Ghana's democracy. Exploring SNSs and online news media in relation to interpersonal interactions is in line with the social paradigm of political participation established in Chapter Two. Users of SNSs are expected to be exposed to social environments and processes that develop their ability to function as politically-competent members of society (Pinkleton *et al*., 1998).

4.2 The changing media culture and the public spheres online

By the end of the fourth quarter of 2013, active users of Facebook were more than the third most populous country in the world, with over 1.2 billion accounts globally, whereas Twitter had 241 million active users in the same period (Bode *et al*., 2013; The Statistics Portal, 2015). At the end of the second quarter of 2019, the figures of active monthly users stand at 2.4 billion and 330 million respectively (The Statistics Portal, 2019). The statistics further show that there were approximately 1.4 billion active daily users of Facebook alone as at the time of data collection for this thesis in the fourth quarter of 2017. These figures seem to suggest that mass engagements with SNSs have grown linearly, to the extent that they might reveal a new register of social interaction. Can it be said therefore that this mass usage of digital platforms confirms the saturated and restrictive nature of the offline public spaces discussed in Chapters Three and Four? Posing this question is not to suggest that these cyberspaces are replacing the physical ones. Rather, the two flow into each other, except that these cyberspaces are platforms on to which some life activities can be extended (Gyampo, 2017; Curran & Seaton, 2010, p. 277; Lessig, 2008).

The distinctions between the two spheres which matter to the discussion of public spheres and political deliberations may be seen in two lights. The first distinction, on which the majority of this chapter is built, lies in the aims of the organisations who run these online platforms, one of which is to connect more people through the interconnection of networks of people, making accessibility of family relations and friends easier (Meikle & Young, 2012). SNSs easily keep people in contact even when situations of life render them physically apart (Curran et al., 2010). Users have some luxury in acquiring and navigating a list of connections and those made by others within their network. In some cases, a user may not have access to the online activities of his friends' friends, as they may restrict their visibility by excluding third party contacts. When the network is left opened however, online interactions are used to sustain these varied, long and complex chains of relationships in ways that new social support systems are built, including seamlessly sharing news and general information (Meikle, 2016; Meikle *et al*., 2012).

The ability of SNSs to connect people this way throws some light on how fluid a user's network of contacts can potentially be. An individual may belong to a chain of several interconnected groups with no definite size or visible leadership.

But as this process of networking proceeds, 'communities' of interdependent individuals who are networked to each other are created. This conception of extensive network of relationships will be applied to the discussion in the last three sub-sections of this chapter. But for now, it is noted as one major difference between the offline and online public spheres.

The second view of SNSs which is different from offline 'public spheres' relates to control, which will be discussed successively from two perspectives. These perspectives are (i) control in the sense of content creation, and (ii) in the sense of the relative ease with which online privacy appears to be covertly, and sometimes, openly encroached. As it is with offline context of news media use, the use of SNSs represents a power relationship between non-state actors who use it, the state and established media organisations. To have control (legitimate or otherwise) over any of these actors requires the need to be in a position of power. Power in this context relates to "the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actors in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interest and values"(Castells, 2009, p. 32). The notion of power being a 'relational capacity' means that it cannot be practiced in abstraction - there must be a relationship between two or more persons, as in this case of online and social media use. Power is also asymmetrical because there is always a disproportionate, and not absolute, degree of influence from one actor over the other. To further understand the details of these constructs, 'control' in the sense of content creation needs more elaboration at this point. To do this, the technological backbones that enable content creation will be reviewed.

The first decade of the 21st century ushered in a new era of website technology known as Web 2.0. Currently, there is Web 3.0 and Web 4.0 (Meikle, 2016; Waunters, 2009). But what do the different labels of the web suggest? These labels represent upgrades (rather than entirely new technologies) of previous website designing technology (Allen, 2012) which resulted in the user interfaces of websites static (Meikle, 2016). Users had little or no opportunity to contribute to the contents of the then websites known as Web 1.0 (Meikle, 2016). With these upgraded website technologies however, users can actually create their own profiles which are seamlessly linked to others', as highlighted earlier in this chapter.

They can also generate their own content, as well as easily making it visible to a network of contacts (Banda, 2010; Meikle, 2016). The culture of content creation can be argued to have pre-dated the introduction of these web upgrades, as for example, there were online chat rooms and bulletin boards where users could provide some content (Allen, 2012). However, the difference between the earlier culture of content creation and now is the current ability to seamlessly link other websites to social media platforms. By these current opportunities of profile creation and content generation therefore, these cyberspaces appear to be beyond the direct control of the state and traditional news media organisations (Banda, 2010), unlike in the offline spheres (see Chapters Three and Four). Linking political participation to SNSs can therefore be made in reference to the transformed manner in which some media audiences of 'yesterday' known as citizen journalists, have now become integral part of news production and distribution. And this brings into focus the notion of power being asymmetric (disproportionate but no absolute degree of influence from one actor over the other) to be discussed further in the online context.

By means of the convergence of new technologies such as camera, internet and SNSs in smartphones, some users (also known as citizen journalists) have in recent times taken up some roles of professional journalists (Banda, 2010; Meikle *et al*., 2012; Bruns, 2011). These citizen journalists are non-professionals who produce digital news content intermittently or regularly (Banda; 2010; Wall, 2015), but who do not compete with professional journalists in most cases (Bruns, 2011). One of the ways in which citizen journalists fulfil this new role is by capturing events (audio or video) at the exact times and places where they happen, and uploading them on these SNSs not just for their consumption, but also to share amongst friends and family members at local or national levels (Banda, 2010; Wall, 2015; Meikle *et al*., 2012; Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007). Sharing of content can also be done with family and friends abroad, and indeed, other interested publics around the world due to the fluidity of these SNSs which allow seemingly endless network of relationships to be formed, (Banda, 2010; Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney & Pearce, 2011; Goggin, 2011). In fact, most texts and videos in the cyberspaces, including news texts, can potentially be created, copied and shared by anyone (Banda, 2010; Meikle *et al*., 2012), making all of us who have the suitable equipment, software, and skills, citizen journalists in one way or the other.

We generate the content of SNSs and most of other online news media sites, hence the term user-generated content (UGC).

Citizen journalism is a phenomenon which represents a transformation in media culture. It is so because it symbolises a dramatic shift from the old ways of media content production and consumption culture by blurring the distinction between news producers and their audiences (Wall, 2015; Meikle & Young, 2012; Goggin, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010). One cannot discuss content creation and the inter-personal circulation of news on SNSs without mentioning the features of speed and spontaneity, which by themselves, contrast with the offline media environment. In the offline media environments, journalists 'keep the gates' of public spaces by allowing and blocking certain types of news (Meikle *et al*., 2012), and mostly broadcasting them at fixed times (Bruns, 2011). However, members of the public on SNSs sometimes receive, consume and distribute news items even before they are broadcasted on traditional news channels. As Bruns (2011) puts it "any one news organisation keeping choices provide only one first draft of history" (p. 134). News items being kept by traditional news media organisations to be possibly broadcasted later, will only be 'dead' news by the time it is released.

The practice and relevance of citizen journalism have grown to the extent that some professional news media organisations who have either offline and/or online presence have had to adopt such works to remain relevant in today's media landscape (Banda, 2010; Wall, 2015; Meikle *et al*., 2012; Lotan *et al*., 2011; Goggin, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010, p. 65). In the coverage of the 2012 and 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana, amateur videos and reports played crucial roles in traditional news media's monitoring of the electioneering processes (Myjoyonline, 2016; Bokor, 2014). The Electoral Commission of Ghana also teamed up with technology organisations such as Penplusbytes to set up social media tracking centres during the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections to receive incident reports and videos from voters for prompt actions (Myjoyonline, 2016). Earlier examples from the UK context include how the truth behind the death of Ian Tomlinson in 2009 was revealed.

The death of Ian Tomlinson was initially believed to have been caused by heart attack on the streets of Central London as police reported, but later turned out to have happened as a result of unprovoked police brutality, as a member of the public video-recorded the incident (see Meikle *et al*., 2012).

It is also imperative to note that the works of citizen journalists are not produced in isolation. There is a kind of symbiotic relationship in online news media ecology in which citizen journalists also utilise finished news products of professional media organisations (Banda, 2010; Wall, 2015; Meikle *et al*., 2012), as citizen journalists have limited access to major interviews and press conferences (Bruns, 2011, p. 133; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & De Zúñiga, 2010). Through daily subscriptions, some SNS users access news sources from online news media organisations such as Myjoyonline, Citifmonline and Peacefmonline in Ghana, where technology has made it possible for news to be made more interactive. The public therefore talk politics using news items of the day whilst other similar platforms such as 'Ghanaweb' allow them to publish and discuss their own news stories. Due to this multiple media use in everyday life, it will be contentious to discuss user-generated news content on SNSs and online news organisations' sources in a mutually exclusive manner, as these two strands of news flow fluidly into each other (Lutz & Hoffmann, 2014).

To add to the complexities of online news media usage, news media organisations in Ghana, and indeed around the world, also have presence on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, where similar interactions are being initiated to potentially broaden public spaces for talking politics (Banda, 2010). Although the interfaces of online news sites and SNSs differ, the common feature which is important to the discussion of public spheres online is the potential opportunities to talk politics, which seems to be uninhibited at a first glance from a user's perspective. The opportunities to share news items with friends and relatives, as well as inviting them to participate in discussions are also enabled (Banda, 2010; Meikle *et al*., 2012), thus, potentially drawing more participants.

Using similar modus operandi of citizen journalism, some members of the public offer analysis and elaborations of news ignored by traditional media organisations on their blogs (Banda, 2010; Wall, 2015; Bruns, 2011, p. 133), and social media pages (Banda,2010). In so doing, the gate-keeping activities of journalists which control what gets in offline 'public spheres' are challenged in online spaces.

Although professional journalists are considered by some as more trustworthy and reliable, due to reasons including the application of journalistic code of practice and production quality (Niekamp, 2011), members of the public who practice citizen journalism are able to exercise some control over what gets into online public spaces (Banda, 2010; Wall, 2015), and they make it accessible to interested audiences (Banda, 2010; Wall, 2015; Meikle *et al*., 2012). Such a transformation that online media culture brings to the media ecology in Ghana and around the world show that power is not always absolute, and that the influence of power subjects (those being controlled) in a power relationship cannot be zero (see Castells, 2009, p. 32). Power subjects tend to find and utilise means to reduce or neutralise the influence of the empowered.

Despite what appears to be a breakthrough in media culture and 'liberation' of 'yesterday's audiences', the practice hardly goes without criticisms. Works of citizen journalists are perceived as partisan and opinionated (Niekamp, 2011) and their activities often involve the capturing of specific news bits on random basis instead of comprehensive coverage of events. In addition to these short comings, they are also not able to gain access to major interviews or have the accreditation to attend press conferences sometimes (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & De Zúñiga, 2010). These may be true if one considers citizen journalists individually. However, there is an advantage found in their numbers around the world. They are able to cover important news which professional journalists are either not available at those moments or are unwilling to report due to institutional codes of newsworthiness (Banda, 2010; Wall, 2015; Bruns, 2011).

4.2.1 Online surveillance, ownership and monetisation as means of control

Having discussed the first meaning of 'control' on SNSs (identified in section 5.2 of this chapter) in the sense of content generation thus far, I will turn to the second import. In this second sense of control, the internet as a whole appears to be losing its earlier features of anonymity where the task of tracking the sources and identifying content of messages were difficult (Lessig, 2008). This is not to suggest that anonymity of the internet is completely lost. In fact, there are technologies for ensuring anonymity, such as what Lessig (2008) compared to a personal 'virtual wallet' of information.

This ‘virtual wallet’ in simplistic terms is a layer built on to a computer network system that allows its owners to give out only the personal information they are willing to show others on the internet (Lessig, 2008, pp. 51-53). But technologies of this kind require considerable effort and resources which are not available to most everyday users of the internet (Lessig, 2008). Moreover, many other encryption technologies available on the market easily succumb to the invasions of state actors and other private organisations (Global Information Society Watch, 2014), as will be discussed in detail in this section.

That said, mechanisms for controlling online activities have since the 1990s become prevalent, starting with the introduction of technologies such as cookies. Cookies are strands of texts (codes) deposited on computer hard drives that enable surveillance websites to record and transmit information about internet user behaviours (Lessig, 2008). Commercial entities who want to determine or forecast consumer spending habits collect surfing data to specifically create consumer profile for direct marketing activities using cookies (Global Information Society Watch, 2014; Fuchs, 2012). It is however worthy to note that identifying a web user does not automatically depend on these cookies all alone. The cookies help to identify a device that was used to access a particular web page (Lessig, 2008, p. 48). Once cookies are deposited on to a user’s device, identifying the user will mean that their personal data (example name, date of birth, and email address supplied by the user before entering the website) are linked to same data stored elsewhere (Lessig, 2008, p. 49), which is characteristic of some online news media sites. One of the main concerns for observers of online political deliberations is that this pool of data held by online marketing companies end up being targets of state surveillance activities in many jurisdictions (Global Information Society Watch, 2014).

Other levels of online user data collection and exploitations exist. SNSs, and indeed, other online content sites such as Google have also become spaces for a shift in business models in which users (as we have seen in section 5.2) do unpaid jobs of generating content whilst site owners generate revenues out of a processed version of the data (Picard, 2015; Meikle et al., 2012, p. 66; Fuchs, 2012; Fuchs, 2011).

These user-behavioural data are permanently stored on globally-placed computer servers called Content Delivery Networks (CDNs) to assert ownership among other aims. Facebook for example owns and sells the data ploughed from its billions of users; data about contact details, photos shared, network of contacts, places visited, types of news 'liked', comments made and other behaviours (Picard, 2015: Meikle *et al*., 2012, p. 67). With this kind of business model in the know, users may decide not to use these platforms. But non-use could mean social isolation; using them could also mean sociability but also present opportunities to owners to harvest financial benefits. In such a situation, users have to trade-off between the "tempting feel good factor in self-expression and the commercial gains of the site owners" (Meikle *et al*., 2012, p. 66). How then do users of online news media and SNSs view this kind of trade-off?

There have been some intellectual discussions on trade-offs in online spaces, but it is imperative that a clear distinction is made between the inherent trade-off (self-expression of political views versus monetisation) offered by SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter and the trade-off offered by other commercial entities as consumers use their websites. When users browse the website of a clothing business for example, their personal information and behaviours such as the pages they click through and items bought are collected. As explained earlier in this section, these kinds of information are being used to offer customised advertising, just as Facebook does. But studies indicate that consumers view this kind of trade-off (in the clothing business example) as insufficient (Morales, 2010), suggesting unequal trading of value. The proposed value in customised advertising, as offered by the clothing business to its customers, does not match up to the value of the private information customers give to the business. Users therefore manage privacy and information disclosure decisions in this marketing context. A recent study finds that users of SNSs in this marketing context manage their privacy and information disclosure dilemma by deleting their profiles; reducing their usage of SNSs; using the privacy settings of their SNS profiles such that some audiences are restricted; maintaining two or more SNS profiles; being personally vigilant by 'untagging' undesired photos (Marcos, Labrecque & Milne, 2012). If these are some of the tactics that SNS users in marketing context adopt to manage the dilemma of privacy versus information disclosure, how then do people who use SNSs for political participation purposes manage this dilemma?

This question is imperative as Marcos and his colleagues did not explicitly show whether the participants in their study use SNSs for political participation.

Some media and communications observers who discuss the issue of monetising SNSs from political participation perspective dwell on the exclusion of users (content providers) from the monetary gains of platform owners as a limiting factor to the political participation potential of these SNSs (see Picard, 2015; Fuchs, 2012; 2011). Fuchs (2012; 2011) in particular argues that this model of monetising user-generated behaviours on SNSs may prevent people from getting involved in political deliberations, and when they do, such conversations cannot be participatory. Participation, according to Fuchs (2011), must be consistent with participatory democracy ideals. These ideals include the intensification of democratic decision-making and its extension to the grassroots in all realms of society; exploitative power reduced to zero; and the permanent distinction between 'managers' and 'men' abolished. As these are theoretical ideals, the critical question that will be featured during data collection for this study is; how do online users feel in terms of involvement in political decision-making? Apart from the exclusion of SNS users from monetary gains, the internet has the capacity to also store user-generated contents for unlimited amount of time, meaning it never forgets (Meikle et al., 2012), even if users do. Thus, users may also have to consider the permanency of the content they produce on SNSs, whether they delete it from their user accounts or not.

In the field of state security, governments in many regions of the world have increased surveillance activities over the internet in general. Government security agencies of the UK, for example, intensify their surveillance activities by implementing what is called 'the National Cyber Security Strategy 2016-2021'. Such plans allow easy intercepting, storage and investigating 'security relevant' online media communication data. In Ghana, sections 60 and 61 of the Data Protection Act 2012 give legal backing to government security agencies to undertake online surveillances where necessary. As such, there is compulsory registration of mobile SIM (subscriber identification module) cards led by the National Communication Authority and the Ghana Police for online surveillance activities, according to the Ministry of Communication. Curran et al., (2010, p. 266) note that such obtained information is used to identify and prosecute online users whose communications

contents are considered threats to national security. The Electoral Commission of Ghana for example teamed up with security agencies and a technology organisation known as Penplusbytes to set up social media tracking centres during and after the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections. The aim was to track down SNS users who suggest violence in their posts for prompt verification and actions (Myjoyonline, 2016). The relevance of mass surveillance and its justification are therefore founded on the state's purpose to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the population, which can be measured by the people's longevity, health and wealth (MacDonald & Hunter, 2013). This argument is consistent with the notion that, the state is accorded a democratic right to safeguard the lives of its citizens through legitimate means even in the libertarian doctrines advanced by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) in which individual rights and liberties are emphasised (Held, 2006, p. 60). Leaving this function in the hands of individuals or giving people the liberty to do what pleases them means consistent struggle for survival against each other, which can lead to a state of disorderliness. This implies that some degree of state online surveillance can be argued out as a way of ensuring order.

As the practice of online surveillance becomes popular among governments however, there are also heightening concerns (as with other scales of surveillance already discussed in this section) that states are putting their democratic survival at risk as a result of overstraining people's privacy (Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2012). Privacy encroachment could result in endangering freedom of speech or assembly (Abu-Laban et al., 2012), suggesting that the feeling of being aware of another person watching can bring about docility and passivity amongst citizen users. As an example, Christensen (2011) reveals that, after the June 2009 elections in Iran, sophisticated hardware and software were employed to enhance state monitoring and repression of opposing views.

Online surveillances are also partly facilitated by the growing concentration of online news media and SNSs ownership due to the influence the phenomenon may have on political and policy cooperation with politicians (see Picard, 2015; Meikle et al., 2012). For example, the operations of entities such as *BBC, News Corporation* and *Google* are diversified and integrated in such a way that they have presence in multiple online media platforms with which they seem to be controlling news production within the online media

landscape (Meikle et al., 2012, p. 36). According to their official website publications, *Multimedia Group Limited* in Ghana owns a chain of several online and offline media platforms such as *Myjoyonline*, *Multitvworld.com* and *Adomonline*, which are all linked to their offline radio and television operations. There are also mergers, takeovers and collaborations between other equally big multi-media corporations such as Despite Group of companies (Thompson, 2015). As such, wielding this scale of control potentially connects media owners and politicians for mutual business, policy and political purposes (Meikle et al., 2012). Further, some senior executives of these online content sites double up as politicians, which could facilitate the trading of online user behavioural information with government actors. In the same vein of freedom of speech concerns therefore, this cooperation between online news media owners and politicians could also be seen as a continuity of the offline traditional media practices (discussed in Chapter Three) where there is marginalisation of dissenting views.

On another side of the argument against state online surveillance and the collusions between politicians and online platform owners, it could be argued that, in contexts such as Ghana where prosecutions are yet to be related to freedom of opinion expression on national issues and the freedom of assembly, such surveillances and monetization of SNSs may not hinder political deliberations. In Ghana, the Data Protection Act 2012 ensures that surveillance by state security agencies is necessary and without excessive use that could harm data subjects. Further, although it is acknowledged (even within security agencies) that carrying out these surveillance activities pose risks to democracy, the public through the pursuit of a perception of security, find them beneficial (Picard, 2015, p. 37). Thus, people may place their security as priority over their liberties in this case.

4.3 Potential implications of citizen journalism on talking politics online

In view of the participatory culture (Wall, 2015; Meikle *et al*., 2012; Papacharissi, 2010, p. 65) and the relatively liberalised online media environment in Ghana as discussed, this thesis argues that as this recent media culture of producing, sharing and interactivity is applied to political information, the interest of young adults in political processes could potentially be reignited. These practices may especially include seeking political information, getting involved in political deliberations, and for these reasons, promising to challenge the status quo in Ghana. This recent media culture also promises to improve dissemination of political information in original state or elaborated versions, thus, opening up more political activities for public scrutiny. The remaining subsections therefore will be focusing on how the use of SNSs and online news media may be addressing the barriers that inhibit the participation of young adults in Ghana's deliberative democracy, as discussed in Chapter Four.

4.3.1 Access to political information and democratic processes

In Ghana, access to political information and platforms for talking politics have been elusive to majority of young adults (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018) as discussed in Chapter Three. The political environment seen in the 1950s which gave young adults opportunities to participate in democratic processes has gradually been replaced with one where old age has become an informal requirement. However, considering the ways in which SNSs facilitate information sharing and political interactivity among an individual's network of friends and family relations, as discussed in section 4.2, the culture of talking politics can be encouraged (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018). From the context of Ghana, Grauenkaer and his colleague argue that there is a causal relationship between media use (especially digital media) and the participation of young adults in other processes that bring about social and political changes. As such, online mode of talking politics may also help in mobilising people to take part in elections, as participants may want to back their opinions with actions (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018; Chambers, 2003, p. 308).

The social and political events that characterised the run up to the 2008 election of Barack Obama and his re-election in 2012 are examples that further buttress this position. In the run up to the 2008 US presidential elections, the Barack Obama campaign created an online network site (mybarackobama.com) in conjunction with SNSs to successfully recruit and engage with 'grass root volunteers' of ordinary citizens which helped to build relationships with both existing and potential voters (Dickinson, 2008). With over 104,000 online volunteers, the campaign team launched a full-fledged networked campaign in which members of the network could access all the contact details of people in their neighborhoods and mobilize them to go out to vote (Talbot, 2008, p. 1). This resulted in stimulating the interest of a wide cross section of the public in the pre-election political talks and the voting itself to an extent that Barak Obama appeared appealing to voting minors (Talbot, 2008; Dalton, 2009).

The Obama administration also used SNSs to solicit inputs from the public before the president officially presented the State of the Union Address 2015. This provided an opportunity for the US public to engage with the prevailing topical issues of the time. Furthermore, the social movements for change in some Middle East and North African (MENA) democracies, including regimes hitherto classified by The Economist Intelligent Unit as undemocratic (example Tunisia, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria) can also be cited (see Curran *et al*., 2010; Bode *et al*., 2011; Lotan *et al.*, 2011). These nations have recently witnessed political movements for democracy spearheaded by non-state actors due to similar production, consumption, and distribution of information on SNSs (Lotan *et al.*, 2011). For example, according to Lotan *et al* (2011), Egyptian citizens inspired by the success of Tunisia's public demonstrations also protested against the then long-serving president, Hosni Mubarak, in January 2011. Protestors challenged the status quo on issues including lack of political freedoms. This protest drew a number of youth activist organisations, including the "April 6 Youth Movement," who relied on SNSs to distribute information, mobilise online deliberations and coordinate citizens to protest, which resulted in the president's resignation in February 11, 2011 (Shane, 2011; Ali, 2011, p. 185; Lotan et al., 2011, p. 1377).

As can be noted, young adults constitute the majority in many of these societies where such massive political participation have been taking place (see for example Gyampo,

2017; Lotan, 2011 and Ali, 2011). Until online SNSs became popular over the last decade however, members of this population segment, as highlighted in Chapter Three were considered to be among the minority when it comes to the expression of public opinion and political participation in general (example Gyampo, 2015; 2014; Hassan, 2004, p. 104). Why then are young adults and politicians in Ghana turning to SNSs as means of talking politics as recent studies suggest (see Gyampo, 2017; Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018)? Apart from giving the young adults 'on the go' access to information, other potential reasons that suggest themselves immediately include: (i) because there could be reduced fear of political retribution; (ii) because there could be reduced fear of being isolated from their social groupings; or (iii) because there could be reduced concerns of embarrassment as a result of expressing their opinions, even when they perceive that the general atmosphere of opinions contradicts theirs.

The recent culture of publishing self-produced and opinionated contents on SNSs, blogs and writing articles to express their opinions on issues of national concern could be symptomatic of people who are relatively free to express themselves in a way that is independent of the influence of reference group(s) to which they belong. At the same time however, these expressions online can influence the political behaviours of others. This notion contradicts Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence Theory which is prominent in public opinion literature. From philosophical and social psychology perspectives, Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence theory suggests that people who perceive themselves to be in minority are less vocal and less willing to express their opinions in public. The underlying assumptions on which this theory is built are that: (i) individuals are able to gauge the proportion of people who favour or oppose a given issue of social concern – that is, the opinion climate of society; (ii) people who perceive themselves to be of minority opinions do not want to be seen being amongst the losing side – that is fear of losing; and (iii) the reference group to which an individual belongs threatens those who deviate from the group's social norms and majority views with isolation (Neumann, 1995).

One would expect that these assumptions will affect the visibility of the minority and the majority in a way that majority opinions can become reference points over time. The minority on the other hand will be suppressed, as they continuously become weaker because they feel reluctant to express their opinions in public.

The theory in this way suggests that the guiding mechanism that leads people to self-censor in the midst of differing opinion climate is fear of isolation, and that this factor is prevalent in every person. However, Noelle-Neumann acknowledged that other people may develop resistance to this fear of isolation and may be ready to pay the price for expressing their views contrary to the views of the majority (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, p. 48-49).

Other variations of this theory exist. Hayes, Glynn and Shanaham (2005) for example, question whether fear of isolation is all that is needed when explaining unwillingness to speak in public. The reason why people will self-censor their own opinion expressions differ from person to person (Hayes *et al*., 2005). Fear of isolation alone is therefore not enough to explain for all people in that situation. "Willingness to self-censor" may also be appropriate to explain an individual's tendency to withhold their true opinions from a perceived opposing audience, where self-censorship is the withholding of one's opinion from an audience perceived to disagree with that opinion (p. 298). In this case, the individual must have had a chance to express him or herself but made a choice not to do so for some reasons.

Hayes *et al.* (2005) suggest that the willingness of an individual to self-censor or not, depends on where he/she is located on a continuum. This continuum is structured on a set of characteristics that people bring to the opinion expression context. These individual characteristics are; *concerns about negative interpersonal evaluations*- referring to worries that an individual entertains if he or she is to be evaluated negatively by other members of a group and therefore suffers social rejection. Or the extent to which a person is concerned about being evaluated negatively by others (Hayes *et al*., 2005, p. 311).The rest are *shyness and social anxiety*- referring to the extent to which people are talkatives, outgoing and comfortable to express themselves in social situations; *argumentativeness*- the extent to which a person enjoys a debate that may arise as a result of advocating a position that others may not agree with; and *self-esteem*- the feeling of self-worth. Thus, individuals who feel uncomfortable about their value as persons would probably be more hesitant to express an opinion than those who know and assert their good qualities (p. 312). That notwithstanding, reference groups impact on respondent's willingness to express their opinions (Scheufele, Shanahan & Lee, 2001; Moy, Domke & Stamm, 2001).

By extension, it can be inferred that individuals in groups may not be entirely free to express their views in offline contexts and may rely on the opinion of the general public to form their views.

This can be different in online contexts. The potential influence of majority views can be reduced because establishing dominating opinions accurately can be difficult as there can be a large number of opinions to deal with, and this tends to make people willing to express their views (Liu & Fahmy, 2009). In Ghana studies focusing on spiral of silence in online contexts are scarce but a tentative hypothesis can be made drawing from the discussion in Chapter Three and this chapter. It will be expected that young adults will censor their opinions given the restrictive nature of the political, social and cultural environments as discussed in Chapter Three. However, judging from the scale of pervasiveness of SNS use and the recognition by key politicians that SNSs are popular among young adults in Ghana (see Gyampo, 2017), it is plausible to deduce that young adults appear to feel less constrained expressing themselves online, irrespective of variations in opinions. In Germany, Porten-Cheé and Eilders (2015) found no support for Spiral of Silence among online discussants of climate issues. Under the condition of using real names, variations in personal opinions and perceived opinion climate did not hinder people who viewed themselves as minority to express their views. Similar findings were made in Kuwait where social network sites (Twitter and Facebook) are eliminating fear of isolation, cultural and religious barriers among women (regarded as minority in public voice), making them to participate in public political discussions (Dashti, Al-Abdullah, & Johar, 2015). In the US however, and on the issue of Edward Snowden's 2013 revelations of widespread government surveillance of Americans' phone and email records, 42% of Facebook and Twitter users were willing to post about the issue on these platforms. Amongst these 42% of SNS users, more are willing to share their views only if they thought their audience agreed with them, supporting the Spiral of Silence theory (Pew Research Centre, 2014).

4.3.2 Benchmarking polities through transnational political participation

Political philosophers such as Aristotle, Rousseau and Michael Walzer have understood citizenship to be essentially a status of full membership in a self-governing polity (Bauböck, 2005; 2007). A full member of a state will therefore enjoy all social, civil and electoral rights, as well as taking part in government either directly or by electing representatives (Bauböck, 2005, p. 683). Up to this point of this thesis, discussions have mainly centred on citizens of a nation state residing in their home countries. In this sub-section however, the focus is broadened to encompass those citizens of a nation who reside abroad (emigrants and expatriates) and other wider actors alike, in line with the distinctive connecting capabilities of SNSs discussed earlier in this chapter.

Emigrants come from one country (the sending state) into another known as the receiving state (Bauböck, 2007). Before some of them make decisions to naturalise, they still remain citizens of their respective original countries (Bauböck, 2003). Even after naturalising, the sending country sometimes allows them to hold dual citizenships, which they may utilise in both countries if they so wish (Bauböck, 2003, p. 703). The sending country does so for potential social, economic and political gains that might accrue to them as a nation (Itzigsohn, 2000; Bauböck, 2003).

In the social and political light, many emigrants have ties with family and friends in their home countries with whom they may directly or indirectly be engaged in political discussions that potentially have consequences on domestic policies (Bernal, 2006). In doing so, they may either express opposition to or support for the current home country's political regime and its policy goals (Bernal, 2006, p. 162; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003, p. 5). It needs to be mentioned, though, that those who are likely to be involved in this practice are the first generation cohorts of emigrants, and could even be more among their children born in the host countries (second generation). Such practices may however diminish eventually as subsequent generations come into existence (Bauböck, 2003, p. 706).

That clarified, it is also imperative to note that the phenomenon of political networks and practices among citizens living in their home countries (home-based citizens) and their emigrated relations (family and friends) who reside abroad is not new.

Even governments of sending countries who need the intellectual inputs of their citizens and former citizens residing abroad also establish such networks through politico-economic incentives (Bernal, 2006, p.164; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). But its practices on these fluid and relatively liberalised SNSs could potentially be a different experience all together for the actors involved. In the context of the connection between governments and their citizens abroad, the incentives, as Bernal (2006) observes, show a deliberate rationale to mobilise new political practices and experiences to 'deepen' democratic institutions and processes in an individual's original country. In the case of conversations among family and friends on the other hand, the interest of this discussion is on the spontaneous ones, which represent grassroots processes capable of bringing about political change at the local, national or even the international levels.

This description essentially points to the process of transnational political participation. Transnational political participation is understood in this sense as various forms of direct and indirect cross-border participation in online political deliberations and/or physical elections of their country of origin by emigrants and their relations in home countries. But the type of actors involved in transnational political participation is not an iron rule; it is not only limited to only home-based citizens and their emigrated counterparts. In the context of online media and SNSs, people's networks could include other actors with diverse nationalities (Bokor, 2015; Meikle & Young, 2012; Castells, 2009). Therefore, the process of transnational participation could also involve other wider global contacts and publics. It will be helpful then, for the purpose of this discussion, to label all abroad-based contacts of a *focus individual* as *contacts abroad,* and the focus individual(s) resides in a *focus country* (for example Ghana). Also, there are elements of direct and indirect cross-border participation in the definition of transnational political participation above which needs elaboration. Transnational participation is direct when activities are deliberate to achieve certain political goals in their home countries. Example of this direct type, which this thesis is not focusing on, is what Eltahawy and Wiest (2011) observe in the Egypt version of the Arab Spring, where one police officer-turned-activist, Omar Afifi, used SNSs to inspire and direct home protesters with videos while living abroad.

In keeping with the context of this research, the focus here is on everyday conversations involving a *focus individual* (living in Ghana) and their online contacts resident abroad. This kind of transnational process can be argued to be an element of the pervasive 'cultural globalisation', where there is an attempt to homogenise world cultures and politics in a way that ensures interconnection and interdependence of nations (Castells, 2009). This means that the role of SNSs and its networking capabilities, as discussed so far in this chapter, is evident then. This is because every day social and political conversations, as argued in previous sections, require a relatively fluid and easy access to information and communication media. Therefore, having described the fluid connecting properties of SNSs in association with political deliberations thus far, it is also possible that its potential can be extended to the phenomenon of transnational political participation centred on varied societal issues in Ghana.

This potential of SNSs may easily be discounted due to notions that the internet and its communicative platforms can create a 'community' of people who are unconnected to where they live or work (see Curran & Seaton 2010, p. 277). This thinking suggests that people who are connected online may not identify with one another's local settings. But SNSs are able to connect people to their families and friends who may have travelled abroad (Bernal, 2006; Kissau & Hunger, 2008). In such networked connections, information may be exchanged and discussed along the paths of home to abroad and vice versa (Bokor, 2015). Moreover, national level political movements in some contexts have ended up being issues of global concern, and have therefore received, and will continue to receive global support from people's online contacts in diverse locations (Bokor, 2015; Castells, 2009). In the online domains, people are embracing cosmopolitanism, where people consider themselves as citizens of the world, with a belief in a shared destiny (Castells, 2009, p. 118). As such, these exchanges of information on SNSs can be informative to our *focus individual's* contacts abroad on current happenings within their home countries (Bokor, 2015) as information dissemination is almost instantaneous (Meikle *et al*., 2012). Information received may then be compared to the circumstances of their respective countries of residences. And in cases where the political situations abroad are judged to be better than what is happening in the *focus individual's* country, information is likely to be transferred by *contacts abroad* from the perceived better politics to the local through every day online conversations (Bokor,2013).

In other words, criticisms and alternative perspectives on SNSs are in this context shaped by the location of networks of people outside a given state.

Looking from the perspective of our *focus individual* -where the focus of empirical data collection for this thesis will be- he/she could be informed about other rights and privileges which they could be enjoying, but which were previously unknown. As discussed from the social paradigm of political participation in Chapter Two, an individual's political activity level also involves political awareness from others in a network. Without political awareness, citizens cannot know what is at stake, nor will they actively participate in the actions needed to change the status quo to their benefit (Bokor, 2015). Therefore, as our *focus individual* gets enlightened democratically from global perspectives, he or she may be motivated to be involved in public deliberations with the aim of injecting new ideas into local politics. Thus, in their interactions with peers, they may reference these new discoveries of democratic practices, which may then be discussed and potentially inform opinions. For example, until the 2011 uprising in Syria, Syrians were generally known to distance themselves from political actions that challenge the status quo (Aslan, 2015, p. 2508). The prevailing culture according to Aslan (2015), was to obey what have been put forward by their leaders without criticisms. Although they were weary of such a culture and there was general awareness of political undertakings, they lack the experience and local cultural support to revolt against public leaders (Aslan, 2015, p. 2508). However, through their interactions with contacts outside of Syria, mainly via online and social media platforms, the population became accustomed with the culture of protests over time, leading to the diffusion of protest culture across a number of Syrian towns and cities (Aslan, 2015).

As these kinds of global political cultures are injected into local politics therefore, politicians may in turn become aware of these new democratic expectations, which may lead on to the formulation of policies and programmes from global standards to meet the expectations of young adults in Ghana.

4.3.3 Towards the prevention of physical violence

In Chapter Three, the role of public spheres in the context of democracy is discussed. Public spheres play central roles in the development of deliberative democracy, by promoting public debates and deliberations (Abbey, 2000). With the increasing popularity of SNSs (The Statistics Portal, 2017; Gyampo, 2017), the role of public spheres may even be more crucial in future democracies. In face-to-face contexts of political deliberations, scholars have long held the notion that the nature of public political deliberations must be 'civil', where civility is conventionally measured in the light of politeness and courtesy (Papacharissi 2004, p. 250). But the nature of some democracies such as deliberative ones may come with passionate public deliberations of issues which can breed factions and degenerate into physical confrontations between people of disputing views (Gutmann, 2004). As highlighted in Chapter Three, this nature of deliberative democracy sometimes results in physical violence in Ghana involving young adults. Although this type of violence is not extensive, and are less severe compared to situations in many other countries (Amankwaah, 2013; Bob-Milliar, 2014), overlooking such electoral and post-election violence is like turning blind eyes on potential future disaster.

In pursuance of this public sphere ideal by government, as evident in the 2010 Youth Policy, the nature of online political deliberations appears to lend itself to this end. From social psychology perspectives, many early scholars and recent ones have criticised the lack of personal touch associated with computer-mediated communications (CMCs). Non-verbal cues which complement and reinforce verbal actions during interpersonal discussions are absent in CMCs (see Meikle, 2016; Cummings, Butler, & Kraut, 2002; Nardi & Whittaker, 2002; Short, Williams & Christie, 1976). This sort of argument has resulted in theories such as the Social Presence Theory and a host of others collectively called Cues-Filtered-Out Approach (see Culnan & Markus, 1987). Indeed, non-verbal cues are important in communications (Walther, 2002; Walther, Loh & Granka, 2005). Participants in a face-to-face conversation are likely to relate to messages conveyed as they see accompanying cues such as the blinking of eyes, facial expressions, colour of face, the movement of arms, voice quality and vocal inflections, physical appearances, and other body movements (Short *et al*., 1976). However, the absence of physical presence and non-verbal cues in CMCs, which also applies to public deliberations on SNSs, may potentially promote political tolerance and prevent incidences of physical violence in the long run.

Tolerance can be conceived from moral philosophy perspectives as a virtue connected to the civil behaviours of people (Calhoun, 2000, p. 255). Calhoun writes that the civil citizen exercises tolerance in the face of deep disagreement about the good. He or she respects the rights of others, refrains from violence, intimidation, harassment and coercion' (Calhoun, 2000). Gutman also offers an alternative notion by arguing that the civil citizen simply seeks for points of moral agreement; offers rationales that minimize the risk of her position being rejected; and refrains from presenting her views as unalterable convictions. With these two sets of fairly varying elements of tolerance, it appears that a clear definition and it's universally accepted features seem to be elusive in existing literature.

What is known about the term however is that, it is widely related to politics in a way that emphasis is placed on the end results of behaviours rather than preceding features (see Papacharissi, 2004, p. 260). Put differently, it is the resultant action (physical violence) rather than preceding features which is paramount. Tolerance in this context therefore refers to the tendency of a person to exercise personal restraint in order not to physically act negatively towards another person who offers an opposing or offensive view. Based on this theoretical understanding of the terms civility and tolerance, this sub-section argues that 'faceless' deliberations on SNSs may not end in physical confrontations in spite of the enraged nature of such interactions.

Indeed, there are numerous examples of antisocial behaviours on SNSs, such as trolling and cyber-bullying (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014). The forms in which these anti-social behaviours manifest include racist comments, threats, the excessive use of question and exclamation marks (Lapidot-Lefler *et al*., 2012; Suler, 2004), some of which led Hungary's social media sites for example to attempt censoring the membership of perpetrators (Szakács & Bognár, 2010). These negative features online can be termed as toxic disinhibition behaviours (Suler, 2004). As diversity of opinions becomes the nature of some online political deliberations, it may as well become passionate and therefore stir up emotions which may be openly expressed on these SNSs.

There are other prominent suggestions explaining why an online user may act in such disinhibited ways. Basically, there is a weakening of psychological barriers that block hidden feelings and needs under conditions of online communications (Lapidot-Lefler *et al.*, 2012; Suler, 2004). This is known as online disinhibition effect. At least, six elements of online media act together, or function independently to make users express themselves more openly than they would have done in real world situations (Suler, 2004). Four of these online elements will be discussed and applied here.

Firstly, when a person thinks that his or her identity online cannot be traced to their identity (personal looks, gender, weight, age, occupation, ethnic origin, residential location) in the real world, they tend to feel unaccountable for their negative behaviours when communicating with another partner, as they cannot be identified as the perpetrators of those behaviours (Suler, 2004). This is known as Dissociative Anonymity. It must be clarified that, while an online user's identity may not be entirely anonymous to government security agencies, as discussed in section 4.2.1 of this chapter, it is not easy for an everyday online user to know the real identities of other online users unless they know each other in the real world.

The second online element that causes toxic disinhibition effect is the affordance of invisibility (Suler, 2004). In many online environments, especially those that are mostly text-driven like Facebook and Twitter, people can be invisible. They cannot see each other like face-to-face conditions afford. Although people in some circumstances of online communications may know to some extent about each other's identities and lives, they still cannot see or hear each other in real time. A person may not have to be concerned, therefore, about facial expressions such as the shaking of head, the frown on the other person's face and bored expressions, which can inhibit what people really want to say in in-person situations (Suler, 2004). This loss of facial expressions in online communications sometimes amplifies disinhibition.

Thirdly, when people use online platforms as means of communications, eye contacts are lost. Even when online interpersonal communication includes visibility, as in webcams, real eye-contacts are still lacking. Under this condition, online disinhibition behaviours are triggered during interpersonal communications (Lapidot-Lefler *et al*., 2012).

Fourthly and finally, in online domains, there is also Minimisation of Status Authority (Suler, 2004). A person's status held in real world may be unknown in cyber world, and may not have as much impact. People express authority through their dressing, body language, opening of the eye, which may all be absent in public online communications. With the diminishing authority appearance therefore, some online users tend to see online communications as peer-to-peer, which weakens barriers that can withhold hidden feelings (Suler, 2004).

In view of these online disinhibition effects and the way they can influence online communications in a toxic way, it may be easy to discount any contribution(s) that the use of SNSs and related platforms might make towards the prevention of physical violence. If one should carry out a textual analysis of political talks online, occurrences of verbal abuses are likely to be prevalent. However, it must be noted from the explanation of the online disinhibition effects that, online conditions tend to make people act out more than they would have done in real world situations. Hence, they may not necessarily carry out their enraged behaviours exhibited online in the real world.

4.4 Conclusion

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have speedily become domains of political interactivity where power play mainly between users, governments and platform owners can be observed. The gatekeeping function of traditional news media organisations that enabled them to control many of the traditional public spaces seems to be reduced in online domains through advancement in website technologies that allow users to create, share, consume, and interact with their own content and those from a wider range of sources. Controlling the public spheres online can be seen in different forms apart from the phenomenon of content creation. There are also controlling in the senses of monetisation of user-generated content; surveillance activities of governments; and verbal abuses. These activities can repel potential and current users from using SNSs to talk politics depending on the political, cultural and social contexts within which they are practiced.

In comparison to the bureaucratic and fairly one-directional nature of the offline public spaces for talking politics in Ghana however, the argument for the political deliberation potential of SNSs in this chapter has been premised on the notions that (i) online and social media could potentially be offering young adults in Ghana the opportunity to jointly produce political media contents, share information that are of interest to them, and thereby enabling access to political information and processes; (ii) online and social media platforms offer a relatively liberated media landscape and the opportunity for an individual to belong to multiple online groups at the same time, which could potentially reduce fear to comment on social issues; (iii) online and social media platforms facilitate transnational political participation, which helps to globalise local politics through political benchmarking; and (iv) The absence of the opportunity to see co-discussants face-to-face may not promote online verbal tolerance but can potentially reduce instances of physical confrontations, and therefore achieve tolerance in the long run.

These ideas seek to provide potential qualitative explanations to the main research questions which seek to understand: (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling the constitutional right to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media; and (RQ4) whether and how talking politics online influences decisions of young adults' involvement or exclusion in national elections?

CHAPTER FIVE

Research methodology

5.1 Introduction

The main aims of this study are to gain insight into the motivations and user experiences of young adults in Ghana and state-office holding politicians such as Members of Parliament, government ministers, municipal and district chief executives, as they use social networking sites (SNSs) to talk politics that can be consequential on national policies. Such usage of SNSs occurs in a Ghanaian society that used to have restrictions on political activities, alienates and undermines young people's involvement in public deliberations, and where there is young people's disaffection with political processes in general (Banda, 2017). As discussed in Chapter One, politicians in public offices were chosen as a user group in the empirical studies because in national democracies, they are the actors who have a duty to put together and implement national policies on behalf of the rest of the citizenry. They are therefore the duty bearers when it comes to rendering accountability to the rest of the citizenry. Further, in deliberative democracy theory, national deliberations of policy content and related national accountability are mainly between public officials and the citizenry (see Gutmann & *et al*., 2004, p. 7).

This study seeks to understand: (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling the constitutional right to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media; and (RQ4) whether and how talking politics online influences decisions of young adults' involvement or exclusion in national elections?

The theoretical framework gleaned from the critical literature review in Chapters Three, Four and Five suggest that in contrast to the fairly controlled and one-directional nature of the offline public spheres in Ghana, (i) SNSs could be offering young adults in Ghana the opportunity to jointly produce political media content, share information of interest, and thereby enabling access to political information and processes; (ii) SNSs could be offering a relatively liberalised media landscape compared to pre-web contexts where young adults were marginalised in offline deliberations in established forums, and the opportunity for

users to belong to multiple online groups, which could potentially reduce fear to comment on political issues; (iii) interactions on SNSs could be enabling transnational political participation which helps to subject local politics to global perspectives through political benchmarking; (iv) the absence of the opportunity to see co-discussants face-to-face may not promote online verbal tolerance but could potentially prevent instances of physical confrontations and therefore achieve tolerance in the long run.

This chapter discusses the approaches used in collecting data that answers the main research questions within a recognised research methodology. To do this, the chapter will first show how available methodological approaches were evaluated and justify the ones adopted in this study. Secondly, the research strategy is highlighted and discussed. Here, the chapter reviews the methods employed in the research design; discussing the sampling techniques, the data collection methods, access to participants and the data analysis techniques employed. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of ethical issues relating to this research, in line with Whiteman's (2012) suggestion of 'localised' ethics decisions making approach.

This idea of localised ethics decision making is in recognition that this study is unique in the sense that the context within which it is situated is different from other research projects. The ethical stance of this research (discussed in section 6.7 of this chapter) was therefore developed from the details of the study, including the nature of the social settings and anticipated concerns of research subjects (Whiteman, 2012, p. 9). Moreover, in order to keep the ethical stance within a recognised framework, the ethics decisions made in this study were also consistent with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the University of Stirling's ethical requirements where applicable.

5.2 Conceptualising the qualitative research methods tradition

Social science research has been shaped by illuminating ideas and its obsession with objectivity, provided by the positivist research paradigm. To adherents of the positivist paradigm, objectivity in research can be attained by conducting an empirical investigation capable of generating precise, accurate and generalisable explanations, which actively attempts to avoid any influence of the researcher. This research paradigm considers truth and reality to be singular. Hence, numbers are used to quantify data (Brennen, 2012). Due to this, it is thought by some as more authentic and reliable than interpretive thoughts (Brennen, 2012).

Qualitative methodology on the other hand does not reject objectivity entirely but uses an interpretative approach to challenge the epistemological basis of the emphasis on objectivity, and have therefore sought alternative ways of researching the social world. This shift in focus from positivist stance stems from critical cultural theorist perspectives (Brennen, 2012). When it comes to media and communication research, adherents of quantitative methods tend to emphasise on methodological issues such as sampling, instrumentation and measurements, and in the process, are inclined to overlook theoretical issues that surround the role of media and communication within a given society (Hardt, 1992). To cultural theorists, communication is seen as a cultural practice, suggesting that it carries different meanings to different people in various societies. Quantitative methods could therefore not answer questions regarding the role of communication in the social production of meaning due it its singular focus on what is truth and reality. Although qualitative research is influenced by other distinct paradigms such as positivism, post-positivism and critical theories, adherents believe in multiple understanding of truth and consider other competing notions of reality. Researchers' subjectivity is also central to the research process (Brennen, 2012).

Hansen and Machin (2013, p. 227) advise that qualitative methods are suitable "when examining the dynamics of what experiential knowledge and frames of interpretation audiences bring to bear in their use of media content; what role media use has in the everyday life of audiences; or how audiences use the media as a resource in their everyday lives". The inference is that qualitative methodologies allow a researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of participants' understanding and interpretations within a specific context, thereby assessing the world through the perspectives of those who are being

researched. An attempt to gain in-depth understanding of the participants' online experiences in this study can therefore be accomplished only by the use of a research strategy that lets them narrate their own stories, providing some depth of details on their choices (both past and present), and how these come together to create their uniqueness. This study's affiliation, therefore, is with the qualitative tradition. Whilst individual diversity and experiences are important to this study, it must be acknowledged that experiences may be shared within a subcategory of a population. Linking similarities that exist in the respondents' experiences enabled the researcher to form opinions on the study. For each of the participants in this research project, their story represents their reality. Their reality depicts their world of public communication activities constructed within a social and cultural setting.

On the other hand of research method traditions, Hansen *et al* (2013) show numerous media and communication research works that have used quantitative methodologies such as surveys. According to the authors, a large proportion of these survey-based studies have contributed immensely towards the development of important models in media and communication such as the two-step flow model of media influence, agenda setting research, and diffusion of innovation model. Online and social media researchers have also used quantitative methods to establish the link between social media and political participation (for example Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012). Quantitative methods have also been used extensively and successfully to study the various forms of political participation, including participating in political discussions (for example Olsen, 1972; Huckfeldt, 1998; McLeod et al., 1999). However, outcomes of quantitative methodology tend to give descriptions of a given phenomenon without revealing how and why the phenomenon occurred (Hansen et al., 2013). The basis of such an approach rests on fixed constructs from precisely defined populations, in an attempt to fit individual opinions and beliefs into those fixed constructs. This means a quantitative approach allows little room for research participants to influence the direction of the research as discussed above in this section. Under such a condition, there is loss of the expression of intrinsic opinions and consequently, there is also loss of individual opinions as a reflection of different life experiences. These restrictions conflict with the aims of understanding individual experiences and opinions - an aim imperative to the study of individual and personal issues that this current study seeks to uncover.

5.2.1 The qualitative methods employed

Using two qualitative data collection modes, views from a sample of young adults on one hand and politicians in state offices on the other hand were captured. Individual experiences were observed and the meanings that the various participants derive from the use of SNSs to talk politics were extracted. Using this methodological approach was time-consuming in terms of data collection, transcription, and analysis, making it a daunting task overall. There was also the possibility that clear patterns would not have emerged from the participants' responses to questions. However, its potential of allowing an in-depth understanding of social processes by permitting participants to express themselves in a relatively open manner outweighed the setbacks in this particular study.

Qualitative research can be conducted using only one mode of interviews. However, it is also common to find two or more modes of interviews used in a single study (see Deakin *et al*., 2013). In the study involving the young adults therefore, individual interviews were conducted online through the use of Skype, following the recommendation of Deakin (2013), while the elite interviews followed the traditional face-to-face style. Although there were more young adults who were willing to participate in this study as informants, getting face-to-face interviews was challenging due to time and financial constraints.

Focus group discussions could have been used in this study but individual interviewing was preferred for a number of reasons. Public discussion of political issues until recently used to be sensitive in Ghana, as discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. What constitutes a sensitive research topic according to Renzetti (1993, p. 5) "is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or distribution of research data". Although there appears to be a culture of freedom of speech currently prevailing in Ghana, it was anticipated that public talking of politics would be a sensitive issue partly due to the legacy of restrictive political contexts in recent history. Moreover, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) classifies research on political matters as sensitive, and therefore recommends that ethical practices should always be enforced when undertaking such a study (ESRC, 2015, p. 9).

In view of these sensitivity issues, using focus groups could have potentially deterred informants from participating. If focus group discussions were employed, it would have involved the discussion of research issues with a group of participants at the same time (Hansen et al., 2013). In such an environment, potential respondents would have had concerns about other participants knowing the information they supply for fear of being victimised. To feel safe, they would have responded to questions but under the influence of majority opinions, thereby amplifying performativity. And due to their spontaneous and participant-led nature, measures such as asking variant questions to mitigate such performativity and validate information provided would have had a limited effect. Thus, although it is regarded as a popular tool for researching sensitive topics (Hansen et al., 2013; Renzenti et al., 1993), focus group discussions would have been inappropriate for the enforcement of the privacy and ethical policies of this current study.

There are two main approaches to interviewing in qualitative research (Brennen, 2012). These are semi-structured and unstructured interviews. In this current study, the two streams of interviews were semi-structured in style, using topic guides (see appendices 2 and 3). Although the aims of this study requires interview participants sharing their views and experiences in their own words, there was the need for the researcher to steer the interviews to cover the essential issues under investigation to serve the purpose of the research, a feature which could have been lost if unstructured interviews were used (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

The topic guides used in the two streams of interviews were a list of key words covering the focal issues under investigation. They served the purpose of maintaining focus on the key themes (see Hansen *et al*., 2013). This system also retained flexibility, creating opportunities for open-ended discussions with the participants and ensured that relevant areas were all covered. The topic guides also allowed the researcher to respond to issues that evolved during the interviews as against pre-coded questions or fixed sequence of questions which constrains interviewers (Hansen *et al*., 2013). In addition, questions which emanated from the topic guides were semi-structured, which ensured that the data collected are comparable for the purpose of analysis (see May, 2011). This was achieved by ensuring that key questions in each individual interview had similar meanings to the participants.

The opportunity to vary the wording of the questions helped the researcher to restructure questions to the understanding of each participant whilst maintaining their original meanings. Question variation also served as a way to mitigate performed responses.

5.3 Preparing the topic guides

The topic guides were prepared to help provide information that answers the pivotal objectives around which this study revolves. These objectives are to understand: (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling the constitutional right to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media; and (RQ4) whether and how talking politics online influences decisions of young adults' involvement or exclusion in national elections?

In the set of interviews involving the young adults, thirteen sub-topics were initially constructed out of the four key research themes gleaned from the literature review. These sub-topics were used as reminders to the researcher, making sure each topic area was made loose in order to build in open questions. For example, at the end of the interviews, I made it a point to give the participants opportunities to tell me anything else that they would have liked to say but which I did not ask.

To test whether the listed topics in the Interview Stream 1 were sufficient to cover all important issues in the study, the topic guide was piloted, initially using 3 of the researcher's Ghanaian friends who were on different holiday durations in Britain. After interviewing them via Skype, 2 more referrals were obtained from these friends and were also interviewed via same medium. Until their short holiday travel to Britain, these informants were originally living in Ghana for most parts of their lives.

After the pilot study was analysed, it became apparent that one important sub-topic (Link between involvement in deliberations and participating in elections) needed to be added to the initial thirteen-topic guide.

The relevance of this sub-topic stems from the argument that there is a causal relationship between media use (especially digital media) and the participation of Ghanaian young adults in other processes that bring about social and political changes (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018). It can be argued therefore, that online mode of talking politics can potentially help in mobilising people to take part in elections, as participants may want to back their opinions with actions (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018; Chambers, 2003, p. 308). To fill this gap in the topic guide, participants were successfully re-contacted via Skype to respond to the questions that emerged from the added topic. The pilot study gave the researcher insights into how well questions would be understood, what words may be confusing, and what areas might ignite sensitive issues in the actual field interviews.

In the elite interviews with the politicians, the topic guide also constituted fourteen sub-topics drawn from the literature review. Some of the central topics around which discussions revolved include; experiences of using SNSs; potential reasons for politicians' use of SNSs to engage young adults in public political deliberations; potential reasons for SNS use among young adults; concentration of online media ownership and the expression of political views online; online surveillance in the context of deliberative democracy; essentials of online atmospheres for political deliberations. Although the procedures for preparing the two categories of topic guides were similar, that of the elite interview was used without an initial pilot study as politicians could not be easily accessed remotely via online means.

The set of questions in both Interview Streams 1 and 2 were framed in ways that brought to light relevant political participation life history of the participants, and to achieve the research objectives. The themes explored include 'views on the participation of young adults in public deliberations; reasons for using SNSs to talk politics; general experiences of using SNSs; general concerns when using SNSs to talk politics; existence of transnational flows of information and political cultures; and face-to-face discussions versus online discussions of public issues' in the interview stream 1.

5.3.1 Summary of key themes explored

The following is a summary of some of the key themes and the justification of their inclusion in the topic guide, starting with the Interview Stream 1.

Views on the participation of young adults in national deliberations

Questions under this theme enabled the researcher to gain first-hand understanding of the wide context within which the participation of young adults in public deliberations occur in Ghana. This revealed the multiple and complex factors that hinder young adults' participation in a historical manner.

Reasons for using online and social media to talk politics

In Ghana, politicians use SNSs to talk politics with young adults on daily basis, especially during elections periods (Gyampo, 2017; Grauenkaer et al., 2018). The informants were therefore asked to give their reasons for using online and social media as against asking them for a "main reason". This was designed to enable them talk about the factors that motivate them to use such platforms without leaving any of the reasons out as much as possible. This theme opened up the interview and enabled the young adults to talk about the suitability or otherwise of online and social media platforms for talking politics.

General experiences of using online and social media

This theme allowed the researcher to 'enter' into the online world of the participants, bringing to bear their daily and accumulated experiences of using SNSs for public deliberations. Participants were able to give account of a number of memorable real life experiences to explain how they participate in national deliberations; how they feel about the processes of online participation in terms of exercising their rights of freedom to participate in national deliberations; and whether their views on national issues are being channelled into national policies and decision making. The open-ended nature of the questions in this section "as a young adult, could you please share with me your own daily experiences of using SNSs for national deliberations of political issues in as much detail as possible?" produced many fascinating and informative answers in most of the interviews.

The intention here was to allow each participant to tell their own stories with as little influence as possible. In most of the interviews, responses generated from this particular theme acted as a spring board to the rest of the other themes in the guide, which were noted and probed in subsequent questions.

General concerns when using online and social media

Here, the intension was to engage with the literature on controlling online spaces in the context of deliberative democracy in Ghana specifically and democracy as a whole. The theme allowed the participants to discuss their views on Ghana government's moves that monitor the online spaces and the likely implications this will have on their adoption of SNSs and related online platforms for public deliberations. The researcher was able to investigate whether there is any kind of fear (example government retributions) as the participants use SNSs. Questions on commercialisation, concentration of online media ownership, government-online platform owners' collusion and how this impacts on their use of online platforms for public political deliberations, as discussed in Chapter Five, also took centre stage under this theme.

Existence of transnational flows of information and political cultures

The interdependencies in information sharing and political cultural flows that the literature in Chapter Four reveals were examined for any democratic values. Responses on this theme emerged naturally from themes such as 'general experiences of using online and social media'**.** The symbolic power the informants gain through the acquisition of information from various sources including their online relations was revealed. Further, how they view these streams of information and political cultures, and how such flows of information influence their political participation level was examined.

Face-to-face discussions versus online discussions of national issues

Open questions like 'when a national issue comes up for discussion, how would you compare having a face-to-face discussion with those national leaders involved in the issue with discussing the issue online?' paved way for the researcher to observe the presence or absence of Spiral of Silence and Willingness to Self-Censor as they use online platforms for public deliberations. As discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, Noelle-Neumann's

(1974) Spiral of Silence theory suggests that people who perceive themselves to be in a minority are less vocal and less willing to express their opinion in public.

Whilst Spiral of Silence mainly dwells on external factors, the Willingness to Self-Censor theory focuses on intrinsic factors that may hinder an individual's tendency to express their true opinions in the midst of an audience perceived to disagree with that opinion (Hayes et al., 2005). Some of the factors that the researcher was looking out for were *concerns about negative interpersonal evaluations*- referring to worries that an individual entertains if (s)he is to be evaluated negatively by other members of a group and therefore suffers social rejection. Or the extent to which a person is concerned about being evaluated negatively by others *shyness and social anxiety*- referring to the extent to which people are talkative, outgoing and comfortable to express themselves in social situations (Hayes et al., 2005, p. 311). Using real life scenarios, the informants discussed features of online platforms that make it relatively easier to express their views on national issues as against doing so in offline contexts in Ghana.

In the Interview Stream 2, the themes were similar to those in the Interview Stream 1, including, essentials of national deliberative environment; essentials of online atmospheres for political deliberations; experiences of using SNSs in public political deliberations; online surveillance in the context of deliberative democracy; concentration of online media ownership and the expression of political views online. The set of questions that emerged from these themes were also framed in similar fashions as in the Interview Stream 1, except that they were made appropriate to suit the contexts of the politicians.

Essentials of national deliberative environment

This sought to obtain from the participants' own thoughts and words, what their picture of a deliberative environment should look like. The researcher sought to observe the actors that will be mentioned as key players; what those actors should and should not be doing.

The intention was to gain insight into who and what the participants perceive to be important in Ghana's deliberative democracy when a national issue comes up for discussion. This theme provided a backdrop to interrogate past and present political cultures of national deliberation.

Essentials of online atmospheres for political deliberations

This theme invited participants to discuss how online platforms should be in deliberative democracy terms. This prepared the grounds to probe into what the current situation is like in Ghana and how the current atmosphere impacts the participation of young adults in national issues.

Experiences of using online and social media

As in the Interview Stream 1, this theme gave the opportunity for the participants to share with the interviewer what they felt about using online and social media to engage young adults on national political issues; whether the online platforms enable young adults to express their views on national issues compared to offline encounters?; and what the online engagement of young adults brings to national policy formulation and decision making. It was an attempt to solicit information to answer research question 2 and 3.

Motivations for using online and social media to engage young adults

Questions under this theme directly sought to answer research question 1. Participants were asked a simple question of 'why do you use SNSs?' It was expected that the participants would enumerate the reasons why they are departing from the old culture where young adults were restricted in national deliberations (Grauenkaer *et al*., 2018) to embrace a culture of their inclusion.

Online surveillance in the context of deliberative democracy

The literature reviewed in Chapter Four is divided on the impact that government surveillance of online platforms has on online deliberations of public issues. For example, it has been argued that, states' online surveillance activities mean a risk to the survival of their democracies, due to the encroachment of people's privacy (Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2012). The feeling of being aware of another person watching can bring about docility amongst citizen users, as by monitoring, their freedom of speech and assembly are being endangered (Abu-Laban *et al*., 2012). Further, Fuchs (2012) regard political expressions on monetized platforms (Facebook, Twitter, online news media) as non-participatory, and argues that in addition to monetizing online contents, collusions between states and internet corporations may prevent people from getting involved in public political deliberations. However, as discussed in Chapter Four, there are suggestions that social media users may be trading-off the commercial gains of the site owners with the tempting feel good factor in self-expression (Meikle *et al*., 2012, p. 66). They may also prioritise their security provided through state online surveillance over their liberties (Picard, 2015, p. 37). These issues, together with the permanency of the content that users produce whether they delete it from their user accounts or not; the concentration of online media ownership and the expression of political views online were the focus of investigations under this theme. This theme and the set of probing questions that followed sought to answer research question 3.

5.4 Sampling technique

To execute the data collection strategy, qualification of sample members for interviewing purposefully focused on young adults within the age category of (23-37) who use SNSs to talk politics, and were at least involved in the 2012 general elections in Ghana. This minimum period and age category were chosen to enable potential participants to share their experiences of engaging with socio-political issues on SNSs in relation to their past experiences and knowledge of participating in offline contexts. Participants in the Interview Stream 1 were recruited from the Greater Accra and the Ashanti regions. These two regions were chosen for their relatively high levels of urbanisation and government activities.

Data from the Ghana Statistical Services (GSS) reveals that Ghana has a population of approximately 25 million people unevenly distributed among 10 regions. The Ashanti region has the highest population (4,780,280, representing 19.4 % of the country's total population) and the second highest in terms of urbanisation (60.6%). Greater Accra is the capital city of Ghana and has the second largest population proportion of 4,010,054 (16.3%), and the highest level of urbanization of 90.5% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).

In this study, as with all qualitative studies (see David & Sutton, 2011, p. 113; Silverman, 2013, p. 145), it was impossible to specify in advance exactly those who were needed to be interviewed. Snowball sampling was therefore used as a sampling method because of its chain referral property (David *et al*., 2011, p. 112; Penrod, Preston, Cain & Starks, 2003). It was thought however that using snowballing can potentially generate situations where respondents refer the researcher to only others who share their political outlook or are members of the same party. To mitigate this tendency, varied sub-categories of young adults were identified for the interviews, as shown in table 1 in this section. These comprise of young adults who belong to the two major political parties in Ghana, using the parties' ranking in the last 3 general elections. Members of two non-political associations comprising of young adults, namely the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) and Youth Bridge Foundation were also acquired as informants. Informants from the two main political parties were chosen based on data from the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) which reveals that the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party share approximately 99% of total votes cast between them (CODEO, 2013).

Table One - Age and group affiliations of interview stream-1 participants

Name of interviewee (Anonymised)	Reported Age	Youth sub-category identified with
1. Adjei	29	National Democratic Congress (NDC)
2. Kofi	25	Youth Bridge Foundation
3. Oteng	29	NDC
4. Helen	32	NDC
5. Zac	Between 30-35	New Patriotic Party (NPP)
6. Nartey	30	Youth Bridge Foundation
7. Boss	28	NPP
8. Isa	25	NDC
9. Sali	27	National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS)
10. Yemo	31	NDC
11. Joe	23-25	NUGS
12. Ike	28	NUGS
13. Zoe	26	NPP
14. Atia	25	NUGS
15. Isaac	33	Youth Bridge Foundation
16. Ato	30	NDC
17. Aisha	28	NPP
18. Josh	30	NPP
19. Rose	29	NPP
20. Ben	30	NPP
21. Theo	Early 30s	NPP
22. Yaw	32	NPP
23. Kid	26	NUGS
24. Gizo	30-35	Youth Bridge Foundation
25. Odoi	28	NPP
26. Lee	26	NDC
27. Duke	26	Youth Bridge Foundation
28. Sena	25	NDC
29. Slim	28	NUGS
30. Ken	26	NPP
31. Elmo	25	NUGS
32. John	Undisclosed	NPP

In total, 32 interviews with the young adults were conducted. Through the assistance of a local research volunteer attached to the National Youth Authority (a statutory public organisation under the Ministry of Youth and Sports), a participant from each of the identified sub-categories of young adults was contacted through telephone and interviewed using Skype. The use of this liaison was handy to the researcher because the Authority works directly with a number of groups who deal with young adults in the country.

Leads to potential sample members were then obtained from each of these primary informants and later contacted for interviews. This lead-obtaining process continued until subsequent sample members' responses were repetitive and predictable. This meant that there was negligible or no new information needed to understand the main issues at stake in this study (see Brennen, 2012).

5.4.1 Negotiating access to politician-participants

Gaining access to this type of informants was also easier than anticipated. Public directories of Ghanaian parliamentarians, government ministers and district chief executives exist, which include their respective email addresses. These directories, however, do not have a list of those who use SNSs because it is not mandatory for them to provide such information. To create a primary sample of SNS users out of this group therefore, the names of these politicians were searched on Facebook and Twitter. The names of the search results were noted, and using their telephone numbers provided in the directory, calls were made to request for interviews. This was followed up with emails (appendix 5) before the first few informants in this category gave their consents to be interviewed.

As was done during the interviewing of the young adults, leads were obtained from each successful politician participant to gain access to other potential participants. In total, 22 interviews were carried out, comprising 9 members of parliament (MPs) from the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) at the time of data collection; 6 from the New Patriotic Party; some 5 senior officers from the ministry of information, ministry of communication, and the ministry of youth and sports (see Table 2). The rest of the interviews were conducted with 2 municipal and district chief executives in the Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions. All 22 interviews were conducted in English language, and in the various offices of the participants. The table below shows the anonymised names of politician participants and their respective public offices they hold.

Table Two: Data on Politician participants and the offices they occupy

Anonymised Names	Public office occupied
1. Honourable Ntim	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
2. Honourable Vidal	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
3. Honourable Twum	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
4. Honourable Daniel	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
5. Honourable Nathaniel	New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP
6. Honourable Manu	New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP
7. Honourable Asare	New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP
8. Honourable Denu	New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP
9. Honourable Anokye	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
10. Honourable Seth	New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP
11. Honourable Bonsu	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
12. Honourable Osei	New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP
13. Honourable Ansah	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
14. Honourable Wiredu	Senior officer – Ministry of Youth and Sports
15. Honourable Steven	
16. Honourable Oppong	New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP
17. Honourable Nana	
18. Honourable Konadu	National Democratic Congress (NDC) MP
19. Honourable Agyemang	Senior officer – Ministry of Information
20. Honourable Badu	Senior officer – Ministry of Information
21. Honourable Dzakah	Senior Officer – Ministry of Communication
22. Honourable Ofori	Senior Officer– Ministry of Youth and Sports

5.5 Conducting the online (Skype) interviews

Online interviews have been acclaimed as new methodological breakthrough with great potential for collecting data in a novel manner (Madge, 2010). Skype is video-enhanced online software which has gained prominence amongst qualitative interview researchers in recent times (Deakin *et al*., 2013). Amongst the online video-enhanced software applications available, Skype often stands out within the literature due to its greater national and international recognition (Deakin *et al*., 2013). Long before the inception and popularity of Skype, it was argued that online interview methods, such as email interviews, are associated with the loss of non-verbal cues which would have helped to contextualise individual participants when used. There is also difficulty in building rapport with potential participants in such disembodied interviews (Deakin *et al*., 2013). But the quality of responses obtained through online research is much the same as responses produced by more traditional methods (Denscombe, 2003).

Getting participants to use the Skype software was without obstacles as they preferred using it to face-to-face interviews. It is also free to download and uncomplicated to use. Most of them had already installed the software on their smart mobile devices and laptops, and were very competent in using it. Conducting Skype interviews require high internet speed and the averages for the UK (13.9Mps) and Ghana (11.55Mps) according to Statistica (2016) and Net imperative (2016) were enough to make the online video interviews successful. As a result of the video function, using Skype presented the researcher an opportunity to connect with and see the interview participants in real time. Non-verbal cues such as facial expression of emotions and body movements were observed and recorded as field notes when it was necessary. The information collected in the interviews provided in-depth insight required for the study as the participants directly use SNSs to deliberate on national issues of political nature.

To ensure that all the important issues were covered, the interview times were not restricted in both interview categories, although each interview was allotted a minimum of 45 minutes. Practically, each interview with the young people lasted an average of 53 minutes approximately. All interviews were conducted in English language, recorded on an audio digital recorder and transcribed immediately after the interviews.

5.5.1 Conducting the elite face-to-face interviews

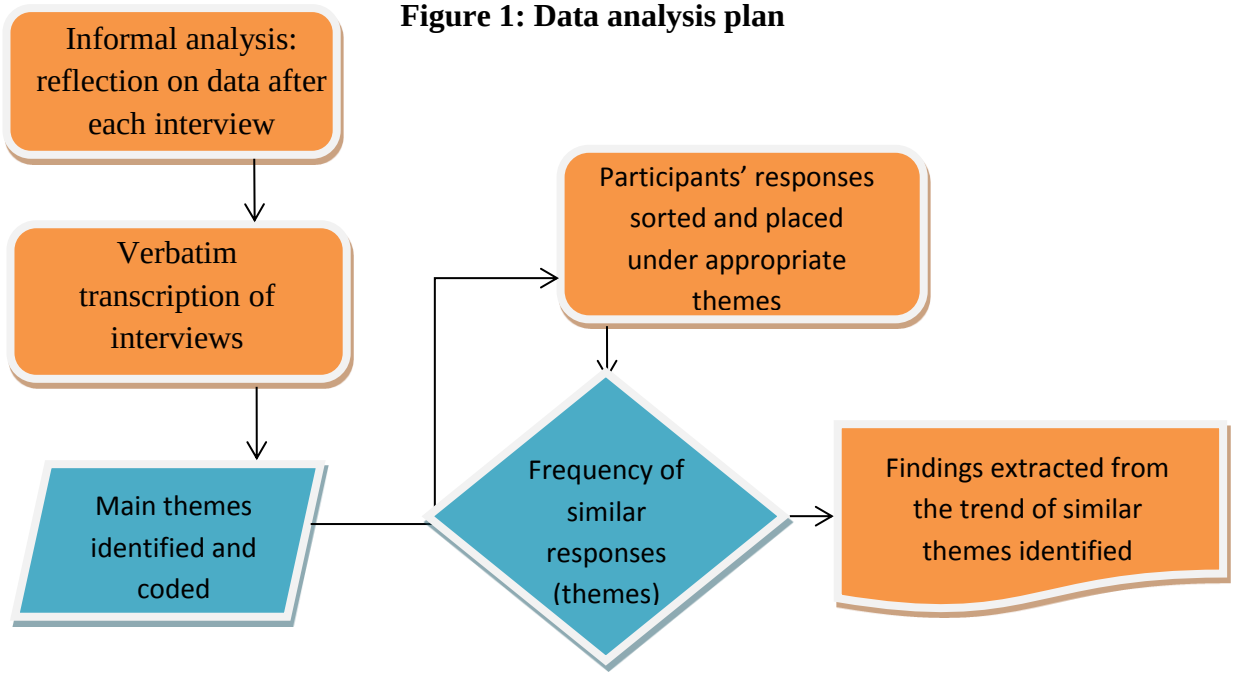
Whilst online interviews were suitable for the young people, the politician participants preferred face-to-face interviews.

As in the interviews with the young people, the interview times of the politicians were unrestricted, although each interview was allotted a minimum of 45 minutes. In practice, each interview in this category lasted for an average of 49 minutes approximately. All interviews were conducted in English language, recorded on an audio digital recorder and transcribed.

5.6 Data analysis procedures

Using qualitative approach in this study came with the challenge of analysing volumes of information that it produced. Analysing the data was therefore generally a time consuming process. As there is no one particular standardized method that is used (Brennen, 2012), this study drew from Cresswell's (2014) five-stage process and Brennen's (2012) suggestions, but only as a guide to make the task manageable. This involved organising the data; creating categories and recognising common themes and patterns; testing initial and developing hypotheses; searching for alternative explanations; and finally, writing the report. In this study however, data analysis informally began moments after it was collected by constantly reflecting on the data even when the formal analysis had not actually begun (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Data analysis plan



Data transcription was done manually and so were the rest of the processes of the data analysis. These processes could have been carried out using computer software applications such as NVivo, however, using manual methods helped the researcher to be familiar with the data. After transcribing the data verbatim, formal analysis began. On the whole, 315 pages of transcripts were reviewed in the interviews involving the young persons and 237 pages in the politicians' interviews.

In terms of organising, the topic guides used for the interviews were already organised according to the salient themes in the literature on SNSs use and the participation of young adults in Ghana (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018; Gyampo, 2017). For example, in the interviews with the young adults, there were themes such as 'reasons for using online and social media; general experiences of using online and social media; general concerns when using online and social media; and existence of transnational flows of information and political cultures. In the interviews with the politicians, experiences of using online and social media'; essentials of online atmospheres for political deliberations; potential reasons for young people's use of online and social media; online surveillance in the context of deliberative democracy; and the concentration of online media ownership and the expression of political views online' were some of the key themes. Other themes that emerged from the interviews were added and coded Yh1-Yh17 in the interviews with the youths, and Ph1-Ph14 for the elite interviews.

Responses given by each of the participants under each theme were critically examined by reading them line-by-line and more than once in most cases. Patterns of similar responses under each of the identified themes were then identified and noted onto a recording sheet. These procedures allowed for meanings in the data to be made explicit. As a result, the researcher was able to form opinions relating to the main research questions.

5.7 Ethical considerations

For clarity and consistency, ethics refers to formalization of rules that draw clear distinction between good conduct from bad (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 30).

In this study the overall benefit was evaluated against the potential harm it could cause to the researcher or participants – a principle which is consistent with the ESRC Ethics Framework 2015.

Guidance provided by ESRC advices that all social science research activities, especially those that involve the use of primary data, must have the approval of an appropriate ethics committee (ESRC, 2015). The guidance document also advises that research should not proceed without notification of the staff member who is responsible for the research within the organisation. Since this research used primary data, an application to the Faculty's Ethics Committee for approval was necessary. A research proposal was therefore presented to the chair of the Ethics Committee and approval was subsequently granted after clarifications have been made with the researcher. The staff members responsible for the research were also notified about the commencement of the data collection phase.

The ethical issues that were identified and implemented centred on upholding the principles of confidentiality of informants and informed consent, which involves disclosing appropriate information to participants before their involvement. In keeping with the localised approach to ethical decision making, as explained at the introduction of this chapter, the ethical decisions also covered issues relating to respecting people's privacy in their homes where the researcher had to conduct interviews in the homes and offices of participants; length and line of questions; transcribing data for analysis and results presentation.

The first ethical concern implemented was about respondents' right to information. As discussed at the sampling section of this chapter, participants had prior knowledge that their information will be needed in this research. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher ensured that participants were given ample information regarding the purpose, methods and the intended uses of the research through a standardized information sheet and a consent form (appendices 1 and 4). Issues relating to the potential risks as a result of their participation were also fully discussed with each participant prior to interviews.

Eliminating or minimising perceived risks of involvement meant that there was a need to gain credibility. In addition to the information provided on the information sheet, the researcher achieved this credibility by presenting a student identity card to each participant before interviews.

In the online (Skype) interviews, the identity card was scanned and sent to the participants via online means. Gaining this credibility was crucial to the entire process of recruiting participants, as leads were obtained from each successful respondent. By allowing enough time, each participant made their own independent decision to either be part of the research or opt out, which was thought to have further bolster the credibility that was required for successful interviews. A few of the participants in the Interview Stream 1 were reimbursed for the money (a little less than £2) spent on internet data. There was absolutely no reimbursement in the Interview Stream 2.

Protecting participants' confidentiality is the next key ethical concern implemented in this study. Confidentiality must be assured in order to prevent unwanted exposure (Christians, 2013, p. 136). Although the subjects explored in the interviews did not cover an individual's specific political ideology or views, the researcher had the view that the practice of discussing politics in an opened manner or sharing of political views could be perceived by some participants as sensitive. To address this issue, an official letter from the university affirming the researcher's studentship and the student identification card were useful. Respondents were also given the option to withhold their true names from the researcher. In cases where they provided personal data, each of the participants was anonymised, and their anonymised identities were kept throughout to the final writing of the report in accordance with ESRC's (2015) guidelines. Further, a list of anonymised data was kept separate from the actual names. In keeping with the UK Data Protection Act 1998, as well as the Ghana Data Protection Act 2012 (Act 843), this also meant that interview recordings had to be transferred unto a password-protected drive and deleted from the recording equipment immediately after the completion of each interview. Transcripts of the recorded interviews were also done maintaining the anonymity of participants, and were kept on a password-protected hard drive.

It is imperative to state that prior permissions were sought from participants before recording any interview with a device. This, together with the remaining ethical issues, were implemented by sending a standardized information sheet (appendix 4) and a consent form (appendix 1) to the participants at least 18 hours before the scheduled interview. Signed consent forms were collected before all interviews began.

Having addressed respondent's confidentiality, the next ethical issue enforced was the length and line of questioning. Subjecting participants to a long list of questions was considered to be potentially stressful to some participants. In the same vein, it was considered that questions that could have brought negative memories to participants would have had psychological effects on them. As discussed in section 6.3 of this chapter, piloting the topic guides before the main research began informed the researcher on the appropriate length of questions. Words and questions which were deemed to ignite respondents' sensitivity were also identified and reconstructed in the course of the interviews. Respondents had prior knowledge of the minimum time allotted for each interviews before their participation in the study. To this end, respondents' right to waive questions and to withdraw from the interview at any time were communicated intermittently.

5.8 Validity/Reliability of research

There are two types of validity – internal and external validity (Brennen, 2012). Internal validity refers to how findings are linked to the issues being studied, whilst external validity is the extent to which findings can be generalised and related to similar studies (p. 8). Reliability can also be conceived as the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study (Joppe, 2000 cited in Golafshani, 2003). Essentially, if a research is valid, then it is reliable (Golafshani, 2003). In qualitative research, matters of validity are more of authenticity rather than reliability, as qualitative methods seek to develop an understanding of people's experiences (Seale & Silverman, 1997). Validity in this study also refers to credibility and 'confirmability' of data and findings (see Golafshani, 2003).

In terms of internal validity, two topic guides (each for the young people and politicians) were designed from the theoretical framework of the study, as discussed in section 6.3 of this chapter. The themes of the topic guides were then used as the frameworks to analyse the data collected from the 2 strands of interviews (Brennen, 2012). The process of validating data in this study was crucial, as the researcher knew beforehand that some interviewees could attempt to deceive the interviewer.

The researcher also knew that some interviewee's responses may be self-serving, whilst others may say anything that comes to mind in order to end the interviews. To mitigate such flaws, question variation was used as mentioned in section 6.2.1.

In order to achieve external validity (authenticity or confirmability) in this study, semi-structured interviews were used to capture the perspectives, experiences and meanings of the informants who were involved in this study as Seale and Silverman (1997) advice. Capturing the participants' perspectives and the narration of their experiences online through audio recordings and transcribing the interviews, provided evidence by which interpretations and conclusions made out of the data were supported. During the course of each interview, the researcher made sure that non-verbal cues (such as facial expressions, emotions and body movements) of interviewees were noted to check their agreement with the actual spoken words. In this regard, the interviewer was very satisfied with the observations made. Also, common responses identified in the interviewees' statements were used as means of validating facts (see Brennen, 2012). Finally, the systematic data analysis processed used ensured structure, rigour, and overall validity in the research findings.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology that provided a framework for the study, by explaining and justifying the research design and various methods that were used to achieve the objectives of the project. This research was undertaken: to understand what motivates politicians' and young adult's use of SNSs for talking politics publicly?; to know whether and how SNSs facilitate political deliberations or not?; to understand what their experiences are as they use such media for political deliberations?; to know whether and how talking politics online influence decisions of the young adults' involvement or exclusion in national elections?

A qualitative research approach allowed a focus on the interpretations that the research participants make of social happenings in a bid to understand what is happening and why it is happening. Online and traditional face-to-face data collection methods were separately utilised in the 2 categories of interviews. This ensured that samples from the two targeted user groups needed to supply information were accessible.

Some of the drawbacks associated with qualitative approach to research, as experienced in this study, include its time-consuming nature in collecting data, the difficulty in analysing the data due to the volume of information collected. But these were outweighed by its feature that allowed an in-depth understanding of the issues at stake, by permitting the participants to express themselves in a relatively opened manner. Using qualitative methodology ensured that the focus of the research was beyond statistical measurements in a bid to understand the stories and lived experiences of the young adults and politicians in their effort to create spaces for communication amongst themselves. The qualitative research paradigm used for the data collection process produced rich data with clear patterns which helped the researcher to form opinions in the research, and thereby, helping to achieve the aims and objectives of the research. In sum, the choice of the methodologies used reflects the nature of the research undertaken, and it boosted the researcher's interest to achieve the purpose for which the project was set out.

CHAPTER SIX

Results and discussion of the study on online deliberation practices among a sample of young adults in Ghana

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, an account and examination of the interviewees' motivations for and experiences of using SNSs to talk politics are organised under eight main themes. This examination seeks to answer the four main questions of the study, which aim to understand: (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling constitutional rights to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media; and (RQ4) whether and how talking politics online influences decisions of young adults' involvement or exclusion in national elections?

The background of this analysis is established by the discussions in Chapter One to Chapter Four. As this study partly looks at prospects of communications on SNSs extending the public sphere, an elaborated version of a conceptual public sphere, deliberation and liberal democracy are discussed in Chapter One to serve as the basis for analysing the Ghanaian online spaces created for talking politics. These ideals are (i) e*xchanging ideas and critiquing with reasoned claims* - referring to communication partners engaging in evidence-based critique of ideas rather than conjectures; (ii) *reflexivity*:– a requirement that demands that communication partners re-think and revise their stance on a given topic of discussion when challenged by a better idea proposition (iii) *ideal role taking*:– respecting participants' opinions without any form of abuse; (iv) autonomy from state and economic power - deliberations are centered on public interests rather than being driven by private benefits or administrative power; and (v) *sincerity*:– requiring participants to disclose information such as their identities and interests on a given subject (Dahlberg, 2005). The remaining ideals suggest that: (vi) political talks in a public sphere may be individual libertarian or communitarian in form; (vii) there may be alternative forms of public spheres where the public can express their opinions on public issues rather than a single dominant space; (viii) less formal communication styles, such as rhetoric and the expression of hate (which is constructive)

or love towards an idea can be featured; and (ix) all participants of deliberations are accorded equal statuses.

Chapter Two reveals how an individual's political participation level is not only determined by his or her socio-economic status (such as education level, income level, occupation and age) and psychological variables (interest, attitude and beliefs), but also depends on social contexts such as neighbourhood and interpersonal discussions. Interpersonal discussions are likely to expose individuals to a set of different politically relevant information that is likely to be more than what they possess (McClurg, 2003). In Chapter Three, the dominant pattern in the literature on traditional news media's role in political participation, particularly the use of contents in interpersonal interactions that lead to different forms of political participation, and the unilateral manner in which traditional news media organisations work with governments to produce news that shape the public sphere to their interest, were discussed as the issues that affect the experiences of different users. In Ghana, factors such as age discrimination coupled with the lack of information and spaces for adequate involvement of young adults in public expression of political issues; political clientelism involving politicians, young adults, and some media organisations, continue to inhibit effective participation of young adults.

6.1 Essentials of democratic environment in Ghana

The existence of public spheres is one of the essential attributes of a democracy, particularly deliberative democracy (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 38; Dahlberg 2005). As such, studies show that there are models of a public sphere, as discussed in Chapter One and highlighted at the introduction of this chapter. In Ghana's hybrid democracy where tenets of liberal democracy are also expected to be achieved, issues such as freedom of speech, equal right to political voice and the promotion of plurality of opinions are also imperative as stipulated in the 1992 national constitution.

This current study identifies from interview participants' own words what they perceive to be important features of a democratic environment in Ghana.

The dominant pattern of perspectives identified under this section relates to a perceived need for the social and political environments to embrace opinions of young adults. Respondents revealed that the environment where opinions of young adults are relegated will further discourage their inclusion in public deliberations. This can be linked to the need for equal respect and equal political voice to all persons who want to talk politics publicly, corroborating Habermas' (1989) public sphere requirement of equal status. It can be noted in many of the responses that the practice of devaluing the opinions of young adults can silence them at the national level, potentially leading to a spiral of silence. It can also result in a decline in confidence, which is an important social capital needed for political participation (Lin, 1999). For example, Zac revealed that:

> Zac: ".... the practice where our leaders see opinions from certain groups of people as if they are not worth considering must stop. Things like this do not happen in many countries we call the advanced nations. A little boy can call his dad and tell him what he wants in a TV for example. But who are you to do this here... so if one cannot say this at the home level how can he go to the extent of national level. It is even against the constitution for our leaders to treat us [young people or young adults] the way they do". (Male, 30-35)

While political clientelism flourishes based of partisan politics, discriminating against the opinions of young adults cuts across the political spectrum. Boss, a 32-year old male who identified himself as a card-holding member of the ruling party echoed this revelation. For a card-bearing member of a ruling political party to express difficulty in getting his opinions across via traditional channels in much the same way as other non-card-bearing participants is an interesting revelation. This is because, it is expected that his party card would give him an edge over others who do not have, given the way politics is organized on conditions of political clientelism (see Driscoll, 2017; Gyampo, 2013). Boss' revelation therefore shows how difficult it can be for the opinions of young adults to be recognized in traditional settings of deliberations.

The embedded interest in the subject being talked about is important to interviewees. Several respondents expressed their dislike when topics and arguments are purposely skewed in the interests of a small section of the people to the disadvantage of the masses. Neutral discussions which advance the interest of the public are preferred and Habermas (1989) cites this feature as characteristic of a public sphere.

Setting the agenda and controlling discussions to favour a group of persons in itself may not be considered an explicit way of infringing on a person's right to equal political voice but responses such as Yemo's reveals that this right can be trampled upon subtly. This is because such practice falls short of providing critical information for in-depth scrutiny. Access to information is a fundamental requirement of liberal democracy to uphold as the absence of it means effectively making citizens unable to exercise their political voice productively (Wolterstorff, 2012). This practice doesn't just weaken ability; it also sometimes influences willingness to participate. Yemo, for example, stated that the partisan traditional news media in Ghana do not make it attractive for him to participate in the discussions that ensue on those platforms.

> Yemo: "...right now, if you look at the airwaves, you will see that almost all the radio stations and the newspapers especially ... they are all wearing political colours. So, right from the start you will get to know that whatever this station discusses is in the interest of some politicians. It makes the discussion there not interesting... it is always one way ...one direction. But if you have another platform where it is open to all and you can clearly see that the issues are in the interest of the nation, everybody will also see the good work. And people will like to join that discussion. They have to be neutral and also put the nation first. That is a healthy environment and that is what I expect ..." (Male, 31)

A Public sphere and deliberative ideals such as reflexivity, ideal role-taking, autonomy from the state, and sincerity did not feature in the data collected but a few can be linked to the issues identified by the respondents. For example, the alignment of traditional channels to political party ideologies can be said to be evidence of state intervention or political coercion that works against the effective functioning of a public sphere where dissent can be freely expressed.

6.2 Views on the participation of young adults in Ghana's democracy over time.

The researcher sought to obtain first-hand information on the contexts within which young adults of Ghana participate in public deliberations. Interview participants gave narratives based on their experiences and knowledge they hold on Ghana's political landscape. Among the responses collected on this topic is a pattern suggesting a perceived improvement in their participation in the last decade as compared to the previous ones. For example, Nana Adjei, a 27-year-old male said:

> "The youth [young adults] have been very vibrant in voicing out their opinions on pertinent national issues that has transcended over the years. Initially, you couldn't really feel their voices much because the media space was very narrow. You could only be restricted to the traditional forms of the media... that is TV and radio. Even with these, it was only the national ones that were available. These platforms were only opened to high level opinion leaders, which mostly involved the chiefs, the politicians, the corporate big men and the likes but the youth really didn't have a voice within that time until the era of the social media where any youth anywhere can just contribute to national issues in terms of discussions".

The data also suggests another level of improvement in the participation of young adults. It appears that there is awareness of apparent societal acceptance of young adults occupying government positions such as ministers and becoming parliamentarians. What is not clear, however, is whether this new order results from the use of SNS by young adults to participate in political talks online. Nartey, a 30-year-old male's story exemplifies this awareness among the young adults interviewed.

> Nartey: "If you look at the current youth and employment minister, Haruna Iddrisu, who was a former NUGS [National Union Of Ghana Students] president,... he entered into politics straight from the university at a very young age. So what I will say is that if you look at the current parliament, we have a number of youth. The likes of Isaac Asiamah, Dominic Ntiwu, Haruna Iddrisu, Okudzeto Ablakwa, they were all at their youthful ages when they entered into parliament". (Male, 30)

Along with the general perception of this improvement among interviewees, there were also feelings that more progress is needed. To some respondents like Adjei, the need for more progress in the area of participation means seeing more young adults at the forefront of national leadership than the current situation.

> Adjei: "so far Ghana's youth actually haven't done best to steer our democracy. When you go through all the political parties, you will see that the leaders are always above 45...50s...most of them! I can say about ... at least 70% of them are above 45 years and so youth decision [making] or participation is not so encouraged in Ghana's democracy. Although they [young adults] now express their views on various platforms… we have pressure groups in Ghana that are basically made up of the youth but which have been initiated by the youth themselves [without government support]...but the actual governance of the nation is done by the aged who are in their 45s, 50s and 70s and even 80s". (Male, 29)

Despite the narration of stories that suggest perceived improvements in the participation of young adults, all the narratives revealed experiences of difficulties relating to passive access to discussions and unequal status accorded them when using traditional channels. In essence, there is an underlying awareness of discrimination meted out to young adults when participating in more traditional platforms such as public forums, radios, and TVs. The age discrimination discussed in Chapter Three as a socio-cultural barrier to participation featured prominently in most responses. People who are older or are in national leadership positions continue to dominate these spheres of deliberations. The revelation of this awareness among these young adults is an indication that their participation in the processes of talking politics on such traditional platforms remains restrictive indeed (Gyampo, 2013). Corroborating Gyampo's (2013) observations highlighted in Chapter Three, this sort of discrimination appears to take its roots from a societal convention that age is directly proportional to the acquisition of wisdom. In other words, the older a person becomes the wiser his or her opinions. This inference is evident in the short extracts of Oteng, Kofi, and Helen to mention but a few. Oteng revealed that the culture of opinion discrimination against young adults "has been our [Ghanaian] culture".

> Oteng: "....that has been our culture. When you come to Ghana, we are of the view that only the old or the elderly are impetus of knowledge so if you are a youth and you want to rock [rub] shoulders with them, they will bring you down. They will say...when did you grow? It takes only some few courageous youth that are able to fight this course. That is why if you fear as a youth, you cannot go and be rubbing shoulders with the elderly because the culture alone will not permit you". (Male, 29).

In terms of their capacities to effectively participate, this age discrimination difficulty that young adults face can impact their abilities to critique the actions and inactions of national leaders progressively, as the opinions of national leaders may be over rated, in an attempt to save their faces from the frowns of society. The saving of faces may also be a result of the clientelistic culture in Ghana and its associated harassment, as critical opinions may be interpreted as serving partisan goals. Young adults may be able to reflect on their views on a given public issue but the absence of critique due to its disapproval in that society can potentially mean a lack of exchange of ideas as well. The emphasis placed on respecting leaders and potential political harassments can also mean that young adults may have to alter their identities if they want to challenge the status quo in situations where access to political talks is gained on radio, for example, as they would not like to be linked to behaviour considered in society and the political spaces as deviant. Thus, there could still be a sense of fear of harm and/or uneasiness among young adults if they were to be part of political talks with leaders in traditional public spaces. This is a feature in Zac's response when probed.

> Zac: "...Another major thing was that, in those times... from 1992, it has always been 2 political parties and in the past I will say ....for NDC, we all know where they came from...from military junta which metamorphosed into a political party. So they had their old men and 'big men' already during the military regime. So it was very hard for the youth to 'infiltrate in'. It was very hard for the youth to venture into any form of politics for fear of victimisation and during the 90s we know how the NUGS fought the PNDC regime which metamorphosed into NDC (National Democratic Party). So there was no appetite to join politics for anything". (Male, 30-35)

6.3 Motivations for using online social networking sites

On this topic, many reasons were given by respondents for using SNSs as platforms to engage with national issues. This is because the questions posed in the interviews were designed in a way to seek many reasons. Almost all the participants declared their motivations for using SNSs and related online news media platforms for public political deliberations. Motivational factors are essential for three reasons as far as this study is concerned. Firstly, they help to understand the drivers behind a willingness to participate in political talks online. Finding some participation drivers can help determine how to engage more young adults online.

Secondly, they will help to understand some diversity among young adults and their specific individual motivations. That way, specific barriers to participation may be addressed. Thirdly, an understanding of motivational factors may facilitate the management of initiatives at a policy level to help create a desirable environment for talking politics online. To understand the findings, the reported motivations will be categorized under five themes.

The first motivation found is perceived 'absence of editorial restrictions on word count' relating to the issues of space and the opportunity for users to express their desired opinions. The respondents perceive some online platforms to be 'limitless' in terms of the number of words allowed in the composition of their opinions, which can be deemed as imperative as far as free expression of political voice and the promotion of plurality are concerned. This is because the original intent of an opinion can be effectively communicated in such an environment potentially. Subjecting a piece of drafted opinion to the editorial process of a newspaper, for example, can result in information distortion or loss of the aim(s) for which the piece was dratfed. Zac and Boss are respondents who have had experiences with traditional media channels and online platforms such as Facebook when it comes to the expression of opinions on national issues. Zac explains that...

> Zac: "....because, if what you are writing contains...let's say 8 pages, you have to write it all down and when it gets to the editor too, he will take his time to determine which one is important or not. And fast forward you will see your 8 pages reduced to may be 2 pages. In that way, many of your views would have been curtailed and the worse of it is that it may not represent exactly whatever you want to say". (Male, 30-35)

There are other dimensions of freedom of speech and the expression of political voice that SNSs such as Facebook support, which serves as a source of usage motivation for the interviewees. 'Ease of obtaining political information' is one of such opportunities available to users online. When probed to explain what they meant by 'easy' in many interview cases, respondents related it to the time taken to access information, which they profess wouldn't have been possible without these online platforms.

Obtaining information for personal consumption portrays a liberal individualistic use of SNS (see Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Dahlberg, 2001), however, to be able to obtain information and have adequate space where a user's opinion is expressed on a channel with such relative ease, as captured in the extracts of Zac, Yemo and Joe, serve as evidence suggesting relative ease with which young adults can potentially gain direct access to national politics talks. Accessing national politics in a way that information and spaces are obtained to express opinions are critical public sphere essentials (Dahlberg, 2001; Ghana National Youth Policy, 2010). Such accessibilities are also essential requirements of liberal democracy, which many of the Ghanaian offline public spaces lack, as revealed in Chapter Three. Per the values of liberal democracy highlighted in Chapter One, denying citizens information on national issues amounts to rendering them incompetent for any form of political participation.

> Yemo: "I use it [SNSs] because I believe that a lot of Ghanaians within and without also visit such platforms to bring what is going on in Ghana out. So I go there to also abreast myself with the current happenings within and without the country. Because there are times that I can't tune in to the TV and radio to be able to listen to everything that is going on but when you visit these [online] sites, there are other things that can be seen or read within a short time...I get information very fast from friends without sweat."(Male, 31)

The seemingly limitless space for the expression of opinions, and perceived 'ease of obtaining political information on SNSs are not the only reported usage motivation factors that may enhance a free expression of political voice. A third force capable of encouraging users to express their political voices may also contribute and this is perceived 'easy processes'. From explanations given by interviewees, it can be deduced that perceived easy processes is the relative ease of procedures through which users undergo to make their opinions known to the public, relating to the issue of accessing the platforms.

> Joe: "…apart from using phone-ins to make your contributions during radios and TV programmes, it is a little bit difficult most of the time when you are trying to get to the platform as compared to you having access to Facebook and Twitter and the likes. You don't need to follow protocols, you don't need to write a letter to the editor, you don't need to go speak with the operating director. But with these online platforms that we are talking about, they are very…very easy to make your thoughts or views known. With the offline platforms, you have to make a case why they should feature your thoughts and the process is very complex [in such a way] that it may never end if I want to explain". (Male, 23-25 years)

Operations of traditional news media in Ghana and any other democracies can be considered an important feature of liberal and deliberative democracies (see article 162 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, for example) as some of their functions allow some level of freedom of speech about prevailing public matters. But as discussed in Chapter Three, one limiting aspect of these platforms is that news production is centralized and inward-looking. There is no or limited opportunity for the public to be part of value creation regarding news production. The reverse of this situation is seen in the Ghanaian online space to the extent that it is a usage driver to most of the users interviewed. This reversed situation is a novel symbiotic relationship between established news media organisations and amateur SNS users forged to produce news (see Meikle et al., 2012; Bruns, 2011) as discussed in Chapter Four. In this present study, there seems to be a general awareness among the respondents that traditional news media organisations make news out of people's opinions expressed online. As such, perceived importance that news producers of traditional media organisations attach to opinions shared online motivates users to employ SNSs to talk politics. Most of these respondents explained with experiences from using SNSs and on the online platforms of news media organisations. Typical of this perception can be seen in Ike's interview extract, which is exhibited below.

> Ike: "... when you want to send some information across, just get on to Facebook...Twitter put it there...Instagram put it there... and the following day you will find it in the newspapers if you are lucky, and if it is critical to national development. That's the reason why some of us are on social media. I quite remember recently when Yvonne Nelson posted something on twitter concerning 'dumsor' [erratic electricity supply] must stop', the following day, she was interviewed on BBC" (Male, 28)

The featuring of opinions expressed online is not restricted to only national media organisations. Some of the informants gain access to international media organisations where their opinions are sought as a result of their social media usage. Zoe explained how she got an audience on a British-based radio station because of her continuous use of SNSs.

> Zoe: "I forgot to add this that on November 2nd 2015, one radio station [name withheld] in the UK called me to be one of their panellists because of the way I have been active on Facebook. And so, I posted on my Facebook account that my followers should listen and they did. It generated a whole lot of conversations. I have been really grateful since that day and that alone motivates me to post my thoughts and also take part in other hot conversations..." (Female, 26).

The stories narrated by Ike and Zoe are repeated in diverse forms by Gizo, Oteng, Lee, Duke, and Josh to mention a few. Like Yemo's extract above, Ike and Zoe's reports depict liberal individualistic use of SNSs, but as can be seen in Zoe's extract in particular, her personal opinions online got her involved in a radio talk show as a panelist and also generated some interactions online among her contacts. Some responses also reveal a sense of independence using SNSs to talk politics in the sense that their views are not subjected to what others such as their parents, teachers and their peers think. Atia recalls that not too long ago, he used to consult his parents about his thoughts on national issues but has stopped ever since he started using SNSs.

> Atia: "...and I use it just to out-forward my opinions... I think not what my father or mother thinks. If hitherto I did not have access to social media, I would have consulted on issues before I could be able to send my opinion to the traditional media like the ones that I used to do. When I wrote letters in those times, I had to give it to my English teacher for him to look through and correct it before sending it through the post for it to be sent to the Daily Graphic [one of the newspapers in Ghana] editor. Even before my teacher could allow me send it, he might probably have made changes... some portions that do not represent my own views and that wouldn't be representative of my views ". (Male, 25)

As can be inferred from this extract, the rationale for seeking a second opinion from others before sending views across to newspapers was to ensure the correctness of ideas and language, suggesting low confidence. Thus, Atia's revelation does not only relate to a feeling of independence but also the feeling of confidence in self-expression online. This may be due to the availability of political information online which he accesses in the formation and expression of his opinions. His confidence also indicates trust in the online platforms that his opinions will be given equal space as other users.

These SNSs usage motivations highlighted are all indicative of the restrictive nature of the more established news media spaces as discussed in Chapter Three. They are also indicative of a context where there is equal status of participants as users appear to have better control over what gets published in public spaces online, compared to the situation offline. Further, the perceived relevance accorded to opinions shared online by traditional news media, as revealed by the informants as motivating, shows another remarkable revelation. It indicates a realisation among the users that their marginalised statuses in society have amounted to disrespect accorded their opinions in more established public domains. Hence, using SNSs and related online news media platforms is a potential way of making their views matter when it comes to public opinion formation.

Participation, as highlighted in Chapter Two, is to be involved in a process of seeking to influence policies and decisions of government (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Fuchs (2011) argues that using SNSs in any form of interaction with political processes cannot be participatory, basing the argument on participatory democracy ideals. Participatory democracy theory, amongst other features, suggests that there should be the presence of participatory decision-making in all areas of society (Fuchs, 2011). Democracy is intensified and extended to the grassroots in all realms of society. Permanent distinctions between 'managers' and 'men' are also to be abolished to make interactions online participatory (Fuchs, 2011). When interview participants were asked whether using SNSs makes them feel involved in talks about national affairs or not, most responded positively. Expressing their views on national issues to their immediate online contacts means their involvement in the talk processes towards national decision making.

This feeling of involvement is based on the networked nature of SNSs where the base of a user's contacts can be increased through friends of friends, which serves as a crucial vehicle to convey opinions to decision-makers. Thus, not only can liberal individualistic use of SNSs generate talks about politics online and on traditional news media platforms, but it can also result in talks in more formal settings such as the house of parliament.

> Ato: "One or more of my friends on social media can be a friend to these big men in places of power or authority. So as I post all that I want to say on my page, my friends do comment on it or even hit the like button. When this happens, their friends will also get to see what their friend has been up to. So if this friend of theirs is an MP [Member of Parliament], then automatically, my opinion will be seen by this MP. This MP too would want to pick my opinion up if it's reasonable and if the issues I have written about is of national concern... that's how these MPs work sometimes. For example, there was radio presenter who said on his social media wall that weed should be legalised. Few weeks later, this was discussed in parliament and the guy was invited..." (Male, 30)

In reality, though, this reliance on the extended network of online contacts to convey one's opinions to decision-makers depends on the page settings of their contacts. On Facebook, for example, such reliance will be possible if a contact turns on notification settings to receive posts from other people in his contacts. Therefore, a user may decide not to see posts from a particular contact by turning off notifications from that specific contact.

The feeling of involvement in talks about national affairs towards decision-making also comes from instances when users comment on issues published on official websites and the online platforms of state officials. The reciprocity of interactions between officials and the public particularly fuels this perception. This finding is important given that exchanging of ideas is a vital feature of deliberations and for that matter, a public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001).

> Ike: "....Because sometimes you will come across a post from a very renowned politician online and have the opportunity to also comment...just imagine how you will feel [with smiles and laughter]. Sometimes, you comment and the person comments back and you feel that yes...your voice is also heard somewhere. (Male, 28)

Whereas reciprocity in communication has always been characterised by the exchange or sharing of ideas verbally between communication partners (see Dahlberg, 2001), the online environment introduces another form. This form can be described as subtle as it is non-verbal. This new form of reciprocity observed is evident when an online user's post is 'liked' by other users. It denotes recognition and a reaction that expresses support for the idea posted, and to some of the informants, it is enough to make them feel involved.

> Isha: "...We have created a national group platform of 'Alliance for Accountable Governance'. On my campus, we have it so even if you are at home, your voice is heard there. When you make a comment and 2 or 4 people like it, or reply to you ...it makes me think that... yes, they have heard it". (Female, 28)

That said, it was not clear whether the informants' use of SNSs for political talks influence their decisions to be involved in national voting exercises. To the informants, voting was the only option available to demand accountability from politicians before opportunities to express opinions online. As such, they reported being regular participants in all national elections. However, without the opportunities to be involved in talking politics, their choices of national leaders could be narrowly informed. The data suggests that political talks online represent opportunities to be exposed to more comprehensive sources of information needed in their voting decision-making processes as they compared to offline contexts, and as will be discussed in some detail in section 7.7 below. Gizo, for example, revealed that sources such as online contacts at home and abroad, perceived independent social commentators, and more established online news sources from home and abroad work together to help in his voting decision-making processes. On the other hand, the absence of online platforms means to the informants that voting decisions could be shaped by trends in family voting decisions and traditional news media outlets offline, which are generally perceived to be partisan.

6.4 Suitability of online SNSs for talking politics in Ghana

For the purpose of analysing the data collected in this study, suitability refers to whether SNSs facilitate the talking of politics in deliberative and liberal senses, as discussed in Chapter One. Thus, this section will provide answers to research question 2. The communicative use of SNSs that conform to liberal ideals can be identified when political talks satisfy individual objectives (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019). An example is a user seeking information from political leaders and using the platform as means of self-expression (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Dahlberg, 2001). A user may also express a personal opinion on a public issue that features links to political information or interactions from different online forums on their page (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019).

Deliberative-suitability of SNSs will also be examined on the basis of the identified requirements in Chapter One, which have been categorised into issues of freedom of speech and equal right to political voice. Thus, the examination of the data in this section is also to ascertain whether SNSs facilitate: (i) the exchange and critique of ideas in a reasoned manner; (ii) reflexivity; (iii) communications in which there is respect of views irrespective of who expresses them; (iv) the creation of a communicative environment liberated from state and economic powers; (v) a communicative environment where users can talk without disguising their identities; (vi) an environment where the status of an adult (be it social, educational, or economic) is not used as acceptability or admission criteria; and (vii) the creation of multiple public spheres. Twenty-six participants responded to this topic effectively, giving clear reasons why using SNSs is suitable to them as young adults. All 26 respondents think SNSs are suitable for talking politics, and a number of thought patterns were identified. These patterns of thoughts will be discussed under four main headings as follows.

6.4.1 Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right to all Ghanaians according to the 1992 constitution. SNSs provide platforms to people who may have ideas to contribute during public engagements but are shy to speak in traditional platform settings. Shyness (which refers to the extent to which people are talkative, outgoing, and comfortable to express themselves in social settings) is linked to a person's perception that his or her opinions will be negatively evaluated by others and is known to inhibit the expression of personal opinions (see Hayes *et al*., 2005). But the idea of freedom of speech frowns on any form of barriers to free speech. The perception that a person's opinion can be negatively evaluated in in-person settings indicates concerns of being disrespected, which seems to be felt more in traditional offline settings. Using SNSs such as Facebook appears to reduce concerns of being negatively evaluated. Ike and Yemo's thoughts are examples of this finding.

> Yemo: "...the person is not standing right there [referring to online SNSs] so it gives you that freedom to express yourself without any hindrance...as in shyness. You know, naturally I would want to show respect even if the person is a kid standing before me. I wouldn't want to sound insulting or disrespect the person with my critique. But on these platforms such as Facebook wall, 'you' tend to think that things that are being done and have gone wrong [referring to government activities]…you want to speak your mind and heart out.... you want to express it in a particular way that leaves nothing within your heart. And for me when I don't empty my head that way, I don't feel well at all. I feel restless and sick." (Male, 31)

Sali's response also reveals that shyness is not only a condition felt by an individual. A person could share in other people's state of shyness without necessarily saying something wrong. For example, he indicated that he feels the embarrassment of political leaders who cannot answer questions posed to them in offline contexts. This kind of shyness heightens when people physically present tend to blame him for the leaders' embarrassment, a situation that makes him withhold his opinions. Further, a leader's social status (position) plays out as a barrier to free speech. This form of inhibition is plausible given the pervasiveness of political patronage of the Ghanaian society, where people (especially young adults) trade their ability to abuse others considered to be opposition for financial benefits (Driscoll, 2017).

> Sali: "Another reason too is that, there are sometimes when I may feel sorry to pose questions to a leader or someone in the face-to-face context because it may be hurting to do so. There may be certain things that are not going on well at the person's ministry and I may want to ask. But sometimes I may feel a bit sorry for asking that question because of the person's position and convenience. Maybe he can't answer and sometimes ...like I said earlier,...when you come out to say what is on your chest, other people or the society will see you as arrogant. But on social media…he is not there physically and you will just put the info or question over there". (Male, 27)

This revelation is an exception to the Willingness to Self-Censor Theory (Hayes et al., 2005) discussed in Chapter Four. This theory suggests that a person will self-censor his or her opinions when shy. But most of the interviewees in this study indicated that SNSs such as Facebook serve as platforms that alleviate shyness (uneasiness to express themselves in social situations), which in this context is caused by social disapproval of young adults and people alike who question authorities and suggest differing views.

In the Ghanaian society, age mediates free speech. Respecting adults means a culture of silence on their actions or inactions (see Gyampo, 2013). However, the data indicate that SNSs and related online platforms help eliminate this age discrimination in Ghana when talking politics publicly. This shows the informants' awareness of discrimination against their opinions and difficulties with which they may have to endure if they are to speak up in the presence of older people. This finding lends support to observations made in some recent studies. Online media such as Facebook and Twitter have been observed as ways by which 'social minorities' are removing some forms of socio-cultural barriers and inequalities (Dashti et al., 2015; Suler, 2004). In this present study, some status information of the young adults, such as their ages, can be concealed when expressing opinions online, supporting Suler's (2004) observation.

> Sali: "...you know in our country here, we are being influenced by our culture...like talking to an elderly person. It's not everything that we can voice out to our leaders face-to-face. It takes only a few people to do that... standing in front of elderly people or people who occupy higher positions in society and asking or saying whatever they want to say. As soon as you come out to say what is on your chest, other people will read different meanings into it. They will say I don't respect or I am some rude boy. Meanwhile, on social media, you can just put it there... it's simple" (Male, 27)

6.4.1.1 Talking politics online and Spiral of Silence

The ability to express opinions, whether or not there is a chorus of opposing views, can be put forward as one of the essentials if public spaces for talking politics are to approximate the public sphere described in Chapter One. Thus, the inability to express opinions under conditions of divergent and abusive ideas can be viewed as toxic and an impediment to free speech, as well as suppressing the ability to exchange and critique claims. The data in this study indicate that abuses such as insults are a regular feature when talking politics online, especially when dissenting views are expressed. Respondents revealed that this kind of abuse is experienced whether in groups or on their personal spaces online, lending support to one of the assumptions that underpin Noelle Neumann's (1995) Spiral of Silence theory. Neumann (1995) suggests that the group to which an individual belongs threatens those who deviate from the group's norms and majority views with isolation. Despite the frequency of insults and trolling, the willingness and ability of almost all the respondents to share their opinions were reported unaffected. There is a tendency to perceive the online abuses as normal in politics as seen in Kid's interview extracts. Yaw is a 32 year old male who experiences such abuses online when talking politics on the online pages of key political personalities in Ghana.

> Yaw: "Some of those who are hooked [connected online] are there for their followers only. So if you happen to say something that contradicts their views, you have to run back with some top speed. So, sometimes you don't want to join them because what you will say or do will not be in the interest of the people there. Example, when 'you' like Akufo Addo [the president of Ghana] on his page, about 95% of those who have liked him there are his followers so everything they say should be in the interest of the group. The same applies to John Mahama [the opposition leader] and others. When you put something there that is good but contradicts, they won't be happy with you. But I say it anyway. They will lambast you or give you 'electronic blows'… like insults."(Male, 32)

From Yaw and Kid's responses, it can be deduced that the use of SNSs helps the informants to withstand threats of being isolated from a homophily group and being perceived as opinion deviants. In yaw's extract (exhibited below), for example, it can be noted that he 'runs back' (as he put it) to other online spaces when he expresses contrary opinions in a particular homophily group.

This indicates that he has an alternative online group(s) to which he belongs, suggesting that there is the liberty to choose which group to associate with. Being expelled from one group for expressing contrary opinions through insults, therefore, does not necessarily make him isolated from other online social groupings. As stated at the beginning of this sub-section, abusive comments have the potential to mitigate free speech. But Kid's extract, for an example, reveals that this toxic online behaviour can be viewed positively or may have minimal effects on intended targets in some circumstances, and this is consistent with Suler's (2004) observation.

> Kid: "I remember when I first started using these internet platforms, I couldn't handle the insults but as time went on, it has become normal and sometimes I must be honest... errrmm [with laughter]... I sometimes insult back when I feel it's becoming too much. I have to take it as occupational hazard because eerrmm...otherwise I don't think anyone will talk about political issues on the internet".

To some other informants, contrary opinions online is one of their motivations to get involved in political talks online. Gizo (between the ages of 30 and 35) and Kofi (25 years) for example shared their views on this by indicating that, issues which are not of national concern rather repel them from getting involved in deliberations. Not even do challenging encounters with people in authority who threaten some of the informants through phone calls deter them from expressing their opinions.

> Gizo: "I look at what people have posted as in their contributions or comments... That is what I consider because when I get to know that your comments are in the same direction with mine, I will like it. But when it conflicts with mine, that is what attracts me most.... that's how it should be. I will then post mine to stir up the conversation and provide alternative views. I think when it's in one direction, it becomes boring so we have to 'jaw-jaw' [discuss]. There wouldn't be a need for any new view on social media if a conversation is in one direction" (Male, 30-35)

6.4.1.2 Online Surveillance, monetisation and concentration of ownership

The issues of state online surveillance, commercialisation of platforms and concentration of ownership in the hands of a few owners, as discussed in Chapter Four, were expected to dominate responses. However, these issues were mostly unmentioned. Just a couple talked about the issue of state online surveillance in the context of talking politics. When prompted about these activities, it came out that most were unaware of state online surveillance activities but knew about the commercial gains of online platform owners. Commercialisation of platforms is not perceived as a usage deterrent according to the data, so far as users are not directly surcharged. The issue of generating revenue from users' data online is a central issue considered undemocratic (see Picard, 2015; Fuchs, 2012; 2011). But there is a trend in the responses suggesting that commercialised platforms that allow the expression of opinions and concerns are liberating and are preferred to a situation in which there is no platform at all. Commercial activities of online platform owners end up in a win-win situation where in this sense, the users benefit without direct cost to them, while the owners also satisfy their commercial objectives. This represents some trading between users and platform owners, and as long as users do not shy away from talking politics, the business model does not contradict any tenet of democracy, bearing in mind that democracy is also about the freedom to engage in legal economic activities according to Meyer (2020). A typical example of these views is the one expressed by Joe.

> Joe: "...If the owners don't do something to make money from their ideas how can we also get the chance to communicate with our friends and do politics? The way I see it, nobody charges me for using online platforms... it is free to air 'your' views. So, as I was saying, how will they maintain the websites if they don't look at other genuine ways of making money? I see it as a good business idea but we the users are the ones who benefit... they also get their money." (Male, 23-25)

Given these observations, commercialisation of SNSs, as it stands now in Ghana, does not seem to deter the participation of some of these informants online as some recent observers would have suggested (see Picard, 2015; Fuchs, 2012; 2011). Instead, this finding corroborates the idea that users satisfy the tempting feel-good factor in self-expression and, in exchange, provide for the commercial gains of the site owners (see Meikle et al., 2012, p. 66).

Regarding the existence of state surveillance of online platforms, it emerged that most of the respondents did not perceive such activities as deterring with regards to their usage for public deliberations. Preference to continuous surveillance activities dominates amongst the respondents, but as will be expected in all democracies, there needs to be a legal framework that will protect the common good of the people, one that deters state officials from using their privileged positions to suppress free speech. There are concerns in extant literature that state online surveillance means encroaching on the privacy of users, and that can result in the erosion of freedom of speech or assembly (Abu-Laban et al., 2012). A public sphere should be self-regulatory devoid of government interventions (Dahlberg, 2001). This finding is therefore interesting as it represents an exception to this conventional notion of public spheres. In support of Picard's (2015, p. 37) suggestion, the interviewees perceive state surveillance as part of state duties that may cause users to consider the implications of what is published online. An interview participant like Sali expressed a lot of support for security agencies to continue with surveillance activities. Sali noted that some potential users are discouraged from using online platforms to talk politics because of verbal abuses that are unleashed on these spaces. According to Sali, online surveillance will therefore help sanitise the platforms by helping to control the frequency of online verbal abuse and thereby encourage new users. In this sense, interview participants like Sali negotiate another level of trading-off as the inference here reveals that the informants seem to be prioritising their security over their liberties.

> Sali: "I will encourage them [government security agencies] in the sense that, whatever that will be done over there [SNS platforms] will then be fair. Because I think sometimes we are not being fair to other people. We may see or hear other people's private lives and we bring it there. But if we had certain ways that will track or prevent people from doing that, it will be good. Sometimes we do record people unlawfully, and we bring it there [on SNS platforms]. If we can control all these behaviours, we will get the good side to prevent people from the insult…because if we have ways of controlling, it will also encourage people to see it [SNSs] as different". (Male, 27)

Rose's response also reveals an interesting finding which seems to be new to studies on online media and talking politics. Rose feels that talking politics online is a non-private activity to 'help change some things which are not good in our society' therefore the issue of government agencies seeking to monitor opinions on public issues is not concerning to her. In other words, public talks occur in public spaces and can be visible to any member of the public, hence, the issue of privacy concerns does not apply when it comes to such context of SNS usage.

> Rose: "Let's be real here...my reasons for commenting on social issues is to contribute to national issues. If that is the case, then my voice has to be heard... and heard by people who take decisions for our country. If you look at it that way, then there is no reason why I wouldn't want state security guys like the police to see what I write or post on social media. The whole point is to add your voice to the masses to help change some things which are not good in our society. I do not enjoy it when someone insults me for any comment I make on social media so I do not expect to be insulted or people threatening me. When people insult or threaten me online, where will I find them to take them to police station ...and you know most of the people we chat with online ...we don't know them physically. It is the duty of the state to find these people. So all I am saying is that laws must be made to govern social media just as we have normal laws in football ...in schools and in parliament". (Female, 29)

Calls on governments around the world and social media owners to regulate the platforms, as indicated by Rose and Ben, have been heightening in recent times. For example, in the United Kingdom, the government is considering having a compulsory code of ethics for social media companies (Wakefield, 2019). These regulations may involve the platform owners taking down hate speeches and other online abuses in stipulated times (McGrath, 2018). Hence, surveillance activities may be inevitable if these pending regulations that seek to protect the public are to be meaningful.

6.4.2 Equal right to political voice

Studies suggest that some elements of online platforms make users act out more when communicating with others than they would usually do in the physical world (for example, Suler, 2004). In some instances, these overt online behaviours can be observed positively, such as the expression of hidden love affections to others online, and are known as benign disinhibitions.

Some of these behaviours can however be negative (toxic disinhibitions) in some societal contexts, such as the issuance of threats and expressions of anger (Suler, 2004). Amongst other reasons, persons may show negative online behaviours because they feel their identities online cannot be traced to their real persons - dissociative anonymity; because they cannot see other participants at the time of communication – invisibility; or because the social statuses of their communication partners are not fully visible in online communications - minimisation of status and authority (Suler, 2004). This suggests, therefore that people may not behave violently as they do online when talking politics under real world conditions.

Regarding the data in this current study, there is awareness among interview participants of potential violence that can occur if they talk politics with other members of the public face-to-face (Amankwaah, 2013). "... like the Facebook discussions... normally the way it degenerates into insults... assuming the person is in front of you, I know it will definitely end in a fight". This is Sena (25 years) sharing his views on what he thinks could happen in face-to-face contexts if insults that occur online were expressed physically.

Using personal experiences, many respondents such as Ken also shared this view, and there is a link between this sort of violence and the patron-clientelistic activities of some politicians and young adults, as discussed in Chapter Three (see also Driscoll, 2017; Amankwaah, 2013; Bob-Milliar, 2014). Ken narrated how he could get paid by physically beating up people of opposing political parties when they talk politics offline. He narrates that:

> Ken: "my experience was with this 'TESCON' thing [youth wing of the current ruling party]. You know back on campus we used to campaign and go around doing announcements for TESCON. And one day, I entered a class and a known TEIN [youth wing of the opposition party] guy stood up and said 'why do you come here to tell us this shit'? Immediately the guy said those things, I was very angry, and at that moment, the lecturer was there in the class so I didn't reply that guy. I knew the response wouldn't be appropriate so I just kept my cool and left. But in my mind I said... NO [with emphasis]... wherever I meet this guy, I would have to face it off with him for embarrassing me. And I truly did but it was just a slap I gave him. I know for sure if I am able to beat 5 guys and I go tell my leader that today I gave it to [beat up] 5 guys, I know definitely that my pay will increase. (Male, 26)

Essentially, online verbal abuse can be argued to ruin the facilitation of public spheres in cyberspaces (See Dahlberg, 2001). It is not the ideal role play expected in deliberations of all sorts, as the requirements stipulate. It can also potentially prevent some interlocutors to be heard, which means the requirements of inclusion and equal status that need to be accorded communication partners can also be potentially defeated. However, there seems to be perceived safety in using SNSs and related online news media platforms for talking politics, as compared to doing so in face-to-face contexts. Although some of the informants used some harsh words to describe their experiences of verbal abuses - such as Josh who sees the insults to be more painful than being cut with a blade - majority of the respondents felt that the use of SNSs insulates them or other people from physical violence. There is an assumption among the informants that the people they engage online are unable to track their physical locations.

> Isa: "There was one particular radio station that was ransacked... a political party went there to destroy their things because someone who was there [in studio of the radio station] in person made a comment. But on social media for instance, would you spoil your phone or computer or whose computer are you going to spoil? Where would you find me to assault? I hope you understand [asking the researcher]? But if it is done in person, people will not take it kindly. You will be assaulted. You can even demonstrate on social media without being injured as we hear when people demonstrate in person". (Male, 25)

This observation shows evidence of Suler's (2004) Dissociative Anonymity theory discussed in Chapter Five. Underlying the various responses given by the informants is the assumption that their online identities cannot be traced to their real persons. This perceived safety online is even evident in respondents who reported to use their real identities online, such as Isa. Other meanings of safety, as used by the informants, can be extracted from the interviews. To some, online verbal abuse is a 'normal' phenomenon, as it is experienced frequently from their parents. The negative effects of verbal abuse is also neutralised due the frequency of its occurrence online. Hence, instead of ruining moments of talking politics, due to its disrespecting nature and an outlook of unequal regard to differing opinions, it seems to have no practical effects on these users online. It can then be said that the effects of online abuse depends on the societal context within which it occurs.

> Yaw: "Social media can be a very good for growing our democracy because there are no violence there only verbal assaults... and as for verbal assaults we take them every day from our parents and colleagues so it's normal. Have you seen machetes and guns running on social media? [asking the interviewer] On Facebook, I feel like am hiding behind something, so I can talk my mind and say things that I really wish to say. (Male, 32)

What is more, physical distance between online communication partners can also play a role in this perceived safety online. Yemo feels that he will not bother looking for people who verbally abuse him online because of the physical distance between them. He also feels that victims of his insults online may also not consider getting to him due to the same reasons.

> Yemo: "...If the person is close to you [close ties], it is easy to discuss without any acrimony. But if you don't know the person, it will be very difficult for me to discuss the issue [political issue] with him. If I am not in that kind of relationship with the person, that'll be very difficult because you don't know his temperament and all that. So in that instance, it is best to discuss it online because when he gets angry, he or she cannot get to me physically…my friends online are mostly remote. Some are in Tamale, Kumasi and even abroad so how can I go to Tamale just because I am looking for someone who insulted me online. By the time I leave my room and board a car from Accra, my heart would have 'cooled down' [calmed]. I would have forgotten about all those". (Male, 31)

6.4.2.1 Transnational flows of information and political cultures as a liberating force

The notion of transnational flows of information and political cultures is famous in political participation literature, particularly those focusing on online media and political participation. From the interviewees' narratives in this study, it is clear that information sharing -particularly political information- transcends the borders of nations. An international digital community is created where there is some sort of support towards filling information gaps. Information that concerns the way citizens are governed and their expectations of public services is almost seamlessly shared, and respondents in this study do not only learn from this kind of information, they also use them as sources of reference when talking politics in public settings. The learning process is possible through the ability of the informants to identify differences in social and political scenarios painted to them.

This level of access to information represents access to crucial social capital needed when participating in politics (Lin, 1999). It is particularly important when talking politics because being informed in a sense is liberating as it enables one to exercise his or her right to political voice competently (Wolterstorff, 2012). Politically, a relevant social capital yields return(s) in the form of participation (Huckfedt, 1999). Thus, the fact that the informants are further activated to propagate their new found knowledge when talking politics indicates that the information they collect are politically relevant. Josh' experience is explained in this extract.

> Josh: "When there is a national issue to be discussed, those people living outside Ghana compare what they see there. There was a man who commented from Dubai some other day and said...for some years now, there hasn't been an increase the prices of goods...but Ghanaians see inflations as normal. You will clearly see the differences in those commenting from Ghana and those doing so from abroad, especially those who have stayed outside Ghana for a long time. The atmospheres are not the same and I feel like their views are far better than those from inside Ghana. When we are debating on social media we also take those views as sources of reference and then use it in our arguments. I think their views are very...very important in our discussions..". (Male, 30)

6.4.3 Exchanging ideas and critiquing with reasoned claims

The suitability of SNSs in Ghana's context of online democracy can also be linked to the time taken to process opinions before actually posting out to the public. Josh's evidence exhibited below relates to the feature of reflexivity needed in a deliberation (see Dahlberg, 2001). Reflecting possibly allows a communication partner to consider and revise ideas put forward in the face of a superior one (see Dahlberg, 2001). It is a process of thinking which takes into account necessary factors to produce sensible claims. Josh reported 'having ample time to think through whatever he wants to say'. Further examination of the interview extract revealed another interesting evidence of a deliberative requirement. Josh goes on to talk about how SNSs enable him to 'think and assess a topic or the information critically' and how he sits down to analyse a given topic of discussion and interrogates himself in search of the right response to contribute to a discussion. Going through this process of critical mental activity may take minutes, hours, or even days and can potentially yield the production of reasoned information. This also indicates that talking politics online can possibly be ongoing for a longer period of time than in offline contexts, potentially providing an opportunity for users to reflect and later revise their opinions.

> Josh: "On social media, you have ample time and you can even think through whatever you want to say. On such platforms, you can think before you comment. But in a face to face scenario, you will sometimes end up saying what you didn't intend to say. You can think and assess the topic or the information critically and sit down to ask yourself, what do I want to say, or analyse it before it is said. (Male, 30)

Transnational flow of information that is produced when talking politics online also equips participants with evidence to back critical claims. There are two possible ways as observed in this study. First, talking politics online exposes the informants to conditions of democracy they perceive superior to what is being offered to them. This insight gained into the happenings of other political contexts is a valuable resource with which evidenced and reasoned opinions are made, as evident in Slim's extract exhibited below.

> Slim: "...The views of those people abroad actually influence us big time [in a big way]. Because for example, we have had erratic power supply for 4 years now but someone from Nigeria commented that 'that cannot happen over there'. So it makes us think that we are not being offered better services as a country. I have a friend in Kuwait who commented that the energy minister resigned for not providing power for just 3 days while in Ghana, we don't see that. So when he said that I asked myself... why? This has actually influenced my thoughts. And I ask myself, are we not humans for this to happen to us? Why are we treated this way and all that?" (Male, 28)

Secondly, there is a perception among many of the informants, such as Sena, that this stream of information from online contacts abroad are true reflections of the suppliers' feelings towards political issues than those being received at the local level. Interview participants therefore find it easy to relate to and adopt such information as the perceived credibility of these external sources of information provides confidence. The perceived credibility of external sources of information can potentially provide a user with important evidence(s) when making claims, which can then be seen as reasoned opinions. Moreover, transnational information is used as reference when talking politics, as seen in Josh' extract in section 6.4.2.1, which is also indicative of the use of evidenced claims.

> Sena: "...normally the difference is this…as Ghanaians, we usually worship personalities. We say things to please the person. But when it comes to those outside [online contacts abroad] whatever they post is genuine. They try to put out what they really feel and not hiding anything.". (Male, 25)

6. 5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the responses of 32 young adults in Ghana relating to their motivations for using online news media and SNSs to talk politics. Light has been shed on some of the means by which online SNSs can facilitate expressions that satisfy people's individual interests and talking politics with the aim of affecting national decisions. It has also revealed what it means to the young adults to use SNSs in relation to the issue of fulfilment of constitutional rights to be involved in public deliberations.

The online experiences analysed essentially underscore the notion that SNSs are spaces where public spheres can be facilitated. The reasons why the young adults use SNSs, as this study finds, is an interplay of factors that link to the ability of SNSs to afford liberal and deliberative participation, including access to political information; perceived absence of editorial restrictions on word count; perceived absence of difficult processes; and perceived importance that the traditional media attach to opinions shared online. Being able to obtain information and have adequate space where a user's opinion is expressed on a channel with such relative ease are important evidences of the relative simplicity with which young adults can potentially gain direct access to critical information and national conversations online.

The use of SNSs also enables inclusion and further enhances access by serving as channels where shyness and age discrimination (which are found to hinder the participation of young adults) can be overcome. The disembodied online platforms ensure that the revelation or verification of their ages when talking politics in real time is difficult. By potentially eliminating or minimising shyness and age discrimination, SNSs can also facilitate equal statuses to communication partners as shyness can result from a feeling of being negatively evaluated and undervalued.

There are other ways in which the use of SNSs helps eliminate inequalities. Social media use helps to boost the confidence of the users interviewed by proving an important social capital in the form of political information from domestic and international sources. With this information in their armoury, the sample of young adults interviewed are able to challenge the status-quo by being able to set and pursue their own agenda on matters that affect them, helping them to gain some control in cyberspaces. A user's perceptions of equal treatment online and actual experiences can be enhanced as there is an equal possibility that an opinion will be given equal space. Users can potentially ignore threats of insults and expulsion from a group as there could be multiple online groups to which they belong. Generally speaking, this latter observation suggests that the context of young adults talking politics online in Ghana could be an exception to both Spiral of Silence (Neumann, 1995) and Willingness to Self-Censor (Hayes et al., 2005) theories.

Online verbal abuse represents a phenomenon that can erode the feeling of equal treatment and respect online from a conceptual perspective. In practice however, its frequency of occurrence online helps in the loss of its potential negative effects on the sample interviewed. Much as many of the informants felt threatened with isolation by way of abusive words (insults) when they express opinions contrary to 'majority' views online (Neumann, 1995), diversity of opinions seems to be an attractive feature that gets them involved in political talks.

Online interactions are not autonomous from the state. The duty of protecting the online spaces from verbal abuses and other kinds of cyber bullying through surveillance is a service which everyday users cannot provide by themselves, due to the cost and technologies involved. The informants in this study are relying on the government to carry on with this function, as it is perceived to be the government's duty. From theoretical perspectives, this kind of state intervention contradicts ideal conditions of the public sphere, but it seems to be an activity that can potentially attract more users if done lawfully.

There are pieces of evidence to support the presence and process of critiquing and exchanging of ideas in a reasoned manner. The process of transnational participation enables the respondents to acquire information with which they profess to buttress their claims when talking politics online. Although it is a find worth highlighting, there needs to be further studies that employ content analysis as a method to establish whether information acquired from contacts abroad really feature in the claims of interlocutors. With regards to the deliberative feature of reflexivity, communicating via social media and other related platforms can provide a unique opportunity to users by allowing them time to give adequate thoughts to a topic being discussed, as discussions can proceed for longer times than in offline contexts.

Chapter Seven

Study on online practices among Ghanaian politicians with young adults

7.0 Introduction

In Chapter Five (the methodology chapter), it is indicated that this research project comprises of two studies. This chapter is the second of the two, and it presents findings of the study conducted on the politicians' online deliberative practices with young adults. It analyses the data in the light of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapters One to Four. Similar to the discussions in the previous chapter, which examines online deliberative practices of some young adults in Ghana, this chapter analyses 22 Ghanaian politicians' motivations for and experiences of using SNSs for talking politics with young adults in Ghana. It also examines the potentials of SNSs for public political deliberations, with issues such as Spiral of Silence, online surveillance, the concentration of online media ownership and monetisation of user-generated contents being some of the underpinning themes, as discussed in Chapter Four. The next chapter brings together the issues identified in this chapter and Chapter Six to make comparative analysis and discussions between the two groups of SNSs users.

7.1 The participation of young adults in Ghana's democracy

Under this theme, responses were sought from the politician participants about the contexts within which young adults in Ghana talk politics on public scale. The narratives of the politicians were generally based on their personal life experiences and knowledge they hold about the participation of young adults in traditional settings, such as public forums and on traditional news media platforms.

The data indicate that the participation of young adults in public deliberations is almost non-existent in more established traditional contexts, reflecting Gyampo's (2013) revelation. There is a systemised regime for ensuring unequal rights to political voice, as the social and cultural norms that undermine the opinions of young adults are taught right from the family level, through the local communities, and at the national level. At the national level, these norms make it difficult for them to be embraced into national systems of talking politics, making it challenging for them to gain access to information and space, which I believe partly explains their artificial silence after elections (see Gyampo, 2012a).

The practice of unequal rights to political voice seems to be so pervasive that even a national leader such as a member of parliament (MP) may have to be submissive to the opinions of older people during deliberations. This happens despite the existence of a constitution that establishes all members of parliament as leaders of their respective constituencies. Honourable (Hon) Seth is a middle-aged MP (46 years) who revealed in his interview that, at his age, and being an MP, he must 'submit' to the opinions of his older uncles and persons of his uncle's age during family or community meetings where decisions are made. Therefore, it seems that this unwritten cultural norm in Ghana appears to be conflicting and more powerful than the stipulates of the national constitution that is supposed to be the overarching framework that protects the right to equal political voice and free speech. This conflicting standard guiding processes of talking politics undermines efforts at securing free speech and equal right to political voice. Hon Seth indicated that:

> Hon Seth: " …Ghana for instance is a traditional state by virtue of how our nation state has existed. I described a while ago about residual powers that our traditions and traditional authorities hold. And in such arrangements you cannot be a youth and overnight rise to override the status quo, being the traditional authority or the traditions. So where ever you go you will have to find a way of submitting or allowing yourself to go under their authority. In our modern global youthful engagements and deliberations, the youth believe they are of age, and they believe they must do things per their own understanding. It doesn't flow with a society like ours. At my age as a legislator and the leader of a community, I have uncles in my home who I must submit to in respect to family conversations, community conversations, and their opinions must be respected".

Similar observations were made by Hon Oppong when interviewed. Hon Oppong's extract suggests it is considered a rare privilege when young adults are appointed to public positions although that position could just mean a figure head without the needed critical decision–making capacity.

> Hon. Oppong: "… per our tradition, where the young is always wrong as compared to the decisions of the elders, the young person's view is always not considered. If you go to our traditional set up, when the elders are talking, who are you the young man to contribute? So that mentality, as we speak, is still in there. It's very strong. We haven't been able to get it out entirely. So when you are a young person and you've been given a position or voted for as a member of parliament or to head an institution by means of appointment or whatever, it is difficult at times when you are taking a decision and even when you have a good point, you will still be heckled by the elders who will ask…'who are you?...you small boy!… are you the one to teach us what to do?' As I said, our democracy is growing, we are actually trying our best at that but it's not out at

> all. So at times, 'we' meet some young people and irrespective of their educational background, they [the elders] think you are too young to be taking decisions. I am talking from experience because I became an MP when I was just a little above 39 years and it wasn't easy. I also headed an institution when I was just 30 years and I considered myself very lucky".

Apart from the value system of the Ghanaian society that places emphasis on respecting leaders (Gyampo, 2013), this study also finds, in the extracts of Hon Anokye and Asare, another interesting explanation to such 'strong' (to use the words of Hon Oppong) socio-cultural norms regarding public deliberations. Hon Anokye revealed that financial dependence of young adults on older adults in Ghana may also account for their difficulty in expressing opposing opinions in face-to-face contexts. In a similar light, Hon Asare also indicated that young adults largely depend on the older adults and those in leadership positions for jobs. Speaking up or critiquing the views and actions of the elders, therefore, means forfeiting chances of being employed or losing a source of livelihood possibly. Hon Asare said that:

> Hon Asare: "You may have youthful groups, but because of the dependency systems that still exist with us, we have graduates that have come out of school and are still dependent on these so called old men. Because the social… economic structure have not provided for them [young people] and so they are still dependent on parents. And so if one is falling back on these existing family structures, you cannot whole heartedly say the youth have come of age in the context of articulating their voices in our democracy within the local settings that we know of. The youths cannot speak in public…not that they can't talk *per se*, they cannot look straight into a leader's face and speak their mind. In public gatherings, the chances that they will be called [by moderators] are very slim, let alone talk".

7.2 Motivations for using SNSs to engage young adults

As in the previous chapter, this section will examine the interview data on the politician participants' motivations for using SNSs to engage young adults in Ghana in the context of talking politics, and it seeks to answer research question one. The reasons behind the quest to understand motivational factors in this study are similar to the study on the young adults. The found motivations can help to understand the drivers underlying the politicians' willingness to use SNSs to engage young adults in a context like Ghana, which may then be used as a basis to promote or discourage the practice. The motivational factors may also help to facilitate the design and management of initiatives at a policy level to help create and foster a more productive environment for talking politics nationally. Except for a few, most interview participants declared directly or indirectly that they use SNSs mainly to engage people classified as young adults. Responses such as 'I had always wanted a platform to communicate frequently with the youth in their masses'; 'I have come to like these internet platforms to a great extent mainly because of the youth in this country'; I always wonder how our predecessors were able to do their work without social media…maybe because they were not mindful of the youths', are reflective of the participants' clear interest in online platforms to engage young adults.

Analysis of the interview data reveals that the motivations cover a fairly broad spectrum of themes. These themes include using SNSs for the purposes of (i) countering opposition propaganda information due to perceived online media's reach (ii) avoiding perceived bureaucratic traditional channels and (iii) appearing attractive to young adults. These will be discussed in turns.

Among the politician participants in this study, there is a general perception that online media such as Facebook and Twitter reach wider audiences than the traditional news media. Due to this perception, some participants indicated that these platforms are useful in combating false information disseminated by their colleagues in opposing parties. One of such participants is Hon Nana, who has been a member of parliament for 3 consecutive terms (12 years). Nana said that;

> Nana: "Let me put it this way, perhaps it will make more sense. As we speak, I have 2 Facebook accounts. Each of them is full in terms of the number of friends permissible, which means I have 5000 contacts each.

> That means that I have 10,000, most of whom are youth. Now, in the lowest estimation, each of my contacts would at least have 200 friends so if I posted an information on my pages, it mean[s] that a minimum of 1,000,000 people are likely to see my post. Now, consider the circulation of traditional newspapers; apart from Daily Graphic and one or 2 more, the highest circulation is like 30,000. So if an opposition newspaper writes something false about me and I go to Facebook and debunk it with a post, you can imagine who's will have a wider reach".

As noted in some of the young adults' views in Chapter Six however, the algorithms of Facebook for example work in such a way that a person's online contact is able to filter news feeds. This function may therefore be used to switch off news feeds from unwanted sources. The reach of information on SNSs such as Facebook is thus contingent on how this function is applied in the selection of news sources by other users who are linked to each other.

One would expect that being the age-sensitive society that Ghana appears to be (as revealed in section 7.1 of this chapter), it is only non-office-holding young adults who will experience opinion alienation on traditional news media platforms. On the contrary, some politicians who reported to be first timers in parliament expressed their reasons for using online platforms in ways that suggest that they experience bureaucratic procedures in getting their information across to the public on a day to day basis. This observation is not strange given the partisan nature of the Ghanaian political realm (Driscoll, 2017) and the media landscape (Conroy-Krutz, & Moehler, 2015) as discussed in Chapter Three.

Boosting political communication strategies is also an underlying usage motivation factor. Whilst the participants frequently referred to young adults as the majority segment of Ghana's population, they also perceive that SNSs use are popular among them. For this reason, some politicians in this study indicated that their use of SNSs is a strategy to be attractive to young adults in order to win their votes during elections.

> Hon Ntim: "Because that's where power is [with opened eyes of excitement]. I mean you are talking about a population that has more than 50% being young and who fall under the youth age limit. It is a young population. The sheer force of their numbers ... it means that they have some relevance somehow, it is not by choice [with emphasis on the word 'sheer'].

> For instance if you go into a local election where we call the primaries, it is most likely that most of your delegates are going to be young people, so you have to strategize the campaign in such a way that the youth identify with you otherwise you are going to be unattractive. ".

These found motivations are essential but what is more imperative to this study is the linking of the politicians' motivations to the paternalistic nature of Ghana's society. This link is crucial as the Ghanaian political and social environments are such that there is significant value in respecting authority and people older than one's age (see Chapter Three). Consequently, conversations involving young adults and national leaders on matters of rendering accountability or suggesting alternative ideas are ventures for only a few in face-to-face contexts (Gyampo, 2013). Moreover, this culture means the opinions of young adults remain underrepresented in national deliberations of public matters when it comes to in-person contexts and on traditional media platforms. As such, I will now turn to the data on the politicians' views that specifically show their motivations for using SNSs to engage young adults within the context of Ghana's social and political cultures.

7.3 Suitability of SNSs as platforms for talking politics with young adults

As in Chapter Six, suitability refers to whether SNSs facilitate the talking of politics in deliberative and liberal senses as discussed in Chapter One. Thus, this section provides answers to research questions 2 but from the perspectives of the politicians. The data in this section will be discussed on the basis of 4 conceptual frames. Two of these frames are common underlying principles that the forms of democracy share, as discussed in Chapter One. These underlying principles are (i) freedom of speech and (ii) equal right to political voice. The other 2 conceptual frames are (i) exchanging of and critiquing with reasoned claims; and (ii) reflexivity, which relate to requirements of deliberation as also discussed in chapter One.

7.3.1 Freedom of speech

The responses in this category show that most of the politicians in this study believe online social media is a progressive new interface in Ghana's democracy as far as talking politics with young adults is concerned. The long-existing cultural norm which prefers young adults to not question the status quo can be considered an affront to free speech, and the society offline continues to nourish its roots to ensure its sustenance. Using SNSs to engage young adults is however an opportunity to practice democracy without feeling that cultural norms are being broken. It is an interface where cultural expectations that block the perspectives of young adults are trivialised to enable a free flow of opinions. As an example, Hon Bonsu, a 59-year old MP, reported that he found it difficult engaging young adults in face-to-face contexts because not only did he feel that they kept the real issues from him in such contexts, but he also could not endure when some of them decide to discuss the issues that point out his mistakes.

> Hon Bonsu: "social media are very good communication platforms when it comes to the youth. It has helped me overcome cultural barriers that exist in Ghana. In my constituency, I have several youth groups who I need to reach out to. I used to go to them but the issue is that …to think of someone who is the age of your son or nephew 'drilling'[interrogating] you and pointing to petty things that may have gone wrong with my administration.… I just want to be frank with you…you are a human being… you will feel a bit disgraced that a small boy …. I mean most of them can't say it in front of you but there are always bold ones. They could be sponsored by my opponents, and you know when there are big men behind them, then they will do it boldly. So I put my nephew in charge because until recently, there were no research assistants assigned to MPs. He [referring to his nephew] could flow [get along] with them. They tell him more than they would have told me. Later he also travelled abroad but suggested to me to be using Facebook, and I have since liked it. I get vilified and criticised in a very harsh way but at least am not there in my person…"

This observation suggests that in the online domains, certain practices such as the demand for accountability through questioning leaders and offering alternative views on national matters by young adults may be acceptable, but the same may not be bearable in in-person contexts. The politicians seem to be able to save faces online as alternative opinions and criticisms that can potentially undermine their status are offered. This finding further suggests that the culture of alienating the opinions of young adults could be lessening online while equality for all participants and inclusion are being facilitated.

Such an observation appears to be non-existent in the literature focusing on online media and political deliberations in Ghana, but a similar observation has been made in Kuwait (see Dashti et al., 2015). Unlike this current study that finds that politicians are using online platforms (mainly Facebook and Twitter) to seemingly break communication cultures in Ghana however, Dashti and his colleagues' findings relate to women (also regarded as minorities in Kuwait) using the same Facebook and Twitter platforms to eliminate cultural and religious barriers and fear of isolation. What is common between this current study and that of Dashti and his colleagues' is a feature of online platforms that appear to be responsible for breaking entrenched cultural practices in the two societies – and this is the impersonal feature of SNSs.

7.3.1.1 Perceived absence of Spiral of Silence online as a motivating factor among Ghanaian politicians

In explaining their motivations for using SNSs to engage young adults, some of the politicians actively used notions that together come across as an exception to the theoretical underpinnings of Spiral of Silence. Although the politicians were not directly asked about their thoughts on or experiences of Spiral of Silence among young adults as far as their use of SNSs is concerned, some responses were found to be relating to the phenomenon and are therefore note-worthy. As explained in Chapter Four, Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence theory represents an important issue when discussing freedom of speech in a democracy, as it suggests that people who perceive themselves to be in opinion minority are less vocal and less willing to express their opinions in public. If a person feels unable to express his or her ideas in the presence of opinions perceived as a majority, for fear of facing isolation, then the situation can be considered as one that weighs against freedom of speech. Going by the framework of the theory, one would expect that young adults, having been artificially classified as a minority, and who may experience harassment from supporters of opposition political parties and the society (Driscoll, 2017; Amankwaah, 2013; Bob-Milliar, 2014), would be less willing to express their opinions publicly online.

But from the perspectives of the politicians, the choice of using SNSs as platforms for talking politics with the young adults stems from their observations that young adults are able to express themselves better through SNSs than in-person conditions. It appears that the loss of physical presence and eye contact that online platforms offer reduce the young adults' concern about being negatively evaluated within the context of the Ghanaian value system that places emphasis on not questioning the status quo. The following is an excerpt from an interview transcript:

> Hon Anokye: "If you encounter a group physically, they might not tell you the truth because of the way our society is, which I have been talking about a while ago. So if you are a boss and running… let's say a bank here in Ghana, you are best being online with your staff if only you can. Because that is the only way they can tell you stuff that they can't tell you in the face. I had a students' forum in [location withheld] and I was there myself. It was done for my party's students wing members [name of political party mentioned] so I had to be there with other party big shots. I mean, the whole program was dominated by some 2 or 3 guys but I understood why. Why, because we were physically there so the usual. The same group has Facebook forum but the experience on Facebook is by far different because I have hundreds of people expressing themselves on a daily basis… When I leave the chat on my phone and go back in an hour, I am not able to finish reading the conversations that different people have posted…"

7.3.1.2 State online surveillance in the context of Ghana's democracy

The issue of state online surveillance represents one of the triggers of power contestation in cyberspaces. It is a phenomenon that links to the problem of state interference of public spaces online when examined against the liberal democracy and the deliberative values discussed in Chapter One. But there are divergent conclusions in literature on this matter. While some observers consider state surveillance as an invasion of citizens' right to freedom of speech (for example Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2012), other perspectives suggest such activities are necessary for national security (see for example, MacDonald and Hunter, 2013). These debates have therefore led to questions about who and how to control cyberspaces. In this current study, the data indicate that all participants support the government pursuing online surveillance in the interest of national security. The possibility of anonymity which online platforms allow users is generally perceived to be dangerous to national security in the absence of state surveillance programmes.

Notions of the government's constitutional responsibility to protect the nation therefore characterised the responses of the participants irrespective of their different political affiliations. In this sense, there is an extension of the national boundaries of Ghana into digital spaces, which warrants a digital 'arm' of national security. Honourable Manu, whose thoughts reflect those of Honourable Badu, Osei, Ansah, Denu, Seth, Ofori and Anokye, to mention but a few, suggested that online platforms are 'full blown territories', and that government was elected to work with the constitution and laws of the country. This idea indicates a clash between theoretical and practical appropriateness. Although state online surveillance may not fit perfectly in the academic view of liberal and deliberative democracies, it is an important task to keep all users safe in practical terms. The underlying reasoning of this idea, which runs through the participants' responses, is a need to have a 'balanced law' that would be unfriendly to the abuse of government and its security agencies, which would protect society. There is plausibility in this thinking as in both liberal and deliberative democracies, there is a shared principle of protecting the common good of the people by using a constitution, although there is also the principle of freedom of speech (Wolterstorff, 2012). For example, article 162 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana is emphatic on the freedom of the media and all persons who provide content. In article 164, however, there is a provision that allows the government to establish some controls in the media environment in the interest of national security. The 1992 constitution of Ghana, in this case, tasks the president and his team and the parliament (which is constituted by the people's representatives) with this responsibility but not the public. As it is a constitutional duty, failure to act amounts to a breach.

> Hon Manu: 'The president, and by extension, his team of ministers were elected with a constitution. The constitution and all the laws represent the sovereign will of the people of Ghana. So if the constitution says that the government must protect the territorial integrity of the people, it means the people of Ghana have voted for you to protect them in all ways. If a president fails to do so and he is allowed to stay in power, that could be a form of anti-democracy. It means the president and his officers are not going by what the people want. For the past few decades, the internet has been classified as a territory and it is receiving more and more attention of governments in terms of its security. So I don't see why a full blown territory such as the one we have on the super high ways should not be monitored. I believe that if the internet is not monitored for security reasons, then our borders, the seas, streets should also be left opened for anything to pass through."

Analysing the data of several participants also show that online surveillance as a concept is conceived in a 'soft manner'. The participants indicated in different expressions that online surveillance does not mean listening or monitoring what everybody writes or say online. There is preference to look at it in a loose sense of paying attention to users who are perceived to have derailed from what society sees as good. As can be seen in Honourable Osei's extract for example, what the society sees as good is the law made by parliament on behalf of the people of Ghana. Online practices considered to be potentially non-conforming therefore represent efforts to jeopardise the security and wellbeing of society, and are the only ones that are tried using the frames of the law. Indeed, the Electoral Commission of Ghana for example teamed up with a technology organisation known as Penplusbytes to monitor particular buzz words online which were thought to relate to violence or activities that can potentially mar the peace of the 2016 elections (Myjoyonline.com, 2016).

> Hon. Osei: "When you use surveillance as though everybody is being checked, then the practice assumes a negative connotation. It's not a big brother effect to say that I want to make sure that those who abuse the freedom of the internet are brought to the law. Or as a leader, I want to make sure that citizens are doing the right thing because you can't actually control what I post on social media. So it's more to do with identifying just the potential online offenders like a magnet attracts pieces of metals among saw dust. I remember when [mentioning one popular politician's name] story came out. I mean somebody wrote something about him somewhere in 2009. And he came to me and said 'my nephew, what do these people want to say'? And I said this is the internet so there is little you can do if your security is not threatened by their comments. Then he said 'whaaat [with exclamation] I will report to the security agencies to track all of them down'. I said to him that 'you have to also react because if the security people decide to investigate, it is only those who have said things that are of potential threat to your life that will be arrested and sent to the court. So the monitoring aspect is not a big brother or nanny state...we are not in a nanny state".

Regarding the implications of state surveillance on the participation of young adults online, the notion that online surveillance can endanger freedom of speech and assembly (Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2012) was investigated. The data suggest that state online surveillance can potentially repel young adults but only for a short period of time. The perceived misunderstanding of the term 'surveillance' where it is conceived as monitoring everybody may bring about discouragement among young adults in Ghana.

From the responses of Hon Ofori, Denu and Anokye, it can also be noted that the preserved political history of Ghana under military rulers and public distrust of the security agencies can further elicit and compound the state of repel from talking politics. This observation is plausible given the signs of adverse effects of the long-standing partisan and patronage politics recently observed in the Ghanaian society (see Driscoll, 2017). A society in which the politics of patronage and partisanship is becoming an established order may yield fear to express dissent to avoid being a victim of violent attacks. But this pulling out from the expression of opinions online will be short-lived if users learn about the perceived positive uses of online surveillance, such as national security.

> Hon Ofori: "Narratives and memories of the Ghana's years under military rule may make online surveillance have a resemblance of those dark days although this is a democratic dispensation. When I talk to some of the people I get the impression that surveillance is a dreadful thing. They think everybody is being monitored all the time. Based on this feedback I get, the youth in particular may feel that somebody is watching them to report to the police or the BNI [Bureau of National Investigators] as it was in those days. From time past…I will say even now, the security system has [the] issue of public mistrust to deal with. Even if they [the young adults] did not experience what happened in the revolution days because they were either too young or were not born, these are facts that they read about in schools so they definitely know about that part of our history".

To use social media for any purpose can involve evaluating and making a rational decision between being anti-social, resulting from non-use on the one hand, and exposing one's self to potentially become a subject of surveillance and the source of data for commercial activities due to social media uptake (Meikle *et al.*, 2012). Sometimes, desires to express opinions on social media supersede concerns of surveillance and monetisation (Meikle *et al.*, 2012). A sort of this preference was observed in this study as an internal force that can discount potential anti-free speech effects of online surveillance, in the absence of alternative platforms. In this sense, the situation of unavailable platforms for young adults in Ghana to talk politics in a liberal or deliberative manner can drive them in a way that makes them overlook fears of surveillance. Furthermore, the ability of social media to breed communitarian homophily groups (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Camaj et al., 2009; Dahlberg, 2001; Ancu & Cozma, 2009) can also encourage free speech and help exercise the right to an equal political voice as users may feel safe in a group.

Through protests, the group can confront government abuse of surveillance if need be. As undemocratic prosecutions can be viewed as a tool for suppressing dissent, as was the case in the colonial era and the immediate years after independence (Gyampo, 2013; Simensen, 1974), the ability of the young adults to mobilise themselves in demand for justice, as revealed in Hon Badu's extract, is as a way to enforce the constitutional right to equal political voice for all.

> Hon. Badu: "A lot of online users are not aware of internet surveillance. Even when they know, they still want to be heard on such platforms because not everyone will get the chance to speak on radio or TV. The proliferation of social media has served as a big...big opening for them [with emphasis]. The kind of political environment for the youth some 30/50 years ago is not the same as we have now. Let's say that this surveillance is used to prosecute someone in a bias way…you will see that the rest of the young chaps who may be against the action will use the same medium to form groups, and within few minutes, they will be protesting in the streets. From observations across the world and even in Ghana, they are able to mobilise themselves quicker than in the past. So I feel like… the strength in their numbers online will not make it attractive for any government to use surveillance against them in a wrong way."

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7.3.2 Concentration of online media ownership, monetisation of contents and the right to equal political voice

Apart from state online surveillance, the phenomena of ownership concentration of online platforms and monetisation of online contents are two other issues that fuel tensions in online power relations between users, politicians and platform owners. The significance of these issues to democracy is that they can be linked to users' motivations to express political opinions. With regards to the issue of online ownership concentration and the expression of views, the responses of most participants in this study show divergence from some identified notions in existing studies. The main concern of some scholars is that the more concentrated ownership of online platforms become, the more the cyberspaces become politically controlled by their owners and their political affiliates potentially, by dominating news production and dissemination and thereby discouraging and suppressing dissenting opinions (Hobsbawn-Smith, 2015; Meikle *et al*., 2012).

The issue of ownership concentration can therefore be discussed in relation to the right to equal political voice, which is a common constitutional right in both liberal and deliberative democracies, and also embodies the right to equality and inclusion (Fuchs, 2011; 2012). If the ownership concentration phenomenon is found to suppress dissent in this study, then it does not support inclusion, neither does it support the value of equality of opinions. It can also be viewed as inviting state and economic power in the management of cyberspaces by potentially drawing political power and the use of financial strength in the control of the platforms.

The analysed responses in this study however show a trend suggesting that the want of available spaces for the expression of political views may supersede concerns about who owns online platforms among young adults. Hon Seth indicated that 'in an environment where the young adults have been starved of making their ideas known and considered, they are hungry to be part of the democratic discourse'. Hon Badu also shares this view, and in his words:

> Hon Badu: 'Who cares about whether Mr A or Mr B owns 20 media platforms? Because of our culture, the youth have been side-lined for a long time that they would want to utilise anything at their disposal. I don't see too many youth given the chance on radio and TV to speak on politics so the internet is the best girlfriend for them in terms of political discussion'

Evidence from the responses of Hon Ntim, Vidal, Wiredu, Ofori, and Seth, to mention a few, reveal that news from established media organisations continues to be an important part of the 'news mix' consumed by SNSs users. However, the online platforms give users the opportunity to interrogate and engage mainstream news items with divergent views, as Bruns (2011) suggests. The inference here is that mainstream platforms foster unequal political voices, but there is a sort of freedom and space to question the status quo and choose what to believe online.

> Hon Vidal: "Radios, newspapers, TVs …all of these traditional media houses are able to control the flow of news because they determine what number of people to speak on an issue of the day. When it comes to what happens on social media, I don't think they have that power like before. They are limited in a way because people have thousand and one means to also express their views on a particular story that comes out. Just 2 months ago… when the government launched its achievements in the NDC Green Book, some propaganda media houses carried it as it is in the book. But ordinary citizens were able to go on the ground to take pictures of locations where the press said there are projects.

> It came out that there were no projects at a lot of the places. In the past nobody would have known the truth".

Furthermore, the data show that SNSs offer spaces for individuals to build their profiles as credible sources of news which contend with mainstream news organisations. Recall from Chapter Six that such individual libertarian use of SNSs was observed among the young adults interviewed, and can be undervalued from an idealised perspective of deliberation. However, as explained in Chapter One and evidenced in Chapter Six, such SNS usage can generate opportunities to talk politics that feed into formal deliberations due to the fluidity of SNSs. Thus, it can be argued that the possibility of government actors and platform owners working together to influence these online public spaces with their agenda can be somehow diluted potentially. In view of this observation, it can therefore be said that the concentration of ownership phenomenon may not foster exclusion from talking politics online.

> Hon Denu: "It is easy for people to build their profiles online to also offer the general public alternative ideas about a social or political matter. A lot of people respect the views of Ace Ankomah, Occupy Ghana and IMANI. TV3, Metro TV are popular but not every person will believe everything they broadcast as news".

The issue of monetisation of user-generated online contents by platform owners and the willingness to talk politics online is not different. Examining the data critically reveals diverging views from what Fuchs (2012) offers and there is no find of contravention of any of the democratic tenets discussed in section 1.4 of Chapter One. Firstly, the monetisation of user-generated content by online platform owners is considered by most of the interviewees as a legitimate venture in the sense that there is public declaration of objectives of the online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (as they were frequently mentioned in the interviews). These objectives are thought to have been made known to potential and existing users before using the platforms. This suggests the freedom to choose or decline usage of SNSs is served, thereby complying with what is considered as the common good in Ghana. Existing and potential users are given the information needed to make choices to either use the platforms or find alternative ways to express their opinions.

Secondly, and as in the issues of state surveillance and concentration of online platform ownership, the function of SNSs which allows young adults to share their thoughts to the public and politicians were perceived to potentially supersede conceivable concerns regarding monetisation of user-generated contents. The inference is that some kind of value seems to have been placed on the SNSs offerings of speed of sharing and receiving knowledge and perceived convenience of communicating with politicians. Fuchs (2012; 2011) emphasise on inequality in the sharing of value (profit) by most commercial SNS owners. But the value of convenient communication and the opportunity to gain access to politicians for possible conversations, as perceived by these sample Ghanaian politicians appear to have been set equal or even above potential concerns of monetising user-generated contents, given the established nature of cultural barriers that inhibit young adults in Ghana from talking politics. By implication, what constitutes value can differ in different societies and in different democracies. As highlighted in Chapter One, some democracies value public inclusion in the processes of talking politics while others do not. To illustrate these, the responses of Hon Anokye and Seth are exhibited as they represent different aspects of the findings.

> Hon Anokye: "The platform owners created the platform in the first place. They created the opportunity. You should also be looking at what you [referring to users like young people] get out of it. You are able to tell your politicians what you feel about some national matters. You are even able to advertise some small businesses on these platforms. So if these guys are trying to make some money out of it, I don't think they have faulted and I don't think that will affect youth participation [in Ghana] in any way. I don't think they [young adults] even care so far as they can get a platform to throw their feelings at us in that context of politics".

> Hon Seth: "It depends on what premise the platform was established. What was the objective? If the objective is for commerce then it's commerce. It is not as if the owners of Facebook, for example, said to the public that their platform was purely non-commercial, only for us to discover that they are illegally using our data for business. It is stated on their platforms quite clearly. It will be an issue if the way they make money is beyond the confines of the law but they are within. Would their commercial objectives of using user data to generate money affect young people by way of their participation in online discourses? No! [with emphasis]. Facebook has billions of users and it's still growing. Are the users not aware of their commercial objectives? They are aware".

The ultimate goal of political participation (and for that matter talking politics publicly), however, is to influence decisions of government (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This means the ability of SNSs to support the democratic requirement of inclusion and equality, as revealed in section 7.3.2, will further be investigated in the light of whether or not political voices expressed online by young adults are actually influencing government decisions. The importance of this further investigation is in the fact that political voices in Ghana are unequally valued to the detriment of young adults (Gyampo, 2012). A trend observed from the data indicates that there could be a positive revaluation of the young adult's political voices online to the extent that national decisions and policies can potentially be impacted. For Honourable Asare, Seth, Oppong, Nana and Twum, a trend in Ghana whereby national policies are tested on SNSs presents opportunities to young adults to steer government decisions. For example, Honourable Seth indicated that, popularity of SNS use among young adults gives them an urge to dominate policy conversations online, and thereby controlling policy directions.

> Hon Seth: "You become useful when you are engaged in an activity. So in the policy process... the inputs include what youth groups online say... I know policy institutions monitor these platforms because if they want to gauge a policy and see how it is going to fair, they do it on these platforms. And the youth groups have become powerful because they are able to use these gadgets more than any group of the population…and because of the dominance of the youth with these technology… they react to it [draft policies] quicker. Or in our [MPs] case, we want to do something about youth employment…what do people think? So once the youth are the dominant group who are able to use the instrument of mass communication on social media, they certainly benefit from it".

According to Hon Oppong, the rise in the expression of young people's opinions on SNSs 'has had a direct impact on the way government does business', and has given rise to government-sponsored social initiatives such as Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA) and Youth Employment Agency (YEA) to address their needs.

> Hon Oppong: "You will notice that from the time of president Kufuor, we've had to create a specialised ministry taking care of women, gender and children and then also there has been a lot more emphasis on the ministry of youth and sports, and under that ministry alone, there is YES [Youth Entrepreneurial Support], there is GYEEDA [Ghana Youth Employment And Entrepreneurial Development Agency], there is AYE [Alliance Of Young Entrepreneurs]... there is YEA [Youth Employment Agency]. Why so many youth programmes?

> It is precisely because the youth are more and more beginning to assert themselves mainly in the online domains and so there is also the need for policy to be geared towards them and addressing their issues".

The inter-connectedness of activities in cyberspaces and the physical world (Curran & Seaton, 2010; Lessig, 2008) was also evident in the issue of young adults' use of SNSs to drive government policies. The young adults rely on their numbers online to easily 'bond together' (as used by Hon Seth) and mobilise themselves for online advocacy causes which metamorphose into offline street protests to demand action from government and leaders alike. This finding is evident in a couple of responses like Hon Denu's, and it represents a force that emanates from online spaces to unify people with shared political voices with the aim to achieve an important democratic right to protest, which one person may not be able to achieve alone.

> Hon Denu: "In recent times, we've seen the youth mobilising themselves very forcefully…they wield so much power on social media such that mobilising themselves to push agenda in parliament and even cabinet has become easier. In Ghana here, those who use social media a lot are the youth. I won't even go far, just last year, we saw the demonstration of youth power when they are online. One Yvonne Nelson posted her frustration over the poor lighting situation on Facebook I think, and then asked the youth to wake up on the matter. Within just a few days, tens of thousands were discussing on social media at the same time, and before we realised it has become a big street protest and government had to respond quickly by setting up the new power ministry. Some of my colleagues and I thought at the time that government took a panic decision because we already have the ministry of energy so why set up another ministry for almost the same functions?

7.3.3 The use of SNSs and physical violence among young adults

It has been observed that some features of online platforms make users act out and exhibit violent behaviours more than they would have been in real world (Suler, 2004). This obseravtion suggests that in the context of real world talking of politics, for example, people may not behave violently as they do online. But the draft 2010 youth policy of Ghana indicates that violence among young adults occurs in instances of face-to-face talking of politics.

In this section therefore, the focus will be on examining the ability of SNSs to foster the right to equal political voice, with online violence being the focal point of discussion.

Although none of the participants could identify situations in which talking politics online resulted in physical violence in Ghana, all of them indicated that such usage of SNSs could result in physical violence. Again, the interflow of cyberspaces and the physical world (see Curran & Seaton, 2010; Lessig, 2008) is a critical factor as in diverse ways, many of the informants indicated that online communications are not isolated from offline behaviours. The extract of Hon Osei for example, suggests that consumers of a flaming-containing conversation are the agents responsible for extending same conversation offline, which can result in physical violence due to the physical presence of the people involved. This is a possibility worth noting, and which its occurrence would mean that a tool for subverting people's political voices, in the clothing of bullying, is manufactured online and sold offline to carry out an agenda that is non-conforming to the values of both liberal and deliberative democracies. As in the context of voting in which each person of voting age is entitled to one vote, every person is also entitled to express their political voice without any abuse according to the 1992 constitution.

> Hon Osei: "Someone can post a certain distasteful statement and he will get people 'liking' or commenting on the message. He may not continue talking about the same message in physical conversations himself, but some other person or the people he shared the information with online may use that information in physical conversations at home or on campus. That is where the problem can actually start. Because if there are people who oppose that particular misguided online information, and it is now being discussed face-to-face, it can turn into heated arguments and end up in serious physical assault or violence. The person who started it online may not be involved at all when the actual violence starts. He may be sitting in his home while another person finishes the violent act for him".

Politicians are another type of human agents who can act as 'bridges' that link between online spaces and the physical world to bring about physical violence through clientelistic arrangements.

The mechanism by which this may occur, according to some of the informants, is by the use of public power to influence national security operatives to uncover perpetrators of flaming behaviours online, in cases where disguised identities have been used. And as being practiced offline (see Driscoll, 2017) the politicians may then mobilise a group of young adults to carry out physical attacks on the identified persons.

> Hon Anokye: "In this country, anything is possible. Citizens don't trust politicians and politicians too don't trust citizens because people hide behind unknown identities to misbehave. But you see, I don't think it will be difficult for some politicians to call the BNI (Bureau Of National Investigators) that… look, I want you to get me who is behind this image, and that will be done quickly, especially those in power. When politicians are in power they have privileges. They have their youth following them, they can use them to cause violence once the identities of disguised users are exposed. It doesn't happen often in this country because as I said democracy is fast growing in Ghana. I think we are very blessed when it comes to this violence because we don't hear it often but that doesn't mean it doesn't happen and will never happen. We can't also say that using social media can curtail youth violence".

Furthermore, the deliberative requirement of sincerity requires participants to disclose their identities when talking politics. Thus, the anonymity tools on these SNSs reduce their potential to approximate an ideal public sphere. In view of these revelations, it appears that online domains of political talks such as SNSs may not be final stops to disinhibited behaviours. There could be spill-overs of disinhibited behaviours from the online domains to the physical world, which could potentially cause physical violence.

Chapter Eight
Inter-study analysis and discussion

8.0 Introduction

The empirical work of this thesis comprises two strands of studies that explored online practices of talking politics that approximate deliberation and usage motivations of young adults in Ghana on the one hand and politicians on the other hand. Chapters Six and Seven are discussions of these two studies exclusively. The discussions in this chapter synthesize the two studies to offer a comparative analysis and discussion of the various findings. Undertaking this comparative analysis and discussion will shed light on the differences and similarities, if any, in the two sets of results, and that will make clearer the holistic perception of the use of SNSs for the purpose of talking politics in Ghana.

To ensure comparability, both empirical studies were driven by similar aims. These aims are to understand: (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling constitutional rights to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media; and (RQ4) whether and how talking politics online influences decisions of young adults' involvement or exclusion in national elections?

The background of this analysis and discussions is set by the arguments in Chapters One to Four. As this study partly looks at prospects of communicative interactions on SNSs extending the public sphere, an elaborated version of a conceptual public sphere, deliberation and liberal democracy are discussed in Chapter One. This conceptual public sphere, deliberative requirements and liberal democracy, ultimately served as the basis for analysing the Ghanaian online spaces created for talking politics. The deliberative requirements are (i) *exchange and critique of reasoned claims* – referring to communication partners exchanging critique of ideas with basis rather than simply asserted claims; (ii) *reflexivity* – a requirement that demands that communication partners reflect and revise their stance on a given topic of discussion when confronted with a superior alternative; (iii) *ideal role taking* – respecting participants' opinions without explicit abuse; (iv) *autonomy from state and*

economic power - deliberations are centered on public interests rather than being driven by private benefits or administrative power; and (v) *sincerity*:– requiring participants to disclose information such as their identities and interests on a given subject. The rest of the ideals suggest that; (vi) political talks in a public sphere may be individual libertarian or communitarian in form; (vii) there may be alternative forms of public spheres where the public can express their opinions on public issues rather than a single dominant one; (viii) less formal communication styles, such as rhetoric and the expression of hate (which is constructive) or love towards an idea can be featured; and (ix) all participants of deliberations are accorded equal statuses.

Recall from section 1.4 of Chapter One that the forms of democracy share the central ideals of freedom of speech, equal rights, respect for common law and justice. Thus, these deliberative requirements and the features of liberal democracy were integrated and aligned to the appropriate central values of democracy. Freedom of speech and equal right to political voice, as used as the basis of analysis in Chapters Six and Seven, therefore, embody seven deliberative requirements and the features of liberal democracy discussed in Chapter One. The same frames are used for analysis in this chapter.

Chapter Two established that an individual's political participation level is not only determined by her socio-economic status (such as education level, income level, occupation and age) and psychological variables (such as interest, attitude and beliefs), but also depends on the individual's social contexts such as neighbourhood and interpersonal discussions. Interpersonal discussions are likely to expose an individual to a set of different politically relevant information that can potentially be more than what he or she possesses (McClurg, 2003). The prevailing trend in literature on the role of news media in political participation, particularly the uses of news media contents in interpersonal interactions that lead to different forms of political participation, and the unilateral manner in which traditional news media organisations liaise with governments to produce news that shape the public sphere to their interest emerged as some of the issues that configure the experiences of different users as far as political participation is concerned.

Using the conceptual framework of the public sphere and liberal democracy developed in Chapter One, an examination of some of the offline public spheres in Ghana was further undertaken, focusing on how they encourage the involvement or otherwise of young adults in the country's democracy. The result of that work indicates formal and informal talking of politics between young adults of Ghana and political leaders have are subjected to socio-cultural and political practices passed on from generations spanning the days of British colonial rule to the current. These socio-cultural and political practices ensure that the opinions of young adults are some distance away from public opinion in more established public spaces, such as public forums of all types, traditional media, and even the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS), which was created by students to advance their concerns and interests. These practices in Ghana, therefore, make it imperative to understand the motivations of these two user types for adopting SNSs as platforms for talking politics, with issues such as Spiral of Silence, online surveillance, the concentration of online media ownership and monetisation of user-generated contents being some of the underlying themes explored.

8.1 The participation of young adults in Ghana's democracy

In both studies, it was an aim to get first-hand information on the participation contexts of young adults in Ghana regarding public deliberations. From Chapter Six, all the young adults interviewed demonstrated awareness of discrimination against their opinions in offline public forums. The expression of this awareness, therefore, indicates that indeed talking politics offline remains restrictive, and it represents a condition which has no place in the values of the hybrid democracy of Ghana. In support to Gyampo's (2013) observations, this sort of discrimination appears to stem from a societal belief that the older one becomes the wiser his/her opinions. From the data, this stereotypical age-centric belief appears to characterise most of the established public spaces, including the traditional news media spaces and public forums, giving people who are older or are in national leadership positions the edge to dominate these domains.

The analysis also shows that a combined force comprising this discriminative communication culture and legacies of restrictive political contexts in recent history where negative consequences happened to people who expressed views contrary to government actions (see Chapter Three), could still be responsible for a sense of fear and/or uneasiness among the young adults if they were to talk politics with leaders in more established public forums. This decadence in the Ghanaian public spaces designated for talking politics can therefore be said to ruin their potentials of approximating the democratic values discussed in Chapter One and highlighted in this chapter. In particular, the right to political voice which the 1992 constitution of Ghana instructs to be served to all persons of voting age is being undermined. For example, fear to question the status quo adversely impacts the ability of a young adult to exchange and critique an elder's claims. Government retributions may not be actively visible in Ghana presently but the legacies of historical brutalities resulting from expressing dissent can be considered a 'soft tool' in the hands of state actors to control what people say in public realms meant for talking politics.

It is acknowledged that this find and the rest in this study are based on data collected from mostly male participants who are at the higher end of the term young adults (mostly 25-37 years). However, I content that the results of a study involving much younger adults and mostly females will not be different as the culture and political history of Ghana are taught in schools at early ages (10years and beyond) and enforced at all levels of the society (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018). Moreover, as existing studies reveal and evidenced by the data in Chapters Six and Seven, the practice of devaluing the opinions of young adults and political clientelism that can lead to harassing people who express dissenting views linger on in offline contexts (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018; Driscoll, 2017). A truncated extract of Hon Ofori exhibited in section 7.3.1.2 of Chapter Seven serves as useful evidence in support of this issue of generalisation.

> Hon Ofori: "Even if they [young adults] did not experience what happened in the revolution days because they were either too young or were not born, these are facts that they read about in schools so they definitely know about that part of our history"

The observations and inferences made from the study involving the politicians on this theme are not different from the observations made in the study involving the young adults. What can rather be added is a further revelation by the politicians of a broader picture depicting how the values of freedom of speech and equal right to political voice are violated. In Chapter Six, a perception among the interview participants suggesting that Ghana's society is embracing opinions from young adults, by electing them to parliament was highlighted. It appears however that this promotion of young adults is offered with the same restrictions and disregard accorded them outside the corridors of leadership. The opinions of young adults and even middle-aged political leaders in public positions, especially in Ghana's parliament, are still being overridden by the opinions of older colleagues. Given the fact that the 1992 constitution establishes all members of parliament as leaders of the various communities in Ghana with equal powers, it could be said, therefore, that the practice of undermining the opinions of young adults seems to override the dictates of the national constitution which is meant to be supreme.

The data from the interviews with the politicians produced yet another new and interesting revelation. The discrimination against the opinions of young adults in more established public spaces and what looks like uneasiness when they get rare opportunities to engage leaders in in-person contexts may also have latent economic reasons. From the analysis in Chapter Eight, it appears that there is financial dependence on leaders in public offices and older people due to lack of jobs generally among young adults in Ghana. This economic situation makes the expression of dissenting views a pricy venture for the young adults. It is costly in the sense that by expressing dissenting views, a young adult could be trading the sources of their financial support and jobs for freedom of expression.

8.2 Motivations for using online social networking sites

Research question 1 (RQ1) of this study seeks to explore motivation factors that underpin the use of SNSs for talking politics by the sample of young adults and politicians involved in this study. Thus, analysing the data with regards to this theme is imperative to achieving this aim. Although this theme mainly seeks to provide answers to RQ1, pieces of evidence that relate to the other research questions will be briefly highlighted and utilised later in other appropriate sections of the chapter. As seen in Chapters Six and Seven, this theme produced a fairly broad spectrum of reasons why the young adults and politicians use SNSs to engage themselves on public matters. With regards to the study involving the young adults (Chapter Six), awareness of discrimination against their opinions; uneasiness to speak up in the presence of older people (Gyampo, 2013) and the restrictive nature of the more established public spaces (Gyampo, 2014; Gyampo, 2013; Aidoo, 2006; Alhassan, 2005) motivate almost all of them to use SNSs to express their political opinions and to engage public office-holding leaders. From Chapter Seven, most of the politicians in this study also exhibited awareness of opinion discrimination against young adults and their uneasiness to express opinions in person, which motivate their use of SNSs to engage young adults specifically. It needs to be noted though, that young adults are more likely to cite these reasons as they are the victims of the opinion discrimination practices.

As motivation drivers were explored further in both studies, it became evident that breaking cultural barriers is not the only influence on the participants' usage. Other factors, which seem to be missing in extant studies, mediate to influence the use of SNSs in interesting ways. These other drivers of usage motivations, however, fairly vary across the two current studies. In Chapter Six, factors such as perceived editorial freedom on word count; perceived absence of difficult processes and perceived importance that the traditional news media attach to opinions shared online motivate the young adults' use of SNSs. The fact that the sample interviewed are motivated to use SNSs for reasons such as perceived less restrictions on the number of words permitted and perceived easy processes leading to access and publishing of opinions are all indicative of the restrictive nature of the more established news media spaces. These motivating factors also show the ability of SNSs to support freedom of speech and that there is equal opportunity for opinions to be published and considered.

This implies a better prospect for young adults to be a controlling force online, a force that can contend with systemic activities that undermine free speech and the right to equal political voice, such as agenda-setting activities of governments and their associated media organisations. Further, the perception among the young adults regarding the integral role that opinions shared online play in traditional news media's productions shows another interesting revelation. It represents an abandonment of the era of centralism in news production, which also means there is an infusion of democratic values in the processes of making news as young adults now have a greater opportunity to make their voices count.

With regards to the study involving politicians, the other factors that could be motivating Ghana's politicians in public offices to use SNSs as means of engaging young adults include (i) countering opposition propaganda information due to perceived online media's reach (ii) avoiding perceived bureaucratic traditional channels and (iii) appearing attractive to young people. Using SNSs as means to appear attractive to young adults suggests there is awareness among the politicians that SNSs are popular among young adults and could be suitable platforms to engage them on public matters. It could also be an exposition of the politicians' usage intention which is not geared towards a genuine deliberative agenda with young adults. This observation, together with the politicians' use of SNSs as a propaganda repellent machinery, therefore buttress inferences made earlier in this section (8.2) that the politicians are less likely to use SNSs because of the opinion discrimination against young adults.

8.3 Suitability of SNSs as platforms for talking politics with young adults

As used in Chapters Six and Seven, suitability refers to whether SNSs facilitate the talking of politics in deliberative and liberal senses, as discussed in Chapter One. Thus, this section synthesises data from the two strands of studies in this thesis to provide answers to research question 2. Four conceptual frames form the basis of analysis in this section. Two of these frames are common underlying principles that the different forms of democracy share, as discussed in Chapter One. These underlying principles are (i) freedom of speech and (ii) equal right to political voice.

The other two conceptual frames are (i) exchanging ideas and critiquing with reasoned claims; and (ii) reflexivity, which relates to requirements of deliberation, as also discussed in Chapter One.

8.3.1 Freedom of speech

Online platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been identified to eliminate socio-cultural barriers (Dashti et al., 2015; Suler, 2004), fostering freedom of speech and equality of political voices. This present study finds this to be true. Status details of young adults, such as age, in this case, seem to be concealed at the instant of talking politics, and this paves the way for opinions to be shared on public platforms. As an exception to the theory that a person will self-censor his or her opinions when shy (Hayes et al., 2005), most of the young adults consider SNSs such as Facebook as alternative platforms to overcome shyness (uneasiness to express themselves in social situations), which in this case stems from social disapproval of young adults who question the status-quo and offer alternative views to political leaders. Similarly, the politicians also consider the use of SNSs suitable for violating long-standing anti-democratic communication practices in Ghana due to the possibility to tolerate the opinions of young adults that question the status quo.

This observation also links to Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence phenomenon advanced in his theory. Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence theory suggests that people who perceive themselves to be in the minority are less vocal and less willing to express their opinions in public. Going by this logic, one would therefore expect that young adults, who have been artificially classified as the minority population when it comes to opinion valuation, and who are aware of tribal alignments in Ghana politics, would be less willing to express their opinions online. But, as already highlighted, it was clear the politicians felt and believe that as far as public political communications are concerned, young adults can express themselves better through SNSs than in-person contexts, and this is a factor that drives their adoption of SNSs when communicating with them (see Chapter Seven). It appears the young adults interviewed find resistance to the fear of being perceived as social deviants and the threats of violence and isolation through the use of SNSs.

8.3.1.1 State online surveillance and the participation of young adults in Ghana's democracy

This section will discuss three different but intersecting themes. They are intersecting because while online media ownership is becoming more concentrated, operations of these same media platforms are also becoming diversified and extensive, making their owners appear powerful and attractive to politicians for mutual policy cooperation (Meikle & Young, 2012). Moreover, some senior executives of these online content sites double up as politicians, a situation which can facilitate the trading of online user behavioural information with government actors in surveillance activities.

In terms of state surveillance in the context of talking politics online, existing studies highlight concerns that such a government activity defeats the purpose of individual privacy and could result in the erosion of freedom of speech or assembly (example, Abu-Laban et al., 2012). Judged against article 162, clause 4 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana and the public sphere ideals discussed in Chapter One, surveillance represents an activity that seems to pale chances of SNSs becoming extended public spheres. This judgement is because, in theoretical terms, a public sphere should be self-regulatory devoid of government interventions (Dahlberg, 2001). But from the study on the young adults, surveillance is not a deterrent to talking politics online. Instead, the practice is considered a state duty that may have positive implications on the way users express their opinions, as MacDonald and Hunter (2013, p. 124) point out. With the prevalence of verbal abuses online, as revealed in the study, online surveillance is considered a way to potentially reduce such occurrences and possibly attract new users who have otherwise been discouraged by such abuses. This notion is consistent with the 1992 constitution of Ghana as in article 164, the government is bound by a duty to take reasonable actions within the media industry to protect 'public order, public morality and the rights and freedoms of other persons'. Abusing a person online for expressing his or her opinions can be considered a violation of the person's right to free speech, hence the need to institute some sort of preventive actions as sanctioned by the constitution. An interview participant like Sali expressed strong support for security agencies to continue with surveillance activities. According to Sali, online surveillance will help bring decorum on the platforms by helping to control the frequency of online verbal abuses and thereby encourage new users.

By this finding, it can be said that interview participants like Sali negotiate another level of trading-off as the inference here reveals that the informants are putting their security ahead of their liberties. This finding is therefore interesting as it represents an exception to the conventional idea of public spheres discussed in Chapter One.

The acceptance of surveillance activities by the young adults is not strange in the sense of the power theories advanced by Castells (2009, p. 32). The theory suggests that power subjects (young adults in this case) tend to exhibit a certain degree of acceptance and compliance in power relationships (Castells, 2009, p. 32). Relating this particular power relationship theory to the discussion here is not out of context. In theory and practice, state online surveillance is one of the factors that generate issues of power contestations in cyberspaces between the state and users. But in this present study, the acceptance of online surveillance by the young adults is premised on the notion that it will help to deter online verbal abuses during public interactions and potentially attract more users of SNSs.

In addition, the idea that talking politics online is a public activity to contribute towards shaping society further discounts potential adverse effects of state online surveillance on the participation of young adults (see analysis in Chapter Seven). Such informants as Rose, who talks politics online to 'help change some things which are not good in society' may not be able to achieve her aims if her opinions are not in the public domain, and for which she does not seem to be concerned about her opinions being accessible to state security agencies. This finding is essential as online surveillance is usually discussed without clarifying its effects on the different ways in which SNSs are used. Disregarding the various uses of SNSs when discussing surveillance can lead to over generalisation, which can be misleading.

Like the young adults, the politicians expressed support for state online surveillance irrespective of their political ideology differences. In Ghana, differences in political ideologies are partly a result of regional and tribal undertones in the way politics is organised. These differences come to bear on almost all political issues as discussed in Chapter Three.

Rarely do the major political parties (National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party) agree on any issue, and this gives this finding another fascinating dimension in the sense of Ghanaian politics. As a variance to the observations made in the study involving the young adults, however, most of the politicians' thoughts are more skewed toward national security interests. Consistent with article 164 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, notions of government's constitutional responsibility to protect the nation were generally cited by the politicians. Clearly, the country's territory is now defined beyond physical landmarks. Online spaces such as Facebook and Twitter can be considered extensions of the physical society and territories that should be given equal security attention, as is indicative in Hon Manu's extract exhibited in Chapter Seven.

> Hon Manu: 'The president, and by extension, his team of ministers were elected with a constitution. The constitution and all the laws represent the sovereign will of the people of Ghana. So if the constitution says that the government must protect the territorial integrity of the people, it means the people of Ghana have voted for you to protect them in all ways. If a president fails to do so and he is allowed to stay in power, that could be a form of anti-democracy. It means the president and his officers are not going by what the people want. For the past few decades, the internet has been classified as a territory and it is receiving more and more attention of governments in terms of its security. So I don't see why a full blown territory such as the one we have on the super high ways should not be monitored"

To most of the politicians, the absence of state surveillance means danger to the nation due to possibilities of anonymity which online platforms offer to users. In other words, users who undertake online crimes under anonymised identities may be unidentified without state surveillance. The common concern that cuts across the politicians' views is a perception that SNS users tend to share unverified information at a higher speed compared to doing so offline (Meikle et al., 2012). This concern is real as the acts of making and peddling fake news have taken centre stages in recent post-electoral reviews in Ghana and in some Western countries such as the US. This phenomenon has therefore led Facebook for example to implement a policy to unpublish news considered to be false. The inability to secure online spaces through surveillance was therefore generally cited in the interviews as a breach of the constitution of Ghana.

When it comes to the effects of surveillance on talking politics online, the observations from the politicians' perspectives generally come across as an exception to concern in some recent studies (for example, Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2012) that the feeling of being watched can bring about passivity among users. Sometimes, the choice to use social media may result from a rational decision-making process that involves exposing one's self to potentially become a subject of surveillance activities or becoming a supplier of data for commercial activities (Meikle *et al.*, 2012). Under this circumstance, a choice to use social media means the desire to express opinions on social media supersedes concerns of surveillance. In this study, the absence of alternative platforms in Ghana drives internal desires of self-expression and discounts potential anti-free speech effects of online surveillance. In other words, the situation of unavailable platforms for young adults in Ghana to talk politics in a liberal or deliberative manner (The National Youth Policy, 2010) can drive them in a way that makes them overlook fears of surveillance.

Further, the ability of social media to breed communitarian homophily groups (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019; Camaj et al., 2009; Dahlberg, 2001; Ancu & Cozma, 2009) can encourage free speech and help exercise the right to an equal political voice as users may feel safe in a group. This implies that social capital in the form of security would have been provided by the size of the group. With this social security, the group can confront government abuse of surveillance through a democratic tool of protests. As unconstitutional prosecutions can be viewed as a tool for suppressing dissent, as was the case in the colonial era and the immediate years after independence (Gyampo, 2013; Simensen, 1974), the ability of the young adults to mobilise themselves in demand of justice, as revealed in Hon Badu's extract, can be considered a way to enforce the constitutional right to equal political voice for all.

Apart from state online surveillance activities, two other issues contribute to the tension in power relationships online. Research and other academic observations discussed in Chapter Four suggest that monetisation of user-generated online content has become a new business model for owners of online platforms. The content supplied by users, such as all who engage in citizen journalism and other forms of interactions on Facebook for example, has become raw materials for business in the prime interest of platform owners. The online platform owners analyse these user-generated content in order to sell to other commercial organisations the opportunity to undertake targeted advertisement (Meikle et al., 2012, p.

66; Fuchs, 2012; Fuchs, 2011). Fuchs (2011) argues that this kind of online business on SNSs and related online platforms may prevent people from talking politics, and when they do, such conversations cannot be considered participatory.

As an exception to this notion, the data in this study show that the young adults interviewed do not regard monetisation of online platforms as a participation deterrent, so far as they are not directly surcharged. Most of the informants prefer such commercialised platforms that allow engagement with public issues to a situation where there are no such platforms. These commercial activities of online platform owners are seen as win-win situations where in this sense, the users benefit without direct cost to them, while the owners also satisfy their commercial objectives. To the informants, the monetisation of user-generated content is a means of ensuring continuous maintenance and availability of channels where they can engage with public issues.

In accord with this observation, the politicians, on the other hand do not see monetisation of user-generated content discouraging young adults either. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the indications of the data represent exceptions to what Fuchs (2012) suggests. Firstly, the monetisation of user-generated content by online platform owners is considered legitimate in the sense that there is public declaration of the objectives of the online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (as they were frequently mentioned in the interviews). By inference, this means existing and potential users are given the information needed to make choices to either use the monetised platforms or find alternative ways to talk politics.

Secondly, and as in the issue of online surveillance, functions on SNSs which bring about opportunities for young adults to share their thoughts to the public and politicians are perceived to supersede potential concerns regarding monetisation of user-generated content. Some sort of significance is attached to the function of speed of distributing and receiving knowledge on SNSs as well as perceived convenience of communicating with politicians. As discussed in Chapter Seven, Fuchs (2012; 2011) stresses on inequality in the sharing of value (profit) by most commercial SNS owners. But the value derived in the usage of SNSs, as perceived by Ghanaian politicians, appears to have been set equal or even above potential concerns of monetisation of user-generated contents. This is plausible given the entrenched nature of cultural barriers that inhibit young adults of Ghana from the processes of talking politics.

The opportunity to communicate with politicians on SNSs about national matters is therefore a semblance of a media environment that will support freedom of speech, as alternative avenues have been made available to decentralise traditional media platforms that remain tools for bureaucracy in Ghana. From this observation and inferences, it could be said that what constitutes value in this issue seems to differ from one society to another. At the minimum, there could be variances in value expectations among users of SNSs located in different cultures.

The issue of concentration of online platforms ownership and the expression of dissenting political opinions is not different. Most of the participants' narratives are in accord with Bruns' (2011) in the sense that although news stories from established media companies are consumed by various users of SNSs, online platforms give users the opportunity to express opinions which may differ from the opinions of the established news organisations. Additionally, SNSs offer spaces where individuals can build their profiles to analyse issues which can be credible sources of news potentially, and can contend with mainstream news organisations. This study could however not determine whether news and opinionated comments from individual online users are perceived to be more credible than contents from established online news media organisations. In terms of the public sphere and deliberative ideals however, these observations further serve as evidences supporting the notion that SNSs can facilitate equality and inclusion. The platforms are opened to any user who desires to make an impression on public opinion.

8.3.2 Online abuse and the right to equal political voice

Studies, as discussed in Chapter Four, suggest that online platforms engender users to act out more when communicating with others than they would normally do in the physical world (example Suler, 2004). These overt online behaviours sometimes have positive outlooks (such as people going extra miles to show kindness), and are known as benign disinhibitions. Depending on the context however, some of these overt behaviours appear negative (toxic), such as hatred, threats and anger (Suler, 2004) and are viewed as acts that violate the democratic right to equal political voice (Wolterstorff, 2012).

Online disinhibition effects are complex, as there are a number of factors that can cause a user to exhibit negative disinhibited behaviours. Among other factors, persons may show violent (toxic) online behaviours because they feel their identities online cannot be mapped to their real persons - dissociative anonymity; because they cannot see co-participants at the time of communication – invisibility; or because the social statuses of their communication partners are not fully visible in online communications - minimisation of status and authority (Suler, 2004). In some situations, an online user exhibiting violent behaviours may be as a result of one factor. In other situations, it may be an inter-play of two or more factors. This suggests therefore that, under conditions of talking politics in real world, people may not behave violently as they do in online contexts. But as discussed in Chapter Four, the draft 2010 youth policy of Ghana reveals that small-scale violence among young adults occur in instances of face-to-face talking of politics. Using the perspectives of the young adults and politicians as basis, this section focuses on cross examining ways in which talking politics online may, or may not result in physical violence. The findings are then interpreted in the light of the democratic ideals, specifically dwelling on the requirements of 'ideal role taking' as well as participants' inclusion and equality of political voices.

In Chapter Six (the report on the study involving young adults), awareness among all interview participants of potential violence that may occur when they engage other members of society in face-to-face talking of politics (Amankwaah, 2013). Political ideology differences among young adults and the associated clientelistic culture facilitated by some politicians were cited as primary potential causes of violence, as also discussed in Chapter Three. Ken, for example, narrated that he could get paid by physically abusing people of opposing political parties when they talk politics offline. Although all the interview participants also exhibited awareness and experiences of verbal abuses online, there seems to be perceived safety in using SNSs to talk politics. Though Josh, for example, considers online insults to be "more painful than being cut with a blade", most of the respondents (including Josh) feel that using SNSs insulates them or other people from physical violence. In this sense, there appears to be the assumption that contacts with whom political opinions are exchanged do not have the capacity to track their physical locations, although most of them professed to have real names and true images of themselves online (Suler, 2004).

They seem to perceive the online spaces and the physical world as separate entities that do not flow into each other. As has already been done in Chapter Six, Yaw and Isa's extracts encapsulate these observations.

> Isa: "There was one particular radio station that was ransacked... members of a political party went there to destroy their things [equipment] because someone who was there in person made a comment [appears to be negative comments not in favour of the attacking political party]. But on social media for instance, would you break your phone or computer or who's computer are you going to break? Where would you find me to assault? I hope you understand [asking the researcher]? But if it is done in person, people will not take it kindly. You will be assaulted". (Male, 25)

Others', such as Yemo's extract, indicate appreciation of online and the physical world inter-flow but seem to suggest that the physical distance between two online discussants potentially mediate in two ways to prevent physical violence. To these informants, the physical distance could either discourage the offended partner from attempting to reach the other communication partner who used abusive languages, or it may potentially help the offended partner to forget about the incident, abandoning any physical violent motives in the process.

> Yemo: "…I have been using these online platforms for some time now and it hasn't occurred to me that people will be physically violent because you see, my friends [contacts] online are mostly remote. Some are in Tamale, Kumasi and even abroad so how can I go to Tamale just because I am looking for someone who insulted me online. By the time I leave my room and board a car from Accra, my heart would have 'cooled down' [calmed]. I would have forgotten about all those. It is very hard. Physical violence happens on radio discussions and face-to-face scenarios but Facebook and the likes are very difficult. People just insult and others retaliate and that's all. I really don't take those insults to heart at all". (Male, 31)

Other interesting but complicated observations were made from the young adults' extracts, and for discussion, Yaw and Isa's extracts, which are immediately above, will be used as sources of reference. Yemo, who revealed that he uses Facebook with anonymised identity and apparently engages in verbal abuses such as insults (toxic disinhibition), demonstrates Suler's (2004) Dissociative Anonymity theory as a factor of online disinhibition behaviours.

This Dissociative Anonymity theory, as discussed in Chapter Four, has it that when online users are able to anonymise their identities, they tend to feel that they cannot be identified by other users, and that their real person cannot be traced and blamed for anti-social behaviours. Isa on the other hand also revealed that he uses Facebook and Twitter with his real name and image, and engages in online verbal abuse. His truncated extract which is immediately above suggests that some other users with revealed identities may also feel 'safe' online and that their anti-social behaviours cannot be traced to them in person. Judging exclusively from the young adults' perspective, it may seem that this perceived safety whilst online is only felt when they engage themselves. Data from the study on the politicians however suggests that this perceived safety among the young adults may not be restricted to only when they engage themselves, but also when they engage the politicians. This observation is apparent in most responses to questions relating to online surveillance and the participation of young adults in Ghana's deliberative democracy (see Chapter Eight, Section 8.4). Hon Anokye's response typifies this observation when he said that:

> "On my Facebook platform for instance, I personally know a good number of the people who interact with me and I don't think they are bothered about online surveillance. Because, they also know me that I am a senior government officer and as most people think in Ghana, a top government person has access to the security agencies yet they say all kinds of things [suggesting verbal abuses inclusive] on my social media platforms as if I do not exist."

Therefore, using Suler's (2004) Dissociative Anonymity theory alone to explain this observation of perceived safety among the young adults will not be entirely accurate. Suler's (2004) Minimisation of Status and Authority, and Dissociative Anonymity theories are at work here in a supplementary manner. As the extracts suggest, the young adults who use real names and images are able to express their opinions that feature verbal abuses to the politicians probably because in cyberspaces, the known offline status and power of the politicians tend to have less online presence and influence. With the diminishing authority appearance therefore, the young adults possibly perceive the online engagements to be peer-to-peer (Suler, 2004).

The young adults' feeling of safety whilst online and their perceptions that online platforms may prevent physical violence are however divergent to the observations made in the study involving the politicians. Although none of the participants could identify actual situations in which talking politics online resulted in physical violence in Ghana, all of them theoretically linked the culture of talking politics online to physical violence, as discussed in Seven. The first principal variance between the observations made in the study involving the young adults and that of the politicians is the diverse ways in which many of the politicians indicated that online communications are not isolated from offline behaviours (Curran & Seaton, 2010; Lessig, 2008). Talking politics online can therefore be extended into real world contexts. The extract of Hon Osei for example suggests that within an online group, flaming information shared can influence other online communication partners, who may extend the same online discussion to offline contexts with potentially different set of people. This can potentially bring about physical violence due to the physical presence of people who might hold opposing opinions.

> Hon Osei: "Someone can post a certain distasteful statement and he will get people 'liking' or commenting on the message. He may not continue talking about the same message in physical conversations himself, but some other person or the people he shared the information with on the online platform may use that information in physical conversations at home or campus. That is where the problem can actually start. Because if there are people who oppose that particular misguided online information, and it is now being discussed face-to-face, it can turn into heated arguments and end up in serious physical assault or violence. The person who started it online may not be involved at all when the actual violence starts. He may be sitting in his home while another person finishes the violent act for him. Because people can hide their real faces, they are able to do a lot of mischief and surprisingly, they get a lot of unsuspecting people to buy into their ideas".

Politicians could also act as bridges that link between online spaces and the physical world to bring about physical violence. It was found that toxic online behaviours such as verbal abuses and threats could cause physical violence because a political leader may use his office and influence on national security operatives to uncover perpetrators in cases where they have used disguised identities. The politician(s) may then mobilise a group of young people to carry out physical attacks on the identified persons.

There were some divergent thoughts to the linkages between online and the physical world that can bring about physical violence. Honourable Asare, Bonsu, Seth and Twum suggested that information dissemination is fast online but this could cost the society because an online user can consume and distribute potentially violent information to many other users without verifying the truth. According to these participants, this can cause an 'atmosphere' of anger among the affected political party loyalists who may retaliate in the form of physical attacks on the followers of opposing political party. Again, Hon Asare's extract will be highlighted to elaborate this observation:

> Hon Asare: "I think that on the social media, you can get a wider audience so certain political information can reach wider audience. But what I have noticed is that,, assuming that on an online platform, a certain political party… let's take NPP in this case…and then someone write that an NPP person has poured acid on an NDC member. There is the probability that when an NDC man receives this information, he may keep sending to his fellow NDC members without sitting back to query or enquire a little deeper to say that … aaahh this information that I have received, is it true or it is false? So in the case of a die-hard [core] NDC member or an NPP member, they may not reason on the matter to find out the truth of the matter. This can cause anger and cause people to retaliate by attacking each other physically. On the other hand, if we have fair audience who can stimulate his thinking and see that this is not true, or he will take time to look into what he disseminates, we will not be promoting violence. Because information flow is very...very fast and depending on who is digesting it, it can corrupt the minds of the recipient or people around who can even pass the wrong information around to cause physical violence".

Contrary to the views of the young adults, these findings suggest that online spaces designated for talking politics may not be insulated receptacles of people's disinhibited behaviours. Rather, it appears that there could be spill-overs of such behaviours from the online domains of to the physical world, which could potentially cause physical violence.

As far as equal right to political voice in the 1992 constitution of Ghana is concerned, engagement in online abuses is a violation of a democratic requirement. This requirement demands mutual respect for each other's in the face of opinion differences. However, it needs to be stated that for each of the participants in this research project, their story represents their reality. Their realities depict their world of public communication activities constructed within a social and cultural setting. Thus, though the right to equal political voice is clearly violated from a theoretical perspective, the practical experience is that of

safety to the young adults, and that is their real world. Additionally, Facebook and Twitter have tools that allow users to report abusive languages and fake news. Facebook for example have over 7,000 workers globally who scrutinise these reported cases and remove them if they flout 'Facebook's community standards' (The Guardian, 2017).

8.3.3 Transnational flows of information and political cultures as a liberating force to achieve equality of political voices

In the literature analysis of Chapter Four, the possibility and importance of transnational information flows to the young adults of Ghana who use SNSs as channels of engagement with public issues was discussed. The discussion highlights that these young adults could potentially be drawing and infusing political ideas from global perspectives into local political interactions through the use of SNSs. Indeed, the narratives of the young adults in this study generally suggest political information sharing transcends the borders of nations and acts as a force that fortifies the voices of the young adults to gain acceptance and bring about change. The fortification is made possible as differences in the way citizens are governed, their expectations of public officials and public services are identified in their daily interactions online, and not only do they seem to learn from this kind of information, but they also appear to use them as sources of reference that brings about the force needed for change. Josh stated that his contacts abroad take part in everyday talking of politics and that helps to bring into perspective what happens in other societies. Specifically, Josh revealed that his friend in Dubai once helped him to appreciate what he perceives as abnormality of Ghana's inflation rate. Likewise, Duke also indicated how he learns "from some other countries around the world" through his online contacts abroad during everyday interactions, and uses that information to buttress his claims online. Without such an exposure to this important social capital, the young adults may not be open-minded beyond their local experiences and knowledge.

> Josh: "For example I have a friend in Cyprus, he compares the political atmosphere there to that of Ghana. There was a man who commented from Dubai some other day and said...for some years now, there hasn't been any increase [in prices]...but Ghanaians see inflations as normal. 10% inflation in prices is normal but elsewhere it's not normal. So if such a person is commenting, you can imagine what he will say. He will say that so many things are abnormal in Ghana but in Ghana we see it as normal. You will clearly see the differences of those commenting from Ghana and those doing so from abroad especially, those who have stayed outside Ghana for a long time. The atmospheres are not the same. When debating on social media we also take those views as sources of reference and then use it in our arguments. So I think their views are very...very important in our discussions..". (Male, 30)

The ability to show evidence in support of claims when talking politics is critical as far as public sphere and deliberative ideals are concerned. In real life talking contexts, interlocutors may be rhetorical in their claims at some point, but evidence(s) remain imperative, and as in the extract of Josh and Duke, information flows from contacts abroad provide this necessary deliberative element.

Many of the politicians' responses in this study also reveal evidences of their awareness and experiences of external information flows into the Ghanaian political spaces. The use of online links during online interactions with young adults is one way of bringing about such awareness and makes some politicians realise that the young adults are 'taking in things from external sources', to borrow the words of Hon Bonsu. As observed among the young adults, such information is considered consequential on political behaviours. Hon Nana for example talked about how he thinks information flows from abroad via online channels are helping young adults to learn the culture of demanding accountability from leaders 'almost on a momentous basis' in this extract.

> Hon Nana: "…what has changed, I think is our interface with the Western world because our culture is changing. The youth at the peer level are engaging their peers outside the country in other cultures. And so they are seeing that if that child in America can ask his MP or leader these questions, why can't I also ask? It is a natural development of human beings that fundamental questions are asked... that if he can do that then I can also do same but that is mostly driven by online platforms. I mean it's happening so there is such a high level of interaction that our cultural values and systems are all changing on a daily basis… almost on a momentous basis".

By drawing from other societies in the process of learning different political cultures, the young adults of Ghana appear to see themselves as citizens of the world outside their local world, making it easy to learn different political cultures which have shared aspirations. There seems to be an amalgamation of global political cultures with shared goals (see Castells, 2009). Specifically, these findings are important as they expand our understanding of deliberative democracy to a new height. In the physical world, deliberative democracy, as discussed in Chapter One, is normally practiced through the use of formal and static arrangements such as consultative forums. Consultative forums in real world are static because participants are pre-determined and the events are held in confined spaces. Online deliberative democracy of a given country however, can be fluid in the sense that there is no limit on who participates and where to participate from, given that internet supply is uncut and social media sharing tools are enabled.

As pointed out in Chapters Six and Seven, and in line with the working definition of political participation adopted for this study as activities to influence decisions of government (Verba, *et al*.,1995), it is imperative to examine the use of SNSs by the young adults in relation to the feeling of inclusion in governance. Undertaking this examination seeks to achieve two aims: one is to provide answers to research question 3, and the other is to ascertain the potential of the Ghanaian social media spaces in fostering the public sphere and democratic requirement of equality and inclusion. In the study involving a sample of politicians, this investigation delved into whether talking politics online feed into government policies. As already discussed in Chapter Six, most of the young adults feel part of the national deliberative processes using SNSs, and this was apparent in a number of ways. Firstly, expressing their views on national issues to their immediate network of friends online means their involvement in the public opinion formation aspect of governance. This may seem simple but there is more to it. The networked nature of SNSs can potentially create, for the young adults, opportunities to gain the attention of politicians and be heard. It is believed that friends of their friends may see or share their opinions, and that this extended network of friends may have state decision makers within. Theoretically, such dependence on SNSs is possible, as one of the aims of SNSs is to link a network of people together. Practically however, SNSs such as Facebook have built-in tools that enable a user in a network of people to break the flow of information from one network to the other. The objective of an online communicator to have his or her opinions transcend different networks of people may therefore suffer this setback. That

notwithstanding, there is no empirical evidence suggesting that SNSs users actually utilise these tools that potentially block the flow of information from one network of people to another.

Secondly, the opportunities to express political opinions on official websites and social networking sites of state officials give the young adults rare chances to interact with national leaders, which also contribute to their feelings of involvement. Thus, as discussed in the previous section (8.2) in this chapter, talking politics online is perceived to be a quick way to get opinions into mainstream public opinion, and even to the floor of parliament. Finally, 'liking' of posted comments by friends and state officials also signifies to some of the young people interviewed that their opinions are recognised as can be seen in Isha's interview extract.

> Isha: The Akuffo Addos and the Paa Kwesi Nduoms and the rest [referring to some prominent political leaders in Ghana]... I get to speak with them online but it is not possible anywhere else. So to me, what I see is that, on the discussions of social issues and how fast it is in getting these people, I think these online platforms are the best. We have created a national group platform of 'Alliance for Accountable Governance'. On my campus, we have it so even if you are at home, your voice is heard there. Once your comment is critical, they take it. Especially, when you make a comment and 2 or 4 people are liking it, or reply you ...it makes me think that... yes, they have heard it". (Female, 28)

In the study on the politicians' online practices (Chapter Seven), the young adults' feelings of involvement were not only confirmed, but it also revealed in more practical terms, some of the ways in which their opinions feed into national policies. The flow between cyberspaces and the physical world (Curran & Seaton, 2010; Lessig, 2008) was evident in this issue. This inter-flow lends to the young adults a novel opportunity to mobilise themselves to protest, which represents an important democratic way of expressing a political voice to achieve equality of voice in the public realm. The young adults are able to achieve this as they easily appreciate their numbers online, and that seems to make it less difficult for them to string shared opinions together, aiding online mobilising efforts which progress into offline street protests to demand favourable action(s) from government and leaders alike. The protests serve as amplifiers of the individual 'devalued' voices of the young adults to levels that cannot be disregarded by the leaders.

This bonding opportunity online and the resultant communication actions to question the status quo also relates to one of Castells' (2009) theories of power. In power relationships between the empowered (example state officials) and power subjects (example ordinary citizens), 'the empowered, in order to maintain domination, must destroy the relational capacity of the power subjects' (Castells, 2009, p. 32). The capability of the power subjects to mobilise their relational strengths is imperative to their ability to question or resist the status quo. Per the data therefore, SNSs seem to be alternative platforms where the young adults of Ghana may potentially be able to harness some strength in their numbers to communicate their concerns to the powers that be.

Further, a practice of soliciting policy feedback online by public officials also presents opportunities to the young adults to comment and steer policy directions. The popularity of SNS usage among young adults, as some of the politicians such as honourable Asare, Seth, Oppong, Nana and Twum reveal, gives them the leverage to direct government decisions. Such engagements with proposed policies online have produced and continuously to shape government-sponsored social initiatives such as Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA) and Youth Employment Agency (YEA) to address the needs of young adults. It therefore appears that the Ghanaian social media spaces are realms where equality and inclusion of interlocutors can thrive, and the notion of political participation as activities that seek to influence government decisions applies to the Ghanaian cyberspaces.

That noted, it is not clear whether the use of SNSs to express political opinions influences the decisions of young adults to take part in national voting exercises, as discussed in Chapter Five. This is because all the young adults interviewed reported having exercised their voting rights in national elections. It appears from the data analysis that, in the absence of the opportunity to publicly talk politics offline, voting was perhaps the only mode of expressing their political voices. However, the opportunity to engage online makes their choices of national leaders more informed. There is a sort of liberalisation as information needed in their respective voting decision-making seem to be received from wider sources online than in offline contexts alone. In Gizo's extract exhibited in Chapter Six for example, sources such as online contacts home and abroad, perceived independent social commentators, and more established online news media sources from home and abroad, all seem to help in the voter decision-making process.

Without the online platforms, most of the young adults' voting decisions could be narrowly based on trends in family voting decisions and traditional news media outlets which are perceived to be biased.

8.4 Conclusion

Socio-cultural and political practices of discriminating against the opinions of young adults in offline modes of talking politics persist. These practices adversely influence the abilities of the young adults to freely and fully express their political voices in more established offline spaces. Awareness of this culture is a basic denominator underlying SNS usage motivations among the sample of young adults and politicians in this study. The uses of online platforms such as Facebook appear to be eliminating socio-cultural barriers built by age differences. While the young adults, through the use of SNSs, are overcoming social disapproval of questioning the status quo offered by political leaders, the politicians on the other hand are able to tolerate such emerging communication culture when they engage the young adults online. This indicates that the phenomenon of Spiral of Silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) and willingness to self-censor due to shyness (Hayes et al., 2005) appear to be diminished when talking politics online and this represents an essential catalyst to liberate the voices of the young adults held up for so long.

Online social media help to actualise freedom of speech and the right to equal political voices in many other interconnected ways. Perceived editorial freedom on word count; perceived ease of publishing; and perceived importance that the traditional news media attach to opinions shared online also motivate the young adults to use SNSs. These motivating factors further strengthen evidences that there is equal opportunity for opinions to be published online, and for this reason, promotes free speech and plurality of ideas. Indeed the young adults feel involved in the national process of talking politics when SNSs are used. Indications such as the ability to express their opinions to their contacts online; opportunities to talk politics on official websites and social media pages of state officials; and the 'liking' of comments they post by friends and state officials together signify to them that their opinions are being valued.

This feeling of involvement appears to be true from the perspectives of the politicians. But to be able to question the status-quo, the young adults need to harness their numerical strength (Castells, 2009). Using SNSs helps to enforce the democratic right to freely assemble as the young adults are presented with the opportunity to bond as a force, one that helps in online mobilising efforts that result in offline street protests to influence government actions. Further, an emerging practice of soliciting policy feedback online presents to the young adults another opportunity to strengthen their political voices by utilising their numbers online to dominate policy-related talks, helping to control policy formulation in the process. These findings show that there may be a better opportunity for young adults to be controlling forces of the online public spaces to contend with possible controlling activities of governments and their associated established media organisations. Similarly, due to the phenomenon of transnational flows of political information and practices, and the ability of the young adults to produce alternative news, the control of what gets into public realms can be decentralised. Attempts by government and media organisations to shape news agenda, and thereby suppressing other voices, may still be on-going in the virtual domains of Ghana but it may not yield the same results as it would have been offline.

On the other hand, factors such as countering opposition propaganda information due to perceived online media's reach; avoiding perceived bureaucratic traditional channels; and appearing attractive to young voters could be motivating Ghana's politicians in public offices to use SNSs. It seems therefore that both of the two user categories in this study have found alternative spaces online that gives life to the once dead right to free speech and equal voice.

On the issue of state surveillance and talking politics online, the young adults and the politicians are at congruence. Online surveillance is perceived as an imperative to national security, as SNSs are viewed as appendages of the physical world, and therefore requiring equal security attention. Failure on the part of government to secure the virtual spheres of Ghana in accordance with the 1992 constitution of Ghana amounts to failure to carry out a constitutional duty. Potential government retributions against those who express dissent may be unattractive to politicians in power as SNSs present to young adults opportunities to utilise their numbers online to carry out the constitutional right to protest.

Thus, although online surveillance means SNSs are losing their privilege to self-control, it is perceived as (and indeed it is) an important constitutional function that cannot be undertaken by individual users or platform owners alone. Such government intervention is needed to protect the constitutional freedoms of all users in Ghana.

In a similar sense, monetisation of user-generated online content, in the face of restrictive offline spheres of deliberation, is seen as a way of sustaining the availability of the platforms for the expression of political opinions. The opportunity to express one's opinions online may be enough to discount potential concerns of monetisation activities by platform owners. The issue of concentration of online platform ownership and the expression of dissenting political opinions is indifferent. SNSs enable ordinary users to build personal profiles to offer alternatives to the news produced by established online media organisations. Ordinary citizens are therefore equipped in a sense to critique news items from established media organisations, making the control of news in public spaces appear decentralised. This set of findings under the three themes of online surveillance, monetisation of user-generated online content and concentration of online platform ownership indicate a possible low tension in the power relationships online between young adults and politicians.

There are evidences of online verbal abuses during public engagements among the young adults, and also when they engage politicians with or without anonymised identities. Online abuses violate the rights to free speech and equal political voice of victims. Irrespective of this feature online, the young adults consider the platforms safe for use. In theory therefore, there could be violence as a result of users engaging in verbal abuses but in practice, the experiences of the young adults online show otherwise. Frequent use of abusive languages online reduces or diminishes their potential negative effects, which renders them negligible. Further, through available tools users have been democratically empowered to report foul languages to platform managers who then consider their removal in accordance with stipulated standards (The Guardian, 2017).

Finally, SNSs can potentially facilitate the ideal deliberative features of critiquing and exchanging ideas in a reasoned manner as well as reflexivity.

The process of transnational participation enables the young adults interviewed to acquire information with which they professed to buttress their claims during political talks online. Although the study involving the politicians confirms this feature, making it an evidence worth citing, there needs to be further studies that employs content analysis as a method to establish whether information acquired from contacts abroad really feature in the claims of interlocutors. With regards to the feature of reflexivity, talking politics on SNSs and related platforms provides a unique opportunity to the informants by allowing them time to give adequate thoughts to a topic under discussion as discussions can proceed for longer times than in offline contexts. Going through this process of critical mental activity can take minutes, hours or even days and can potentially yield the exchange of reasoned information in a deliberation.

To this end, it appears that with the exception of online verbal abuses and threats, SNSs such as Facebook seem to lend themselves more as public spheres in Ghana than the offline ones and they largely facilitate political deliberations. In view of these observations, some light has now been shed on (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling the constitutional right to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions and implications of research

9.1 Introduction

This thesis makes an innovative and original contribution to the field of political communications involving young adults and political leaders in Ghana, which until now has been an underdeveloped area for research. Recent reports indicate that the use of online social networking sites (SNSs) for political communications is growing in popularity among young adults in Ghana (example, Grauenkaer & Tufte 2018; Gyampo, 2017; Banda, 2010), but no studies are focusing on the underlying motivations for this emerging media culture. This study has highlighted the importance of this subject in the face of heightening global interest in research on the political participation of young adults online. The study's objectives were to understand: (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling the constitutional right to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media; and (RQ4) whether and how talking politics online influences decisions of young adults' involvement or exclusion in national elections?

This project has been productive and thought-provoking. I have always had an interest in understanding the communication issues of young adults in Ghana, especially regarding their involvement in talking politics publicly. This curiosity, therefore, influenced my focus on three goals as I embarked on this journey: (i) to learn more about the issues, perspectives and challenges surrounding the participation of young adults in public political deliberations (ii) to learn more about the intricacies involved in conducting research into the lives of others, and (iii) to chart a path for future development of the subject under investigation. It can be seen from the thesis that these goals have been fulfilled. In addition, an understanding of some of the complexities surrounding the involvement of young adults in Ghana's democracy online and offline has been gained.

The boundaries of the overall thesis are located within the field of political communications, but the thesis draws from multi-disciplinary literature so as to set the research in its historical and contemporary contexts.

Both secondary information and empirical data analysis were generally situated within the social paradigm of political participation, which emphasises that interpersonal discussions also play a critical role in exposing an individual to a set of different politically- relevant information that is likely to be more than what he or she possesses (McClurg, 2003). As this study partly looks at whether or not communicative interactions on SNSs fit in a hybrid democracy of liberal and deliberative values, a robust version of a conceptual public sphere, deliberation and liberal democracy were discussed in Chapter One. This conceptual public sphere, deliberative requirements and liberal democracy ultimately served as the basis for analysing the Ghanaian online spaces created for talking politics. The deliberative requirements are (i) *exchange and critique of reasoned claims* – referring to communication partners exchanging and critiquing ideas with basis rather than asserted claims; (ii) *reflexivity* – a requirement that demands that communication partners reflect and revise their stance on a given topic of discussion when confronted with a superior alternative; (iii) *ideal role taking* – respecting participants' opinions without explicit abuse; (iv) *autonomy from state and economic power* - deliberations are centered on public interests rather than being driven by private benefits or administrative power; and (v) *sincerity*:– requiring participants to disclose information such as their identities and interests on a given subject. The rest of the ideals suggest that; (vi) political talks in a public sphere may be individual libertarian or communitarian in form; (vii) there may be alternative forms of public spheres where the public can express their opinions on public issues rather than a single dominant one; (viii) less formal communication styles, such as rhetoric and the expression of hate (which is constructive) or love towards an idea can be featured; and (ix) all participants of deliberations are accorded equal statuses.

Recall from section 1.4 of Chapter One that the forms of democracy share the central ideals of freedom of speech, equal rights, respect for a common law and justice. Thus, these deliberative requirements and the features of a liberal democracy were integrated and aligned to the appropriate central tenets of democracy. Freedom of speech and equal right to political voice, as used as basis of analysis in Chapters Six and Seven therefore embody seven deliberative requirements and the features of liberal democracy discussed in Chapter One.

These concepts of the public sphere, deliberative framework and liberal democracy were not only useful in the analysis of the empirical data of this study. They were also used in Chapter Three to examine traditional news media culture and other offline spaces (such as public forums) designated for political talks in Ghana and in other contexts. Specifically in Ghana, the outcome of this examination indicate that factors such as age discrimination coupled with the lack of information and spaces for adequate involvement of young adults in processes of talking politics; and political clientelism involving politicians, young adults and some media organisations, continue to inhibit effective participation of young adults, and represent a violation of the young adults' rights to free speech and equal political voice. The young adults' rights to exercise their political voices are further violated as the traditional news media use inconceivable languages, creating unfair access to these traditional public spaces.

Discussing the contributions and limitations of the traditional news media and other offline spaces designated for talking politics provided grounds for the theorisation of social media use in Ghana's deliberative democracy in Chapter Four. Therefore, Chapter Four explored the fits and misfits between social media use and Ghana hybrid democracy with phenomena such as user-generated content, citizen journalism, Spiral of Silence, state online surveillance, the concentration of online media ownership and monetisation of user-generated content being some of the underlying themes. The discussion in this chapter was organised into two main sections. The first section mainly focused on the fits and misfits between SNSs and democracy in different contexts, including Ghana's, where (i) transformations in ways of linking and networking widely dispersed individuals; (ii) technology is enabling members of the public (citizen journalists) and online news media organisations to inter-depend on each other's news production, resulting in a radical change in the way news is produced, consumed and distributed; and (iii) ease of monetization and surveillance, representing complex questions of power relations (in the sense of controlling the online sphere), seem to be dominating in recent debates.

The second section of Chapter Four narrowed the discussion to consider the potential impact of SNSs use in Ghana's democracy. Here, contrasting the bureaucratic and fairly one-directional nature of the offline public spheres in Ghana, the section crystallised the ultimate argument of the chapter by arguing that SNSs and online news media could be offering young adults in Ghana the opportunity to exercise the right to free speech and a political voice by (i) equipping them to jointly produce political media contents, share information of interest, and thereby enabling access to political information and processes; (ii) offering a relatively liberalised media landscape and the opportunity for an individual to belong to multiple online groups at the same time, which could potentially reduce fear to comment on social issues; and (iii) enabling transnational flows of political information and cultures which provide the force and will required to globalise local politics through political benchmarking. The loss of the opportunity to see co-discussants face-to-face may not promote online verbal tolerance, thereby appearing as a tool to violate people's right to a political voice.

But using SNSs can potentially prevent instances of physical violence and therefore achieve tolerance in the long run. These arguments are based on the notions that; online SNSs allow young adults of Ghana to generate their content in a political environment where there is yet to be government retributions linked to online comments; SNSs can potentially offer a user an extensive network of other users home and abroad, making the sharing of political information and cultures transcend national borders; and that online communications lack physical presence of participants; hence, incidences of physical violence are unlikely.

Chapter Five outlined and rationalised the methodological approach to the two empirical studies. Semi-structured interviewing was employed in the two empirical studies. This methodological approach ensured the successful collection of insightful information on the subjects that this study covers, regarding the young adults and politicians' motivations and experiences of using SNSs for talking politics. It was successful as using qualitative methodology ensured that the focus of the research, in accord with the objectives, was beyond statistical measurements to understand the stories and lived experiences of the young adults and politicians in their effort to create spaces for political communications amongst themselves.

9.2 Achievements of the research

In the context of two different but inter-connected spheres of talking politics, this thesis offers insight into SNS usage motivations and experiences of some young adults and politicians in Ghana. It has been successful at revealing ways in which motivations for and experiences of SNSs usage can be both similar as well as different between these two user groups. Ultimately, it has revealed the perceptions held by these two stakeholder groups of the role of SNSs in facilitating the culture of talking politics publicly. Most studies that focus on the engagement of young adults in political processes online only dwell on the perspectives of young adults to articulate the roles of SNSs in their involvement. In so doing, there is just one side of the knowledge that could be obtained, thus, falling short in bringing to light the holistic views on SNS usage in the everyday management of democratic communications.

The exploration of the motivations for and experiences of using SNSs for talking politics is situated in the context of Ghana. The use of SNSs by young adults for talking politics is a frequently researched subject in the political participation body of literature. However, many of the studies have been based on the European and North American contexts (for example Bode, *et al*., 2013; Emmer, Wolling, & Vowe, 2012; Cogburn, & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Bakker, & de Vreese, 2011; Collin, 2008; Kissau & Hunger, 2008). Rarely has this subject been explored within the Ghanaian contexts. By this gap, scholars and observers alike tend to overlook the heterogeneous nature of societies in the different regions of the world when analysing and discussing the subject. This thesis, therefore, adds to our understanding of an area that was previously ignored.

As a whole, the results of the two separate studies discussed in Chapters Six, Seven and the comparative analysis in Chapter Eight together reveal interesting findings that contribute to knowledge about the political communications of young adults online. The chapters show that socio-cultural and political practices of discriminating against the opinions of young adults in offline modes of talking politics persist. These practices adversely influence the abilities of the young adults to freely and fully express their political voices in more established offline spaces. Awareness of this culture is a basic denominator underlying SNS usage motivations among the sample of young adults and politicians in this study. The uses of online platforms such as Facebook appear to be eliminating socio-cultural

barriers built by age differences, and this represents an essential catalyst to liberate the voices of the young adults held up for many years.

Although online platforms and the physical world flow into each other, the online domains could be safe spaces where the society's ability to practice its exclusionist culture against young adults is limited. The young adults, therefore, seem to be able to express their opinions regardless of contrary views and the presence authority figures. They seem not shy about potential negative evaluations from society; they seem unconcerned about being expelled from online groups for expressing contrary opinions. The statuses of authority figures appear to be diminished, and that seems to have created an even playing ground for the young adults and politicians when talking politics. While the young adults, through the use of SNSs, are overcoming social disapproval of questioning the status quo offered by political leaders, the politicians, on the other hand, are able to tolerate and therefore nurture such emerging communication culture when they engage the young adults online. This indicates that the phenomenon of Spiral of Silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) and willingness to self-censor due to shyness (Hayes et al., 2005) appear to be diminished when talking politics online. Spiral of Silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) in particular has received the attention of researchers (example, Porten-Cheé & Eilders, 2015; Dashti, Al-Abdullah, & Johar, 2015; Pew Research Centre, 2014; Liu & Fahmy, 2009). However, the idea of observing the phenomenon amongst Ghana's young adults online in the context of talking politics appears to be non-existent until this study. The same can be said of Willingness to Self-Censor (Hayes et al., 2005).

Regarding the political communications of young adults, online social media help to add a practical dimension to the rights to freedom of speech and equal political voices in other connected ways. Perceived editorial freedom on word count, perceived ease of publishing, and perceived importance that the traditional news media attach to opinions shared online strengthen evidence that there is equal opportunity for opinions to be published online, promoting free speech and plurality of ideas.

Indeed the opportunities created to talk politics online with contacts and public officials build a sense of involvement in national processes of talking politics among the young adults. But for the right to equal political voice to be served, young adults have to utilise their numerical strength to amplify their collective voice.

Using SNSs pays off in this regard as it helps to enforce the democratic and constitutional right to free assembly, which is used by the young adults to generate a force, the type that helps in online mobilising efforts that result in offline street protests to influence government actions. This type of social capital found in their numbers online is used in other interesting ways. It is used to strengthen their political voices to dominate policy-related talks online, helping to control policy directions in the process.

Similarly, due to the phenomenon of transnational flows of political information and practices and the ability of the young adults to produce alternative news, the control of what gets into public realms can be decentralised. Attempts by government and media organisations to shape news agenda and thereby suppressing other voices may still be ongoing in the virtual domains of Ghana, but it may not yield the same results as it would have been offline. On the other hand, the politicians can exercise their constitutional right (as enshrined in article 162, clause 6) to respond to propaganda information using SNSs, thereby avoiding perceived bureaucracies associated with traditional channels. SNSs are tools used to attract young voters. These, therefore, suggest that the user groups in this study have found alternative spaces online that give life to the once dysfunctional right to free speech and equal voice.

One of the uncertainties of the literature on state surveillance and talking politics online has been the influence of surveillance on freedom of speech. This problem is compounded with analysis often made without empirical evidence. The analysis in Chapter Eight (section 8.3.1.2) is therefore a vital contribution to this body of literature. The analysis show that the young adults and the politicians are in congruence. Online surveillance is imperative to national security, as SNSs are viewed as appendages of the physical world and therefore requiring equal security attention. Thus, although online surveillance means SNSs are losing their privilege to self-control, it is perceived as (and indeed it is) an important constitutional function that cannot be undertaken by individual users or platform owners alone. Such a government intervention is needed to protect the freedoms of all users in Ghana. Furthermore, talking politics online is considered an activity already in the public domain, making state surveillances an insignificant concern to users. Studies that focus on online surveillance, therefore, need clarity as to whether the SNS usage being studied is for talking politics publicly or for other purposes. This call is essential because

social media are networked platforms that integrate public with personal communications (Meikle, 2016).

In a similar sense, monetisation of user-generated online content, in the face of restrictive offline spheres of deliberation, is seen as a way to fund and ensure the availability of the platforms for the expression of political opinions. The opportunity to express one's opinions online may be enough to discount potential concerns of monetisation activities by platform owners. The issue of concentration of online platform ownership and the expression of dissenting political opinions is indifferent. SNSs enable ordinary users to build personal profiles to offer alternatives to the news produced by established online media organisations. Ordinary citizens are therefore equipped, in a sense, to critique news items from established media organisations, making the control of news in public spaces appear decentralised. This set of findings under the three themes of online surveillance, monetisation of user-generated online content and concentration of online platform ownership indicate a possible low tension in the power relationships online between young adults and politicians.

There is evidence of online verbal abuses during public engagements among the young adults, and also when they engage politicians with or without anonymised identities. Online abuses violate the rights to free speech and equal political voice of victims. Irrespective of this feature online, the young adults consider the platforms safe for use. In theory, therefore, there could be violence as a result of users engaging in verbal abuses, but in practice, the experiences of the young adults online show otherwise. Frequent use of abusive languages online reduces or diminishes their potential negative effects, which renders them trivial. Further, through available tools, users have been democratically empowered to report foul languages to platform managers, who then consider their removal per stipulated standards (The Guardian, 2017).

Finally, SNSs can potentially facilitate the deliberative features of critiquing and exchanging ideas in a reasoned manner, as well as reflexivity. The process of talking politics on a transnational scale provides the young adults interviewed some information with which they buttress claims.

Although the study involving the politicians confirms this feature, making it a piece of evidence worth citing, there need to be further studies that employ content analysis as a method to establish whether information acquired from contacts abroad really features in the claims of interlocutors. Talking politics on SNSs and related platforms can offer a unique opportunity to reflect on a given discussion topic and responses as discussions can proceed longer than in offline contexts. Going through this process of critical mental activity can take minutes, hours, or even days and can potentially yield the exchange of reasoned information in a deliberation.

Apart from using these two findings as pieces of evidence of reasonable critiquing and reflexivity, they have particular implications on two other major issues. Firstly, they extend our understanding of deliberative democracy. This is because the practice of deliberative democracy in the physical world can be static as participants and locations of deliberations are pre-determined. In online democracy however, there can be minimal or no restrictions on participants as people from across the world can participate. Secondly, these findings have implications on state policies in Ghana in the sense that global perspectives and best standards need to be considered when local projects and programmes are being thought of. Further, public information should be made more accessible online to avoid mistrust between the government and the young adults.

It appears, therefore, that except for online verbal abuses and threats, SNSs such as Facebook seem to lend themselves more as public spheres in Ghana than the offline ones. Given these observations, there is some considerable clarity on (RQ1) what motivates politicians' and young adults' use of SNSs and related online news media for talking politics?; (RQ2) whether these cyber platforms facilitate talking politics in liberal and deliberative senses and how this is possible or not; (RQ3) the experiences of the young adults in terms of fulfilling the constitutional right to be involved in talking public issues as they use such online media.

9. 3 Implications for methodology

This study makes a significant contribution to the body of research on the engagement of young adults in democratic processes online which has generally been silent when it comes to the Ghanaian context. A recent study by Gyampo (2017) gives an indication of how Ghanaian politicians and young adults use SNSs in the Ghanaian political space and for what, but there seems to be no study that looks at why both user groups use such platforms and how the platforms facilitate political talks that can influence policy. The methods used in this study helped to reach the root of the research problem and therefore largely achieved the objectives. The methodology chapter of this thesis (Chapter Five) explicates the methods so as to reveal the processes and experiences behind the research findings. The chapter also sought to engage the reader in an appreciation of how those findings were made.

It is acknowledged that the findings in Chapter Six are based on responses of people at the higher end of young adults (mostly 25-37) and mostly male participants. However, I contend that the results of a study involving much younger adults and mostly females who are politically active will not be different as the culture of respecting elders and the political history of Ghana are taught and imbibed in schools at early ages (11years and beyond). Moreover, as existing studies reveal and evidenced by the data in Chapters Six and Seven, the practice of devaluing the opinions of young adults and the culture of political clientelism which leads to the harassment of people who express dissenting views linger on in offline contexts. A truncated extract of Hon Ofori exhibited in section 7.3 of Chapter Seven can serve as useful evidence on this issue.

> Hon Ofori: "Even if they [young adults] did not experience what happened in the revolution days because they were either too young or were not born, these are facts that they read about in schools so they definitely know about that part of our history"

Although the qualitative perspective has strengths, there are also challenges associated with the approach. An example is the unavoidable investment of self in the research process which has been rewarding but time consuming. For example, and particularly for the politicians, interviews and observations in some of their offices often involved hours of gaining their trust as it involved in-depth conversations.

Secondly, some relevant issues could not be readily ascertained. These issues include the credibility perception of news produced by the more established online news media organisations against that produced by ordinary citizens.

9. 4 Limitations of the research

There are some limitations of this research project. Firstly, this research was unable to get to the roots of the issue regarding credibility differentials (if any) between user-generated online contents and news produced by established media organisations. Although not an objective of the thesis, it is imperative to further understand the power contests and relationships between the two user categories and state actors. Secondly, this research was unable to help understand whether talking politics on SNSs influences the young adults' decisions to get involved or be excluded in national elections. This could be a limitation due to the sample used. As the samples of young adults were purposively chosen for the interviews, they are more politically active than the general population. A larger sample size could have been more beneficial as far as this issue is concerned. Some key questions that future studies may attempt to address in this issue are: (i) does talking politics online by young adults influence their decisions to get involved in national elections?; and (ii) how does talking politics online influence young adults' decisions to be involved in national elections or otherwise?

9.5 Implications for policy on young adults in Ghana

The thesis has demonstrated that both young adults and politicians at the national level seem to have found a relative 'safe space' to engage in political issues with little or no disapproval from society. Furthermore, at the peer level, the young adults interviewed prefer talking politics online to doing so offline to avoid physical confrontations, although politicians might serve to bring about physical violence.

The findings of this thesis therefore point to the following issues as critical: encouraging young adults to take the relative advantage online to engage with the political issues of Ghana; strengthening and developing policies to involve more young adults in national development deliberations in offline contexts; designing educational programmes for young adults that take into account the issue of verbal abuses online as a more significant issue in preventing physical violence; state online surveillance activities should be carried out in the interest of securing Ghana's cyberspaces and where the need arises, a public education programme about its contribution to national safety be rolled out; tightening existing laws to discourage politicians (including harsh punitive measures) from abusing their powers over state security agencies in their bid to infringe on online users' privacy; and traditional news media organisations should devote more attention to their online outlets as a way to be more externally focused in news production and broaden public opinions on national issues.This study has laid the groundwork upon which these policy issues can be founded and further improved.

9.6 Reflections and future research implications

This study was methodologically robust and rigorously devised. It worked well and supported the choice of focusing on two groups of actors in Ghanaian politics. Concerning the design of the research, this study focused on office-holding politicians and young adults in Ghana. Future work can usefully extend the study to look at a comparative analysis of user motivations between young adults in Ghana and those abroad. For the present study, the inclusion of young Ghanaian adults abroad would have made the sample size too large. The desired quality in terms of depth and richness of data produced by the smaller sample would have therefore been lost.

Given the rapid changes in the technological and legal environments, this research could also be developed further by usefully including a longitudinal dimension. A longitudinal study was not possible in this present study due to time elapsing, but a longitudinal dimension would complement the historical approach, potentially adding a distinctive analytical perspective. For example, in a more extensive research project, the same young adults can be interviewed every year for the next ten years or more.

Such repetitive interviews would have consequences for reflexive interviewing techniques. For example, the chance of getting access to interviewees over the entire longitudinal study would mean a greater emphasis on ensuring that the first interview is a positive experience. It would also mean continuous improvement of relations with interviewees.

Finally, other studies can attempt to investigate the credibility perception of news produced by the more established online news media organisations in Ghana against that produced by identifiable ordinary citizens practicing citizen journalism. Such a study would help throw more light on the power relations regarding the control of online public spheres.

Appendix One: Research participants' consent form

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

DIVISION OF COMMUNICATIONS, MEDIA & CULTURE

Research Participant Consent Form

Name of Researcher: Hayford Baah Tawiah

Student Number: 2123308

School: School of Arts & Humanities

Title of Project: The participation of young adults in Ghana's democracy online: An exploratory study

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reasons. ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study ☐

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. ☐

5. I agree that the researcher may keep recorded interview not more than 5 years. ☐

6. I agree that the information supplied should be used for only academic purposes. ☐

7. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

8. Other requests of the participant.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

.....	.....	.....
Name of participant	Date	Signature

.....	.....	.....
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix Two: Topic guide for the young adults

(RQ1) What motivates politicians' and youth's use of online and social network sites (SNSs) for political deliberations?

(RQ2) In what ways do online and SNSs afford political deliberations?

(RQ3) What are their experiences as they use such media for political deliberations?

(RQ4) How do deliberations online and SNSs influence decisions to be involved or excluded in national elections?

Phase 1 - ice-breaking

Talk about:

- What they currently do
- Job/voluntary work related conversations
- Job title
- Role in organisation
- Views on their current role

Phase 2

- Views on Ghana's democracy as far as they can.
- Essentials of a national deliberative environment.
- Views on youth participation in national deliberations
- Seek experiences of participation in public discussions of national issues

- Reasons for using online and social media
- Seek general experiences of using online and social media
- Seek general concerns when using online and social media
- Link between involvement in discussions and participating in voting exercises

- Spiral of silence - pre-message posting considerations
- Determination of majority/minority views online
- Face-to-face discussions vrs online discussions of national issues
- Existence of transnational flows of information and political cultures
- Transnational flows – what individuals make of it
- Transnational flows - influence on participation in local discussions?

Probe any lead that touches on youth and violence

- Face-to-face vrs online discussions
- Final comments

Appendix Three: Politicians' topic guide

Phase 1- Ice-breaking

- Job title
- Role
- Length of time with organisation
- How do you see your role in your professional life

Explore:

Phase 2 – offline contexts

- General views on Ghana's democracy
- Evolution of youth participation in elections and national deliberations
- Essentials of national deliberative environment

Phase 3 – online context

- Current online (ie online news and social media) environment in deliberative democratic terms.
- Experiences of using online and social media
- Motivations for using online and social media to engage the youth
- Essentials of online atmospheres for political deliberations
- Potential reasons for youths' use of online and social media for national deliberations
- Online surveillance in the context of democracy
- Spiral of silence; face-to-face vrs online deliberations
- Online media and transnational flows of information and political cultures
- Building political tolerance
- General view on youth violence

- Youth violence in the context of online deliberative platforms
- Final comments

Appendix Four: Participants' information sheet

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

DIVISION OF COMMUNICATIONS, MEDIA & CULTURE

Research Participant's information sheet

Name of Researcher: Hayford Baah Tawiah

Student Number: 2123308

School: School of Arts & Humanities, University of Stirling - Scotland

Title of Project: The participation of young adults in Ghana's deliberative democracy online: An exploratory study

Purpose of Research: This research is carried out as a partial requirement of the University's Doctor of Philosophy in Media and Communication degree. As such, it is a purely academic research.

Research funding: This research is being partly funded by a bursary received from the School of Arts and Humanities (University of Stirling) and the researchers own funds. The University of Stirling is a registered charity organisation in Scotland with charity number SC011159. This research is therefore not in any way linked to any political organisation whatsoever.

Basis of participation in the research: potential research participants who will be sharing their views and experiences with the researcher are under no obligation to do so. Participation is purely on voluntary basis, and without any form of inducement or reward. Participants are therefore free to withdraw from the interview at any time as they wish without any explanation given to the researcher.

Obligation to answer questions: Participants are not under any obligation to answer questions they do not want to answer.

Recording of the interview: For the purpose of easing the analysis of data, the interviewer will like to record the interviews. However, each participant **MAY** object to the recording if they so wish. Also, in cases where the participant agrees to interview recording, it will be stored on a password-protected drive for not more than five years.

Anonymity: All audio-recorded interviews will be stored with names other than the real names of participants. Also, names that will be used in the final report and subsequent publications of the research will be different from the participants' original names.

Further questions: for purposes of transparency and clarity, research participants are encouraged to ask questions which have not been addressed by this information sheet as far

is this research is concerned. Signing the consent form attached means that the researcher has the full consent of the participant regarding the issues above. Therefore, the consent form **SHOULD** only be signed when participants are fully satisfied with the information given.

Appendix Five: Sample email to politician participants

Dear (inserting his/her name),

Thank you for the gracious reception you gave me on telephone. I thought you will find it helpful if I made things clearer to you via email.

This project is part of my PhD studies at the University of Stirling in Scotland, and I am researching on 'The participation of young adults in Ghana's democracy online'. I understand that you run a very busy schedule but your invaluable insight into this subject cannot be ignored. I would therefore need your assistance by participating in a 45–minute interview session. This interview can be held at any location of your choice and via offline or online means (example skype).

This project is very important because there is no existing study that looks at this subject in the Ghanaian context. The results of this study have implications on the processes of policy formulation in Ghana.

Please find attached a general information sheet about this project and a consent form for your perusal.

Your assistance in this regard will go a long way to help me complete this project successfully.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Hayford Baah Tawiah

(University of Stirling – UK)

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