AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GHANA AND THE U.S.A.

BY

PHYLLIS DAIKIE OSABUTEY

(10443488)

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LEGON SEPTEMBER 2015
DECLARATION

I, Phyllis Daikie Osabutey, hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of an original research conducted by me under the supervision of Dr. Peace Medie, and that no part of it has been submitted elsewhere for any other purposes.

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PHYLLIS DAIKIE OSABUTEY                                  DR. PEACE MEDIE
(STUDENT)                                                  (SUPERVISOR)

Date: ..............................................    Date: ...........................................

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to me for rising above the numerous challenges of life to have completed this work and my Masters programme generally, and to the General Overseer of Empire of Prayer Ministry, Rev. Samuel Okyere Amankwaa for his encouragement, physical and spiritual guidance.
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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAB</td>
<td>Diaspora Affairs Bureau</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>Electoral Commission</td>
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<td>EMB`</td>
<td>Election Management Body</td>
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<td>FBI</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigation</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication Technology</td>
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<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Al Qaeda and Islamic State in the Levant</td>
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<td>ITLOS</td>
<td>International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea</td>
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<td>MFARI</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
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<td>VPN</td>
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ABSTRACT

Social media is a 21st century phenomenon that is aiding communication in many innovative ways for individuals, groups and governments. Social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc. help people to share information via text, pictures and videos across the world. This has been powered by the ubiquity of Internet in the modern world. Social media facilitates easy and cheaper way to communicate; therefore, governments use it in their domestic and international affairs. This study examines the various ways in which governments, particularly the Ghana and U.S. governments use social media to conduct their political affairs. The study looks at the relevance of social media for these governments, how it has impacted public diplomacy, the challenges it poses, and the prospects for future use. The study showed that governments use social media mainly to inform their citizens and foreigners, who constitute their target audience on local and international policies, obtain feedback on such policies, and interact with them on various subjects of political affairs. The study also revealed that social media helps governments to fulfill democratic mandates because its use promotes transparency and accountability, thereby ensuring trust and credibility for governments. However, social media poses a great challenge of political mobilization against government policies both home and abroad, which makes governments vulnerable to internal and external crisis. Its real-time nature and ability to go viral put the governments under pressure to respond quickly to issues at home and also events unfolding around the world. Despite these challenges, social media has many prospects for governments’ communication including listening to the public, ensuring participation in governance, and providing information critical to domestic and international affairs. The study concludes that social media is a permanent phenomenon that is relevant in the political affairs of Ghana and U.S. governments, and will continue to be used in the long term. It also makes recommendations in areas of lessening bureaucratic systems, avoiding government censorships of the Internet and social media, introducing innovations, undertaking periodic assessments and the need for Ghana to learn lessons from the U.S. government’s use of social media.
CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1 Background to the Research

Social media is a platform that allows for the sharing of information, music, videos and photos among people such as family, friends and even strangers. It also involves blogging, by which people who are either experts or not write and post comments on issues that are of interest to them on dedicated webpages. Social media is a tool that has transformed the interaction and communication of individuals throughout the world. Devices used for social media interaction include desktop computers, laptops, and mobile devices like mobile phones and IPads. Some of the main social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Skype.

Social media has many uses for people depending on their interests and objectives. Thus, social media has also become an instrument used for political purposes at the local, national and international levels. Some particular uses of social media in international politics include using it as a platform to mobilize support for or against political decisions, governmental policies and many other political causes. Governments also use social media to promote public diplomacy, which is communicating with a foreign public to try to influence their opinion on matters relating to foreign policy. Individuals including world leaders use social media to comment on political issues on blogs and personal accounts like Facebook and Twitter while political parties and politicians the world over use social media platforms to interact with their supporters, explain their policies and actions, and also raise funds when necessary. Social media is therefore enabling individuals and institutions to influence events in international politics through various platforms. This study, therefore, seeks among other things to interrogate whether the use of social media is seen by governments as important to their communication strategies. That is if
social media has become an indispensable communication tool to governments’ communication with foreign and domestic publics. Additionally, the study will examine the uses of social media in international politics, by Ghana and the United States, the challenges it creates, and access the relevance it holds in the field of international politics.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Social media, to a large extent, has encouraged citizen journalism and has opened up the political space in international affairs for both state and non-state actors to express their opinions on political events taking place in their home countries and elsewhere. It also often enables such actors to escape censorship. However, social media presents some challenges in the affairs of international politics. On one hand, states use social media to communicate their policies to the public, both nationals and non-nationals for various reasons. On the other hand, states in their relations use social media platforms to directly or indirectly state their opinion, criticize or support actions and events involving one or more states, and sometimes incite the citizens of a state against its government. For instance, the Associated Press (AP) reports on how the U.S. had a secret plan to build a social media project aimed at undermining Cuba’s communist regime. For this reason, a “Cuban Twitter,” was created, known as ZunZuneo, which at its peak, drew in more than 40,000 Cubans to share news and exchange opinions. It said documents revealed that the U.S. government wanted to begin with non-controversial content such as soccer news and music among others.³ However,

Later when the network reached a critical mass of subscribers, perhaps hundreds of thousands, operators would introduce political content aimed at inspiring Cubans to organize “smart mobs” – mass gatherings called at a moment’s notice that might trigger a Cuban Spring, or, as one United States Agency for International Development (USAID) document put it, “renegotiate the balance of power between the state and society.”³
There is also the challenge of easy use of social media to organize opposition against government policies and also distort government communication. In spite of the fact that social media helps governments to communicate with the publics, it also imposes some challenges. The research, therefore, seeks to bring to the fore the challenges social media poses in the affairs of states and what relevance it holds for them despite those challenges. The research questions that stem from the statement of the research problem are:

- In what ways do Ghana and the U.S. use social media to communicate their policies to the domestic and foreign public?
- What are the challenges that Ghana and the U.S. encounter in the use of social media to achieve such objectives?
- Do Ghana and the U.S. see social media as important in their affairs?
- How has social media affected public diplomacy?
- How do the Ghana and U.S. governments ensure that the information they put across social media is correctly understood by the public?
- Would social media remain a communication tool for Ghana and the U.S. in the long term?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the main uses of social media in the affairs of Ghana and the U.S.
- To find out the challenges social media pose to Ghana and the U.S. in their communication with domestic and foreign publics?
To ascertain whether public diplomacy will be enhanced or negatively affected by the rise of social media.

To determine the prospects that social media holds for Ghana and the U.S. governments within the international political sphere in spite of its challenges.

To examine whether social media is a temporary or permanent phenomenon in the affairs of Ghana and the U.S.

1.4 Rationale of the study

Social media as a communication platform has gained prominence across the world and is effectively employed by many as a political tool for expression in various forms. As a relatively new field in scholarship, this study seeks to provide an insight into the importance of social media in the field of international politics. The study will fill a gap in existing literature on the subject of social media and international politics, particularly in Ghana. Also, it will serve as a reference material for further research on the subject of social media and international politics.

1.5 Hypothesis

The study at the end will seek to make a conclusion as to whether;

HA: Ghana and the U.S. view social media as indispensable in their affairs.

HO: Ghana and the U.S. view social media as having minimal importance in their affairs

1.6 Scope of the study

The study will focus on how various social media platforms are employed by the Ghana and United States governments to communicate with their own nationals (domestic) and citizens
(foreign) of other countries to achieve political objectives. The US government uses social media extensively due to its Information Communication Technology (ICT) advancement while Ghana is currently making attempts to improve its ICT to enhance communication. The aim of the comparative study therefore is to find out what lessons Ghana can learn from the US to improve its social media use. The study will also look at what challenges are encountered by these two governments as they employ the use of social media, and then make an assessment of the relevance of social media in the affairs of state.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Social media facilitates communication between its users. Hence, this dissertation will be discussed in line with communication theories. The communication theorist, Harold Lasswell, defines the act of communication as “who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?” This explains social media’s relationship with international politics. In this regard, state and non-state actors forming part of the government’s publics within the international political system interact via social media. Lasswell explained the “who” to mean the communicator or the sender of the information, “what” as the message, “channel” as the medium, “whom” as the receiver and the “effect” as the feedback the information generates. Geoff Barton observed that there must be someone or something that communicates, the message refers to the content of what one wants to communicate, while the channel is what carries the message or the medium, referring to a combination of different channels, and added that the question of which channel or medium to use to carry the message is a vitally important one in all communication. According to him, the receiver refers to the audience or readership, which is important to successful communication while effect is important because “We normally communicate because we want
to achieve something.” As he pointed out, effect also refers to feedback, which can be positive or negative.⁶ This framework will help explain how governments choose which social media platforms to use depending on their target audience and the desired objectives. Harold Lasswells’s theory would help understand through interviews with government representatives who handle social media communication how governments in particular decide what information to share with their target audiences through which social media platforms, and what feedback to expect. For instance, how difficult or otherwise it is to select social media platforms, create content for sharing and how they deal with negative feedback that may often not be expected.

The strength of weak ties theory explains how individuals and groups create networks, express their thoughts, and share information with other people. Social media largely employs social networks to function, and this will be explained in the strength of weak ties theory. This theory suggests that people interacting on a network may not necessarily know each other directly as in strong ties (relations) whereby the interaction may be between either direct friends, family members, or other groups of people already known to each other. According to Mark Granovetter, who propounded the theory, interaction in small groups such as the weak ties aggregates to form large-scale patterns.⁷ Relating this to social media, peoples interaction begin with those with whom they share strong ties who may be few but as they begin to recommend friends, products and pages to their friends, the ties expand and grow to be large. For instance on Facebook, people can recommend those in their network such as family members, who constitute their strong ties, to their friends or request members of their network to like a page or product as a way of increasing its followership. He adds that “whatever is to be diffused can reach a larger number of people, and traverse greater social distance when passed through weak ties rather than
strong.” This is the power of communication that social media has, hence, its utilization by categories of persons, groups and institutions to achieve various objectives.

The strength of the theory lies in the fact that weak ties facilitate the flow of information from otherwise distant parts of a network. Thus, governments rely on members of the public visiting and liking their social media pages and often sharing that information with their friends and friends of their friends on other social media platforms. This scenario can be seen in the Facebook feature of ‘friend of friends’. For instance, in the Egyptian revolution of 2011, weak ties established online allowed different oppositional factions to connect over a common goal of ousting President Mubarak, and to translate this into political mobilization. According to Charles Kadushin, “[I]ndividuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends.” He observes that “weak ties” serves as a bridge between concepts that describe relationships and those that describe entire networks. However, he pointed to the fact that what constitutes a weak tie or relationship can be a challenge as to whether “it is the length of time one knows someone else, the frequency of interaction, the subjective “closeness” one feels, whether the alters are defined as relatives, friends, or acquaintances, or any number of a variety of possible indicators including multiplexity.” This argument relates to how governments form their networks of communication and how simple or otherwise it is to create the necessary bridge between the groups of people they target as their audience. The weak ties theory would indicate (through which social media features are used) how political actors such as government institutions rely on weak ties to reach audiences that are critical to their policies and programme implementations. However, its weakness lies in the fact that although it well explains the phenomenon of social media, it is not a theory of international affairs.
1.8 Literature review

Before the advent of social media, traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television were the main medium of information dissemination by governments to the general public. However, governmental institutions now use social media platforms in addition to traditional media sources to disseminate information of various kinds to the public. This review, will, therefore, discuss the literature on social media in terms of its use, public diplomacy, challenges, and prospects. This section will also relate the various arguments therein to the study and indicate the gaps that exist in the literature.

1.8.1 Uses of social media

Social media has become a tool for political mobilization across the world. This is why Ari-Matti Auvinen said the use of social media, particularly for political mobilization with reference to events such as the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008, the M-15 movement with their camps and demonstrations in Spain in 2011, the “Arab Spring” in the Middle East in early 2011, and the “Occupy Wall Street” movement in New York, also in 2011\(^1\)\(^{14}\) are events that greatly exploited social media to establish communication networks and move towards their objectives.\(^{15}\) Social media, thus, have some influence on communication and mobilization for support either by governments, institutions, groups, or individuals.

Writing about the Egyptian revolution of 2011, Madeline Storck noted that social media networks were used efficiently as an organizational tool which began with online networks and moved to offline networks. According to her, “Egyptian activists were able to successfully play off the strengths of the social networking capabilities of Facebook and Twitter by capitalizing on
their “many-to-many” communication capabilities and the speed with which information can be transferred and spread, an inherent characteristic to any digital media.”

She mentioned that a Facebook group dubbed “We Are All Khaled Said” served as an organizational platform that attracted like-minded individuals to connect over a common interest to commemorate Khaled Said, a young blogger, who was brutally beaten and killed after allegedly posting an incriminating video of police officers. The activities of the group online evolved into a formidable opposition against the Egyptian police force and eventually led to the overthrow of the President Mubarak. Thus, “Not only did Facebook provide the organizational infrastructure, but also it provided a crucial platform for potential protesters to network with one another and share their common grievances.” However, this influence cannot be presumed as the general importance of social media because its effectiveness depends on which medium is used and for what purpose. For instance, traditional media, with their television broadcasts, newspapers, and magazines, are in active interaction with social media, following the lead of social media, but aspects of the latter can also be found in the former.

Auvinen contends that social media is ubiquitous and provides diversity and flexibility. Thus, anywhere there is internet connectivity, and provided its use and that of social media is not restricted or prohibited by government, people can use social media platforms to access information around the globe and comment on them as well. There is accessibility to all kinds of media content without relying on a single source while combining the use of text, video, audio, pictures, and animation for maximum effect. Flexibility therefore enables media users on social media to create their own content without much regulation as affects traditional media. For instance, the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook group used the platform to publicize gruesome pictures of Said’s corpse to arouse negative sentiments against the Egyptian police force and
government. Despite the fact that social media provide ease of communication, governments may have other reasons for using it, which the study seeks to find out.

1.8.2 Public Diplomacy

Social media is not limited to individuals or groups, hence, governments also use social media to conduct their affairs such as public diplomacy. “Public diplomacy has been widely seen as the transparent means by which a sovereign country communicates with publics in other countries aimed at informing and influencing audiences overseas for the purpose of promoting the national interest and advancing its foreign policy goals.”

To a large extent, social media play these roles but can also be used to influence audiences at home. Nabil Ayad noted that public diplomacy gained a foothold when institutions and states were able to manage both the content of news and the speed at which news was released. With social media, governments may hardly determine what content the public will consume or the rate at which a counter message to that of government spreads. Therefore, governments may not be able to present one side of an event as truth or put a spin on an event as it used to. This is because almost as soon as the government releases information, social media can go viral with different versions and videos, audio, and images to counteract government’s position. The only effective control might be restrictions on such sites, which are difficult to accomplish in democratic dispensations such as in Ghana and the U.S.

1.8.3 Prospects of social media

The research seeks to find out how governments deal with this problem to ensure that the actual meaning and purpose of their messages are received exactly as they were sent. Social
media may, therefore, have changed the ways in which governments control information, but Ayad believes that this change, whether for better or worse is not going away. It is, therefore, useful to find out what challenges governments encounter in the use of social media and if they would continue to use social media in the long term in spite of those challenges. Social media has made international affairs a less exclusive intergovernmental affair, engaging vast numbers of actors, whose participation is defined by their capacity to respond to events and to accept responsibility for helping to shape them. This is why the internet played a critical role in the 2008 U.S. presidential election, which was characterized by a growing use of social networking applications, including Skype, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr, which became important vehicles for mobilization by political elites. As a result, social media has reduced the impact of public diplomacy in that the former offers many sources of information and feedback without relying on the traditional methods of communication controlled by governments. However, governments also stand to gain from social media by monitoring events in other nations through social media discussions within and outside that country, to form their own positions and formulate foreign policy.

Ayad concludes that social media is undoubtedly a necessary channel for nations to build their brands since they offer interaction and value, and respond to interest and needs. This is achieved through its quick feedback features. Mathew James Kushin and Masahiro Yamamoto also acknowledged the interactive power of social media in their study of college students’ use of social media in the United States 2008 presidential elections for the creation and exchange of media content. They observed that social media played a significant role in the 2008 campaign affecting young voters’ cognition and behaviours, and through social media, college students’ gathered information and engaged in political interaction with others, which they utilized to
make their decisions. They further observe that the growth of online political behavior has been partly due to the recent emergence of social media. However, governments cannot remain unresponsive to this trend, hence, they also use social media for political activities.

Social media allow users to also interact with others through online expression such as posting political commentaries on blogs and social networking sites, and sharing multimedia commentary.\textsuperscript{25} Also worth noting is the consideration of social media as a democratizing medium because it can increase information access and allow citizens to voice and exchange their opinions. This, therefore, affords democratic governments the opportunity to encourage citizens’ participation through the expression of thought through the same medium. Particularly, social media enable governments to reach out to young people such as college students who rely less on traditional media for information but more on political information posted by family members, friends, and acquaintances on social media platforms. This formed an important political information source for young adults although attention to social media for campaign information was not significantly associated with the individual’s effort to affect the political process and the relevance of issues at a given moment.\textsuperscript{26}

Kushin and Yamamoto contend that although consumption of political information on social media may help cultivate the perception of increased engagement with political systems, certain types of content may inhibit this capacity. For example, political content with strong partisan or cynical messages from peers may act to offset its potentially beneficial effects on political self-efficacy.\textsuperscript{27} Given the exponential expansion of social media, Ayad states that governments and diplomats must resort to an effective and proactive use of social media. It will, therefore, be worth finding out how much premium governments place on social media given its perceived importance to public diplomacy and international affairs.
1.8.4 Challenges of social media

Social media has opened up the public space for communication but also poses many challenges for its users, individuals and governments alike. Mathew Wallin observes that engagement through the internet and social media is best when used as a component of real-world public diplomacy, and so explored the challenges that the use of the internet and social media pose for U.S. public diplomacy.28 “Many may mistake the use of social media as a universally effective tool because it appears comparatively cheap, relatively fast, and it is currently experiencing a certain aura of mysticism around its use and potential”29, but forget that much of the world is not as advanced as the United States or other connected regions.

This study aims to bring to the fore the value that Ghana and the U.S. place on social media in terms of cost and speed, and what lessons each can learn from the other’s use of social media. To use social media effectively, a government must regularly engage and converse with its audiences, making it important to find out how well governments do this and the challenges they encounter in their efforts to do so. Wallin believes that making information available online does not necessarily influence people to do something with that information. As such, there is a challenge of ensuring that the information is accessed by the target audience, and whether the information is actually used to achieve the goal of the communication.

There is also a challenge of keeping up with the numbers as to how many of government’s followers on social media constitute its nationals or foreign nationals that would indicate whether the message is reaching the right target audience.

Another challenge to governments’ use of social media is how to make information less formal and bureaucratic or more personal to the public in a manner that will be of interest to them. For instance, “when employing social media, the U.S Department of State is faced with a
seemingly stark choice between safeguards ensuring message accuracy, and allowing its employees the freedom to engage audiences conversationally in a manner that humanizes their efforts.” Also, governments cannot resort to the use of unusual or sensational content that often goes viral like other users such as terrorist organizations or individuals will do. Thus, governments require a lot of effort in creating content that will be acceptable to its target audience. Wallin concludes that social media is a tool most effectively employed by the public and individuals because it enables them to speak through a popular medium at the same level as governments. Social media therefore, naturally diffuses power away from state run institutions. He believes that social media does have a role in public diplomacy, although the use of internet and social media should not be used as a primary method of communication but should be used as components of an integrated strategy.

Miles Kahler, observes that information technologies could produce new forms of warfare that will not be waged solely by states, but a warfare that centers on vulnerabilities created by deeper integration of information technologies such as social media into national societies. Thus, this situation is likely to create a different international order according to him. In his words, “Such capabilities are usually portrayed as threatening the most extreme leveling, in which individuals or groups, armed with readily available hardware and skills, could seriously weaken the most technologically sophisticated societies.” He attributes this challenge to the rapidly falling cost of most information technology, thus in such a vision of the future of warfare, “international conflict is no longer waged between coherent national states wielding conventional, if transformed, military instruments” and instead, the boundaries of states have been compromised by information networks, and the traditional hierarchy of force between great
powers and others in the system has been undermined by the widespread availability of the new technologies.\textsuperscript{33}

Madeline Storck also talks about how social media poses threat to governments, particularly individuals and groups harnessing the power of social media to oust governments in the popular Arab Spring. She said social media was used to organize and facilitate the political protests that occurred in Cairo’s Tahir Square in Egypt from the 25th January, 2011 attended by thousands of protesters, and to 11th February, 2011 when President Hosni Mubarak stepped down from power.\textsuperscript{34} This also brings to the fore how governments deal with these challenges likely to be posed by the use of social media.

Much of what happens in political affairs is diplomacy, and communication is essential to diplomacy. Communication is so crucial to diplomatic activity that, over history, virtually any advance in communication technology has affected the practice of diplomacy.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, the ubiquity of information, its digital sharing across platforms, ease of storage, the possibility of communicating at very low if not virtually no-cost with wide audiences across borders are redesigning the scope and patterns of social interactions, as well as of political processes, Christina Archetti notes.\textsuperscript{36} This study, therefore, aims to find out how this change has affected government communication with the public since the advent of social media. Over forty years later, new communication technologies like the internet, mobile phones, and more recently social media applications, especially social networking platforms like twitter or Facebook, are regarded by many as drivers of revolutionary changes in our societies.\textsuperscript{37} This, she says, has made a significant impact on the practice of diplomacy. Such a change occurs in the time which diplomats have to react and deliver their analysis to their respective governments. The speed of new technologies are such that if the diplomat delays, internet and social media platforms could
go ahead with vital information that may also be distorted and present challenges to the diplomat and his/her government. With the introduction of a new technology, diplomats and embassies for instance have to adapt their behaviour to the new order. This might require them to pursue new strategies such as social media than, for example, merely issuing press releases in order to reach out to the local national public. This process of adaptation presents both constraints and elements of both innovation and flexibility. As a result, embassies and diplomats that have difficulty such as financial constraints in the satisfactory use of mainstream media can make use of complementary sources such as social media platforms. Also, social media platforms are universally available for free, but once such networks are opened, it becomes necessary to keep them functional. Thus, searching for appropriate material and producing postings frequent enough to capture the interest of the network of friends of followers requires time and effort, possibly the attention of a full time member of the staff. This brings in the need to interrogate whether the issue of cost is a factor in governments use of social media in official government business.

Netpolitik is a new style of diplomacy that seeks to exploit the powerful capabilities of the internet to shape politics, culture, values, and personal identity. It covers how the internet is changing the powers of the nation-state, the conduct of international relations, and the very definitions of national security and how the internet and other digital technologies are changing the conduct of world affairs. David Bollier said electronic networks like social media are changing the architecture of power and culture such that almost all countries including even traditionally closed countries like China, Singapore, and Islamic fundamentalist nations, who apply some restrictions. He notes that these alternative communication sources often are speedier and more reliable than conventional channels of communications and significantly
beyond the direct control of governments. This makes it important to find out the reasons why
governments themselves have taken to the use of social media. Generally, the article seems to
focus on the fact that there is an overflow of information with the influx of news and information
sources. This forces diplomats and governments to respond in extra quick time than before to
events as they happen and are often reported by citizen journalists via social media as well as
traditional media. However, this proliferation poses the challenge of having the capability to sift
through the large pool of information to determine what is worth responding to or taking
seriously. Bollier concludes that the internet and other information technologies are no longer a
peripheral force in the conduct of world affairs but a powerful engine for change. The internet
and social media for that matter has fostered some change that seem to have affected
governments’ communication with their local and foreign publics as well as other governments,
and the relevance of social media to government affairs is what this study seek to bring out.

1.8.5 Gaps in literature

From the above review, it can be seen that social media is a relatively new field that has
not been explored in all its aspects. Most of the reviewed literature focuses on the general use of
internet for the conduct of international politics or public diplomacy in particular. Those that
focus on social media explore the use of social media in public diplomacy alone and not in
relation to the domestic publics. The literature talks extensively about the challenges of social
media but is silent on how governments in particular are tackling those challenges. Although
most of the literature talks about the changes the internet and social media has induced, they do
not say what its future in the field of international politics will be. It is this gap in the literature
that the study seeks to fill by also looking at whether or not social media will be a temporary or permanent phenomenon of government communication strategy in the long term.

1.9 Research Methodology and Sources of Data

The study used the qualitative approach in its investigations. This approach allowed primary data collection through interview and data collection from secondary sources such as books, journal and web articles. To obtain primary data, the Director, ICT of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana who has responsibility for managing social media activities of the ministry was interviewed. The study also relied much on the use of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to source information to complement the primary data.

1.10 Operationalization of concepts

The key concepts that will be used in the study are defined as follows:

Social media

Is a social networking platforms that allow interaction between people on the internet. It is a two-way communication channel that enables feedback.

Traditional media

Conventional news and information channels: radio, television, newspapers and magazines.

International politics

This is the conduct of foreign affairs between nations or the political relationship between countries.
Public diplomacy

This is communication with foreign publics for the purpose of achieving a foreign policy objective.

1.11 Limitations of the Study

The researcher sought to obtain primary data from the U.S. Embassy in Ghana to balance the interview from the Ghana side. However, all the attempts to get response to her questions even after arrangements for interview had been made and later questionnaire sent to the relevant officer did not yield the desired result. This inability to obtain the needed information caused considerable delay and the researcher had to abandon the quest to obtain primary data from the U.S. Embassy, and to solely rely on secondary data on the U.S. Also, the research was limited to the Ghana’s MFARI due to the limited time period of the study and because it is the main ministry that conducts foreign affairs on behalf of government.

1.12 Arrangement of Chapters

The dissertation is presented in four main chapters. Chapter one constitutes the research design. Chapter two gives an overview of social media, and the general trend of social media usage in Ghana and the U.S. Chapter three covers a critical analysis of the uses of social media by the Ghana and U.S. governments, the challenges it creates for them, the relevance of social media in the affairs of state, and the prospects thereof. The last chapter presents the summary of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations.
Endnotes


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CHAPTER TWO

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA

2.0 Introduction

The social media evolution is one that is making waves throughout the world as individuals, groups and governments use one or more social media platforms to achieve their desired objectives. The interactive ability of social media makes it a key communication tool or medium for both formal and informal correspondence for people of all backgrounds. These social media sites have attracted millions of users around the world for many different purposes, making it a part of their lives. It is therefore important to trace the origin of this evolution and to look at its various components as it is being used today.

2.1 Definition

Many definitions focus on the interactive nature of social media while others emphasize its networking capabilities. Social media is defined as media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible publishing techniques online. As such, they are powerful communications tools that have a significant impact on organizational and professional reputations.1 This has made social media sites and organizations such as government institutions that use social media to adopt rules and regulations that guide the use of social media platforms. The aim is also to avoid abuse of such sites and the people who patronize those platforms. Social media is also a web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, communicate with a list of other users with whom they share a connection, view and traverse their list of connections and those made
by others within the system. These social network sites therefore allow individuals to meet strangers, in addition to enabling users to articulate and make visible their social networks. As a result, most sites support the maintenance of preexisting social networks, others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Some sites cater for diverse audiences while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing. Furthermore, social media sites are characterized by the inherent functionality that facilitates the sharing of information between users within a defined network in a manner that allows for the initiation of conversation by either party, a key differentiator from established broadcast channels. This allows for generating feedback easily to and from content creators to users. The social media networks include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, and LinkedIn.

2.2 An Overview of Social Media Evolution

Social media has evolved over time with various electronic and internet-based inventions such as the CompuServe, first email, Bulletin Board System (BBS), Usenet, Prodigy online service, America Online (AOL), World Wide Web, and Tripod among others. These inventions and subsequent improvements gradually led to what is today called social media. CompuServe was the first major commercial internet service provider for the public in the United States, launched in 1969. At the time, it used a technology known as dial-up. This was followed by the delivery of the first email in 1971, which is still used today. Now, Facebook, Twitter and other sites are more popular and give users that instant connection that characterizes the social media
of our times.\textsuperscript{6} In 1978 the BBS was invented to inform friends of meetings, make announcements, and share information through postings. This marked the beginning of a small virtual community. Usenet was an early bulletin board introduced in 1979 and connected Duke University and the University of North Carolina in the United States of America. Subsequently in 1984, the Prodigy online service was introduced, which later grew to become the second-largest online service provider in 1990, with 465,000 subscribers compared with CompuServe's 600,000. In 1985, America Online (AOL) was founded and it became one of the most popular early providers of internet connections.\textsuperscript{7} Tripod was opened in 1992 as a community online for college students and young adults and the European Organization for Nuclear Research in Switzerland, launched the World Wide Web (WWW) technology in 1993. Following this, students at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (NCSA) displayed the first graphical browser, Mosaic, and Web pages as we know them today were established with more than 200 Web servers online.\textsuperscript{8} In 1994, Prodigy pioneered sales of \textit{dial-up} connections to the World Wide Web and hosting services for Web publishers. Also in 1994, Beverly Hills Internet (BHI) started Geocities, which allowed users to create their own websites and Yahoo opened as a major internet search engine and index. As a result, there were more than 1,500 Web servers online in 1994 and people were referring to the internet as the Information Superhighway.\textsuperscript{9}

In 1997, a very popular social media medium which is blogging was started and in the same year AOL instant message was introduced, allowing people to chat online.\textsuperscript{10} There was also the introduction of SixDegrees.com, which allowed users to create profiles and list friends. Google opened as a major internet search engine and index in 1998, and in 1999 the first online social network to achieve prominence, Friends Reunited, was founded in Great Britain to
relocate past school pals. At the turn of the millennium in 2000, the dot.com domain was introduced in the world of business and commerce.\(^\text{11}\)

From the year 2001 when Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia and world's largest wiki, was started up until today, there have been various inventions in terms of social media platforms such as Friendster, a social networking website, which was opened to the public in the U.S. in 2002. MySpace, another social networking website was launched in 2003, LinkedIn was started as a business-oriented social networking site for professionals. In 2004, another social networking website, Facebook was started for students at Harvard College. Podcasting began on the internet and the Flickr image hosting website was opened.\(^\text{12}\) *Blog Early, Blog Ofien*, (BEBO) was started as another social networking website in 2005 while YouTube began storing and retrieving videos in the same year. In 2006, one of the most popular social media sites today, Twitter, was launched as a social networking and microblogging site, enabling members to send and receive 140-character messages called tweets.\(^\text{13}\) In 2010, Google launched Buzz, a social networking site integrated with the company's Gmail to compete with Facebook and Twitter.

In view of these developments, by 2011, social media was accessible from virtually anywhere and had become an integral part of people’s daily lives with more than 550 million people on Facebook, 65 million tweets sent through Twitter each day, and 2 billion video views every day on YouTube while LinkedIn had 90 million professional users.\(^\text{14}\) Also, social media commerce was on the rise along with mobile social media via smartphones and tablet computers, and Apple introduced the Ping social network for music and integrated it with iTunes.\(^\text{15}\) By 2012, ever more people were connecting to the internet for longer periods of time; some two billion people around the world used the internet and social media. People also connected to the internet via handheld music players, game consoles, internet-enabled televisions and e-readers.\(^\text{16}\) More
than half of adults aged of 25-34 used social media at the office, a third of young adults aged 18-24 used social media in the bathroom while the above age-groups all used social networks to stay connected with acquaintances, be informed and amused. Furthermore, advertisers looked to social "likes" to enhance brand visibility. As of 2013, YouTube topped one billion monthly users with four million views per day, and launched paid channels to provide content creators with a means of earning revenue. LinkedIn had 225 million users, MySpace had 25 million users, and Pinterest had 48.7 million users, while WordPress hosted 74 million blogs among others. Additionally, an Australian survey found that 34 percent of social network users logged on at work, 13 percent at school, and 18 percent in the car, while 44 percent used social networks in bed, 7 percent in the bathroom, and 6 percent in the toilet. It is worth noting that even astronauts aboard the International Space Station regularly tweeted live from space to a global audience. Some of the popular social media sites are Facebook and Twitter, which also happen to be the main platforms used by the Ghana and U.S. governments are discussed below.
Figure 1.1 An illustration of the various social media sites. Image via Shutterstock

Source: Designed by KurosDesign.com at CendrineMarrouat.com 2012°
2.2.1 Facebook

Facebook was established as a social network for only students of Harvard in 2004 but then it launched a version for high school students in 2005 and was later extended to other schools, businesses and by 2006 came to be used by everyone above the age of 13. Facebook became the most popular social networking site worldwide by 2008, surpassing MySpace and in 2009 had more than 200 million users, and above 400 million users in 2010. The social networking activities that take place on Facebook are creating individual or group profiles, uploading and sharing of pictures and videos, messaging, chatting, posting comments, commenting on other’s posts, following a group, liking a page, watching videos created by other internet users and sharing a link to articles and reading them. A study by GlobalWebIndex for the second quarter of 2013 indicated that Facebook had nearly 50% of all the world’s internet users as active users, set to increase as regions and countries in the developing world including Africa, Asia, and South America get connected to the web. It added that Facebook dominated social media engagement with 62% of all its account owners being active. The study also revealed that uploading photos was the most popular activity on Facebook from the desktop computer to the smartphone and tablet. Usually, users have a few different methods of communicating with one another such as private messaging or writing on another user’s wall. Wall posts are visible to that user’s friends, but usually not to the general public and often users can easily change their privacy settings to allow different users to see different parts of their profile, based on any existing relationships. There are basic privacy settings including “only friends”, “friends of friends”, and “everyone” that users can choose from.
2.2.2 Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking and micro blogging service that enables users to send and read short 140-character text messages, called "tweets". A tweet is any message posted to Twitter and answers the question “what are you doing” or “what is happening”, directed to one’s friends and followers. Registered users can read and post tweets through the website interface, Short Message Service (SMS), or mobile device applications, but unregistered users can only read them. Tweets are publicly visible by default, but senders can restrict message delivery to just their followers. The first tweet on the site, ‘just setting up my twttr’ was made by Jack Dorsey, the creator of Twitter, on 21 March 2006, and now “even the most basic mobile phone can be used with Twitter, the technology is potentially accessible even in impoverished countries.” The platform has enabled ordinary people to produce news and consume news, especially ‘breaking news’ because anyone with internet access can instantly see a tweet and respond to it. An example is the site’s role in being the first to report on the Mumbai bomb blasts in 2008 and the downed US Airways flight in 2009. Thus, news in these cases is disseminated nearly instantaneously by citizen journalists through Twitter, and also tweets often include linked photographic documentation. As at 2013, Twitter had 500 million registered users, with more than 200 million active and counting.
2.3 Ghana and Social Media

Generally, internet and social media use in Africa is growing with the majority accessing social media via mobile phones due to the decreasing cost of smartphones. In Ghana, available statistics indicate that there were 3,568,757 internet users on June 30, 2012, representing 14.1% of the population, per IWS and as at December 31, 2012, there were 1,630,420 Facebook subscribers representing a 6.4% penetration rate. Thus, Ghana shows quite a high engagement
in social media, content generation on Wikipedia and video sharing, and this builds atop its leading position in mobile broadband penetration on the continent, relieving barriers to higher bandwidth interaction. The social media platforms used mostly in Ghana are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogging, which in recent years has become very popular in the country. In 2008, Kajsa Hallberg Adu, a Swedish national created Blogging Ghana (BlogGh) as an organization of bloggers and social media enthusiasts. The group has become a major platform for boosting social media activities in Ghana like hosting events that inform participants about the benefits of online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, Blogs and influencing the power of social media for positive social change, good governance, accountability, and education. In 2012, prior to the national and parliamentary elections, the group launched Ghana Decides as a non-partisan project that used social media tools to foster a better-informed electorate for free, fair and safe 2012 Elections, and extensively engaged social media users on issues about Ghana while encouraging societal debate by bringing various groups and their stories online via Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

The point is that social media has a presence in the country and both individuals, groups and organizations are using social media in different ways to achieve their desired objectives. Some media watchers observed that Ghana is a good case of efficient use of social media in her political dispensation, referring to the manner in which all political parties utilized social media sites particularly Facebook and Twitter in creative ways to campaign. Many businesses have taken to social media to advertise their products and receive ratings and feedback from their customers while some government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) also maintain some social media presence to inform and interact with constituents. The President also has official social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter through which he interacts with citizens.
Recognizing the potential and usefulness of social media, various public officials have called for its effective utilization in Ghana. For instance, the Minister of Information and Media Relations, Mr. Mahama Ayariga, has called on the citizenry to build their capacities in the use of social media, because it is a good platform for building interactions for development. For him, when people pay attention and pick up the requisite skills and knowledge that comes with social media in the dissemination of information, it helps a country not only to thrive in democracy but in central and economic development.\textsuperscript{32} The Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, Professor Ernest Aryeetey, has also urged universities to move along with modern technologies to exploit the varied social media tools to stimulate research work and promote library search. He observed that “Academic libraries in the Western world use social media and create social networking walls to share academic information, which African universities can re-invent to meet the needs of lecturers, administrators and students”, and urged universities to make social media an integral part of their programmes.\textsuperscript{33} These are the trends of social media usage in Ghana.

### 2.4 U.S. and social media

In the U.S, CompuServe was the first major commercial internet service provider for the public using a technology known then as dial-up. This was followed by other internet-based innovations such as the BBS, Usenet, Prodigy, AOL and the WWW, all preceding the dawn of social media. With the onset of social media networking from about the year 2000, government agencies, groups, companies and individuals in the U.S has extensively employed it for various reasons. The different social media networks utilized in the U.S include but are not limited to MySpace, which became the most popular social networking site in the U.S. in 2006, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, Viber, Tango, Flickr, and Whatsapp. In July 2007, Apple
released the iPhone in the United States, which allowed iPhone users to access social media sites and applications through their phones while Facebook became the most popular social networking site in the same year. By 2010, the internet and social media for that matter had surpassed newspapers as a primary source for Americans to get news, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project. The internet was the third most popular news platform, with many users looking to social media and personalized feeds for news. Although national and local TV stations were strong, the internet was ahead of national and local newspapers. In 2012, statistics indicated that 213 million Americans used the internet via computers while 52 million used the web via smartphone and 55 million used it via tablets. Also, some people connect to the internet via handheld music players, game consoles, internet-enabled TVs and e-readers.

The reasons why Americans use social media include; to connect with family members and friends, and connecting with people who share the same hobby or interest and for political engagement. In terms of political engagement, Americans use social media to obtain information about political parties and follow politicians as well as to comment on political issues in the public domain. Lee Rainie et al observe that the use of social media is becoming a feature of political and civic engagement for many Americans and said a survey by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project found that 66% of those social media users or 39% of all American adults have done at least one of eight civic or political activities with social media. They further note that “the social media users who talk about politics on a regular basis are the most likely to use social media for civic or political purposes and the social media users who have firmer party and ideological ties such as liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans are, at times, more likely than moderates in both parties to use social media for these purposes.” Also, younger social media users are more likely to post their own thoughts
about issues, post links to political material, encourage others to take political action, belong to a political group on a social networking site, follow elected officials on social media, and like or promote political material others have posted.\textsuperscript{39}

According to Megan E. Hershey, social media, and more specifically, Twitter is becoming a lead, unconfirmed source for breaking news.\textsuperscript{40} She indicated that there have been other instances where tweets spawn further investigation into newsworthy stories, thus, Twitter users and all social media users may eventually be considered journalists, much like bloggers are today.\textsuperscript{41} For instance in April 2013, social media was a major source of information about the Boston Marathon bombing, which was the first major terrorist attack in the U.S. during the age of Facebook, Twitter and smartphones. Many Americans therefore received news of the bombing and searched for clues about the suspects on social media while several anonymous posters named people online who they believed were involved in the bombing. When the suspects were identified, investigators looked at the suspects' Facebook accounts for evidence and clues for motives behind the bombing.\textsuperscript{42} In that same month, Russ Johnson, a retired police detective's Facebook post provided authorities with a lead to the driver involved in a 1968 hit-and-run death. Douglas Parkhurst was identified via Facebook as the driver of the car that hit a four-year-old girl in upstate New York on Halloween night in 1968.\textsuperscript{43} As at 2013, it was estimated that 73% of all U.S adults used social media with 71% on Facebook, 22% on LinkedIn, 21% on Pinterest, 18% on Twitter and 17% on Instagram with the number of people on multiple networks at 42% according to the Pew Research Center.\textsuperscript{44} Meanwhile as of June 2014, statistics showed that the market share of the most popular social media sites in the United States based on market share of visits were Facebook – \textsuperscript{38.66}%, Youtube-36.25% and Twitter – \textsuperscript{3.39}%.\textsuperscript{45} These are the diverse ways in which social media is employed generally in the U.S.
2.5 Conclusion

Social media has become an integral part of society, especially the way people are communicating with each other. Governments are not left behind as they try to follow the trend to adopt some social media tools to achieve communication objectives. Thus, governments are increasingly looking for ways to improve their communication with their publics, particularly with the more innovative social media tools that seem to be fairly new and daily evolving. This research therefore seeks to find out how the U.S and Ghana governments are utilizing social media tools to communicate with both local and foreign publics and what ways these could be improved through lessons learnt from each other’s social media experiences, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
Endnotes

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9 Ibid., pp.2-3.
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CHAPTER THREE

GOVERNMENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

3.0 Introduction

The phenomenon of social media as a communication tool has become widespread for both citizens and governments. However, this work focuses on how governments, particularly the Ghana and U.S. governments use of social media in their international affairs, the challenges they face while using social media to communicate with both local and foreign publics, and establish what prospects social media hold for government communication in the future.

According to Ines Mergel, social media gives agencies opportunities to communicate beyond the press release style and create peaks in public awareness and attention with the help of targeted campaigns. Social networking sites have grown at an extremely fast rate in the last decade and are providing fast and cost effective way of reaching people, compared to other technologies. These sites further minimize the delay between communications and allow for average citizens to communicate with governments. For instance, DipNote is an official blog of the U.S. State Department, founded in 2007, which gives the public an alternative source to mainstream media for U.S. foreign policy information, and encourages substantive dialogue between U.S. government officials at the State Department and for both foreign and domestic audiences. Furthermore, asocial media presence is a trademark of a vibrant and transparent communications strategy, and to that end, social media offer particular utility to governments’ affairs, while allowing officials in government to build relationships with key stakeholders, the

http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/
citizens it represents. It is, therefore, within this ambit that governments find the need for social media use.

3.1 The Importance of Social Media

Social media has importance for governments, in that it increases participation, transparency and collaboration with the public, which is part of a presidential mandate. In view of this, government agencies determine the importance of social media to their individual agencies, and choose which social media tools can help them support their own mission. Besides using social media as an information and communication technology to support government mission, it also has the importance of decreasing the communication gap between the citizen’s perception of government operations and the actual work government performs. Particularly, the advent of social media networks provides government officials the means to communicate directly with their public, without the intervention of editors and reporters, who can act as gatekeepers or censors of information.

Also, using online campaigns through social media in particular can raise awareness of public policies and also help the agencies themselves to understand the impact of policies, both on the local and international front. Thus, listening to the audience has clear advantages that are relatively difficult to measure or quantify, because they might not directly lead to changes in organizational performance and effectiveness. For instance, one social media director said: “Given the opportunity, people are really excited and willing to provide fantastic insight in things that help us get closer to the taxpayer and to the people that we serve by listening.” When government responds to issues of interest to local and foreign publics through social media platforms, and especially responds to their concerns, this creates a feeling of accessibility to
government and also trust in a government, even when it has to take tough and unpalatable policy decisions, such as America’s invasion of Iraq. As observed by another social media director:

…If people feel like government is responsive to them and can do big things, can answer their questions, then they’re more inclined to trust us when we want to do something a bit harder. If we can create a more responsive government, we can use these tools effectively in a way to kind of up people’s trust in government a little more. We’ll not only give them a better government, but we’ll give them a government that can do more things to help them live their lives a little bit better.¹⁶

Presently, Ghana is in court with Cote d’Ivoire over the former’s maritime boundary, which the latter is contesting at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Hamburg, Germany. President Mahama and his government agencies as well as individual government spokespersons are constantly engaging the local and foreign publics on social media to whip up support for this cause.

Giving reasons why the MFARI is in the process of employing social media to conduct its affairs in both domestic and international politics, Arkhurst, Director of ICT at the MFARI noted that “the world is changing and people want to know what the ministry is doing.” Also, he said social media is important to government’s international affairs because it will enable government to communicate its domestic and foreign policies to a larger community. This is because most people were connected to social media, while the platform also has the ability to make information go viral within the shortest possible time, unlike the other modes of communication the ministry was using. He believes that such an engagement is necessary for government communication to gain local and international support for its policies, while gaining an insight into the concerns the publics may also have about such policies. He further stated that the ministry was in the process of rebranding itself to enhance its image, and social media will help to achieve that objective. He said social media is the cheapest way to share government
information with the public, and also one of the tools of e-governance, which allows citizens to interact with government and get quick response. This observation is true to the extent that governments often focus mostly on push techniques and use social media channels to provide information recycled from other government communication channels, such as publications, reports or the website itself. According to Arkhurst, the importance of social media to governments lie in the fact that government agencies provide information to the public in a manner that builds credibility for the government.

Additionally, governments have the advantage of asking citizens to submit their ideas or provide media content, such as comments, videos or photos, which ensure participation of citizens in the governance process, and their feedback, can inform decision-making. For example, governments can use social media platforms to conduct surveys on various topics relating to government policy, as well as questions or concerns with online content. Similarly, social media provides a cost effective way for governments to mobilize support for a cause or policy, rather than spending huge sums of money to achieve the same outcome in the mainstream media. For instance, President Mahama took to social media to mobilize support for his government’s campaign to promote the use of “Made-in-Ghana-Goods” or locally produced products on the government’s official Facebook account, with posts such as “I have taken an inventory of my home to find out how many Made-in-Ghana products I use on a daily basis. Here is my list. Take your own inventory. What are the imported items in your house that could have been made in Ghana?”

According to Mergel, “Asking citizens to submit their ideas or provide media content, such as videos or photos, highlights the potential for bi-directional citizen participation; Citizens’ content is actively pulled in through new forms of crowd sourcing and can be re-used in
government". Colona also adds that the internet and social media for that matter, offers a quick cost-effective way of mobilizing, hence it is important for governments to adapt and meet people in their new digital headquarters.

Figure 3.1 A picture posted on the president’s Facebook page depicting the “Buy Made in Ghana Goods” concept.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/JDMahama?fref=ts

To further boost the campaign on social media, a picture of President Mahama inspecting a Made-In-Ghana label of a sportswear, manufactured in Ghana for export to the USA by Dignity DTRT Limited was posted on Facebook.
Figure 3.2 President John Mahama inspecting the Made in Ghana label of a sports wear manufactured in Ghana for export to the USA by Dignity DTRT Limited.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/jdmahama?fref=ts

Still, social media provides a complementary source for further spread of government information and activities on the local and international scene, even when mainstream media is used. Thus, Alec Ross, the then Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton noted that, “21st Century Statecraft is an “agenda” that “complements traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments that fully leverage the networks, technologies and demographics of our networked world.”

An example on the international scene was when President Obama tweeted during the popular uprising in Egypt, saying, “There must be an orderly transition in #Egypt and it must begin now. The U.S will be a partner.” This was also re-tweeted by the U.S. State Department’s Assistant Secretary of State for public Affairs, P.J. Crowley.
3.2 Policies Guiding Social Media Use

Social media platforms of the various government agencies are managed by people who are employees. It is important that clear guidelines and principles are established to guide the use of social media, particularly as regards creation of content and responding to the feedback as may flow from the public -foreign or domestic. Mergel indicates that while social media provide agencies with powerful tools to engage citizens, and other initiatives, it needs to be used appropriately and consistent with legal and policy requirements when used by government. This is because appropriate safeguards and procedures can ensure the public that social media analyses are used in a way that protects the privacy of individuals. An effective social media policy must regulate both employee and citizen behavior when they are interacting online with government, and as a result, social media policies have both an internal and external component, and include, for example, directions in the form of comment policies. Social media creates collaboration between government and its publics, showing a reciprocal relationship by allowing audiences to directly engage with government content and co-create government innovations. However, government agencies must be sure not to desire to create a direct, reciprocated relationship with the publics by following them back and having creative conversations online. This is why it is important to address privacy protections as part of a collaboration strategy, and to restrict collaborative engagement to active interactions of publics with government-provided content.

3.3 Target Audience

To understand which channels are worth focusing on, government communicators have to understand which social media channels their target audiences prefer to receive and interact
with government information and how they are sharing the information.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, before any assumption about the selection of online channels can be made, it is important to understand who the target audiences are. This might include all citizens, or campaigns targeted to specific audiences\textsuperscript{22}, domestic or foreign. This will help government to get the right information to the right people and to get the right response to inform government policy. It will also enable government to detect changes in the online preferences of their audiences on social media, and accordingly make adjustments. Additionally, targeting an audience will also make it easier for governments to make an evaluation of their social media campaigns and determine the success or otherwise of those campaigns.

According to Arkhurst, the ministry’s social media platforms would target anyone who is interested in coming to Ghana and Ghanaians living everywhere. This is why the ministry plans to use at least five of the most popular social media sites based on credible statistics, to see how its audience would respond to the issues that the ministry would discuss on the platforms. What, therefore, helps government agencies to find out if they have the right audiences or their content is being used as planned, is the number of followers as on Twitter or likes as on Facebook, and comments left on particular platforms or topics. This is why the representation objective is clearly to be as inclusive as possible to reach audiences in the social spaces they frequent daily, and many social media managers recognize the need to reach audiences that do not routinely interact with government agencies, and who are, therefore, excluded from government information.\textsuperscript{23}
3.4 How Ghana and U.S. Governments Use Social Media

Social media is transforming the way organizations communicate with their publics, and governments are not exempt from societal pressures to make use of them. Ghana and the U.S. governments all use social media in various ways to achieve different or similar objectives. Graham and Avery observe that the current, “socially informed” generation, expects dialogue and governments at all levels are being compelled to shift their views of citizens from mainly consumers to active participants, by allowing citizens to contribute online to the development of governments. Thus, many government agencies use social media to increase public awareness of program availability or of policies and their potential impact. Others use it to actively establish and improve the relationship with their stakeholders or influence specific actions and online behavior of citizens, such as finding support for budget cuts, or other unpopular policies and decisions. The President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama takes social media seriously and as such has official accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Viber, Tango, Instagram, etc., where he often interacts with citizens and non-citizens alike on his government’s policies, and other issues as they occur around the world. For instance, he once twitted, “As a people, we have had to make sacrifices. I wish to assure you that results of these sacrifices would begin to show very soon.” This was aimed at telling the Ghanaian people that the policies of his government will inure to their benefit, and to win their support for such policies. It also goes further to assure the international community that the country was willing to make sacrifices that will make it better for citizens and foreigners alike.

In Ghana, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration (MFARI) conducts international affairs on behalf of the state. This study, therefore, sought to find out how the ministry was using social media to achieve its objectives. In an interview with the Director of the
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Department of the Ministry, Papa Arkhurst, he indicated that the ministry was in the process of creating social media accounts; such as Twitter, Facebook, Google plus, among others, to interact with the public. He said although the Diaspora Affairs Bureau (DAB) of the ministry uses social media to engage Ghanaians and other people of African descent across the world, the main ministry was now in the process of training officials who would manage the new social media sites to be created. Presently, however, the ministry uses emails, websites and mainstream media to communicate with its domestic and foreign publics, said Mr. Arkhurst.

The U.S. government, on the other hand, uses social media tools like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to connect with people and communicate official information\textsuperscript{26}. For instance, the White House has taken to social media to help push some of its initiatives. President Obama held a Twitter town hall in 2011, where he received and answered questions through Twitter and pledged to start tweeting from his own official account. Also, social networks like Twitter and Facebook have been used in presidential debates and forums. The White House has further set up several verified Twitter accounts for state entities such as the Secret Service (@SecretService), the Open Government Initiative (OGI) (@OpenGov), a Spanish White House account (@lacasablanca) and an official account for White House Press Secretary, Jay Carney (@presssec)\textsuperscript{27}. Furthermore, the U.S. government has expanded its presence in the cyber world by adding to its use of social media sites like Twitter and Facebook to track public opinion, applying social media to accomplish a few unique goals\textsuperscript{28}. Among these are detecting and informing the public about natural disasters through social media, which has provided the government with a quick and efficient way to reach out to the public during times of disorder\textsuperscript{29}, and using social media at the local level through implementation of online 311 platforms where
citizens can report problems in their neighborhoods, such as street defects, graffiti, and sewer issues in many cities. To a large extent, “what used to be discussed in town hall meetings has now moved online, providing even the busiest citizens the chance to share their input on local issues.” The U.S. government employs social media platforms and technologies at the local, state and federal government agencies level to engage the public in a variety of ways, from providing information on government services to emergency response.

Furthermore, federal officials at the Department of Homeland Security are monitoring the buzz on social channels for threats to national security, and the Federal bureau of investigations (FBI) is looking into similar capabilities. Mergel believes that social media use follows different implementation phases or pathways that depend on their purpose and mission support. Specifically, social media use in the U.S. federal government can be divided into three different stages that are reflected in distinguishable online interactions, which are representation, engagement and attention creation, and networking. In terms of representation, most of the social media interactions, to date, have focused on educating and informing followers about information that is also available on the department’s website that the public may otherwise not access or scarcely do access. The representative tactic is often seen as the bare minimum of social media interactions, but it helps citizens by sharing, broadcasting and distributing important government information that they might not actively seek out. Engagement and attention creation helps to make government agencies also actively involved with the public by responding to the queries and concerns of the publics. Usually, “Agencies often take a back seat, presenting their materials online at regular intervals, but otherwise remaining relatively passive. They use social media to listen to and absorb comments, not to actively seek out interactions.” Thus, networking creates a larger network of online users who are all interested in policies, news
coverage, or certain policy outcomes which creates value for agencies on social media. This passive strategy to listen and absorb comments provides them with very valuable insights from their audience, and helps agencies understand the impact of new policies on citizens and the perceptions circulating about the policies both at home and abroad. The result is that government agencies can then move relevant information into the online network to defuse rumors, respond to concerns, provide real-time information, support social media users who are impacted by a policy while other agencies recognize that their online activities can help them assess and potentially improve the relationship over time.

3.5 Social Media as Democratic, Transparency and Accountability Tool for Governments

Graham and Avery observe that social media is used as public relations function to serve democratic, participatory and transparency models across a range of government contexts, hence a social media presence is a trademark of a vibrant and transparent communications strategy for governments. Viteritti states that concise and purposeful communication between a government and its citizens is a pragmatic practice, as well as a moral obligation that derives from the principles of democracy. Thus, the use of social media by governments is seen as enhancing democratic principles because of its engagement and interactivity functions. Transparency, according to Cotterrell, is the availability of information on matters of public concern, the ability of citizens to participate in political decision-making, and the accountability of government to public opinion, and making transparency essential to effective government relations. Particularly, governmental transparency allows the public to develop a more accurate picture of what is happening in government, which allows citizens to hold governments accountable and evaluate performances of government agencies. As social media allows government officials to
build relationships with their key stakeholders, it also enhances governments’ abilities to interact with and engage citizens, as well as to meet their expectations for transparency.\textsuperscript{43} Previously, government communication centered on dissemination to the public through traditional mainstream media, which did not easily allow for public or citizen input as well as easy feedback. Thus, social media fosters more open and transparent government, and creating new methods for democratic participation through its interactive and instant capabilities.\textsuperscript{44} An example of how governments use social media to promote transparency is the Obama administration’s OGI that provides insights on how social media interactions can help increase collaboration, participation, and transparency by harnessing the use of new technologies.\textsuperscript{45} The initiative focuses mostly on using social media channels to provide information recycled from other government communication channels, such as publications, reports, or the website itself with the idea to reach audiences that do not routinely interact with federal agencies and are therefore excluded from government information.\textsuperscript{46} Thus, under the initiative, citizens can be asked to submit their ideas or provide media content, such as videos or photos, to share their opinion on matters of policy. One social media manager observed that by the government engaging people through social media, “we are being more open and engaged in that way.”\textsuperscript{47} Also, there are many instances where the U.S. government uses social media to communicate with the public in an open and transparent manner, by taking questions from members of the public on its position on a major policy or bring attention to a particular matter. Often, the White House Press Secretary will take questions through Twitter and also respond by using the same medium.\textsuperscript{48}

Elections are a key component of the political process, and they have the ability to foster peace and unity or chaos and destruction in a country. Thus, social media is used by both
governments and citizens to monitor the process and for information sharing. For instance, social media can help Election Management Bodies (EMBs) increase the electorate’s perception of transparency and accessibility by enhancing an EMB’s ability to disseminate impartial, accurate and timely information and respond promptly to queries and requests through both formal and more informal platforms. In Ghana for example, the government body mandated to organize elections, the Electoral Commission (EC) used its Facebook page to post election results as they poured in from across districts and regions, and providing occasional information contained in press releases as and when necessary. This allowed members of the public across the world to get first hand information on the process, and ensuring transparency because members of the public also had the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarifications, and also make comments. Previously, the public would have had to rely solely on traditional media for such information or wait till the EC announced the results at the end of entire process. Thus, exchanges held on an EMB’s social media platforms either between the EMB and its followers or between the followers themselves are visible to a wide audience. This in turn allows for increased accessibility to information and transparency around issues of concern. Similarly, during Ghana’s election petition hearing at the Supreme Court in 2013, there were more avenues such as social media platforms in addition to traditional media to channel information from the courtroom proceedings, hence, there were fewer rooms for suspicions. As a result of this transparency, government officials, public commentators and political activists could therefore not relay inappropriate and inconsistent information to the public, as they were privy to first-hand information. Particularly, any new development during the period was immediately posted on social media sites and links made to official websites. For example there was a tweet

http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/
from the Ghana Police Service that informed of the apprehension of 25 people in Kpassa, a town in the Nkwanta North District of the Volta Region.\textsuperscript{54}

3.6 Social Media and Public Diplomacy

Comor and Bean define public diplomacy as “a term to describe the efforts by nations to win support and a favorable image among the general public of other countries, usually by way of news management and carefully planned initiatives designed to foster positive impressions.”\textsuperscript{55} Social media has become a tool for public diplomacy because of its effectiveness for conveying any message to a given public, whether it is from a corporation, a public figure, or a government.\textsuperscript{56} Particularly, social media and the social networks they foster function to direct diplomatic attention and drive the coordination of services and governance.\textsuperscript{57}

Also, the use of social media in politics has been an effective tool in garnering public support and thus provides strategic utility in the practice of public diplomacy such that it can be used to clarify misconceptions.\textsuperscript{58} The ubiquity of the internet around the world, with the exception of a few countries where there are restrictions of internet use has made social media an easy and necessary tool for public diplomacy. As Harris points out, the internet has created an international space where communities around the world are more connected than ever and, therefore, states that with this new level of interconnectivity it is imperative that the U.S. government utilize the tools provided by new media to communicate with foreign publics.\textsuperscript{59} Social media is a tool that enables governments to enhance public diplomacy by directly reaching out to publics in other countries through various platforms. Thus, social media use can add to the policy-making process, as its tools can provide a platform for symmetrical communication, which is “allowing individuals to intensify social contacts while sharing content,
engaging in discussion, but also controlling content via networks they participate in.”\textsuperscript{60} In view of this, social media has become a tool that public diplomacy practitioners use to enhance U.S. foreign policy. Colona notes that, although there are many uses for domestic social networking sites, there is much evidence showing that overseas it is an effective way of communicating with people and mobilizing activists, as was seen in the Middle East revolutions, known as the “Arab Spring”.\textsuperscript{61} For instance,

The U.S. was able to increase its soft power with the Egyptian people by communicating directly with those among them on the medium they were using, showing support for a nation usually skeptical of the U.S., given its allegiance to Israel. Early in the conflict, Crowley tweeted, “the government and people of Egypt face consequential choices in the coming days. We hope they choose the path of dialogue and reform.”\textsuperscript{62}

Colona explains that although Crowley did not explicitly take sides in the conflict, he was calling for peaceful negotiations and change from the Egypt of old.

In Ghana, a message from President John Mahama on U.S-Cuba relations was posted on Facebook as follows “President John Dramani Mahama has in an official message to the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, congratulated him for the bold decision to rescind America’s designation of Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism”\textsuperscript{63} This is why Arkhurst believes that social media has importance for public diplomacy, especially for purposes of foreign policy. President Mahama’s statement as carried on social media shows the foreign policy direction of the country, while reaching out to publics of the U.S. and Cuba. Also, DipNote, the social media blog of the U.S. government, is a strategic communications method for the U.S. to conduct 21\textsuperscript{st} century public diplomacy and is successful because it allows for substantive and interactive discussion between U.S. officials and ordinary citizens on important issues of policy.\textsuperscript{64} As of May 2012, the U.S. State Department’s main public diplomacy units maintain over 288 Facebook pages, nearly 200 Twitter accounts and 125 YouTube channels,
thus, the State Department’s public diplomacy amounts to a “global media empire” of over 600 platforms for engagement while U.S. Ambassador to Japan, John Roos, Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, and Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul have captured considerable press attention for their extensive use of social media in reaching publics. These ambassadors realize the significance of social media for public diplomacy in its capacity to connect traditional diplomats with new and existing constituents at the post or embassy level in more efficient ways.

Using social media to reach out to foreign publics enhances the image of a country and improves its branding when governments use social media in a strategic communication to improve their perception to foreign publics. Arkhurst notes that using social media to discuss public information will promote Ghana’s image abroad although they will be careful not to put out sensitive information that may create problems for the government. According to Harris, “To support the U.S. brand as an advocate for democracy, the Obama administration’s initiatives have pushed for engagement and free-flowing discussions domestically and abroad.” Particularly, the Obama administration developed a policy of engagement, Public Diplomacy 2.0, which used social media to encourage conversation and debate between the U.S. and foreign publics. For instance, on February 11, 2011, the White House posted a video on its YouTube page in which President Obama called for the military in Egypt to ensure a transition that is “credible in the eyes of the Egyptian people.” He added that it was imperative for the transition to lead to “protecting the rights of Egypt’s citizens, lifting the emergency law, revising the constitution and other laws to make this change irreversible, and laying out a clear path to elections that are free and fair in an attempt to bringing all of Egypt’s voices to the table.” According to Colona, the U.S., through this video that was seen by tens of thousands of people, publicly made known its position on protecting the rights of ordinary citizens and advancing
democracy, and this certainly had a positive impact on the U.S. soft power with countries in the Middle East and elsewhere, thus, creating a positive image for the country. For instance, President Mahama is seen in the picture below at the inauguration of Her Excellency Dilma Rousseff for her second term as President of the Federative Republic of Brazil. This picture was posted on the government’s Facebook page, which boosts the country’s image on the international scene as a country that supports democracy in the world.

Figure 3.3 A picture posted on the President’s Facebook page congratulating Brazilian President, Dilma Rousseff on her second term in office.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/JDMahama?fref=ts

Social media is changing public diplomacy in many ways. Previously, public diplomacy relied on mainstream media to reach the publics, which had limitations such as government’s censoring such media or preventing them altogether. Thus, it was quite difficult to directly engage and influence foreign publics. However, social media makes it possible for the
government of one country to directly engage citizens of another country for purposes such as influencing policy and cultivating a favourable image for the country seeking to engage. An example is the U.S. government’s extensive use of YouTube videos to communicate with its foreign publics, which is more integrative and allows people to see things for themselves rather than relying on the report of a commentator.\(^6\) As Arkhurst points out,

“Social media has absolutely changed the way public diplomacy is conducted especially with use of pictures and videos, there is fast and quick relay of information while it is possible to see people’s opinion. Formerly, this was only done through websites, missions abroad and mainstream media without prompt feedback as we have it today.”

Additionally, social media enables quick feedback through the comment sections, thus governments are able to get response to issues in real time to inform policy decisions. Colona cites Evgeny Morozov as saying concerning the 2011 revolts in Egypt:

The revolts were driven by people who had economic grievances and were politically oppressed. They turned to the internet to publicize their grievances and their resistance. The fact that new media and blogs were present probably set a different tempo to the revolts. If the internet were not around, the regime might be tempted to crack down in a much brutal way. The revolts themselves would be taking a different shape, and they may have happened three to six months later.\(^7\)

Colona further cites Hayden on the matter of feedback, and particularly concerning DipNote as a “necessary if not crucial step towards making the State Department more relevant to its U.S. constituents, and providing a means for foreign publics to voice their opinions directly to somebody in the U.S. government.”\(^8\) Also,

“Polemic posts, reasoned arguments, and impassioned responses show the logic of how controversial issues are understood, what counts as evidence, and how arguments are put together in a world view…insights from arguments in the comment field are a window into how to be rhetorically responsive, rather than tone-deaf to global opinion…world views and forms of reasoning found in the comments field can be valuable insight to public diplomacy and, in theory, policy formulation.”\(^9\)
Harris observes that because social media is a symmetrical communication, between foreign publics and foreign officials, public diplomacy is moving away from its perceived propaganda natures and is seen as legitimate and ethical.\textsuperscript{73} According to her, social media have changed the rules of international communication, where both the mass and “niche audiences” are being targeted. Furthermore, the exchange of dialogue that social media use fosters is a source of information for both the public and the foreign ministry, which does away with asymmetrical top-down flow of information.\textsuperscript{74} This way of sharing information between governments and publics enables the latter to influence policy decisions on matters that affect them. Social media has further affected public diplomacy in that it has equipped governments with the technological tools to reach publics in real-time to create awareness of foreign policy and other related matters while promoting the exchange of information and knowledge in a manner that ensures a better understanding of world issues. Social media has also come to serve as a means by which foreign governments obtain information and monitor crisis situations in other countries. For Harris, crisis management abroad often involves the support of other foreign nations, especially with natural disasters, which can include endemics/pandemics, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. thus as the world becomes more interconnected, the U.S. in particular has stakes in the maintenance of civil order in a country due to the number of U.S. nationals living abroad.\textsuperscript{75} Furthermore, the use of social media sites like Twitter creates a platform for discussion where information can be simultaneously exchanged among organizations, governments, and individuals. Social media provides a “credible” platform for crisis management, and governments or organizations are no longer the only source of information as individuals are often the first to communicate important updates.\textsuperscript{76} During the Japanese disaster, which was caused by an earthquake on March 11, 2011, followed by the meltdown at Fukushima
Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, and subsequent tsunami in Tohoku, social media was largely and effectively used to provide timely reports about the situation and what needed to be done. For instance, the American Ambassador, John Roos, was contacted through Twitter to aid Japanese efforts during the crisis with tweets such as “Kameda hospital in Chiba needs to transfer 80 patients from Kyoritsu hospital in Iwaki city, just outside of 30km (sic) range”, and “Some of them are seriously ill and they need air transport. If U.S military can help, pls contact (name withheld) at Kameda.” As a result of these tweets, Ambassador Roos was able to grasp the situation and contact the U.S. defense attaché, who then contacted the military for transport of the patients.

Harris, therefore, believes that effectively using social media to manage crises abroad will increase favorable public opinion about U.S. involvement in other countries and legitimize U.S. foreign policy abroad, since civilians perpetuate the message in social networks. It is, therefore, clear that social media has indeed impacted public diplomacy in a myriad of ways.

### 3.7 Challenges Social Media Poses to Governments

Social media has proven to be of great importance in the affairs of governments as has been discussed under the preceding sub-headings. However, it also poses a number of challenges to governments in their bid to reach their publics both local and foreign.

The nature of social media being that it occurs in real-time presents some challenges to governments. According to Mathew Wallin, “In order to do social media properly, a government must regularly engage and converse with its audiences” and this require governments in their use of social media to post information in a timely and prompt manner to either inform the public or respond to feedback. However, because there are policies, rules and regulations guiding
government’s use of social media as regards who posts what, the process seem to be bureaucratic. As Wallin explains, official government statements, and those made by employees in their official capacity, are often combed over word by word by sometimes dozens of offices and individuals before release. Particularly, the clearance process used by the U.S. State Department can often be slow, and is ill-equipped to respond to the demanding nature of social media. Also, in U.S. public diplomacy, it is vital that messages issued by government representatives be consistent with policy, a necessity which discourages individual action. Furthermore,

When employing social media, the State Department is faced with a seemingly stark choice between safeguards ensuring message accuracy, and allowing its employees the freedom to engage audiences conversationally in a manner that humanizes their efforts. On one hand, using the clearance process ensures that online communication by government employees is consistent with U.S. foreign policy. On the other hand, allowing employees the freedom to respond rapidly in a manner consistent with the nature and discourse of online communities run the severe risk of enabling those employees to essentially determine policy without the approval of Washington. This holds the potential for disastrous consequences which can’t be easily mitigated.

This is why Arkhurst believes that government officials must fully grasp the impact of every message put out, adding, “You must be very careful because the medium is quick about information and once you put something out there, it is gone forever.” He therefore stressed that officials who manage social media must always balance information that goes out with the desired outcome. Also, he pointed out that social media does put pressure on officials to respond to issues quicker than previously they would respond to traditional media.

Another nature of social media that constitute a problem is “Going Viral”, which is the quick spread of information across various social media networks. Wallin says it allows a message to grow not from a single source, but to be replicated instantaneously and distributed across what is essentially a peer-to-peer or electronic word-of-mouth system. What often
causes information to go viral is the unusual, humorous/emotional, cute, utterly impressive, or shocking to gain traction and inspire the user to pass it on to their social networks\textsuperscript{85} but which is often lacking in government communication. Although this process of going viral can help when the information is positive, the disadvantage is that it also spreads false information or bad news with speed across the internet. The challenge therefore is that looking at government bureaucratic process of putting information out there can let a lot of damage occur where a government is concerned. Also, when government finally responds to such a situation, which response might not correspond with the damage done, as it may not go viral like the false information. For instance, terrorist groups such as al Qaeda and Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL) have used this feature of going viral to their advantage by often posting gruesome and graphic videos and pictures on social media with the intent of creating fear and panic. Wallin believes that the sheer number of day-to-day attacks captured on video by insurgent groups and spread via the internet is an unstoppable message intended specifically to challenge the American narrative of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.\textsuperscript{86} He adds that it is difficult for the American government to attempt to out-communicate terrorists by using these techniques, and whereas depictions of brutality can spread virally and subsequently work in favor of terrorist recruiting or training goals the often unintentional viral distribution of graphic violence committed by Americans such as the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse photos, typically proves more harmful than beneficial.\textsuperscript{87}

Social media use provides anonymity to groups and individuals who can often use fake names and impersonate others to achieve their own objectives. This poses a problem to governments, because individuals or groups can hide behind anonymity to put out wrong information that affects government’s communication and other objectives or put out sensitive information that a government may not immediately be able to correct. While the anonymity
provided by the Internet has allowed for previously unheard individuals to express their dissent without fear of authoritative backlash, there is also the possibility for abuse of this anonymity.\textsuperscript{88} An example is the case of the controversial blog, \textit{A Gay Girl in Damascus}, which claimed to be the personal blog of Syrian-American lesbian Amina Abdallah Arraf al-Omari. However, the author was later exposed to be a 40-year old American man, Tom MacMaster, a graduate student at the University of Edinburgh, who was blogging under the false identity of a Syrian woman in order to lend credibility to his reports of human rights abuse in Syria.\textsuperscript{89} Such situations could hamper government diplomatic efforts abroad and as well spark protests that government’s need to use resources to handle.

Another major challenge social media poses is its use for quick and easy political mobilization against governments, especially by opposition elements both home and abroad. For instance, social media was largely employed in the Arab Springs that hit North Africa and deposed sitting governments in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia. These events impacted world politics in the manner in which social media was effectively used for mobilization such that many world leaders, particularly Americans used the same medium to address both protestors and governments to ensure that democracy prevailed. Johnny West captured the power of social media in mobilization, thus “A young internet executive called WaelGhoneim helped organize a call for a demonstration for 25 January in Cairo’s Tahrir Square through a Facebook page entitled We Are All Khaled Said. Fifty thousand people came, not just the dedicated hard core, but fresh faces, old and young. They came back the next day, and the next and the next, swelling to millions, and the rest is history.”\textsuperscript{90} In Ghana some musicians and actors, and other celebrities as well as ordinary people used social media to mobilize people to hold a night vigil dubbed “Dumsor Must Stop” on May 16, 2015 to protest the continuous energy crisis under the
Mahama administration. For instance, of its Facebook page, the group got 3,217 likes. YouTube, the most popular video sharing site has become one of the most important venues for civil activism and political expression.\textsuperscript{91} According to Steve Grove, YouTube’s effectiveness is unlike other traditional forms of media, which is so powerful because there is no “middleman” controlling what gets distributed.\textsuperscript{92} He further observed that:

Average citizens are able to fuel a new meritocracy for political coverage in “the world’s largest town hall for political discussion.” Unlike other traditional forms of media, YouTube makes it so that “politics is no longer bound by traditional barriers of time and space. It doesn’t matter what time it is, or where someone is located— as long as they have the means to connect through the web, they can engage in the discussion.”\textsuperscript{93}

This is how much social media has liberalized the international political landscape, and creating problems for governments in their bid to use social media for the object of furthering political goals. Arkhurst indicated that opposition elements and even ordinary citizens will always take advantage of social media to mobilize against governments but that should not stop governments from using social media because “whether there is social media or not, people will still find means to organize against governments.”

Linked to the lack of control in social media is the fact that it makes organizations vulnerable to both internal and external crises. On an internal level, organizations have to be concerned about online behavior that could potentially damage the brand, such as criticism of management, intellectual property leakages, and embarrassing employee behavior; externally, criticism, false information postings, and rogue activist groups can cause considerable harm to government communication.\textsuperscript{94} A case in point was when on 17\textsuperscript{th} July, 2014, President Mahama tweeted to assure the Ghanaian populace that the difficulties facing the country would soon be over, and a quick response that emanated from the official Twitter account of the U.S. Embassy
in Ghana almost generated a diplomatic row, particularly from the Ghanaian side by both government officials and citizens alike. Below are the tweets as were posted,

Figure 3.4 President Mahama’s tweet and the response from the U.S Embassy in Ghana.

However, the officials at the U.S Embassy having realized the effect of such a tweet immediately issued a statement saying, “the earlier errant tweet was a private message mistakenly sent out on our account. The views expressed in no way reflect the views of the United States Government or the U.S. Embassy.” The embassy further stated that steps have been taken “to ensure that all of our employees fully understand their responsibility toward carefully managing our public outreach through social media.”95 This is a typical example of an embarrassing employee behaviour that generated a lot of backlash and such blunders could damage the image of the U.S.
in the eyes of its foreign publics and also cause a strain in the diplomatic relations between Ghana and the U.S. This also goes a long way to hamper government’s effective use of social media. This is why Wallin observes that social media naturally diffuses power away from state run institutions, and that the level of influence that can be exerted through these types of tools is subsequently limited.96

Censorship and internet blockade also presents a problem to government’s use of social media, particularly in the case of public diplomacy where certain target audiences cannot be reached because their governments have either employed censorship or blocking techniques to prevent access to the internet in general or social media in particular. Often, governments facing political protests tend to censor information and social media sites or shut down the internet altogether. This is because social media provides the platform by which people send out information locally and internationally on happenings within the country such as government arbitrary arrests and brutalities of protestors through videos and pictures. Social media also facilitates organization of protests, and networking between various protest groups. For instance, in the Egyptian revolution, the Egyptian government first blocked Facebook and then later moved to a full internet blockade, thereby cutting off a major source of information for other governments such as the U.S. who were interested in the developments of the revolution. Also “Terrified of the new tools of Twitter and Facebook, and the uncensored visual media of yFrog, Flickr and YouTube, the regime chose to pay the price of millions of lost dollars to the economy in order to deprive protesters of a key weapon- the means of communication.”97 According to Wallin, although many blocking and censorship techniques can be overcome using methods like anonymity software, Virtual Private Networks (VPN), and proxies, the net effect of blocking techniques is not overcome by using these methods. This is because by their nature, these tools are not able to completely eliminate the total impact of blocking methods, as they require the interest and
knowledge of users to a greater extent than unrestricted browsing, and the power of the internet is irrelevant when a host country shuts off the network. As a result, a government may have difficulty sending its message across to foreign publics or even its citizens in another country through the less formal medium of social media.

Finally, social media may deceive governments by the sheer number of followers on their social media platforms into believing that their message is being accessed and used. However, Facebook “likes” and Twitter followers do not necessarily equate a strong connection with an audience. Having a million followers says nothing about whether those tweets are read, nor does that top-line number indicate where a user’s followers reside. Neither does it necessarily indicate whether those followers are undertaking action to support a user’s communications goals. For instance, as of January 23, 2013, the State Department had 3.2 Million followers on 308 official Twitter feeds in 10 languages, 18.5 Million fans, friends and followers on 411 Facebook accounts, and communication with more than 21 million worldwide but Wallin contends that these numbers do not explain much, as there is no indication of how many of those followers are based in the U.S., in the corresponding countries for each account, or elsewhere. Thus, governments may have to invest human and financial resources in real evaluation on the metrics to know whether the information it is sending across is actually being used as is intended. These are the issues challenging Ghana and U.S. governments’ use of social media.

3.8 Prospects of Social Media to Ghana and U.S. Governments

The challenges of social media could be a disincentive for governments to utilize its potential. However, social media holds great importance and prospects for government communications and these will be explored here. Social media has the great potential of enabling governments to reach out to the public in new ways that can help to change perceptions about
government affairs, especially on policies, and also make citizens and foreigners alike change their behaviour towards government and government information through interaction. Thus, governments and in particular Ghana and the U.S. must use a smart means of communicating with the world by more traditional forms of public diplomacy such as face to face interaction, newspaper, radio and television but also by using more technologically appropriate methods such as social media in line with the 21st century.

Going forward, social media will continue to serve as a listening tool for the governments of the U.S. and Ghana. Wallin states that “What the internet has taught us is that the public loves to be involved and wants to be heard”101. This lesson is important for understanding what the public thinks about government’s policies on both domestic and foreign issues, and to further inform future policies. Social media will therefore continue to provide a platform for governments to listen to its people and target audiences in various ways, especially through feedback. Also, listening to the people has the advantage of creating trust in the government on even the most difficult issues. For instance, “When trust is created and people feel connected to the U.S. message, people who are active on Twitter will be more willing to risk their reputations within their network to broadcast that message.”102 Hayden adds that “listening” through social media platforms has been one of the greatest successes of recent organizational shifts.103 This value of social media will continue to serve government’s communication needs in the long term.

Prior to the emergence of social media, the main medium for government communication was mainstream media with the public having little or no chance of contributing to that information. Now, social media has given voice to the people and whereas governments communicate with the people, the latter can also share whatever information they have with
government without necessarily waiting on government to initiate the process. Therefore, social media provides a source of information sharing between governments and their people, hence, governments will continue to use social media for this purpose. According to Arkhurst, if government wants to be effective and proactive, then it has to engage the publics on social media.

Another reason is the fact that social media provides quick response to government information which can go a long way to inform government decisions on matters of policy. As Harris points out “The use of social media sites like Twitter creates a platform for discussion where information can be simultaneously exchanged among organizations, governments, and individuals.” This is why President Obama developed a policy of engagement, Public Diplomacy 2.0, which used social media to encourage conversation and debate between the U.S. and foreign publics. According to Storck, “The role of new media as a source of information in authoritative states is a trend that was recognized by the US government in June 2009, in the wake of controversial elections in Iran.” During the period, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued a request to Twitter, asking that they delay their planned site maintenance, allowing Iranians to continue to communicate via the social network. This gave the U.S. government access to information from Iran, whom the U.S. has had no official diplomatic relations for three decades. Thus, social media has played a role as an important source for not only civilians, but also governments in gaining potential diplomatic information. Governments will, therefore, continue to use social media platforms to provide and source for information in their affairs. Social networking applications and social media, in large part because of their ease of use, have become instruments of communication and change and should be expected to have a significant impact on government communication for the foreseeable future.
In the 21st century, there is an increasing need for governments to connect with their audiences both home and abroad on various matters that are of interest to state and international affairs. Social media therefore comes in as a handy tool to reach audiences anywhere in the world and to have their response to matters at hand. For instance, “The use of social media platforms for U.S. public diplomacy can potentially provide a multitude of connections with stakeholders, opinion leaders and publics, otherwise, crucial to U.S. foreign policy objectives. In simple terms, social media expands the number of contacts with people.”

In Arkhurst’s view, social media enable governments to communicate better with citizens and foreigners in a way that improves a government’s public image. The youth also constitute governments’ stakeholder audience given that often, many governments’ policy target them, and also that they extensively use social media, governments cannot but employ social media in its interaction with the youth. Colona observes that youthful trends indicate that social networking sites are the future of communication, thus, the U.S. government ought to be placing more emphasis on social networking communication strategies to reach international youth to increase the country’s soft power.

He cited DipNote as having emerged as a legitimate element in the U.S and serves as yet another new vehicle to move the country’s soft power in a favourable direction. The blog, according to him, encourages substantive dialogue between U.S. government officials at the State Department and audiences, including the youth, foreign and domestic, and therefore, if its user base continues to go up, the blog’s relevance in the day-to-day world of the average foreign citizen will follow. Another example was when the then U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton participated in a “Social Media Dialogue” with Dr. Ahmed Ghanim of the Egyptian newspaper, Masrawy, on February 23, 2011, during which over 6,500 questions were asked of the secretary.
Democracy demands that citizens are involved in the governance process, and social media provides a platform for governments to directly engage citizens in a way that promotes democracy. Many governments are now involved in E-Governance/E-Democracy, which uses the power of the internet to connect with citizens through electronic means such as social media platforms. Graham and Avery state that “democratic governance occurs through citizen representatives. New technologies can improve representation by allowing citizens the ability to evaluate the records of governments and elected officials and by providing the means for citizens to interact directly with government officials.”

Also, democracy works best when people are directly involved in policy debate, actions, and decisions, thus, social media will help governments to use new technologies to re-engage citizens who have been disengaged in the governance process. For Arkhurst, since governments and the Ghana government for that matter is moving towards E-Governance, social media is a necessary tool for government communication. In view of the fact that citizens have been using the power of social media to organize protests and even uprisings against governments as was seen in the Arab Springs for example, governments will have to utilize the same power in a proactive manner that will forestall future protests and especially political activities that disrupts government affairs. Furthermore, using social media tools to engage citizens and foreigners alike in the democratic process ensures transparency because governments now make issues of public interest available, which enables citizens to participate in political decision-making. According to Piotrowski, governmental transparency allows the public to develop a more accurate picture of what is happening in government, which allows citizens to hold governments accountable and evaluate performances of government agencies.

In view of this, governments will continue to utilize social media to enhance democratic principles. Additionally, new technologies like social media
tools can improve representation by allowing citizens the ability to evaluate the records of governments and elected officials.\textsuperscript{115}

Finally, social media can help governments now and in the future to manage crisis of various kinds. Due to the ubiquity of social media, governments can easily give prior notice to its publics in the case of an impending crisis or respond to crisis situation using social media platforms and at the same time receive information from the public that can help in further solving the crisis. Mergel observes that social media can be used to better prepare for emergencies, enable people show up to vote, sign up for campaigns, apply for health care, or simply become aware of policies and programs.\textsuperscript{116} This ability of social media can be effectively used to manage and promote public diplomacy, particularly the Ghana and U.S. embassies and consulates around the world can employ social media to influence foreign publics on the policies of their home countries and correct misconceptions when they arise. According to Harris, the use of social media in times of crisis by a U.S. embassy can garner public support for U.S. presence. There is also the need for foreign civilians to know the U.S. has a vested interest in their well-being, hence, broadcasting accurate information in times of crisis and listening to the concerns of people abroad will create a level of trust, which would make people feel connected to the U.S. message, and also share that message with other people on their networks.\textsuperscript{117} Although using social media networks like Twitter to spread information and create a reputation can create risks such as the spread of false information about the U.S. and potentially ruin its reputation in the host country, social media provides a platform for U.S. embassy to actively correct misconceptions that social media sites make more visible. Therefore, it is important for the U.S. embassy to follow the leaders in the discussions of U.S. foreign policy in the host country.\textsuperscript{118} This aspect of social media is important to foreign relations, and in the future can be
enhanced to meet government’s needs. Arkhurst observes that social media has come to stay and in view of its advantages, it will continue to serve governments interest in the long term. Thus, governments must take institutional decisions regarding how to address the challenges going forward.

3.9 Conclusion

Social media since its inception has been a communication tool for individual and groups that harness its power of communication for interaction with one another. It has undoubtely evolved over the years to become a popular tool for communication to the point that governments and government agencies have come to also depend on it for their communication needs. The Ghana and U.S. governments all use social media basically for communication with their publics both domestic and foreign, interact with stakeholders and obtain feedback to inform government policy and decision-making. Social media has, therefore, taken an important role in international politics, especially as governments employ it to further democratic and governance principles, create awareness for government policies, and achieve public diplomacy objectives. Colona points out that social media are relevant for public diplomacy because other forms of public diplomacy have become increasingly anachronistic in the 21st century. To ensure that social media use does not infringe any rules of government or rights of people, there are principles guiding social media use that establish clear guidelines for officials handling social media platforms/tools. Although social media poses numerous challenges to governments such as its real-time nature, ability to go viral, issues of anonymity and its use for political mobilization against governments, it also has great prospects for which it will continue to be used in the future. In the words of Hillary Clinton, “It is clear that social media is the future of
communication, in large part because it is being embraced by the youth across the world.” Social media is therefore a great tool in the affairs of state that if properly harnessed can help governments achieve various political objectives on the domestic and international scene.
Endnotes

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8 Ibid., p.13.
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CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.0 Introduction

This study sought to find out how governments use social media in their affairs both domestically and internationally, for what purposes governments use social media, and the challenges governments face while using social media. The study also examined how social media has affected public diplomacy, the prospects of social media to the U.S. and Ghana governments, and whether social media will be temporary or permanent communication tool for these two governments in the long term.

4.1 Summary of Findings

The study found out that both the Ghana and U.S. governments use social media to communicate with domestic and foreign audiences on matters of policy. This is often to inform and explain to the public, government’s position on issues of domestic and international affairs, and also to obtain feedback that can inform further policy decisions regarding such matters. Social media also helps governments to maintain a relationship with different stakeholders through targeted audience and to directly communicating with the audience through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc. The two governments are also using social media tools to fulfill democratic mandates due to its capability to bring about transparency and accountability. This is because governments engage their citizens and foreigners alike in symmetrical communication.
Also, the study revealed that social media poses some challenges to the Ghana and U.S. governments in that its real-time nature, going viral, and anonymity makes it difficult for governments to solely control the flow of government communication like it did in the past. Social media ensures easy mobilization by individuals and groups, especially of political mobilization, hence these governments at one point or another have to deal with protest movements and other opposition forces utilization of social media tools to protest against government policy decisions at the state and international levels.

The data gathered showed that social media aids the governments to conduct their public diplomacy because it has made it easy to reach foreign publics at the click of a button. This enable governments, particularly the U.S. government to indirectly influence political situations in other countries and also provide an avenue to source information through their embassies and missions abroad. Social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, therefore, enhance public diplomacy practices, and help to promote a positive image abroad.

Furthermore, the study found out that social media holds many prospects for the Ghana and U.S. governments in many respects. These include providing a channel for governments to listen to their publics in a manner that promotes transparency, and interact with stakeholders to ensure participation in the democratic process. Its ability to provide quick feedback for governments helps government agencies to make policy decisions. Feedback also helps the governments to know whether the information put out is reaching the right audience, and to further target their messages. Social media also when properly managed, helps in handling crisis situations both at home and abroad.
4.2 Conclusion

Social media is a communication tool that has greatly affected government communication in the conduct of domestic and international affairs. Particularly, its feedback feature enables governments to take informed decisions that create an image of accountability for them. Also, public diplomacy in the 21st century has been greatly impacted by social media in a most positive way. In the U.S. and Ghana governments’ use of social media, challenges remain but the purposes for which they are using social media and the prospects for the future make it important in government affairs. Given the fact that there continues to be innovations in internet development as well as social media, and the ways in which these governments are using social media, this study concludes that social media is important in the political affairs of Ghana and the U.S., and is therefore a permanent phenomenon. Thus, they will continue to use social media in the long term to achieve political objectives. In view of the findings of this study, the hypothesis holds that Ghana and the U.S. view social media as indispensable in their affairs.

4.3 Recommendations

This study makes the following recommendations:

Lessening Bureaucratic Systems

There already exists guidelines that regulate social media use by governments but they must reduce bureaucratic processes that inhibit quick response to the public’s concerns. The U.S and Ghana governments must take advantage of the real time nature of social media to get their messages across promptly as issues arise. In view of this, social media managers of the various government agencies must be well equipped with necessary internet tools and human resource to respond to the demanding nature of social media.
Avoid Censorships

Social media does pose many challenges to government communication and affairs in general especially in terms of protest movements, hence, the possibility for governments to impose restrictions on social media. However, democratic principles require transparency and accountability of governments; thus, the Ghana and U.S governments must ensure affordable access to the internet and freedom of expression on social media albeit with responsibility. This means providing guidelines for use by the public so as not to create political incitements and abuse.

Introduce innovations

The U.S have many innovative ways of using social media but further has to develop technologies and support policies that preserve the ability for people to access government’s information around the world. Ghana and particularly, the MFARI need to invest in innovative ways of using social media if government is to take advantage of social media tools to enhance her international affairs including, especially public diplomacy efforts.

Periodic Assessment

Social media is fast evolving and so governments must periodically carry out evaluation of their social media investments and outcomes to determine areas that need enhancing and further investment. This will help government agencies to produce relevant materials for their target audience, for their social media campaigns to be successful.
Lessons for Ghana

The U.S. government uses social media far more extensively than Ghana and therefore, there is the need for Ghana to pick lessons from the U.S if she is to enhance her use of social media beyond maintaining a website and merely having a social media presence. At the time of concluding this study, the MFARI’s Facebook page has only 58 Likes with virtually no posts. In the words of the ICT Director of the ministry, “Social media has come to stay” and so the MFARI must employ ways such as dedicating resources to take advantage of the benefits of social media.
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