

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA	3
SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION	5
SOCIAL MEDIA AND OBAMA US 2008 ELECTIONS VICTORY	5
SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN GHANA	7
FACEBOOK CAMPAIGNS	8
TWITTER CAMPAIGNS	10
SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COST SAVING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY	11
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15

INTRODUCTION

There is no denying the fact that the advent of [social media](#) has resulted in the most substantial and pervasive change to communication in modern times. Social media remains the greatest impetus for information dissemination in the 21st Century with its opportunities, particularly, evidenced in the spontaneity of political events more than ever. The advent of social media has therefore been touted as revolutionary in all spheres of human endeavour, including engagement on public policy issues.

Since social media tools such as [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and the rest were used to facilitate political engagement and campaigns in the [US 2008 presidential elections](#), they have gained increased prominence in politics all over the world based on their unprecedented potential for increased political communication. Today, news consumers head to social media for their information. As a result, [social media platforms](#) have not only become important channels for distributing news, but have also remained a central part of how well the news is communicated. Consequently, these platforms are popular news channels because they do not only carry a strong and influential voice, but they also provide opportunity for direct interaction and feedback with the target audience.

A 2014 study showed that [62% of web users' turn to Facebook](#) to find political news. The increasing use of social media platforms is largely due to its ability to ensure quick dissemination of political information and encourage political participation. What is the potential of social media? How is social media used for political engagements? To what extent are political leaders using social media for political campaigns in Ghana?

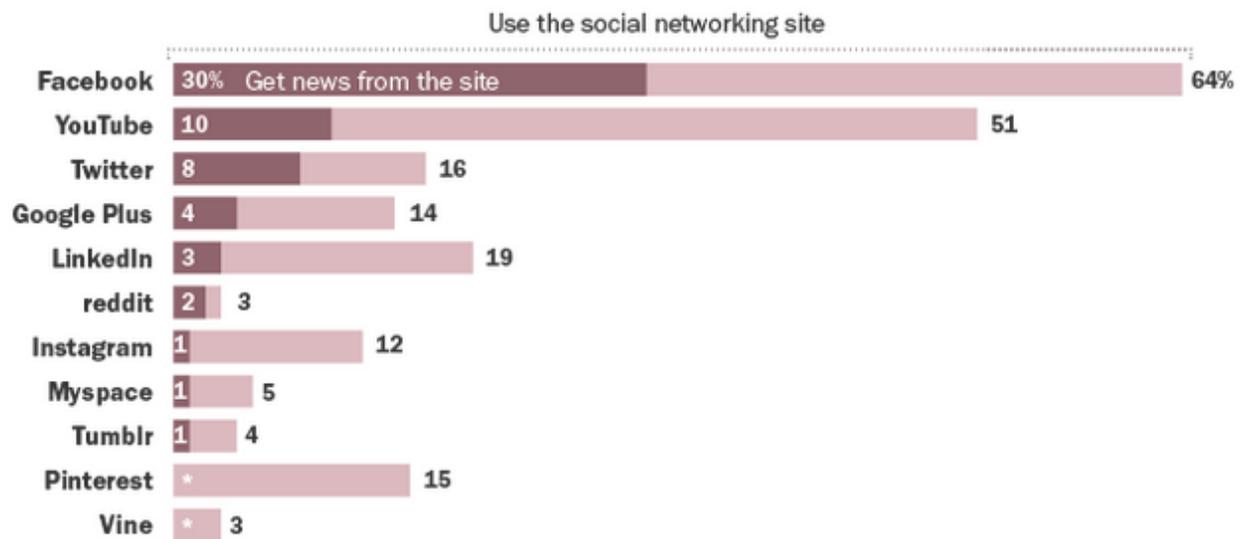
THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media allows users to create, share and search for information without having to log in to any specific [portal destination](#). These tools become 'social' in the sense that they are created in ways that enable users to share and communicate with one another. The social media network,

Facebook, one of the first social media tools, launched in 2004, has over 1.4 billion users worldwide. As a result, information via this platform is disseminated at high speed, low cost, with far-reaching resultsⁱ. Social media is therefore facilitating the connection of the world through the power of the internet.

As evidenced in the **figure** below, the power of social media is fast becoming very ubiquitous, particularly in politics as a major source of news for many citizens and affects voting behaviour because it allows for cheap access to the production and consumption of *current* information without editorial filtering.ⁱⁱ

Percent of U.S. adults who use each social networking site and percent of U.S. adults who get news from each social networking site



Note: The percent of U.S. adults who get news on Pinterest and Vine each account to less than one percent. Facebook News Survey, Aug. 21-Sept. 2, 2013 (N=5,173)

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Today, social media is a major enabler for citizens' participation in the democratic process as clearly demonstrated in the 2008 US Elections when young people were inspired to political topics using social media as [communication platform](#). Social media and its highly visible environment provides presidential candidates the ideal platform to promote themselves, articulate their policy goals and interact with their voters directly and without the filter of the mainstream media.

A research conducted by [Pew Research Centre](#) in February 2012 established that, 80% of adults use the internet and 66% of those online adults use social media networking sites. Political candidates today are increasingly using social media and the internet as a vital campaign strategy for spreading information, raising money, and rallying voters. For instance, President Barack Obama harnessed social media in his 2008 campaign to communicate his vision for the American electorate.

Election campaigns basically rely on communication. Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have not only given politicians a powerful avenue for interacting with a more demanding citizenry, but have also allowed them to offer more personalised images to the public. It has also given the less resourceful parties the opportunity to match well-funded campaigns with creative and relatively inexpensive strategies.

Candidates, members of parliament and local committee members worldwide are now providing information about their policy positions and inviting followers to interact on their platforms. In [the Romanian presidential elections of November, 2014, there](#) was unprecedented use of social media for the first time in that country, both by the political candidates and voters.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND OBAMA US 2008 ELECTIONS VICTORY

In the 2008 United States presidential election, Barack Obama (the Democratic Party Nominee) defeated John McCain (the Republican Party Nominee) to become the first African-American ever

to be elected president of the United States. Obama's total vote amount of 69.5 million was the highest ever won by a presidential candidate. This victory is credited to his competitive edge in social media and Internet following.



Obama had over 2 million American supporters on Facebook and 100,000 followers on Twitter, while McCain attracted only 600,000 Facebook supporters (likes) and 4,600 followers on Twitter. Obama's [YouTube](#) channel held 115,000 subscribers and more than 97 million video views. Obama had maintained a similar advantage

over Senator Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Primary. Obama's edge in social media was therefore very crucial to the election outcome.

According to a study by the Pew Internet and American Life project, 35 percent of Americans relied on online video for election news. Ten percent of Americans used social networking sites to learn about the election. The successful use of social media during the US presidential campaign in 2008 has informed a renewed interest in Facebook, Twitter, [Myspace](#), among others all over the world. Social media has therefore become an integral part of the political campaign toolbox and have affected users' political attitudes and behaviours.ⁱⁱⁱ Political parties all over the world have begun to adopt these tools in engaging potential voters by posting videos and their political campaign messages targeted at their followers in this two-way open conversation that allows for exchange of information in unprecedented manner.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN GHANA

The *tactics* employed by Barack Obama in the 2008 US elections has changed the rules of political communication. Since then electoral campaigns have been more about the use of social media platforms than the conventional approach which emphasized more of one-way communication with limited chances to generate feedback.^{iv} As depicted in the table below, political news is a key reason why social media has gained increase popularity.

In Ghana, social media has undoubtedly exposed majority of Ghanaians to different interactive platforms with a significant impact on political behaviour, decision and judgement.^v Today, social media has become the *battle field* for what was arguably the most competitive election in Ghana's history, as the application of social media tools in political engagement was unprecedented. Social media opened a new wave of opportunity for citizens, politicians and civil society organizations to engage in an open, transparent and dialogical discussion that are relevant to the entrenchment of democratic values and aspirations.

Today, there are more than five million (5,171,993) [Internet users in Ghana](#) representing 19.6% of the population, while Ghana's Facebook user base is about 1,211,760. Giving that the 2008 elections in Ghana was close to call with a difference of 40,586 votes between then Candidate Mills of the National Democratic Congress and Nana Akuffo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party, politicians do not seem to underestimate the power of social media to galvanize, canvass and rake-in floating voters and keep their loyal supporters up-to-date with information and news.

In the 21st century, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are not just innovations in the internet world, but are fast becoming influencers and opinion creators. The use of these tools in Ghana's politics has seen a phenomenal increase in recent times. Currently, 34% of total number of [Facebook users in Ghana](#) are between the ages of 25-35, with 41% between 18-24 years of age. The effect of social media cannot therefore be brushed away in the 2016 in elections in Ghana.

Even before political campaign in Ghana reached the highest apogee in the 2016 electioneering period, social media platforms were the main *arena* for political issues such as the State of the Nation Address, the internal wrangling of the largest opposition party, the judicial scandal, the violence that characterized the limited voter registration, the [presidential pardon granted the Montie trio](#) by President Mahama, and many more gained a lot of commentary on social media.

Civil society groups such as Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) used social media to educate the public on the 2016 limited voters' registration and other related issues. Ghana Decides, a Blogging Ghana Election Project launched the online **#iRegistered** campaign to get eligible Ghanaians to register in 2016 limited registration exercise between April 28 and May 8 2016. The political activities on social media in Ghana clearly shows that this space has rapidly grown in importance and will continue to provide new ways to stimulate citizen's engagement in political life.^{vi}

FACEBOOK CAMPAIGNS

The flagbearers of the major political parties ramped their activities on Facebook, sharing text, pictures and videos. John Mahama's 'Meet JM' app enabled people to sign up to meet the president for private conversation.



Transforming Ghana

August 14 at 6:55pm · 🌐

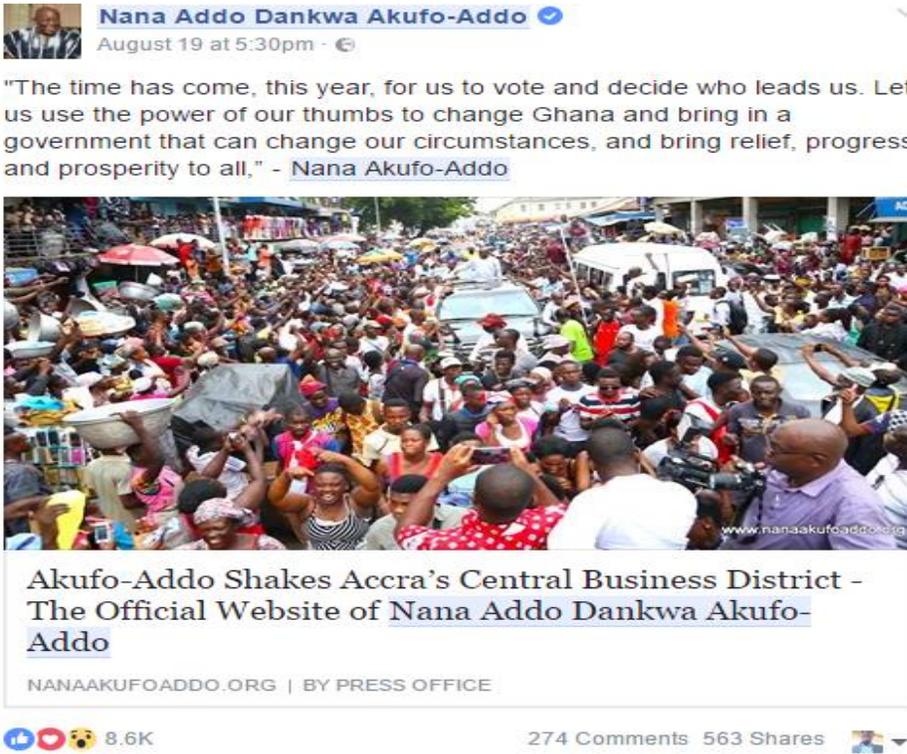
👍 Like Page



Scores of supporters of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) were part of history today as they joined President John Dramani Mahama to officially launch the party's 2016 Presidential campaign. #ChangingLives #TransformingGhana



Picture 1: Screenshot of the Facebook account of President Mahama



The two rivals have also deployed apps on Facebook to deepen engagement with prospective voters. Nana Addo's 'I am for Nana' app enabled people to sign up to a mailing list to receive first-hand information on the flagbearer's activities on the campaign trail.

TWITTER CAMPAIGNS

The leading political parties in Ghana stepped up their campaign on Twitter, with the personal profiles of President Mahama and Nana Addo, the leader of the NPP facilitating the sharing of information about their respective campaign. The President's @JDMahama handle and others such as @Flagstaff Ghana and @TransformingGhana combined to keep the public updated on his campaign.



Picture 3: Screenshot of the twitter handle of president Mahama on campaign tour

Nana Addo’s handle, @NAkufoAddo also adopted similar posturing on Twitter. Active social media engagement and advertising continued on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.



SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COST SAVING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

In December 2015, *The New York Times* reported that digital ad spending was projected to grow by 13.5% in 2016. In the face of [growing political ad spending](#) projected to top \$8 billion, of which digital advertising forms just a fraction in the world where many voters remain disengaged from the political process, grasping the art of social media strategies is essential for swaying potential voters during political campaigns.

While no study has been conducted on whether the increased use of social media by political leaders leads to reduction in the cost of political campaigns, there is no doubt, this strategy is used as cost-cutting measure in Ghana. Political candidates in Ghana, like elsewhere in the world, are taking advantage of the [social media to set the agenda](#) for civic discussions and political campaigns because of the unprecedented opportunities presented by the virtual space. By making their positions on very important national issues and giving followers instant feedback, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, have given candidates the opportunity to reach target groups with political campaign messages and to canvass for votes virtually for free.

Use of Twitter for Political Communication by the H.E John Mahama & Nana Akuffo Addo (NPP)

H.E John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana & Presidential Candidate, National Democratic Congress



John Dramani Mahama @JDMahama · Aug 18

TEN field formally comes on stream. Ghana flag flies proudly aboard FPSO Prof John Atta Mills.



John Dramani Mahama @JDMahama · Aug 3

I was at my polling station in Bole yesterday to check my name in the voters register. Have you checked yours?



John Dramani Mahama @JDMahama · Aug 12

With Anthony Dumenu, a school dropout, a while ago. With support from YES, Tony has a business & is an employer.



John Dramani Mahama @JDMahama · Aug 16

A tremendous & energetic start to our campaign for election 2016. Thank you, people of the Western Region.



John Dramani Mahama @JDMahama · Aug 26

Met with Japanese PM @AbeShinzo a while ago in Nairobi. Japan remains our key dev't partner. #TICAD6NAIROBI.

Nana Akuffo Addo, Presidential Candidate, New Patriotic Party (NPP)



Nana Akuffo-Addo @NAkuffoAddo · Sep 10

Thank you for the support and endorsement. Together, we can bring change and hope to Ghanaians. #ChangelsComing



Nana Akuffo-Addo @NAkuffoAddo · Aug 20

Follow my campaign on Twitter (@NAkuffoAddo) and on Instagram (@nakuffoaddo). #ChangelsComing #AriseForChange



Nana Akuffo-Addo @NAkuffoAddo · Aug 20

Follow my campaign on Twitter (@NAkuffoAddo) and on Instagram (@nakuffoaddo). #ChangelsComing #AriseForChange



Nana Akufo-Addo @NAkufoAddo · Aug 25

There is another opportunity to register to vote: today and tomorrow.
Don't miss the opportunity. #ChangelsComing

 Nana Akufo-Addo, I Am For Nana, Kow Essuman, Esq. and 7 others

As depicted in the **table** below, the cost of serving a digital ad is a fraction of the cost compared to traditional mediums. The cheap cost of digital tools accounts for the increased adoption of social media for political communication.

THE COST OF ADVERTISING NATIONALLY BROKEN DOWN BY MEDIUM

Webpage FX	Setup Process	Setup Cost	Cost of Media	Cost to Continue
NATIONAL TV ADVERTISING	Design + Production	\$63,000 to \$8 million	average of approx. \$342,000 per 30 second ad	Cost of media + agency hourly rate
NATIONAL MAGAZINE ADVERTISING	Design	\$500 to \$397,800	average of approx. \$250,000 per ad	Cost of media + agency hourly rate
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING	Design	\$11 to \$1.4 million	average of approx. \$113,000 per ad	Cost of media + additional design in future
DIRECT MAIL MARKETING	Design	\$50 to \$7,200	approx. \$51.40 per order	Design, publishing + postage costs
TELEMARKETING	Script Writing	\$1,000 to \$5,200	\$7 - \$70 per hour or \$35 - \$60 per lead	\$20-\$60/hour
NATIONAL SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION	Website Configuration	\$4,000 to \$10,000	Free	~\$500/month to internet marketer
NATIONAL PAY PER CLICK MARKETING	Website Configuration	\$4,000 to \$10,000	5¢-\$3 per qualified visitor	Cost of clicks + ~\$500/month to internet marketer
NATIONAL EMAIL MARKETING	Email Template Design	\$4,000 to \$10,000	5¢-\$3 per qualified visitor	~\$500/month to internet marketer
WEB CONTENT MARKETING CAMPAIGN	Development of web content assets and graphical elements	\$6,000 to \$12,000	Free	\$0 (If content is written around "evergreen" topics)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media have become an integral part of public discourse and communication in the contemporary society. Globally, the use of social media in recent elections has significantly intensified, especially in engaging millions of voters through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This has become a cost effective way for politicians to reach their constituents. Though TV, radio phone-ins, stickers, and flyers are still used for political campaign. Social media offers a cheap alternative to communicate a political message to constituents, making social media an imperative political campaign strategy.

Social media has therefore revolutionized political communication by diversifying news sources and increasing the possibility for feedback in a timely manner, with no exception in Ghana, particularly because of its potential to allow for proper targeting and direct and cheap access to political information.

The impact of the social media in Ghana has been unprecedented. However, there is the need for a scientific analysis study on the effect of social media on cost of campaigns and traditional media sources. In its 4th Governance Social Media Index, *Penplusbytes* will present an analysis of social media on the 2016 Elections in Ghana.

End Note

ⁱ Prat, A & Stromberg, D. (2011). *The Political Economy of Mass media*. Stockholm University Working Paper. William H Dutton, through the network of networks: the fifth estate (Oxford Internet Institute, 2011)

ⁱⁱ Sunstein, C. R. (2010). *Republic.com*. Princeton, New York: Princeton University Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Boas, T. C. (2005). Television and neo-populism in Latin America: Media effects in Brazil and Peru. *Latin American Research Review* 40 (2): 27-49.

^{iv} Okoro, N. & Kenneth, A. (2013). Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria during the 2011 General Elections: The Lapses and the Lessons. Paper published by global journal of arts humanities and social sciences vol. 1, No 3, pp. 29-46, September 2013 published by European centre for research training and development UK (www.eajournals.org).

^v Centre for European Studies (2012). Social Media - The New Power of Political Influence. Suomen Toivo Think Tank. Version 1.0 ari-matti auvinen pp. 4-16.

^{vi}<https://rawgist.com/employ-social-media-actively-in-ghanaiian-politics-and-electoral-campaigns-lecturer/> [accessed 9th May, 2016]