

Research Article

# Social Media as an Emerging Instrument of Political Engagement: The Case of Obuasi East Constituency

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## Abstract

Global political communication has changed significantly as a result of the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), shifting from conventional, one-way methods to more interactive and participatory ones. The increased usage of social media and the broad use of mobile internet devices in Ghana have created new avenues for political and civic participation. Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have emerged as essential tools for individuals and political leaders alike, facilitating quick information sharing, direct communication, and the rallying of political support. However, there is still a significant lack of empirical studies examining how social media influences political participation at Obuasi East Constituency. This study investigates the role of social media as an emerging tool for political participation among residents of the Obuasi East Constituency in Ghana. Employing a quantitative research design, data were gathered from a sample of 100 respondents residing in the Obuasi East Constituency to explore how social media is used for political engagement. The study focused on identifying the patterns of social media usage in political activities, assessing the perceived benefits derived from such engagement, and examining the challenges users face. The analysis revealed that social media plays a pivotal role in enhancing political participation by promoting public discourse, encouraging political advocacy, and supporting campaign efforts. Platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as the most commonly used tools, owing to their accessibility and interactive features. Nevertheless, several barriers hinder the optimal use of these platforms, including the spread of misinformation, concerns over data privacy and security, and disparities in digital access between urban and rural populations. It is advised that policymakers and telecom service providers focus on improving internet infrastructure and access, especially in the underserved rural areas of the Obuasi East Constituency.

## Keywords

Social Media, Political Participation, Political Campaigns, Political Mobilization

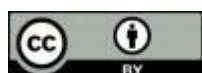
## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has revolutionized global communication, significantly transforming interpersonal interactions, communication patterns, and political discourse. The advent of new media and technology has led to

profound changes in how information is shared and consumed, particularly in the political realm. Scholars from various disciplines, including media studies, political science, sociology, and international relations, have extensively examined the impacts of social media on these domains [18]. Initially, the

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Internet served primarily as a one-way communication channel for political parties to disseminate information through their websites. However, with the advancement of new media technologies, communication has shifted towards a more interactive, two-way model, fundamentally altering the landscape of political engagement [10].

The Internet and social media have increasingly become pivotal in disseminating political information and engaging users in political activities. Social media platforms now facilitate real-time interaction and feedback, enabling a dynamic exchange of information between political entities and the public [28, 17]. This shift has weakened the dominance of traditional, government-controlled media, providing a platform for broader public engagement and reducing information monopolies [47]. According to [37, 38], elections which are a core component of representative democracy, depend on active citizen participation, which is significantly enhanced through ICT platforms. These platforms serve as instruments for political socialization, education, and mobilization, fostering greater individual awareness and engagement [47].

In Ghana, the use of social media has seen significant growth. As of January 2023, there are approximately 6.60 million social media users in Ghana, representing about 19.5% of the population. Internet penetration stands at 68.2%, with 23.05 million internet users and 43.88 million active cellular mobile connections. The gender distribution among social media users shows that 40.5% are female and 59.5% are male. Notably, WhatsApp remains the most popular social media platform in Ghana, followed by Facebook with 5.65 million users and Instagram with about 1.70 million users [4]. The rise of modern communication tools like the Internet and mobile phones has enhanced democratic discourse and increased social media engagement rates [47]. Social media has introduced new opportunities for equitable participation, transparency, and accountability in Ghanaian politics.

Political parties in Ghana have adeptly utilized social media to advance their agendas and achieve electoral [19]. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter enable politicians to communicate directly with the public, rally supporters, and influence public policy. However, this increased use of social media has also raised campaign costs, entrenched inequality, and widened the gap between political parties. Major parties such as the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) have employed numerous social media operatives to manage their online presence, highlighting both the advantages and disparities associated with social media usage [20, 26].

Despite the growing significance of social media in political communication, there is limited empirical research on its role in specific contexts such as the Obuasi East Constituency. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of social media on political participation in this region, considering the strengths and limitations of both traditional and new media. It will also explore the challenges associated with

social media in political contexts.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate social media as an emerging tool for political participation in the Obuasi East Constituency. Specific objectives include identifying the social media platforms used by residents to express political views, assessing the importance of social media for political participation, and analyzing the challenges related to social media use for political engagement in the Obuasi East Constituency. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What social media channels are utilized by residents of Obuasi East Constituency, to express their political views?
2. What is the significance of social media as a tool for political participation in Obuasi East Constituency?
3. What challenges are associated with using social media for political participation in Obuasi East Constituency?

Hypotheses

To guide the analysis and interpretation of results, the following hypotheses were formulated based on Social Network Theory.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the frequency of social media use and the level of political participation among residents of Obuasi East Constituency.

H2: Social media platforms enhance political engagement through information sharing, mobilization, and interactive dialogue among users.

H3: Perceived challenges such as misinformation and limited internet access negatively affect the impact of social media on political participation.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. Theoretical Review - Social Network Theory

The Social Network Theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the impact of social media on political engagement in the Obuasi East Constituency. Initially developed in the 1890s to explore social organization, this theory was advanced by scholars like Jacob Moreno in the 1930s and has since been applied across various disciplines, including Sociology, Economics, Political Science, Communications, and Marketing [48]. Its relevance surged in the late 20th century with the rise of the Internet and social media platforms, which amplified its applicability [2]. The theory posits that social interactions and the nature of connections among individuals are crucial in shaping behaviour, the dissemination of knowledge, and mutual influence. Kim and Lee emphasize that in digital environments, information distribution and interpersonal interactions are profoundly affected by social connections and relationship patterns [24].

The theory's capacity to examine the frameworks of networks including the results for political involvement is one of its main strengths. Adu researched how social media sites like

Twitter and Facebook affect political connections and discovered that by bringing together people who have similar thoughts and passions, such gatherings stimulate the proliferation of political alliances. This relationship enables the mobilization of political activism and involvement [1].

The Social Network Theory has also been praised for providing insight into how politically related information spreads and is influenced within various online platforms. Gonzalez-Bailon et al. showed how powerful people, often known as opinion leaders, play a significant part in spreading political information and influencing public opinion on social media platforms [18]. This discovery is crucial for comprehending how political messages circulate and inspire people to get involved in political activity.

However, the theory has limitations, including its tendency to overlook offline social dynamics and the potential for echo chambers and polarization within online networks. Kim and Lee argue that while social media facilitates political engagement, it may not fully capture the complexities of offline activism [24]. Additionally, Himelboim et al. and Boateng & Wiafe note that online interactions often reinforce existing beliefs and limit exposure to diverse perspectives [21, 5].

Despite its limitations, the Social Network Theory remains an invaluable tool for enhancing political campaigns on social media. By leveraging this theory, campaign strategists can identify key influencers within social networks and tailor their messages to resonate with specific demographics, thereby amplifying the impact of their civic engagement efforts. Research by Nam, Adamic, and Zhang and Tumasjan et al. underscores the practical benefits of applying network dynamics to political communication [31, 43]. These studies demonstrate that a nuanced understanding of network structures and influential nodes enables more effective political outreach and message dissemination, allowing campaigns to target their audiences more precisely and increase the overall efficacy of their communication strategies. This approach not only maximizes the reach of political messages but also enhances the strategic deployment of resources to engage voters more effectively.

## 2.2. Concept of Social Media

Wolf, Sims, and Yang describe social media as encompassing a range of tools, including in-house applications, on-premise systems, and web-based platforms, used to facilitate communication, information sharing, and connections between employees and managers [49]. This definition highlights how social media serves as a versatile tool for information exchange in various technical settings. While it acknowledges social media's role in improving communication among organizational members, it does not address its broader social aspects, such as fostering collaboration, facilitating conversations, or enhancing engagement among staff. Consequently, this definition may overlook the full range of

social media's dynamic features that contribute to social interaction within organizations.

Kwarteng defines social media as websites or software programs that focus on communication and user-generated content. This includes platforms for social networking (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), bookmarking (e.g., Pinterest), news sharing (e.g., Reddit, Digg), media sharing (e.g., Instagram, TikTok), and blogging (e.g., Tumblr) [26]. This definition provides a broad overview of various social media platforms and highlights their core components, such as community-generated content and user interaction. However, while it covers a wide range of platforms, it lacks detailed information on the unique features, capabilities, and attributes of each platform, which might hinder a deeper understanding of the intricacies of social media.

Mukul characterizes social media as computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of content across virtual communities and networks, encompassing a range of information, ideas, professional interests, and other forms of expression [30]. This definition reflects the diverse nature of social media and its ability to support various types of content and user interests. It emphasizes the technological infrastructure that underpins social media platforms. However, by focusing on "computer-mediated technologies," this definition may not fully account for emerging technologies and developments in social media, such as virtual reality or augmented reality, potentially becoming outdated as new advancements emerge.

In general, social media encompasses a broad array of electronic communication tools, particularly online platforms and software, that facilitate the exchange of content, ideas, and various forms of communication [34]. This category includes diverse platforms such as social networking sites, bookmarking services, news-sharing sites, media-sharing platforms, and blogs, each serving distinct purposes. These platforms enable users to create, share, and disseminate content including text, images, videos, and multimedia through online communities and networks. Social media utilizes a variety of tools, including custom-built applications, on-premise software, and web-based systems, to foster interaction, promote information sharing, and enhance communication within and beyond organizational boundaries.

## 2.3. Social Media and Political Participation

The rapid growth and development of social media platforms have had a dramatic impact on the field of political activity. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Twitter, and Telegram have become important participants in this field. Facebook, which was first created for social media, has developed into a thriving platform for political participation and discussion. Bode and Bullock discovered that Facebook has grown to be an important venue for political speech, news consumption, and

engagement with political content in their study on the social media site's role in political communication [6]. Users share political news stories, take part in political debates, join political groups, and participate in political advertising. Gyimah-Boadi et al. noted that in Ghana, political parties, candidates, and activists have utilized Facebook to connect with supporters, disseminate campaign messages, and organize political events [20]. Dzorgbo and Daramy-Williams, and News Ghana observed that Ghanaian users actively engage with political information on Facebook by participating in debates, sharing political news, and expressing their opinions [9, 32].

Twitter, known for its concise messaging format and real-time nature, has become a prominent venue for political conversation and information sharing [12, 17]. Sangalang and DeFeo examined Twitter's impact on political communication during the 2020 U.S. presidential election, highlighting its extensive use by political figures, journalists, and citizens to share political views, provide news updates, and engage in debates [40]. Lugmayr et al. emphasized Twitter's utility for political actors to communicate with the public and influence the political narrative due to its speed and simplicity [27]. Quansah noted the popularity of political hashtags in Ghana, which enable users to follow and participate in specific political discussions [38]. Adu pointed out that Twitter facilitates direct communication between politicians and voters, allowing for transparent and responsive interactions [1].

Instagram has become a major forum for political communication and engagement due to its emphasis on visual imagery. According to Freelon et al., political Instagram users used visual storytelling strategies to captivate followers and spread ideologies during the 2016 U.S. presidential election [13]. Given that Instagram prioritizes visual material, political inventiveness is encouraged through images, memes, and infographics, which in turn promotes political discourse. According to Boateng and Debrah, Instagram has a significant influence on political participation in Ghana since it allows activists and political personalities to publish visually appealing content including behind-the-scenes videos, infographics, and campaign images [4]. Kwarteng noted the use of Instagram Stories and IGTV for sharing campaign activities and engaging followers [26]. Gadzekpo and Debrah observed that Ghanaians, especially the younger generation, actively participate by liking, commenting on, and sharing political content on Instagram, thus broadening the audience for political debates [15].

YouTube is a well-known website that allows users to share videos and is an important forum for political information consumption and discussion. A wide range of political videos, including news snippets, interviews, and user-generated material, are available to users. According to Jungherr, YouTube has the power to shape people's political opinions and actions [22]. Moe and Larsson talked about how individuals who create and share their political videos actively contribute to

the democratization of political communication [29]. Adu stressed the importance that YouTube's video comments have in promoting political discourse [1].

The multi-media messaging app Snapchat has grown in popularity among millennials and developed into a distinctive forum for political participation. According to Lee and Hsieh, political candidates and groups can leverage Snapchat's visual storytelling powers and fleeting nature to establish a connection with young voters [27]. During rallies and demonstrations, Snapchat features like geotags and filters have been used to keep users interested. According to Kruikemeier et al., Snapchat's Discover function provides a forum for news organizations to showcase engaging political news and data, suggesting that the app may have an impact on younger viewers' political engagement [25].

The cloud-based instant messaging service Telegram has gained notoriety for its role in political activity and mobilization [14]. Quansah recognized several of its features, including broadcast channels, groups, and secure chats, which let politically engaged people build political networks and share information [38]. Waisbord emphasized the function of Telegram as a medium for political opposition, citizen journalism, and the coordinating of political acts in areas with restricted press freedom [46]. Boateng and Wiafe discussed Telegram's privacy and security features, which enable users to express political views freely and organize collective actions, particularly in areas with restricted press freedom [5].

Through platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, individuals have instant access to a diverse range of political news, opinions, and analyses [4, 15]. Victor et al. suggested that social media significantly enhances political awareness and information [44]. Users can follow news sources, advocacy groups, and political figures, receiving timely updates and diverse perspectives on political issues [18]. Social media has democratized political discourse by allowing direct interaction between users and political representatives, bypassing traditional intermediaries [8].

Campaigning for political office and voting processes have increasingly relied on social media. Pariser highlighted the use of social media by politicians and parties to connect with voters, disseminate campaign messages, and organize supporters [35]. Roberts et al. (2019) discussed the use of social media in U.S. congressional campaigns, with candidates leveraging platforms like Facebook and Twitter to engage voters and promote their policies [39]. The extensive reach and targeting capabilities of social media allow campaigns to tailor information to specific audiences and interact directly with potential voters. In Ghana, Quansah emphasized that major political parties, such as the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress, utilize dominant social media platforms to spread campaign messages and garner support [38].

Similarly, Lee and Kwak investigated the impact of social media on the 2017 South Korean presidential election, finding

that young people's use of social media positively influenced their political participation [27]. The study highlights how social media provides opportunities for individuals to express their political views, engage in political discussions, and mobilize for political causes. Social media encourages civic participation and engagement, with political campaigns and organizations using these platforms to engage supporters, spread messages, and recruit volunteers [19]. Bode and Bullock noted that social media enables marginalized groups to participate in political activism and voice their opinions [6]. Online petitions and tweets facilitate collaboration, amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups and drawing attention to various political and social issues [8, 38].

Social media platforms have the potential to influence public opinion and set agendas by highlighting specific issues and perspectives [37]. Himelboim et al. revealed that during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, social media significantly impacted public agenda-setting by spotlighting certain issues and framing political debates [21]. Politicians and celebrities can influence public sentiment by endorsing or advocating particular ideologies on social media [11, 1, 22]. Their popularity and credibility make them influential in public discourse and shape the opinions of their followers. Wilberforce found that social media use positively affects political discussion, with participants more likely to engage in offline issues if they engage in online discussion forums [48]. Common platforms like Twitter allow members to voice their opinions, engage in debates, and interact with other users [40].

## 2.4. Challenges of Using Social Media for Political Participation

The rise of social media as a tool for political participation has brought significant opportunities and challenges. One major challenge is the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Vosoughi et al. highlighted that social media platforms can quickly disseminate false or misleading information, undermining public trust in democratic processes [45]. Pennycook and Rand noted that the rapid spread of deceptive content complicates the task of managing and correcting misinformation, potentially influencing voter behaviour and public opinion [36]. Misinformation can distort political discourse and hinder informed decision-making, emphasizing the need for effective strategies to combat false narratives on social media.

The phenomenon of filter bubbles and echo chambers also poses a significant challenge. Pariser described how social media algorithms create filter bubbles, exposing users to content that aligns with their existing beliefs while limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives [35]. This leads to echo chambers, where users predominantly engage with like-minded individuals, reinforcing their views and potentially deepening political polarization [41]. The limited exposure to differing opinions hinders productive political conversations and the development of a well-rounded under-

standing of complex issues.

The manipulation of social media platforms by political actors is another concern. Essoungou discussed how political entities can manipulate social media narratives, amplify certain voices, and influence public sentiment through algorithmic manipulation and targeted marketing [11]. Algorithmic biases can further exacerbate existing inequalities, limiting the visibility of underrepresented groups and shaping political discourse in favour of certain interests [33]. The use of bots and automated accounts to artificially amplify political messages or discredit opponents is a tactic that undermines the authenticity of political discussions and skews public perception.

Anonymity and pseudonymity on social media can undermine trust and accountability in political discourse. Bruns et al. noted that users can hide behind false identities, diminishing the credibility of information shared on these platforms [7]. The lack of accountability for anonymous users can lead to the spread of false information and reduce trust in the authenticity of political discussions.

Data privacy and security are critical issues when using social media for political purposes. Zuboff raised concerns about the collection and sharing of user data for political advertising and targeting [50]. The Cambridge Analytica scandal exemplifies the ethical and legal implications of using personal data for political purposes [18]. Ensuring the protection of user data and addressing privacy concerns are essential for maintaining trust in social media platforms.

Information overload and fragmentation present additional challenges. The vast amount of information available on social media can overwhelm users, making it difficult to discern credible sources from unreliable ones [22]. Tandoc et al. suggested that the dispersal of reliable sources across multiple channels can exacerbate partisan divides and hinder constructive dialogue [42]. Users may struggle to verify the authenticity of political content, complicating informed decision-making and contributing to the spread of misinformation.

In conclusion, while social media platforms offer significant potential for political participation, they also present numerous challenges. Addressing issues such as misinformation, filter bubbles, online harassment, political manipulation, data privacy, and information overload requires a multifaceted approach. Strategies to mitigate these challenges include promoting media literacy, implementing content regulation, fostering online etiquette, ensuring algorithmic fairness, and protecting user information. By addressing these challenges, social media can more effectively contribute to a healthy and democratic political discourse.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to

examine the impact of social media on political participation in the Obuasi East Constituency. Quantitative research allowed for the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns, relationships, and causality. This approach was suitable for testing hypotheses and providing objective, statistically significant results. A survey method was utilized to gather data from a representative sample of the population within the constituency. The survey design enabled the researcher to capture a snapshot of current behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions related to social media usage and political participation.

### 3.2. Population and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study included all residents of the Obuasi East Constituency who are active on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. To ensure that each individual had an equal chance of being selected, a simple random sampling technique was employed. This method was chosen to minimize bias and enhance the representativeness of the sample. A sample size of 100 respondents was selected based on a commonly used formula for sample size determination in social research, particularly when the total population is large or unspecified:

$$n = [Z^2 \times p(1 - p)] \div e^2$$

Where:

$n$  = required sample size

$Z$  = Z-value (1.96 for a 95% confidence level)

$p$  = estimated proportion of the population (0.5 is used when this is unknown)

$e$  = margin of error (0.1 for 10%)

Substituting these values:

$$n = [(1.96)^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)] \div (0.1)^2 = [3.8416 \times 0.25] \div 0.01 = 96.04$$

Thus, a minimum of 96 respondents is required to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 10% margin of error. The selected sample size of 100 slightly exceeds this threshold, ensuring adequate statistical power for the analysis. This approach is consistent with standard practices in social science research, especially in exploratory studies conducted under limited resources or when the exact population size is not precisely known.

### 3.3. Data Collection, Instrument Validation, and Analysis

Data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered both online and in-person to accommodate participants with varying levels of internet access

across the Obuasi East Constituency. The online version was facilitated through Google Forms, while in-person administration ensured inclusivity for respondents with limited digital access. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions, structured primarily around a Likert scale to measure variables such as social media usage patterns, levels of political participation, and demographic characteristics. These design elements were chosen to enable quantification of attitudes and perceptions relevant to the study objectives.

To ensure instrument reliability and validity, the instrument underwent pilot testing with a group of 10 individuals who were similar in profile to the target population. Feedback from the pilot test was used to revise ambiguous questions and improve the logical flow of the instrument. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82 was computed, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability of the scale.

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were computed to identify trends and patterns. Graphical representations including bar charts was also generated to visually illustrate key findings on political participation and social media engagement in the constituency.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The socio-demographic information of the respondents is grouped by gender, age, marital status, educational level, and employment status. This enabled the researcher to know the dominant sample. [Table 1](#), therefore, represents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

*Table 1. Socio-demographic analysis of respondents.*

Demography	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	26	26
Female	74	74
Total	100	100
Age		
18-24	40	40
25-34	52	52
35-44	5	5
45-54	2	2
55 and above	1	1

Demography	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Total	100	100
Marital Status		
Single	91	91
Divorce	0	0
Widow	0	0
Married	9	9
Total	100	100
Educational Level		
No formal educational	0	0
Primary education	0	0
Junior High School	1	1
Senior High School	16	16
Tertiary educational	83	83
Total	100	100
Employment Status		
Employed full-time	10	10
Employed part-time	4	4
Unemployed	13	13
Self-employed	4	4
Student	68	68
Retired	1	1
Total	100	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

According to data from Table 1, 26 (26%) of the responders were male, while 74 (74%) were female. In other words, there were 48 (48%) more female respondents than male respondents in the survey. The gender distribution confirmed the data from the Ghana Statistical Service. In the Obuasi East Constituency, there are 47,474 females and 44,927 men, according to the Population and Housing Census [16]. This indicates that the constituency has a higher female-to-male ratio. This gender gap in response rates may be attributed to the fact that women were more interested in the study and used social media than men [23].

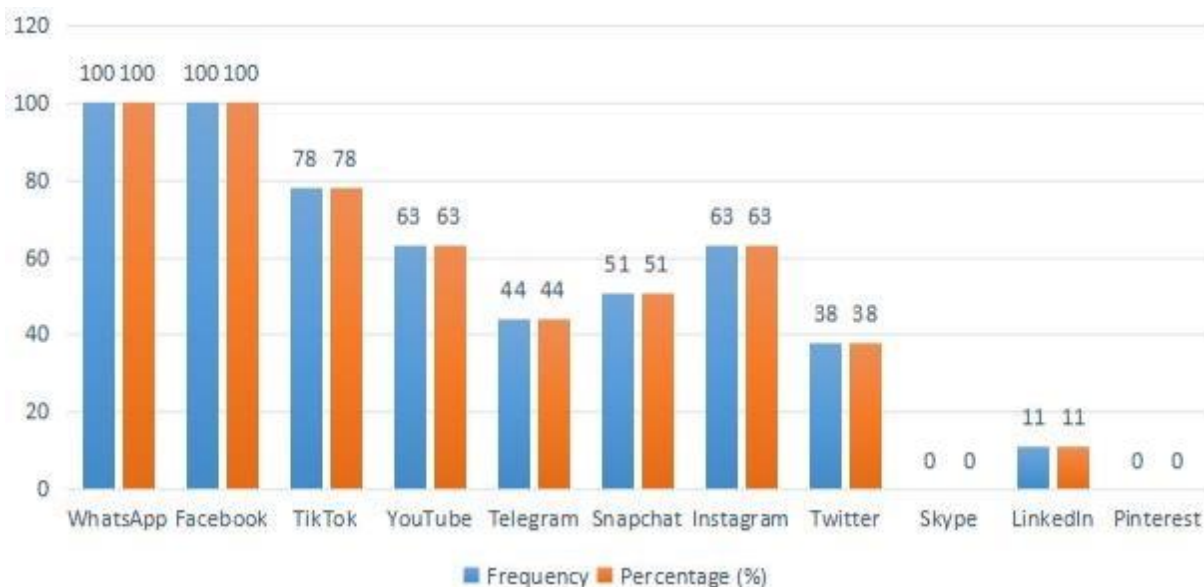
Similarly, respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 were 40, or 40%, while respondents between the ages of 25 and 34 were 52, or 52%. Between 35 and 44, there were 5 (5%) replies, whereas between 45 and 54, there were just 2 (2%). On the other hand, 1% of respondents were 55 years of age or older. According to the data, respondents between the ages of 25 and 34 made up the majority of the study's respondents (52%), while respondents 55 and older made up the least. Similarly, 91 (91%) of the responders and 9 (9%) of them were married. None of them were widowed or divorced. This indicates that the majority of study participants were single.

None of the respondents had any formal education beyond their primary education, according to their degree of education. One (1) respondent, or 1% of the sample, had completed junior high school, as opposed to sixteen (16) representing 16% who had completed senior high school. In terms of tertiary education, it was found that 83 out of 100 respondents, or 83%, had completed that degree of education. This means that the majority of the respondents had tertiary education followed by Senior High School. This result can be attributed to the fact that the Obuasi East Constituency has a university (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science of Technology - Obuasi Campus), and three (3) Senior High Schools (one public and two private) [16].

Regarding the respondents' employment status, it was discovered that 10 (10%) of them were full-time employees, while 4 (4%) were part-time employees. Thirteen (13) out of the 100 respondents, or 13%, reported being unemployed, compared to four (4), or 4%, who identified as self-employed. Only one (1) of the respondents, or 1% of the total, was retired, even though 68 (68%) of the respondents were students. It can therefore be said that the majority of the respondents were students while the least employment status was retired.

#### 4.2. What Are the Various Social Media Platforms Used to Express Political Views in Obuasi East Constituency

This section examined the various social media channels that the people of Obuasi East Constituency utilize to express their political views. It first established if the respondents use social media and whether they use it for political participation. It also looked at the social media type used for political participation. Items 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the questionnaire (see Appendix) were used to solicit responses from the respondents to answer this research question.



Source: Fieldwork, 2023

**Figure 1.** Respondents on Social Media Type.

It is interesting to note that all 100 respondents claimed to have social media handles. This indicates that everyone who is involved uses social media. All one hundred respondents, 100%, who were asked which social media network they use said they use Facebook and WhatsApp. Seventy-eight (78) of the respondents hinted that they use TikTok whereas sixty-three (63) representing 63% said they use YouTube. Additionally, 44 (44%) users of Telegram were found, compared to 51 (51%) users of Snapchat. There were 63 (63%), 38 (38%), and 11 (11%) users on Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, respectively. None of the 100 respondents claimed to use Pinterest or Skype.

According to the data above, WhatsApp and Facebook are the social media platforms with the greatest popularity among users in Obuasi East Constituency because every responder uses them. Since none of the respondents use Skype or Pinterest, it can be said that these platforms are also unknown to the respondents.

This data backs up the claims made by Gyimah-Boadi, Ayee, and Ohemeng and Quansah that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular social media platforms in Ghana [20, 38]. According to a study by Adu titled "Social Media Platforms and Political Participation in Ghana: A Case Study in Ashanti Region, Ghana," the majority of young people in the Ashanti Region have social media accounts, with Facebook and WhatsApp being the most popular [1]. Pinterest is the least popular platform used in their study. As a result, it may be claimed that the Ashanti Region and Obuasi East Constituency use some of the same social media platforms.

Additionally, 92 (92%) of the 100 respondents who were asked how frequently they use social media platforms claimed

they use it more than once a day, while 7 (7%) hinted they use it just once a day. One percent of respondents indicated they use it once a week. None of the participants rarely utilize social networking platforms. The majority of respondents utilise social media platforms more than once each day, followed by once per day, according to this data.

Surprisingly, ninety-four (94) out of one hundred respondents, or 94%, said they utilize social media for political engagement, in contrast to the remaining six (6%) who claimed they do not. As indicated by Quansah, social media use has grown in recent years, particularly since 2010, when network service providers began offering their services to rural communities as well [38]. In other words, the results of this study validate Quansah's conclusion [38]. This indicates that the majority of respondents participate in politics through social media.

When questioned further, they admitted to participating in political campaigns, political advocacy, political debates, and talking to politicians. This information is consistent with Wilberforce's research paper, "Social Media and Elections in Ghana: Enhancing Democratic Participation [47]". According to the study's findings, Wilberforce, 95.3% of young people used social media for political advocacy as opposed to 91.9% for political involvement. The political debate made up 87.3% while communicating to politicians accounted for 90.7% [47].

#### 4.3. What Are the Importance of Social Media as a Tool for Political Participation in Obuasi East Constituency

This section tried to investigate the importance of social media as a tool for political participation in the Obuasi East

Constituency. The questionnaire contains six (6) items for this research question. All the questions were on a scale of four,

from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. These are items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 (See Appendix).

**Table 2.** Respondents on the Importance of Social Media as a Tool for Political Participation.

S/N	STATEMENT	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Total (%)
10.	Social Media serves as an instrument for political mobilization.	0 (0)	0 (0)	21 (21)	79 (79)	100 (100)
11.	Social Media helps in the dissemination of information to the masses as well as receiving feedback.	0 (0.0)	0 (0)	7 (7)	93 (93)	100 (100)
12.	Social Media helps to discover and solve problems.	4 (4)	28 (28)	12 (12)	56 (56)	100 (100)
13.	Social media ensure that the youth participate in political discussions which therefore influence government policies.	0 (0.0)	6 (6)	39 (39)	55 (55)	100 (100)
14.	Social Media can reach a large audience thereby making politicians maintain closeness and transparency with citizens.	0 (0)	11 (11)	41 (41)	48 (48)	100 (100)
15.	Social Media are used to solicit votes from voters.	4 (4)	28 (28)	17 (17)	51 (51)	100 (100)

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

None of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statement that "social media serves as an instrument for political mobilization" for item (S/N) 10 in Table 2 above. Twenty-one (21) of the one hundred (100) participants agreed with the statement, while a whopping 79 (79%) strongly agreed with it. The majority of respondents, it can be mentioned, firmly concurred that social media is a tool for political participation. It can be claimed that all 100 respondents endorse the assertion based on the positive responses (strongly agree and agree). This outcome is consistent with Tandoc et al. statement that "social media has changed the landscape of political engagement by enabling people to make stronger plans and organize events [42]". Freelon et al. specifically suggested that the usage of hashtags on Facebook and Twitter has made it easy to organize protests against the administration [13].

None of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that "Social Media helps in dissemination of information to the masses as well as receiving feedback" in response to item (S/N) 11. 93 (93%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 7 (7%) who agreed with it. According to the data, all the respondents acknowledge that social media facilitates the public dissemination of information and the gathering of feedback in the Obuasi East Constituency.

Boateng and Debrah noted that people now have quick access to a variety of political news, perspectives, and analysis through social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, enabling politicians to receive the input they want [4]. Additionally, the results support Amnesty International's claim that social media platforms have de-

mocratized political discourse by enabling individuals to interact directly and without the customary middlemen with political representatives [3].

In contrast to the 28 (28%) respondents who disagreed with the statement that social media helps to discover and solve problems, 4 (4%) respondents indicated they strongly disagreed with it. However, 12 (12%) of the respondents said they agreed with the assertion. 56 (56%) out of the 100 respondents strongly agreed with the statement. It may be said that 68 out of 100 respondents, or 68%, agree with the statement that social media helps to discover and solve problems. Given Quansah, residents can now utilize various social media platforms to air their grievances and societal problems for onward solving [38]. People post about their bad roads and other development project issues on different social media platforms to raise awareness and encourage participation.

None of the responses provided to the item (S/N) 13 strongly disagreed with the statement that youth participation in political discourse through social media influences government policy. Likewise, just 6 responders (6%) out of 100 agreed with the assertion. On the other hand, 55 (55%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that social media ensures that the youth participate in political discussions, which in turn influences governmental policy, while 39 (39%) of the respondents agreed with it. In other words, 94 (94%) people support the claim.

This study's findings confirm the results of Sangalang and DeFeo's study in the U.S.A. [40]. In their analysis, Sangalang and DeFeo established the conclusion that political actors, journalists, and citizens all made significant use of the Twitter platform to share political perspectives, and news updates,

and engage in political debates during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. These actions either directly or indirectly affect or shape governmental policies.

Regarding item (S/N) 14, unlike the 11 (11%) who disagreed, none of the 100 respondents strongly disagreed with the claim that social media may reach a wide audience, forcing politicians to maintain closeness and openness with constituents. The majority of the respondents, 48 (48%) out of the 41 who responded, or 41%, agreed with the statement in its entirety. Additionally, the majority of respondents believe social media can reach a wide audience and encourage politicians to stay in touch and be open with voters. In light of the study conducted by Lee and Hsieh, and Quansah, a bigger percentage of people use various social media platforms, which in turn reach a broader audience [27, 38]. As a result, officials can interact with the public more frequently, ensuring accountability and openness. In other words, according to Boateng and Debrah, the government and its numerous ministries, agencies, and departments are accountable to the populace through social media [4].

Finally, item (S/N) 15 shows that just four (4) of the respondents, or 4% of those who strongly disagree, disagreed with the statement that social media is used to solicit votes from voters, but 28 (28%) of them did. Even though only 17 respondents (17%) agreed with the statement, a stunning 51 respondents (51%) strongly agreed with it. As can be seen, 68 of the 100 respondents agreed that social media should be used to encourage voters in the Obuasi East Constituency to cast ballots. In other words, voters choose political parties or candidates based on the problems that are discussed or presented to them on social media. Gyimah-Boadi et al. found that the political messages spread on various social media platforms influenced the voting patterns of the electorates in Ghana's 2016 elections [20].

#### 4.4. What Are the Challenges of Using Social Media for Political Participation in Obuasi East Constituency

This section sought to investigate the various challenges of using social media for political participation in the Obuasi East Constituency. Using the Likert scale, items 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 on the questionnaire (see Appendix A) assisted in getting the responses for this research question.

According to Table 3 item 16 below, "social media does not encourage full participation of the people since it is most used in the urban areas as compared to the rural areas", 2 (2%) of the 100 respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. Seven (7) respondents, or 7% of the total, said they disagreed with the statement. While 26 (46%) said they agreed with the statement, 65 (65%) said they strongly agreed because social media is more popular in urban than rural regions, which discourages people from fully participating in society. It is obvious from the data that the majority of respondents agree

with the assertion.

This concurs with Karamat and Farooq's study on the "Emerging role of social media in Political Activism Perceptions and Practices," which claimed that rural residents are still far from using social media because the majority of voters reside in rural areas, where social media cannot reach them, making it difficult for political parties to reach out to them in a timely and efficient manner [23].

The use of social media for political participation allows for foreign interference in elections, item 17 of Table 3, shows that two (2) respondents, or 2% of the 100 respondents, strongly disagreed with the statement. Fifteen (15) of the respondents representing 15% disagreed with the assertion. 39 out of the 69 respondents representing 39% agreed with this assertion, while 44 (44%) strongly agreed. This indicates that a significant portion of the respondents who took part in the study acknowledge that the use of social media for political engagement encourages foreign meddling in domestic elections. Additionally, this study supports Gyampo's work and the widespread belief, supposition, or perception that outsiders meddle in the nation's elections and electoral process through social media [19].

None of the respondents strongly disagreed with the claim in item 18 of Table 3, which reads, "The use of social media allows for the wide spread of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda." Eighteen (18) 18% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Thirty-one (31) of the respondents agreed with the statement, with 51 (51%) strongly agreeing that the use of social media enables the widespread dissemination of propaganda, false information, and fake news. This indicates that the statement is supported by the majority of respondents. According to Gyampo, this problem is prevalent, especially in democratic nations or jurisdictions with weak cyber security [19].

Item 19 of Table 3, asked respondents to respond to the statement "The usage of social media for political participation facilitates political harassment and trolling". According to the responses, 18 respondents (18%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Thirteen (13) respondents representing 13% disagreed with the statement, whereas 28 respondents, or 28%, agreed with it. Forty-one respondents, or 41%, strongly agreed with the statement. This research still shows that the majority of respondents, 69 (69%) believe that political harassment and trolling are some of the difficulties with using social media for political engagement in the Obuasi East Constituency because of the social media's large subscriber base.

Social media creates privacy risks to users and may affect their capacity to form and express political opinions, according to item 20 of Table 3, with 13 (13%) strongly disagreeing and 35 (35%) disagreeing. 33 (33%) respondents strongly agreed, compared to 19 (19%) who agreed. This indicates that 52 respondents (52%) of the study population, concurred with the statement that social media creates privacy risks to users

and may affect their capacity to form and express political opinions in Obuasi East Constituency. In light of this, Zuboff opined that individual privacy is in danger due to the collection, storage, and prospective sharing of users' sensitive details and online actions with other entities [50].

Last but not least, item (S/N) 21 reveals that 16 respondents (16%) strongly disagreed with the assertion that "social media can manipulate citizen's views and expectations," whereas 11 respondents (11%) disagreed with the statement. On the other

hand, 35 respondents (35%) agreed with the statement, and 33 of them (representing 33%) strongly agreed [51-75]. This means that social media can manipulate citizens' views and expectations since 73 (73%) of the respondents hinted. Although social media platforms give people a way to engage in politics, Citron and Norton argued that they can serve as a tool for manipulating users' opinions, particularly in societies without age restrictions on access [8].

**Table 3.** Respondents on Challenges of Using Social Media for Political Participation.

S/N	STATEMENT	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Total (%)
16	Social Media does not encourage full participation of the people since it is most used in the urban areas as compared to the rural areas.	2 (2)	7 (7)	26 (26)	65 (65)	100 (100)
17	The use of social media for political participation allows for foreign interference in elections.	2 (2)	15 (15)	39 (39)	44 (44)	100 (100)
18	The usage of social media allows for the widespread spread of misinformation, fake news and propaganda.	0 (0)	18 (18)	31 (31)	51 (51)	100 (100)
19	The usage of social media for political participation facilitates political harassment and trolling.	18 (18)	13 (13)	28 (28)	41 (41)	100 (100)
20	Social media creates privacy risks for users and may affect their capacity to form and express political opinions.	13 (13)	35 (35)	19 (19)	33 (33)	100 (100)
21	Social media can manipulate citizens' views and expectations.	16 (16)	11 (11)	35 (35)	38 (38)	100 (100)

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

## 5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The study explored social media as the emerging tool for political participation in Obuasi East Constituency. The research examined the various social media platforms used to express political views in Obuasi East Constituency as well as investigated the importance of social media as a tool for political participation in Obuasi East Constituency. It also analyzed the various challenges of using social media for political participation in the Obuasi East Constituency. To achieve this, the researchers used the quantitative approach with a sample size of one hundred (100) respondents chosen using the simple random sample technique.

The study established that all respondents reported having social media accounts, with Facebook and WhatsApp being the most popular platform. As a result, ninety-four percent used social media for political engagement such as political campaigns, advocacy, debates, and conversations with politicians, more than once a day. Again, the majority of the respondents, specifically ninety-three percent recognized that

social media serves as a crucial platform for disseminating political information and receiving feedback, indicating its role in facilitating communication between politicians and citizens.

It was also revealed that social media encourages youth participation in political discussions that influence government policies as well as being a crucial instrument for political mobilization. Respondents expressed concerns that social media's popularity in urban areas might lead to uneven participation between urban and rural populations. Finally, the majority of the respondents believed that political harassment and trolling are one of the major difficulties with using social media for political engagement in the Obuasi East Constituency because of the social media's large subscriber base. Finally, a significant portion of the respondents who took part in the study acknowledge that the use of social media for political engagement encourages foreign meddling in domestic elections. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government authorities are encouraged to develop digital literacy programmes targeting citizens of all age groups, particularly in rural areas, to enhance their

ability to critically evaluate information, engage in respectful discourse, and identify and counter instances of disinformation or foreign interference.

2. Policymakers and network providers should invest in improving internet connectivity and access in rural areas, ensuring all citizens have equal opportunities to engage in political discussions on social media platforms.
3. Local authorities and social media platforms should collaborate to establish clear guidelines and reporting mechanisms to swiftly address instances of online abuse.
4. Governments should collaborate with technology companies to implement robust cyber security measures that safeguard political discourse and elections from external interference.
5. Educational institutions and civil society organizations should develop platforms and initiatives that empower young individuals to engage constructively in political discussions.

## Appendix

### QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is part of a study titled “*Social Media as an Emerging Instrument of Political Engagement: The Case of Obuasi East Constituency.*” The aim is to understand how people in the constituency use social media to share opinions, exchange political ideas, and take part in civic discussions. Your answers will be treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes. Kindly respond truthfully and carefully to each item. Your support and time are deeply appreciated.

*Section A: Demographic Information* (Please tick [✓] the option that best describes you)

1. Gender

- Male  
 Female

2. Age

- 18–24  
 25–34  
 35–44  
 45–54  
 55 and above

3. Marital Status

- Single  
 Married  
 Divorced

Widow/Widower

4. Educational Level

- No formal education  
 Primary education  
 Junior High School  
 Senior High School  
 Tertiary education

5. Employment Status

- Employed full-time  
 Employed part-time

## Abbreviations

ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IGTV	Instagram Television
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NPP	New Patriotic Party

## Author Contributions

Quansah Robert is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired

*Section B: Social Media Usage and Political Participation*

6. Do you have a social media account?

- Yes
- No

7. Which of the following social media platforms do you use?

- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- Twitter
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Snapchat
- Skype
- Pinterest
- Telegram
- LinkedIn
- Others (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

8. How often do you use social media?

- More than once a day
- Once a day
- Once a week
- Rarely

9. Do you use social media for political purposes (e.g., campaign, advocacy, debate)?

- Yes
- No

*Section C: Importance of Social Media as a Tool for Political Participation (Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement)*

Statement	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
10. Social media serves as an instrument for political mobilization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Social media helps in disseminating information to the masses as well as receiving feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Social media helps to discover and solve problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Social media ensures that the youth participate in political discussions which influence government policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Social media can reach a large audience, thereby making politicians maintain closeness and transparency with citizens.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Social media is used to solicit votes from voters.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Section D: Challenges of Using Social Media for Political Participation (Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement)*

Statement	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
16. Social media does not encourage full participation since it is mostly used in urban areas compared to rural areas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. The use of social media for political participation allows for foreign interference in elections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. The use of social media allows for the spread of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. The use of social media facilitates political harassment and trolling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Social media creates privacy risks and may affect users' capacity to express political opinions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Social media can manipulate citizens' views and expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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