



POLITICAL MESSAGING AND INFORMATION DISORDER DURING THE 2020 GHANAIAN ELECTIONS:

A MULTI-STUDY ANALYSIS OF VERIFIED MISINFORMATION
AND POLITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

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BY
ADEDEJI ADEKUNLE





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study set out to generate insight on the influence of information disorder in the 2020 Ghana Elections as evident in electoral issues, audience experience, political messaging and an examination of possible disinformation networks. Below is a summary of key learnings from the mixed study.

Key Learnings:

- First and foremost, it is clear that information disorder was a clear and present challenge that played a role during the 2020 Ghanaian Elections.

- Misinformation patterns change at different stages of the election process and require specialised strategies:

Even though the proliferation of misinformation was evident in the build-up to the election, the viral issues fact-checked on the actual election day were mostly true even though greatly contested. This shows a switch in behavior when the stakes are highest. This also stresses the need for event-based responses to information disorder. Wardle's research points to three messaging durations: long term, short term and event based. The latter requests a special approach given the findings in that section of this study.

- Election results are the main targets of misinformation and controversy:

From examining the thematic areas linked with the misinformation fact-checked in the buildup, during and after the elections, we see the risk information disorder poses to maintaining the integrity of electoral process. The proliferation of claims around result manipulation and election result declaration could influence the electoral process negatively. Also,


- Broadcast platforms were the most dominant sources of Political Information while WhatsApp was the main source of misinformation:

Findings show that broadcast platforms are the preferred sources of information flow and messaging during the political season. It also shows dominance in social media and online platforms as an alternative. This is key because the respondents also claimed they saw most of the misinformation they came across on the same social media platforms, with WhatsApp as the predominant source of misinformation.

- Politicians and spokespersons were the major source of misinformation:

The respondents also claimed that the main category of people who shared the misinformation were politicians and spokespersons. This means for a comprehensive study on election misinformation, analysis of the political presence on social media is important.

- New platforms and fact-checking platforms are the most trusted sources of verified information:



Findings indicate, when sourcing verified information, most respondents seem to rely on the legacy media (newsrooms) and fact-checking platforms for their verification needs. This brings forth the conundrum that even though most of the respondents might have a higher level of trust for news platforms, they still get most of their information from social media (this is not ignoring the fact that many news platforms also have a social media presence).

- The dominant messaging strategy of political interest is to utilize unofficial platforms for controversial discourse:

The Political messaging content analysis showed that overall, the politicians and political parties examined chose to ignore most issues rather than address them using their primary channels. The reason behind this isn't provided by this study, however one can assume it is a deliberate strategy for plausible deniability.

- Closed groups were used to boost the spread of misinformation:

The common sharing patterns by claimants show an exploitation of closed groups or information bubbles. This raises a clear concern about the ease with which disinformation can be made to thrive.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Ghana conducted its 2020 General Elections on the 7th of December 2020. This process led to the re-election of the incumbent President Nana Akufo Addo, who won against former president John Mahama. As a leading democracy and democratic success story in the West African Sub-region¹, it warrants consistent interrogation. By this, lessons and examples can be extracted as knowledge is built around democratic process in Africa as a whole. This cannot be done without interrogating different aspects of the electioneering ecosystem because we know that elections are one of the most important events in democratic governance. The results, fairness and efficiency of this process goes a long way into determining the outcome of governance efforts and overall stability of any democratic nation. Among the many factors that affect electoral process outcomes, information disorder presents a unique and novel challenge². The effect of this phenomena³ which is driven by technology and social media disruption warrants interrogation. Information Disorder as defined by Claire Wardle⁴ can be categorized into three distinct types namely: Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation. These patterns have different effects and can be leveraged on to cause disruption or influence electoral processes in different ways. The primary assumption and hypothesis behind this study/analysis is that political messaging and discourse has been influenced by the information disorder phenomena. Much more than being on the receiving end of its influence, recent events show that political, commercial or international interests have embarked on deliberate disinformation campaigns globally⁵. Evidence of that can be found in the American elections of 2015 amidst reports of alleged external influence by Russia and the activities of Cambridge Analytica⁶ in the utilization of public social media data to engineer targeted messaging for clients thereby influencing electoral outcomes. A report by CNN has shown the possibility of the use of Ghanaian citizens by the alleged Russian troll factory to influence the American social media space. These ideas are the foundation of the probe of political messaging and mis/disinformation before and during Ghana's 2020 General Elections.

1. <https://freedomhouse.org/article/west-africas-democratic-progress-slipping-away-even-regions-significance-grows-0>

2. <https://ghana.dubawa.org/ghanas-2020-election-can-fake-news-influence-voting-behaviour/>

3. <https://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/fake-news-how-it-undermines-access-to-credible-information-in-the-face-of-the-global-pandemic-and-impending-election/>

4. Wardle, C, Derakhshan, H (2017); Council of Europe Report, INFORMATION DISORDER: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making

5. <https://theconversation.com/the-hidden-costs-of-social-media-use-in-elections-a-ghana-case-study-128007>

6. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/12/world/russia-ghana-troll-farms-2020-ward/index.html>



GOAL OF THE STUDY

This study intends to identify and investigate the patterns of information flow during the election season while identifying the methodologies of disinformation circulation to the populace where applicable. It also aims to uncover patterns of campaign communication by political stakeholders during the election season around key issues and debates, while ascertaining the consumer feedback through the entire process and its overall influence on the misinformation ecosystem.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a multi study approach to examine the problem. The findings from the different arms of the study will be cross examined in search of new insight. The observations are then discussed and recommendations made. The four studies are listed below:

- Thematic Analysis of Election Claims
- Audience Experience and Reaction
- Political Communications' response to key campaign issues
- Investigative Analysis of Claimants

Below you can find a more detailed breakdown of the methodologies of the different arms of the study.

Thematic Analysis of Election Claims

One way to understand the influence and intersection between information disorder and elections is to examine issues of concern in conducting credible elections. The influence of information disorder has become a concern not only of the government and institutions, but also of the populace⁷. This brings forth the need to inspect the misinformation generated as a result of the 2020 Ghana Elections and study the typological differences therein. To do that, this aspect of the report runs a content analysis on the available data extracted from the Dubawa database and extracts trends and insights relating to the common events or key issues concerning election execution. The following are the common challenges which plague elections which we call “Themes”⁸ and use to categorize the claims (subject in contention) found in the Dubawa database. These themes include:

- Violence: Violent disruptions in the electoral process, occasioned by thugs or security forces actions which either lead or have the potential of leading to injuries or total/partial stoppage of the process.
- Voter Inducement: This includes activities that tend to swindle eligible voters to vote in favor of a particular political party. This can be monetary, gifts, or stomach infrastructure.
- Governance: These are issues that do not have any direct bearing with the election but are brought in because they are in power or have connections with people in power.

7. CDD-GHANA (JUNE 2020) Double-edged sword? Ghanaians see pros, cons of social media, want access but not fake news; Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 366 | Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Edem Selormey

8. Mboho Eno (2021) <https://ptcij.org/blog/challenges-and-solutions-for-a-free-and-credible-electoral-process/>

- **Disenfranchisement:** Issues of denial to vote in elections by conscious and concerted efforts by either political thugs, polling unit agents, security forces, or party agents. This category can be on a personal or group basis.
- **Manipulation:** These are illegal activities or actions carried out with the intention to directly influence election results in favour of a preferred candidate.
- **Intra/Inter-Party squabble:** Issues of infighting within or across political parties. Issues can include counter-accusations, candidacy litigations, or substitution.
- **Result declaration:** Attempts to rig or manipulate already announced results. It also includes results tweeted or tweets about results either through official channels or otherwise.

To further draw insight from the available data, a number of key characteristics of the data were used in our analysis. These are listed and defined below:

- **Characters:** The source of the claim or the claimant to the misinformation or disinformation.
- **Date:** The exact date the claim was shared by the claimant/character (Before Election, Election Day).
- **The platform:** This pertains to the channel or medium that the claimant used to share the claim. i.e. Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.
- **Verdict:** This describes the veracity of any claim. Dubawa's verdict system can be found below:
 - **True**– A fact-check is deemed true when all elements of such a claim pertain to factual information. It is also used contextually and verifiable at the time of assertion.
 - **False**– A fact-check is deemed false when all elements of such a claim do not pertain to factual information at the time of assertion. In essence, imposter, manipulated and fabricated content will be considered false.
 - **Mostly False**– A fact-check is deemed mostly false when some elements of such a claim do not pertain to factual information at the time of assertion, while an element may be true. Usually, this rating will be assigned to fact-checks with three or more claims.
 - **More Context Needed** - when the claim(s) oversimplifies complex issues. On a surface level, these may seem correct but they are either used out-of-context or depict an unintended meaning

This aspect of the study utilized data which was extracted from DUBAWA's database. The scope of this study comprises all the fact checks DUBAWA carried out on the 2020 Ghana presidential elections (i.e. before, after and on the election day) from the month of October to December 2020.



The Verdict category was extracted from Dubawa’s methodology⁹.

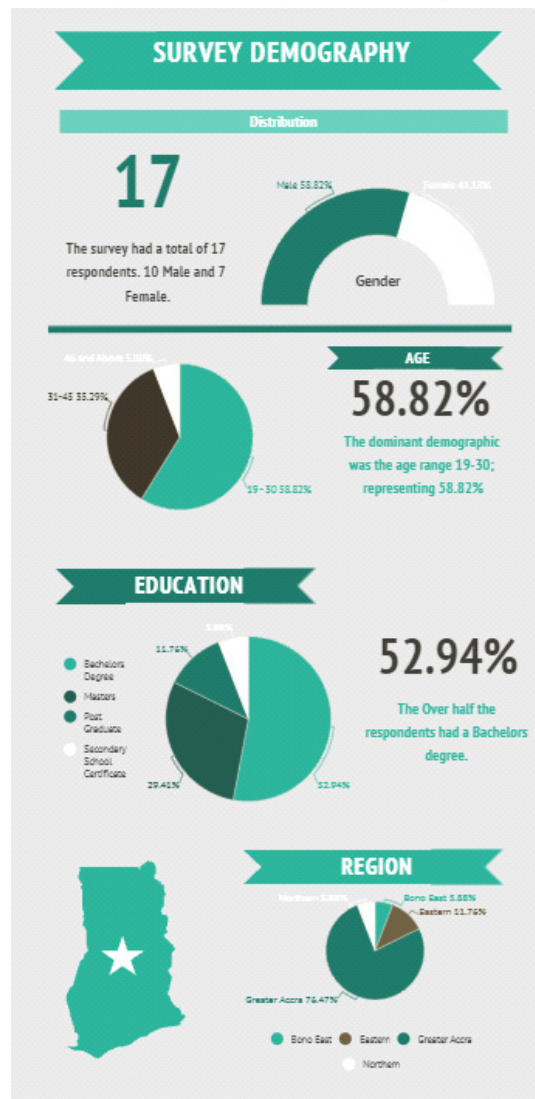
Limitations of this section: The limitation in analysis for this report may be the limited scope in terms of the amount of data worked with and this may have resulted in not finding more patterns or correlations between variables. This could be as a result of poor tracking of claims or a lack of claims actually made during the study period.

Audience Experience and Reaction

This section was designed to examine the audiences’ (consumers) experience during the 2020 Elections with respect to misinformation and their level of awareness of their behaviors. Random sampling was employed via the use of an online survey. The survey was distributed online and on social media to help gather data from respondents. Their responses were then analyzed and findings broken down to generate insight on the major sources of misinformation, the audience reaction and extract samples of the misinformation received.

Survey Demography

9. <https://dubawa.org/about-us/our-fact-check-process/>



Limitation: the main limitation of this section of the study is the limited amount of respondents for the survey. However, the insight extracted still proves useful and important to the overall goal and scope of the study.

Political Communications' response to key campaign issues

This aspect employed a content analysis strategy to extract the response of official communication channels of political interests to controversial issues which were found in the major dailies and media platforms. We utilized the most popular channels of online communication in Ghana¹⁰. The identified platforms included the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Websites of the two major political parties and their Presidential candidates. Even though WhatsApp has the largest market share, its encryption protocol makes tracking messages impractical, and so was not explored. The political parties and their candidates are listed below.

10. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1171534/leading-social-media-platforms-ghana/>

Table 1: Political Parties and their Presidential Candidates

Party	Presidential Candidate
New Patriotic Party (NPP)	Nana Akufo Addo
National Democratic Congress (NDC)	John Mahama

This examination led to the study of over 4125 posts on four platforms. These included 1345 posts on Facebook, 1798 posts on Twitter, 801 posts on Instagram, and 181 articles on the websites of the above listed entities and individuals. The link to the platforms can be found below:

Table 2: Examined official social media platforms

	Facebook	Twitter	Website	Instagram
NDC	https://www.facebook.com/ndccommbureau/	https://twitter.com/OfficialNDCGh	https://www.ndc.org.gh/	https://www.instagram.com/officialndcgh/
John Mahama	https://www.facebook.com/JDMahama	https://twitter.com/JDMahama	https://www.johnmahama.org/	https://www.instagram.com/officialjdmahama/?hl=en
NPP	https://www.facebook.com/newpatrioticparty.org	https://twitter.com/NPP_GH	https://newpatrioticparty.org/	https://www.instagram.com/newpatrioticparty/
Nana Akufo Addo	https://www.facebook.com/nakufoaddo	https://twitter.com/NAkufoAddo	https://nanaakufoaddo.org/	https://www.instagram.com/nakufoaddo/?hl=en

The responses were categorized into a number of behavioral patterns and communication choices with respect to the issues. These included the following active decisions:

- Ignored the Issue
- Denied the Issue
- Accused the other party
- Created a Spin
- Addressed the Issue

Investigative Analysis of Claimants

This section seeks to examine the fact checks made by Ghanaian fact-checking organizations (Dubawa Ghana and GhanaFact) between the period of October to December 2020. The claimants in those checks were equally examined and their associations (individuals who help spread or share the claims) were examined. The goal of this section of the study is to investigate patterns of disinformation to ascertain the

possibility of a coordinated campaign and expose such if they exist. It also aims to examine the behaviours or patterns of interactions on claims and any other oddities. Common terms utilized here include:

- Claimant: The primary individual who made the assertion which had to be fact checked.
- Association/Associate: Individuals who played an active part in sharing the mis/disinformation communicated by the claimant.

KEY FINDINGS

Thematic Analysis of Election Claims:

- Inaccurate claims were more than accurate claims.

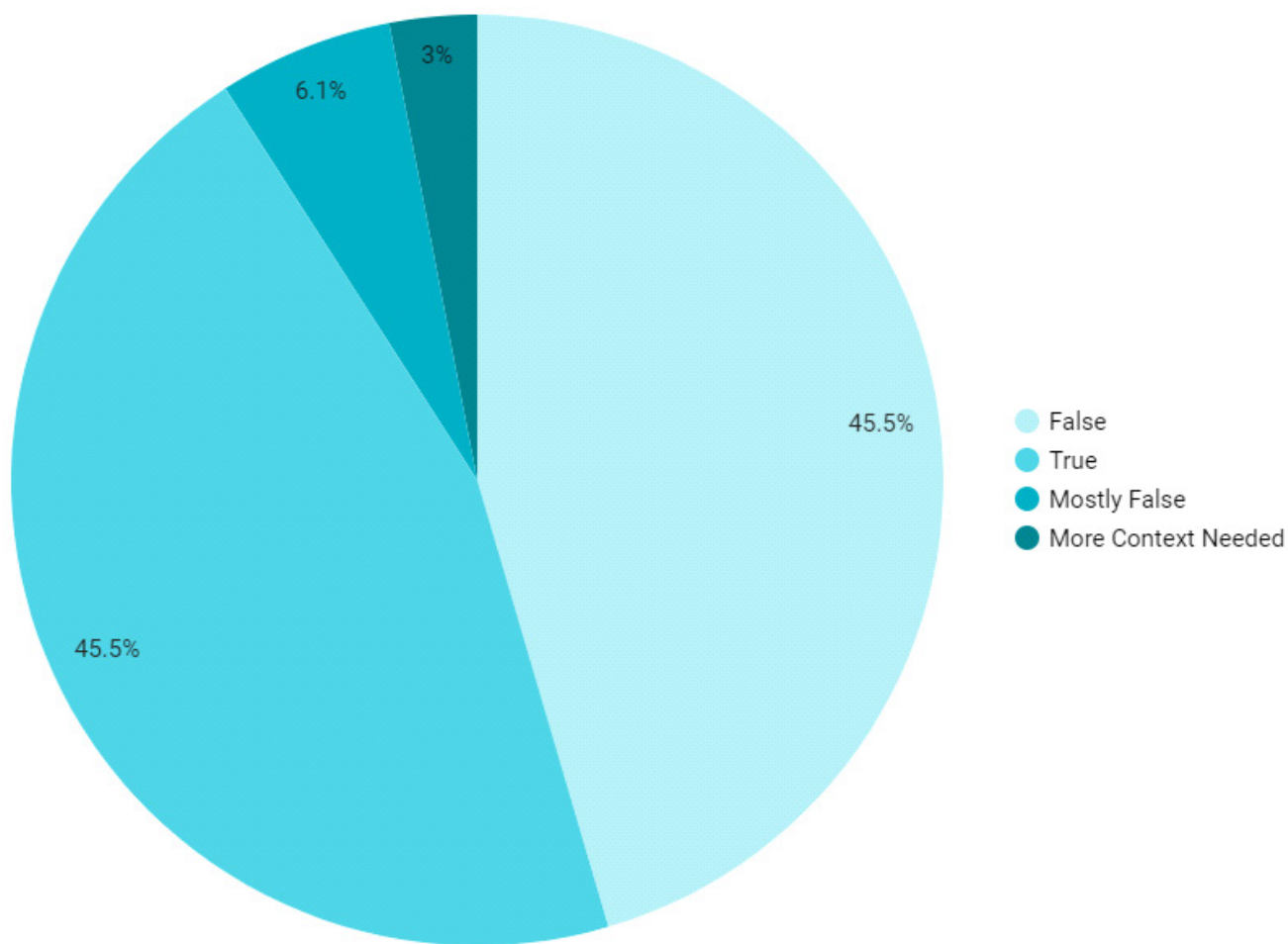


Figure 1: Verdict of Claims Checked

Figure 1 above shows that only 45% of the claims checked were accurate. This means that among the issues of contention during the election period, misinformation is a valid concern. This shows the need for fact-checking interventions. To put this in further context, the fact that Dubawa couldn't have examined all the possible claims in the media and information landscape, the consequences of inaccurate or outrightly false information could be assumed to be immense. Also notable though is the lack of sophistication behind these inaccurate claims evident by most of them being clearly false. This means, that manipulated context which may be more difficult to discern isn't the common misinformation pattern.

- The patterns of claim emergence differed based on the phases of election engagement.

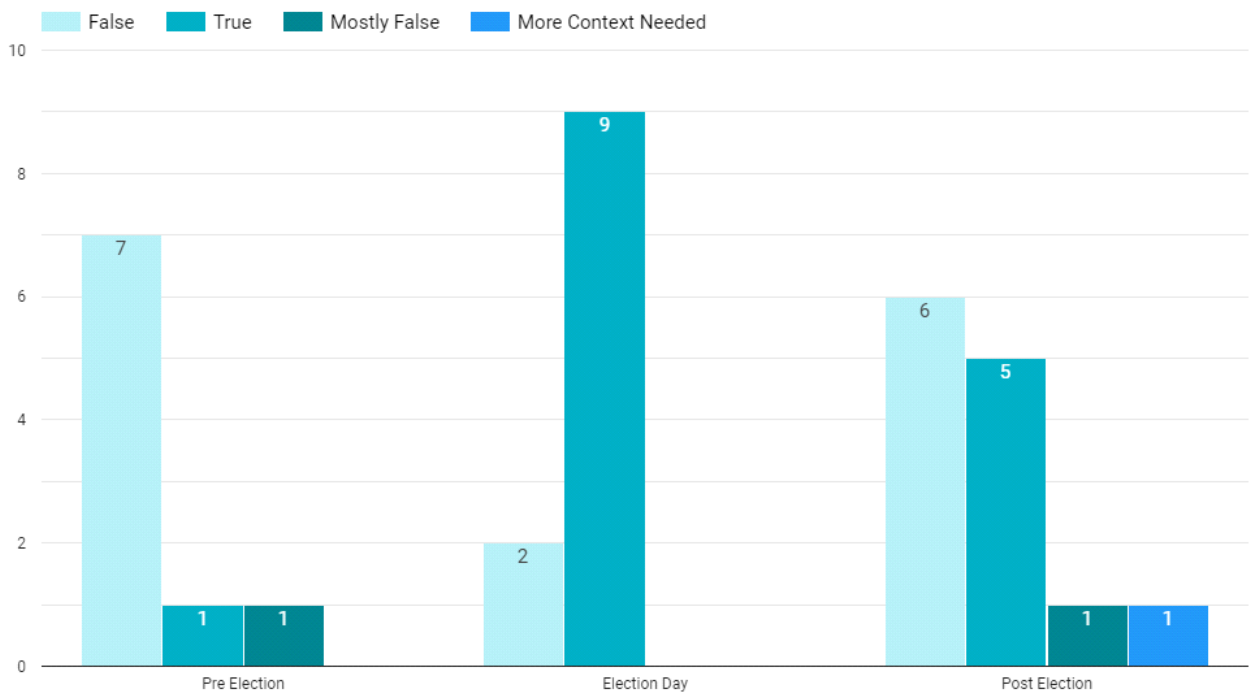


Figure 1: Verdict of Claims Checked

Figure 2 shows a difference in claim sharing behavior at each time period/phase. The period in the build up to the elections show a dominance of falsity. This suggests that mis/disinformation might be a go-to tool during the campaign process for political interests to push narratives and attack opposing interests. However, on election day, misinformation was at its lowest with most claims being true. This changed once the elections were over; with the emergence of falsities, and mixed narratives.

- Result Declaration dominate the Issues in Contention;

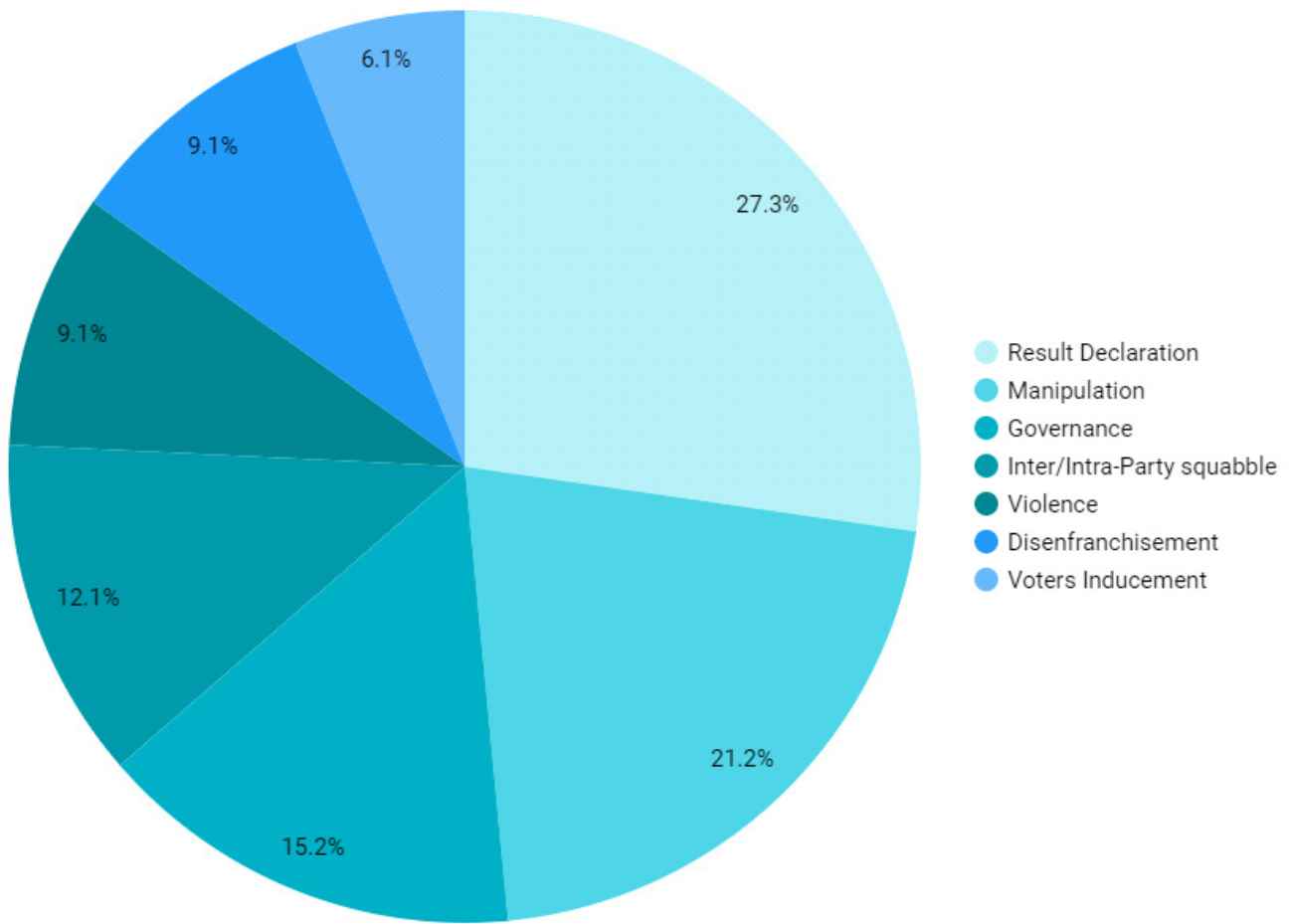


Figure 3: Type of Election Related Claims

Figure 3 shows that the most dominant issues contained in the claims had to do with the results of the elections (result declaration; Manipulation). This is a clear indicator of the risk information disorder poses to the legitimacy of electoral process. Also notable are the issues related to governance and party politics. This again suggests the great impact of political actors on the discuss and the information disorder problem.

Audience Experience and Reaction

Findings on the source of misinformation

- *The major source of information was the broadcast media*

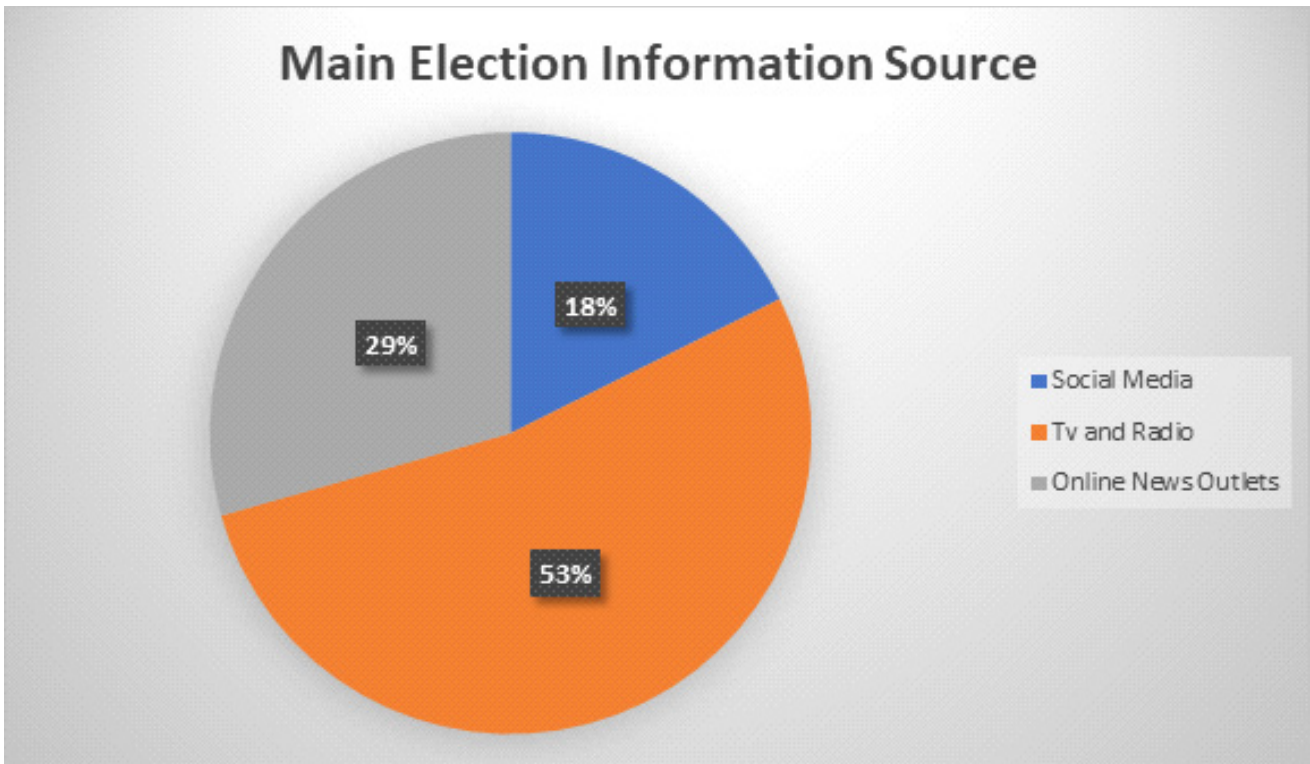


Figure 4: Main Election information source

According to the survey results seen in figure 4 above, the majority of respondents showed that their main sources of election information was television and radio. This represents an overall 53 percent of the responses. The other sources were Online News Outlets (29%) and social media (18%). This can be seen in the figure above.

To further examine this trend, we zoom in to assess their sources of election updates and in figure 5 below, findings indicate that the medium most used for receiving election updates, radio stations were the most used information source followed by online newspapers and Twitter. WhatsApp, Facebook and Blogs were the remaining sources indicated respectively. Print newspapers and YouTube were not selected as sources for election updates. Note that respondents were asked to indicate as many options as applicable. So different respondents utilized more than one medium. It is useful to note that election updates refer to official information on the conduct of the electoral process, while election information refers to the total gamut of discuss on electoral matters, both official and unofficial.

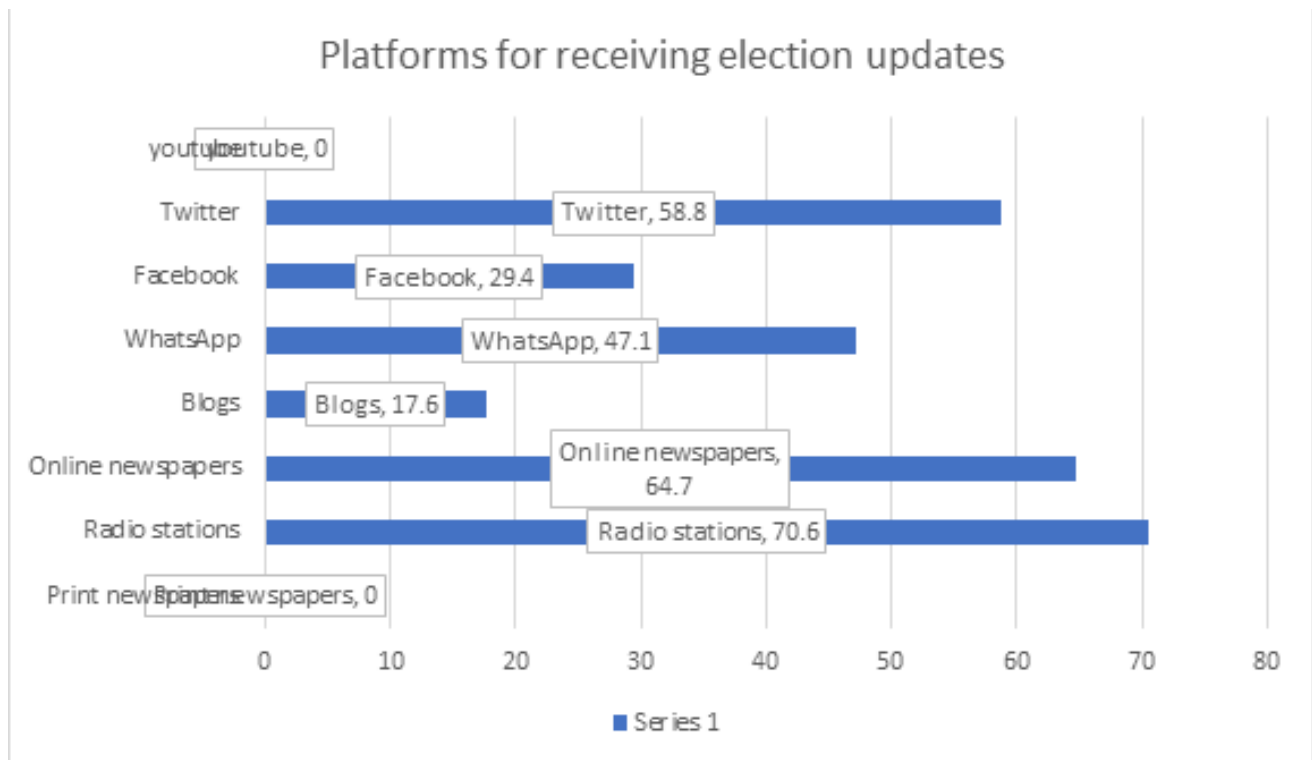


Figure 5: Platform most election information/updates received

The trend observed above suggests that people prefer a mixture of sources with radio stations, online newspapers and twitter dominating the preferences. Most notable is to total avoidance of print media and YouTube for the said purpose. This might be due to the fact that most print newspapers also have an online platform. It is not presently clear why YouTube is not utilized for such updates.

- Most respondents admitted to having received false information with WhatsApp as the leading platform:

According to responses gathered, a majority (82.4 percent) of respondents claimed to have received information that turned out to be false before and during the elections. This can be seen in figure 6 below.

Did you receive information before and during the election which turned out to be false?
17 responses

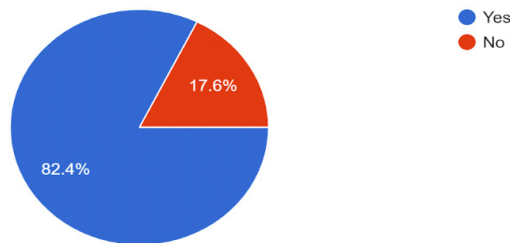


Figure 6: False information receipts before and after elections

According to the survey as shown in figure 7, WhatsApp was the most common source of false information with the platform being in 76.5% of the respondents' selections. The next two platforms which had similar statistics, were blogs and twitter. Facebook was next and trailing behind were radio platforms and print platforms. These results suggest the impact of social media on election messaging is not exaggerated.

If so, What Platform(s) did they come from?

17 responses

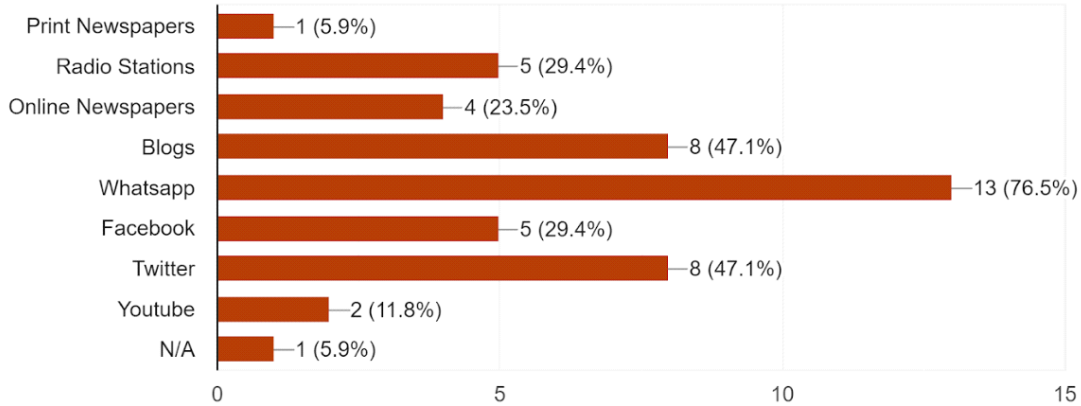


Figure 7: Platforms where misinformation was encountered

We however, cannot ignore the mention of blogs (47.1%) and online newspapers (23.5%). Alongside the influence of social media, the impact of digital communications on information disorder is evident. The print as in previous findings tend to have a low consideration rate as they have a limited share of the audience reach as the survey has shown earlier.

- *Politicians and Spokespersons Stand out as false Claimants:*

What category of person made the false claims?

17 responses

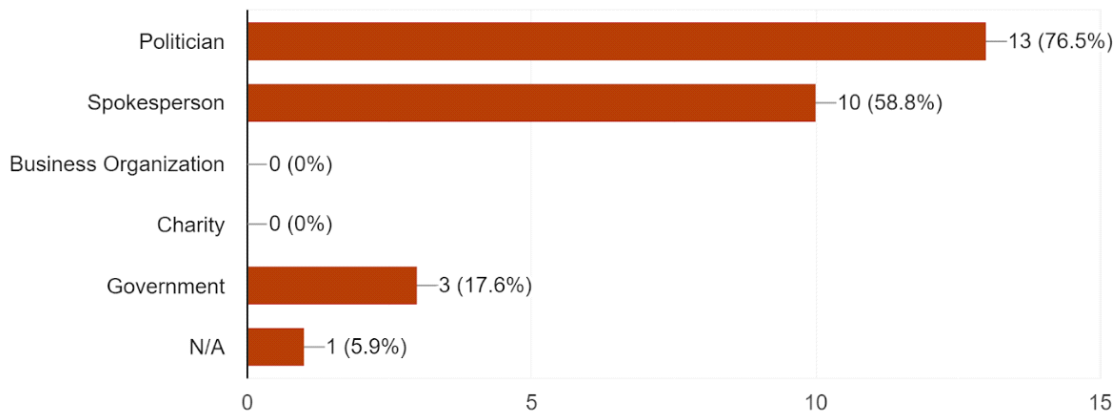


Figure 8: False Claimants

The data collected indicated that most of the claims respondents came into contact with were from politicians and spokespersons of politicians. Respondents also indicated that a certain amount of fake news and misinformation came from the government representing 17.6 % of the category of persons who made false claims.

However, all respondents indicated that none of the fake news they came into contact with were from any business organization or charity.

- *Social circles are a major vehicle for the distribution of claims:*

Who shared the contents with you?

17 responses

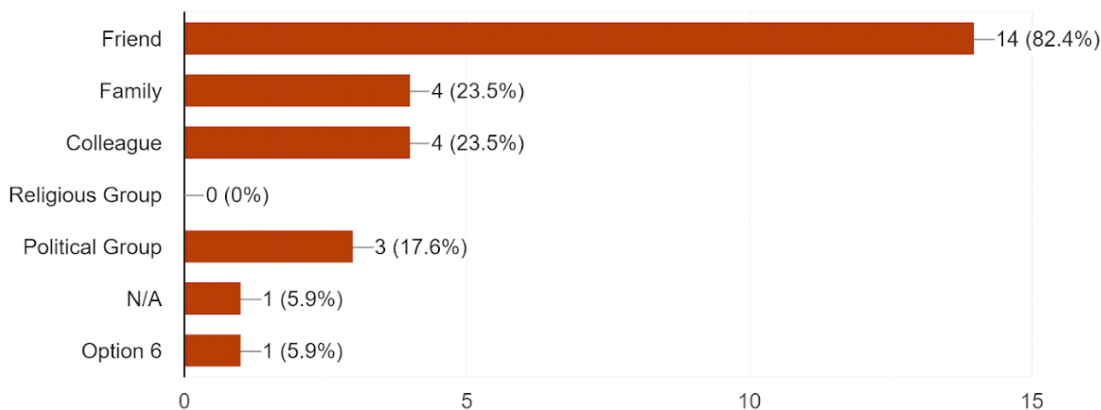


Figure 9: Content Distributor

The findings indicate that friends and family members shared a lot of fake news to respondents. Aside from these categories of people, respondents were exposed to fake news and misinformation through their colleagues and politicians. However, the findings also indicated that no respondents received any fake news or misinformation from religious bodies.

- *Even though respondents received claims in different formats, Text messages dominated:*

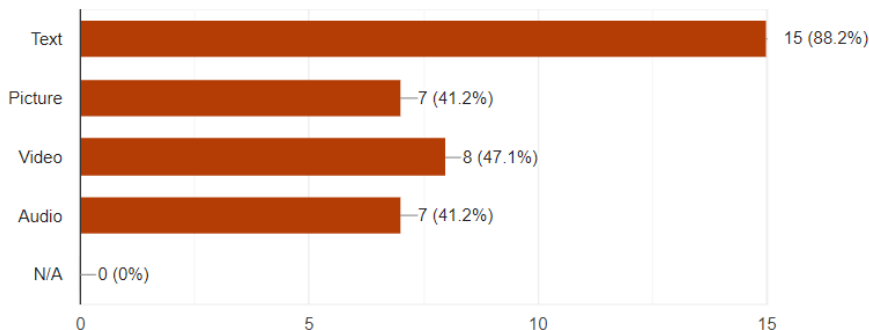


Figure 10: Misinformation Format

Respondents noted that the information they received mostly came in text format comprising 88.2 percent, followed by picture format comprising 41.2 percent, then video formats comprising 47.1 and audio format comprising 41.2 percent. This also provides backing to the earlier finding about the influence of whatsapp as a major platform which can house all these formats quite comfortably.

Findings on Claim Recipient behavior

- *Recipients show a general skepticism about information and rely on fact-checkers and logic to ascertain veracity:*

How did you know the information was inaccurate?
17 responses

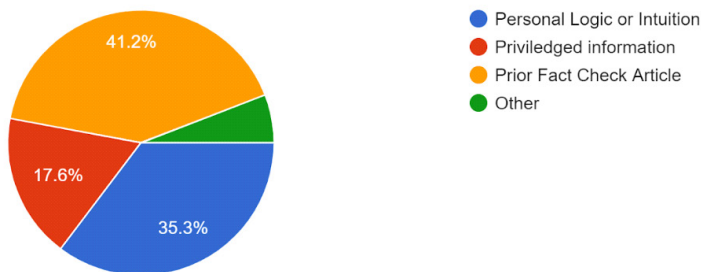


Figure 11: Ascertaining the inaccuracy of information

Majority of the respondents, 82.4 per cent, showed that they were skeptical about the information they read, while 17.6 per cent showed that they immediately believed the information they read.

In determining the inaccuracy of the information they received, 41.2 percent of respondents showed they ascertained from fact-check articles, 35.3 percent indicated they used personal logic or intuition, and 17.6 percent indicated they had access to privileged information.

- *News Platforms and Fact Checking Platforms lead as sources of Accurate Information:*

If you learnt about the inaccuracy from an external source, where did you get the accurate information?
16 responses

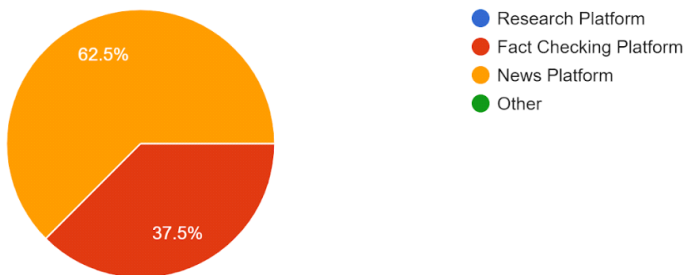


Figure 12: Sources of factual information

For the majority of respondents who indicated that they knew that the information was inaccurate from external sources, 62.5 percent showed that they received the accurate information from news platforms while 37.5 percent received it from fact-checking platforms. Respondents named their trustworthy sources of information to be radio (precisely Citi FM), news agencies, credible online newspapers, print newspapers, the Electoral Commission page, and reliable journalists.

- *Respondents claim to be aware of personal biases and claim to be mostly objective:*

With regards to personal biases and objectivity, 52.9 percent indicated that they were aware of their biases, while 47.1 percent indicated that they were always objective.

In addition, 58.8 percent of respondents indicated that they did not support a particular political party, whereas 41.2 percent indicated that they supported a particular political party.

Furthermore, to ascertain if the support of a political party played a role in their perception of the information they received leading up to the elections, 64.7 percent indicated that it did not and 35.3 percent indicated that it did.

The data shows that the majority of the respondents were aware of possible biases due to political affiliation, however it did not affect their perception of information received prior to elections.

Samples of Misinformation Encountered

Find below a list of misinformation encountered by respondents:

- The military were stopping people from registering due to the voter registration exercise.
- The National Democratic Congress (NDC) won the election due to parliamentary seats won.
- The embezzlement of government funds by the President's daughters.
- Electoral Commission (EC) rigging the elections to favour the New Patriotic Party(NPP).
- Electoral commission steals for Akufo Addo.
- Akufo-Addo was caught red handed taking a bribe.
- I learned the monies given as National Board for Small Scale Enterprise (NBSS) loans will be recovered if John Mahama wins but would be free if Nana Addo wins.
- That some citizens would be disenfranchised.
- The number of seats won by the leading political parties was exaggerated.
- Soldiers were preventing people from voting in Koforidua.

The themes for the misinformation respondents encountered were largely political with focus on the pre-election, voter registration, voting and election outcome.

Political Communications response to key campaign issues:

These were the identified controversial issues:

- 1 Party Manifestos:** The majority of news bulletins and public discourse for the 2020 Ghana elections mainly highlighted the two main political parties, New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC) party manifestos that were launched on their campaign tours as a benchmark for electoral decision-making¹¹. There have been questions raised on the lack of substance in the NPP manifesto as compared to the NDC sector specific manifesto termed the “people’s manifesto”
Also, at the NDC manifesto launch, the NDC flagbearer, introduced his running mate, Jane Naana Agyemang. She was the first female vice candidate of a major political party, and this caused a rise in conversations focused on her ability to be Ghana’s first female vice-president if elected¹².
- 2 NDC’S Primary Health Care Programme/One-time premium payment:** The primary healthcare programme was a manifesto promise by the NDC to provide preventive health promotion interventions, curative care and quality healthcare for all Ghanaians at no cost to the individual¹³. The main debate was on the funding, sustainability effectiveness, considering that the already existing National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)¹⁴ was not readily accessible to some Ghanaians at every hospital.
- 3 Akufo-Addo’s District Hospitals:** At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and drawing close to the 2020 General Elections in Ghana, Ghanaian president Nana Akufo-Addo promised to build 88 hospitals across several districts in the country to solve the growing number of admitted COVID-19 patients in the country as many hospitals were running out of beds. The president announced this in his 8th address to the nation on measures taken to combat COVID-19 situation in Ghana¹⁵. The hospitals, he stated, are expected to be standard 100-bed facilities.

The debates on this promise¹⁶ included the fact that:

11. <https://theworldnews.net/gh-news/ndc-s-manifesto-superior-to-npp-horace-ankrah>

12. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/The-case-for-Professor-Jane-Naana-Opoku-Agyemang-as-Vice-President-of-Ghana-1004848>

13. <https://citinewsroom.com/2020/09/ndcs-free-primary-healthcare-program-will-eliminate-financial-barriers-to-health-mahama/>

14. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ndcs-free-primary-healthcare-policy-will-be-funded-by-consolidated-fund-dr-omane-boamah/>

15. <https://www.moh.gov.gh/covid-19-government-to-begin-construction-of-88-district-hospitals-this-year-nana-addo/>

16. <https://www.dw.com/en/ghanaians-question-presidents-promise-of-new-hospitals/a-53282310>

- There was an already completed ultra-modern hospital at the University of Ghana, built by the previous government which had the capacity to accommodate a large number of admitted COVID-19 patients, however it was not being used and made accessible to the citizens.
 - Beyond solving the bed issue, the already existing hospitals were said to be failing to deliver quality healthcare. The argument was that the government should focus on quality healthcare as well, not just build a hospital, to provide a 100-bed facility.
 - It was nearly impossible for the government to build 88 hospitals and truly, till date, not one out of the 88 hospitals has been built as promised.
- 4 GDP-Debt issues: Ghana's GDP and debt ratio has been one of the many issues the Akufo-Addo government has been consistently blamed for. Prior to the 2020 December elections, President Akufo-Addo was accused of borrowing more than any president in Ghana's history¹⁷. It was estimated that Ghana's debt stock would surpass 210 billion dollars at the end of 2020¹⁸. At the end of 2019, the public debt stock was 208.6 billion dollars which represented 60.3% of GDP.
 - 5 HIPC claims: Before the 2020 general elections, the NDC claimed that the incumbent Akufo-Addo government had sent the country into a Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC)¹⁹ but this was found to be false. Ghana's listing dates back to 2002 before the election of the incumbent government, and has remained so to date²⁰. Additionally, Ghana completed the HIPC process in 2004 and according to the IMF, cannot reapply to the initiative.
 - 6 Economic Growth: In 2018, the International Monetary Fund(IMF) declared that the world's fastest growing economies were from the developing countries with Ghana coming in sixth with a 5.6% growth in its economy²¹. This was capitalised on by the NPP and ruling government who claimed that they enabled this growth. In 2019, according to data from the World Bank, Ghana was the world's 15th fastest growing economy with a 6.5% growth rate in 2019²². Among Sub-Saharan African countries however, it was 6th. In 2020, the country's GDP grew by 1.1%.

17. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Akufo-Addo-government-borrows-GH-86-billion-in-3-years-842872>

18. <https://www.primenewsghana.com/business/ghana-s-public-debt-stock-hits-ghs214-9-billion.html>

19. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ghana-back-to-HIPC-under-Akufo-Addo-Ofori-Atta-Mahama-1094041>

20. <https://ghana.dubawa.org/fact-check-has-the-akufo-addo-government-sent-ghana-into-hipc/>

21. <https://www.mofep.gov.gh/news-and-events/2019-04-10/ghana-is-number-one-fastest-growing-economy-in-africa-in-2019-imf>

22. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/05/ghana-is-set-to-be-the-worlds-fastest-growing-economy-this-year-according-to-the-imf/>

7 Free SHS: The Akufo-Addo government in their 2016 manifesto, and again in their 2020 manifesto, promised to implement free education for Senior High School(SHS) students. However, there were concerns on how it would be funded²³ and the sustainability of the initiative²⁴. Some of the debates on this issue included:

- Issues concerning the double track system where parents were concerned that some children would be delayed in graduating while others graduate earlier than their mates.
- Completed buildings of the previous administration not being used which could have enabled more students to be in school simultaneously as opposed to the double track.
- Issues of who did or built what, including the green book issues and the NPP's development tracker.

8 NDC's payment of 50% fees for tertiary students: Leading up to the 2020 general elections, John Dramani Mahama promised to pay 50% of tertiary students fees if elected to office²⁵. This promise was captured in the NDC's 2020 manifesto and was jokingly termed the "Kyem p3" policy ('which is a native Ghanaian language Twi, literally meaning "divide/share equally" policy).

This was built on by the increment in fees for the Ghana Institute of Journalism and the University of Ghana. The NDC later came back with a received promise to absorb the full fees for their 2020/2021 academic year if elected to office²⁶. This was generally well received by students but the issue of funding was discussed on mainstream media.

9 Okada legalisation*

During the campaign leading to the 2020 elections, former president John Dramani Mahama promised to legalise Okada (motorcycle transportation) in the country when elected to power. The idea generated so much discussion in the media and with divergent discussions on one hand the safety of the means of transport and the other hand the employment opportunities it can offer the citizens²⁷. It also set an agenda in the media where okada accidents were now being reported by the media often²⁸. Government was pressured to take a stance on whether it would ban or legalize it. Issues of safety for road users in light of many accidents and thefts²⁹ were among some of the concerns raised by citizens and experts.

23. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1079018/is-ghanas-senior-high-school-education-really.html>

24. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Teachers-afraid-to-speak-about-Free-SHS-challenges-Gyampo-1243972>

25. <https://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/politics/202009/426425.php>

26. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/ndc-announces-policy-to-absorb-full-fees-of-2021-first-year-tertiary-students.html>

27. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Okada-provides-honest-jobs-it-must-be-legalised-Kofi-Bentil-backs-Mahama-1043008>

28. <https://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/okada-rider-dies-in-road-accident/>

29. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Mahama-s-Okada-legalisation-is-untenable-Drivers-1069309>

10 The ‘Papa No’ comments in parliament: In 2020, there was some controversy over a publicised conversation between a Ghanaian actress Tracy Boakye and Ghanaian singer, Mzbel on social media. Ghanaians became interested in finding out who the “papa no” (a native Ghanaian language, Twi, literally meaning “the man”) was. As it was widely suspected and speculated that the “papa no”³⁰ in question was the former president Mahama caught in the affairs of these two NDC-supporting female celebrities, the NPP members of parliament, particularly the Minister of Information, used the term jestfully in parliament a number of times any time a reference to any man at all had to be made, thereby saying ‘papa no’, to mean the man (any man) under that discussion. The issue escalated three months after the 2020 general elections with the name of the former president, John Dramani Mahama and some other leading politicians³¹ being rumoured again to be at the center of the conversation.

11 Airbus Scandal: In a series of scandals that hit the aeronautic giant, Airbus, former Ghanaian president, John Dramani Mahama and his brother, Ibrahim Mahama were implicated in the matter³². The matter compounded when InterPol sent a red alert notice³³ five months to the 2020 elections stating that Ibrahim Mahama was wanted and would be subjected to investigations on the matter by the Ghana Special Prosecutor at the time. It was speculated to be an NPP-initiated alert to put the leader of the opposition party and brother in bad light³⁴ to gain public disaffection prior to the elections.

12

Agyapa Deal: The Agyapa Royalties Deal is the government of Ghana’s strategy to raise capital from the proceeds of the minerals sector to finance the country’s developmental projects³⁵.

Preparation for the Agyapa Deal started in 2018, when the Minerals Income Investment Fund (Act 2018) was passed by Parliament of Ghana. It had the mandate to manage the equity interests of Ghana in mining companies and receive royalties on behalf of the government³⁶.

30. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Who-is-papa-no-Social-media-users-ask-1034749>

31. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/i-have-apologised-for-papa-no-comment-kojo-oppong-nkrumah/>

32. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/mahama-is-govt-official-1-in-airbus-scandal-special-prosecutor-amidu.html>

33. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/interpol-issues-red-notice-for-samuel-adam-mahama-over-his-role-in-airbus-bribery-scandal/>

34. <https://coverghana.com.gh/martin-amidus-interpol-alert-is-an-extension-of-npps-plan-to-embarrass-mahama-alex-segbefia/>

35. <https://resourcegovernance.org/analysis-tools/publications/nrgi-impact-demystifying-ghana-agyapa-royalties-deal-gold>

36. <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/05/ghana-on-track-with-management-of-mineral-royalties-miif-boss/>

The royalties and revenue received will then be invested for higher returns, and thus support the government development agenda. To make this fund work effectively, a Special Purpose Vehicle was needed to manage the investment returns. The Agyapa Royalties was set up as a limited liability in Bailiwick of Jersey in the UK, a tax haven, to do that.

The setup of the limited liability raised a lot of issues with several Civil Society Organizations calling for little government interference. The minority in parliament had also raised several issues about corruption³⁷ in the deal and had staged a walkout during one of the deliberations on the deal³⁸.

13 Electoral/Voters registration issues: Some voter registration issues faced prior to and during the 2020 general elections included attempts to smuggle non-ghanaian citizens into the country to register and potentially vote during elections³⁹, alleged attempts by the ruling government to suppress voter registration turnout in the volta region (an acclaimed stronghold of the opposition party) and the dispatch of military personnel to again suppress registration turnout in the same said region⁴⁰. During the elections, some individuals were also caught attempting to double-vote while others set fire to ballot boxes in some voting centers. In some polling centers like the Essikado-Ketan, some three unknown candidates were added to the ballot sheets by mistake⁴¹. Additionally, there were multiple centers that had to recount their ballots after errors were recorded.

14 Campaign tours: Campaign tours precede elections and usually take place in all the regions in Ghana. They are led by the presidential candidates and some members of the political parties. This goes on during the designated campaigning period only and ends shortly before the actual election is held. This was highly reported by mainstream media majorly for the two main political parties, NPP and NDC. The main debates were:

- Issues of safety with the large crowds⁴² amidst covid-19 pandemic
- Allegations of money and items being shared by politicians for votes⁴³. Some politicians involved in these allegations were John Mahama, George Andah and John Dumelo.

37. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/minority-ready-to-resist-agyapa-deal-ato-forson/>

38. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1027247/agyapa-royalties-limited-deal-smells-of-corruption.html>

39. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1019855/togolese-escapes-arrest-after-registering-for-ghan.html>

40. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ndc-minority-condemns-increased-military-deployment-in-volta-oti-regions-ahead-of-voter-registration-exercise/>

41. <https://ghana.dubawa.org/election-2020-who-are-the-three-extra-essikado-ketan-parliamentary-candidates/>

42. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Rallies-in-disguise-Here-s-how-many-times-Akufo-Addo-Mahama-s-camps-pulled-crowds-during-campaign-1082137>

43. <https://ghana.dubawa.org/false-john-mahama-did-not-spray-cash-to-supporters-in-berekum/>

Identified Trends:

- Ignoring the Issue was the most common response technique

The data shows that the most common techniques utilized by official social media handles of the Political Parties and their candidates was to either Ignore or address/discuss most issues. In other situations, they resorted to utilize the issue to attack the opposition as seen in pie chart below.

Response Approach

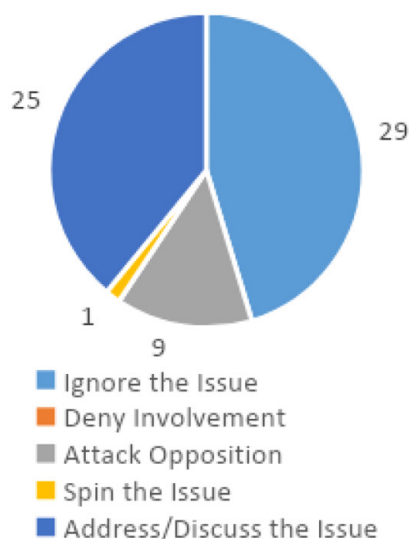


Figure 13: Overall breakdown of Response Approach

It is worthy of note however, that they did address quite a number of them depending on the complexity of the issue in contention. The most discussed controversies were the Free SHS, Agyapa Deal, and Voter’s Registration issues. The following charts show the discussion approach for the most discussed controversies.

FREE SHS

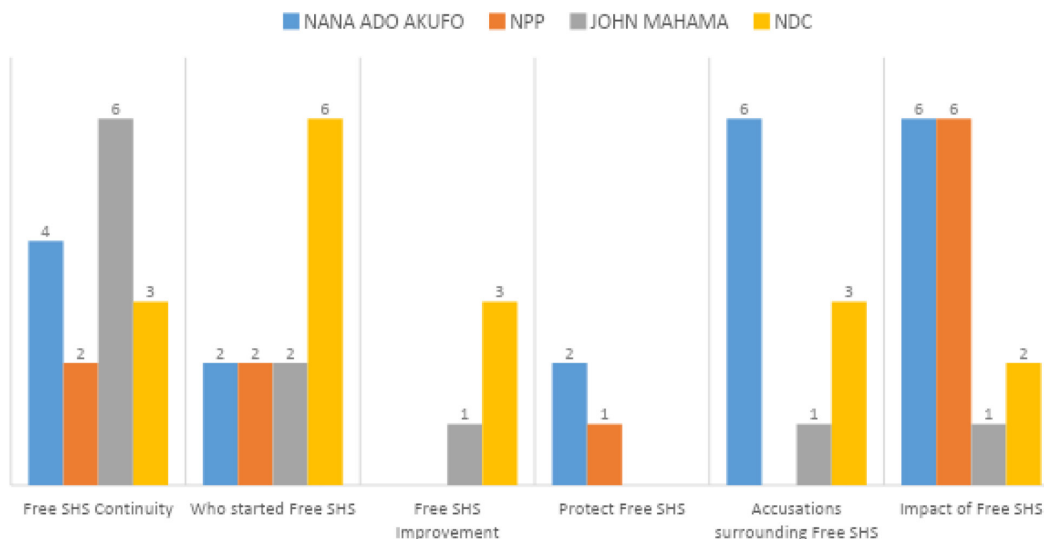


Figure 14: Response Approach to Discussions around the Free SHS

Above you can find the number of communications addressing the different talking points on the Free SHS controversy. The data shows more engagement on the issues concerning the originator of the scheme, continuity of the scheme and the impact of the scheme. Accusations also proved as we will see, a common tactic.

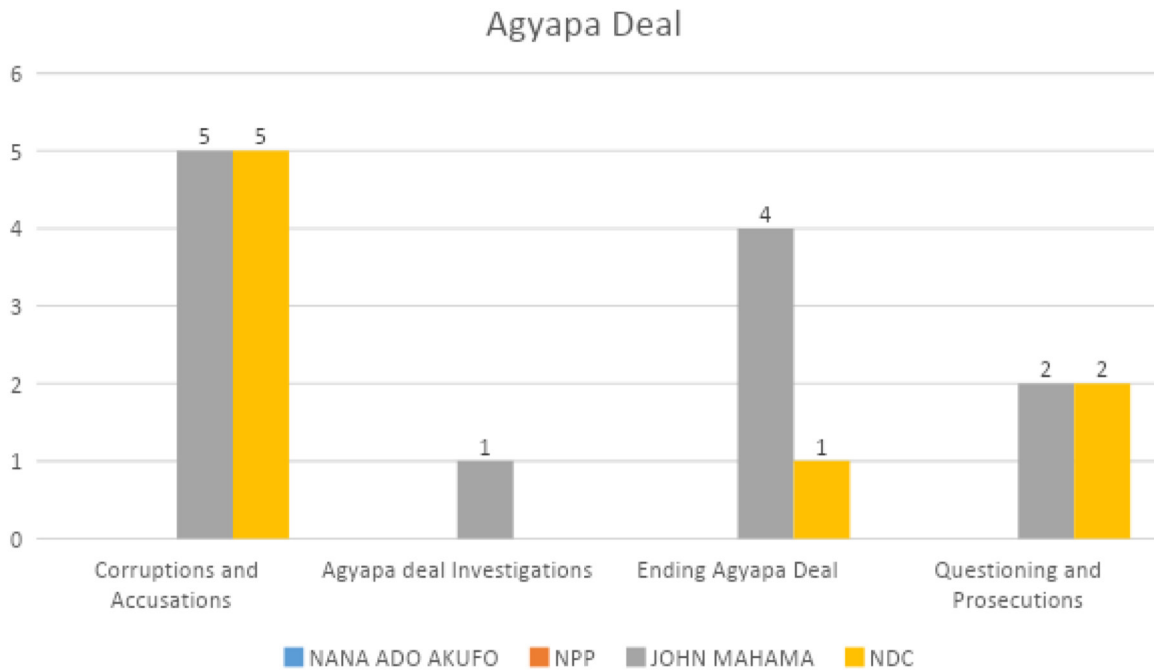


Figure 15: Response Approach to Discussions around the Agyapa Deal

On the Agyapa Deal, the NDC arm focused more on levelling accusations against the incumbent NPP and discussed the termination of the deal and the prosecution issues. Again, the “Ignore” tactic was employed by the incumbent party and candidate.

Election/Voter’s registration Issues

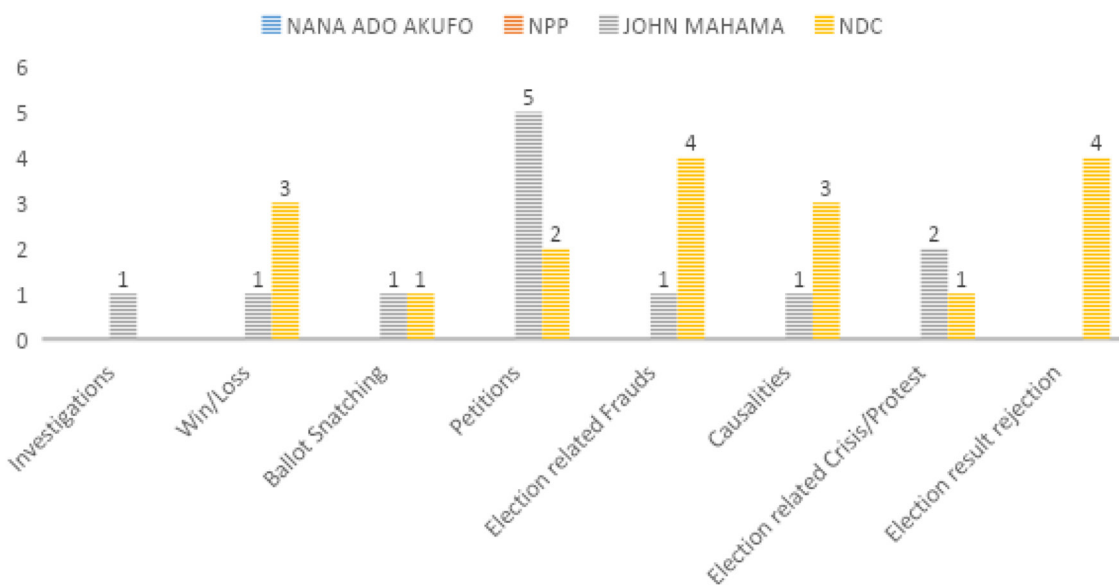


Figure 16: Response Approach to Discussions around the Election/Voter’s Registration Issues

The discussions around election day and voter’s registration more evenly spread across various discussion points. It is worthy to note that the NDC dominated the discussions due to accusations levied at the ruling party of giving themselves unfair advantage in the buildup to the polls.

- The primary target of the controversy determined the messaging approach: Further interrogation showed that reactions varied with respect to the party put under pressure by the controversy. Finding show:

- On issues wherein the Messenger was the primary target of the controversy, the common response was a mixture of ignoring and addressing the issue. The rare tactic was hurling accusations at the opposition.

Response Approach

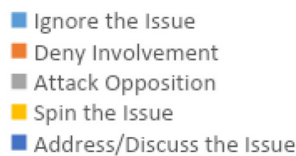
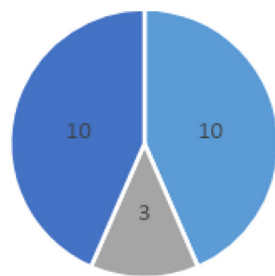


Figure 17: Responses of the Messenger when they were the Primary Target of Controversy

- On Issues concerning their opposition. They common trend was to ignore. Only addressing the issue on rare occasions and even rarer, offering a spin on the narrative.

Response Approach

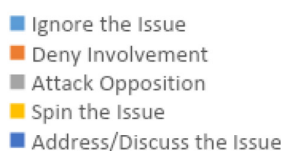
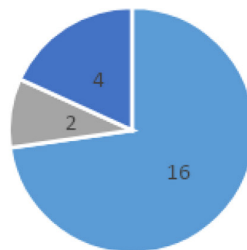


Figure 18: Responses of the Messenger when they weren't the Primary Target of Controversy

- On Neutral Issues, free flowing discussions led the way with most parties choosing to address the issue or attack the opposition. The least common tactic here was to spin the narrative.

Response Approach

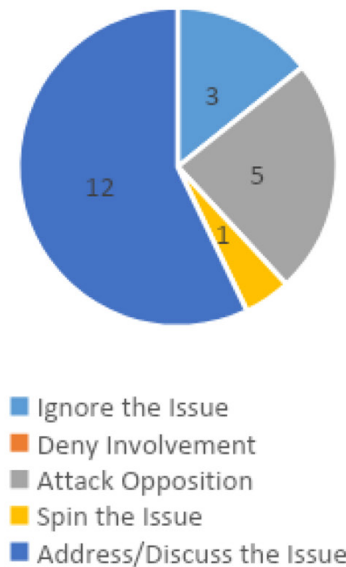


Figure 19: Responses of the Messenger when they were addressing Neutral issues

Investigative Analysis of Claimants

The study examined the debunked claims of 13 claimants by the fact checking organizations during this period. These claimants were categorized as either Private Individuals, Politicians, Group, or Spokespersons with their affiliations noted from the misinformation they propagated. The distributions showed that there were 2 Politicians, 6 Private Individuals, 1 Spokesperson, and 2 Groups/Organizations.

When examining the content with intent to draw out the Party Affiliations we discovered that 3 out of 3 posts were targeted at the NPP from claimants whose profile showed a partisan leaning towards the NDC. On the other hand, there were only 3 of the 13 claimants with NPP leanings who targeted their disinformation at the NDC.

Another observed pattern was the utilization of closed partisan support groups to repost messages initially posted on Facebook feeds as seen in a number of the false claims assessed. This proved to be effective as in one example, a feed post garnered 102 comments and 25 shares. However, when posted in the closed group, the same post had 206 comments and 161 shares; this represents a more than a 100% reach boost. Another common strategy was to have an associate engage in the comments and troll individuals who don't respond in agreement with the post.

The sharing patterns by the associations showed an average of 3 associations per post. These associations shared the post on other platforms or on their own feed. This showed that for each shared disinformation, there were deliberate efforts to push the false narrative. However, from our data sample, we cannot draw the conclusion that there was a large disinformation campaign by one organized group. This translates to a low level of organization in the disinformation efforts.

Conclusion

The following can be inferred from the findings:

- From examining the thematic areas linked with the misinformation fact-checked in the buildup, during and after the elections, we see the risk information disorder poses to maintaining the integrity of electoral process. The proliferation of claims around result manipulation and election result declaration could influence the electoral process negatively. Also, even though the proliferation of misinformation was evident in the build-up to the election, the viral issues fact checked on the actual election day were mostly true even though greatly contested. This shows a switch in behavior when the stakes are highest. This also stresses the need for event based responses to information disorder. Wardle's research points to three messaging durations: long term, short term or event based. The latter requests a special approach given the findings in that section of this study.
- The Audience Survey showed us that broadcast platforms are the preferred sources of information flow and messaging during the political season. It also shows dominance in social media and online platforms as an alternative. This is key because the respondents also claimed they saw most of the misinformation they came across on the same social media platforms, with WhatsApp as the predominant source of misinformation. The respondents also claimed that the main category of people who shared the misinformation were politicians and spokespersons. This means for a comprehensive study on election misinformation, analysis of the political presence on social media is important. The feedback of the audience also validates the categorization in the thematic analysis of the claims, as the issues easily fit into the selected themes and misinformation found in the database.
- The survey also showed that, when sourcing verified information, most respondents seem to rely on the legacy media (newsrooms) and fact checking platforms for their verification needs. This brings forth the conundrum that even though most of the respondents might have a higher level of trust for news platforms, they still get most

of the respondents might have a higher level of trust for news platforms, they still get most of their information on social media (this isn't ignoring the fact that many news platforms also have a social media presence). The data showed WhatsApp, Blogs and Twitter were the most dominant sources of the misinformation encountered. It shows that the newsrooms need to figure out ways to dominate the information flow when necessary. The audience still harbors some trust for them. This is more important, given the audiences expressed a high level of skepticism for information in general. The opportunity is self-evident for the newsrooms. The same can be said for the fact-checking organizations.

- The Political messaging content analysis showed that overall, the politicians and political parties examined chose to ignore most issues rather than address them using their primary channels. The reason behind this isn't provided by this study, however one can assume it is a deliberate strategy for plausible deniability. This strategy points to other messaging techniques being explored and the apparent care in the choice of communication tactic using official handles or platforms. Also worthy of note is the fact that the popular age-old political tactic of switching the blame or narrative to focus on the opposing party or candidate was in full display during the 2020 Ghanaian Elections according to the data gathered.
- The investigative analysis of claimants also showed that a deeper more resourced investigation is needed to fully understand the sharing networks and disinformation flow. The common sharing patterns which show an exploitation of closed groups or information bubbles raised a clear concern about the ease with which disinformation can be made to thrive. It is also worthy of note that the claimants were not direct candidates or official party pages.
- The challenges of the new media (social media, blogs and other online platforms) was evident and the audience showed a clear distrust of them. The circulation of
- Misinformation was clearly utilized to delegitimize the election results making it a very important threat to the integrity of the electoral progress.
- Disinformation not usually done using official or verified handles: The data and results of analysis done in section three of this research show a careful approach to communication on official handles of political parties and candidates. However, in section four, where the misinformation addressed by Dubawa was analyzed, the characters were either private individuals, or politicians or as seen in the responses in section two, political spokespersons. This points to the deliberate tactics of political interest to misinform while preserving an appearance of innocence.

- Utilization of comments and closed groups key to expanded reach: The most common pattern observed amongst false claims was the decision to not only post on individual feeds, but to also repost in closed groups. To further reinforce this strategy, they usually allegedly deployed an individual or a few agents to reinforce the post without recourse to logic in the comments sections. These “trolls” ensure to divert any logically discourse to partisanship or any other divide like ethnic or tribal. This strategy aims to squash any contrary opinion.

Recommendations:

Audiences need to be taught information literacy to help them filter the information received and slow down the sharing pace or spread.

Newspapers and Fact Checking Organizations need to employ strategies to dominate the media space and utilize all platforms including social media to appear as visible sources of verified election information.

Research into the activities in closed groups on social media in Ghana and other African countries need to be conducted given that misinformation thrives better in such groups.

A follow up study or investigation needs to be executed to analyze in detail, the role of political spokespersons, and socially active politically exposed people (PEPs) in the framing of issues during the 2020 elections and as a build up to future electioneering processes in the West African Region.

The role of blogs and social media influencers in driving public discuss also requires investigation. A deep dive into WhatsApp communications and Facebook closed group behavior is also necessary. This will help provide the insight needed when recommendations on social network policy have to be made.

A deliberate strategy to curb misinformation on Whatsapp in particular, needs to be created. Proactive disclosure and consistency is key in the result declaration process of elections as that has been found to be the hotbed of misinformation during elections. This is more important when the idea that the lesser the disputes around election results, the greater the legitimacy of the incumbent government. This also determines the attitude of the citizens in lending support to the governments agenda for the nation.

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