

2020

## Social Media Technologies in Policy Communication: A Case Study of Ghana's Information Services Department

Winnifred Nafisa Mahama  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Social Media Technologies in Policy Communication:  
A Case Study of Ghana's Information Services Department

By

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MA, Cardiff University, 2007

Dip., Ghana Institute of Journalism, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May, 2020

## Abstract

There is an informational gap in demand and supply of real-time policy information confronting Ghana's Information Services Department. This problem of gap in demand and supply impacts the productivity of individuals, groups, as well as public and private institutions. The aim of this qualitative case study was to explore how government could integrate social media technologies in its policy communications to bridge the informational gap. The narrative policy framework provided the theoretical framework for the study. Research questions focused on how government use social media technologies in engaging citizens to generate input for policy decision making as well as how they complement the traditional forms of communication in meeting the information needs of citizens. A purposive sampling technique, semi structured interviews involving 10 participants, reflective field notes, and media monitoring reports provided information regarding government use of social media technologies in policy communication. Data from the interviews were coded and categorized for thematic analysis and constant comparison. Results indicated that lack of access to policy information informed the choice of channel for communication. Participants also expressed the importance of the role information officers play in policy communication as well as the need to be cognizant of barriers to using social media channels in communicating public policies. The findings from this study may provide data to policymakers on the benefits of integrating social media tools in their engagement with the citizenry, which will bring governance closer to the constituents and make government more accountable and transparent.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my loving mother, Esther Brenda Alhassan Mahama, whose prayers, maternal counsel, selfless dedication and sacrifice was the foundation for my life journey.

To my father, Maj. Bede Amoa Mahama of loving memory, who would have been proud to see this work of his 'darling'.

And to all my children, I trust that it has inspired you all. Always remember that there is nothing too difficult to achieve with God's guidance, determination and hard work.

## Acknowledgments

To God be the Glory, Great things he has done

My greatest appreciation goes to my employers, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Roads and Highways all of the Republic of Ghana, without whose funding I could not have undertaken this study.

Thank you to my Committee Chair, Dr. Eliesh O’Neil Lane for her guidance, encouragement, patience throughout the dissertation process. I am also grateful for the feedback and guidance from my committee members, Dr. Olivia Yu and Dr. Michael Brewer.

My utmost gratitude goes to my husband, Sampson S. Samari for the love, support, and encouragement he demonstrated during the challenging times of this doctoral journey.

Finally, thank you to all of my support networks—the people responsible for keeping me from giving up when finishing felt impossible.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The growing importance of social media as a key medium of communication has led to a fundamental change in public communication. According to the Internet World Statistics (2019), more than 10 million Ghanaians, approximately 39% of the population, had access to the Internet in 2019; further, 4.9 million Ghanaians are active Facebook users. Indeed, the 2019 statistics revealed that Internet usage per capita access rate grew consistently from 0.2% in 2000 to 39% in 2019 (Internet World Statistics, 2019). Despite the increasing Internet access, its potential benefit to the state, particularly the Internet-enabled technologies, has remained largely untapped (Dalberg, 2013).

Previously, public communication was largely conducted by a limited set of actors including policymakers, companies, and other groups such as journalists (Chadwick, 2006). The spread and adoption of social media have transformed information diffusion, reduced information asymmetry, and created challenges for policymakers in managing and disseminating public policy. Therefore, social media has the potential, if harnessed effectively, to bridge this gap of delayed communication, and subsequently provide an opportunity for the creation of interactive public policy communication systems. For instance, during the 2016 failed coup d'état attempt in Turkey, social media technology played a critical role in rallying citizens to stand up for democracy and firmly fight against the soldiers leading the insurrection (Uras, 2016). A report by Al Jazeera stated, "President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent a mobile phone text message to the public for them to take to the streets against the coup plotters" (Uras, 2016, para. 5). This call

rallied the citizens together to foil the coup d'état attempt. The diversity and availability of social media to the Ghanaian populace is exhilarating, liberating, and challenging for policymakers to comprehend. One of the key challenges is, understanding how policymakers can harness the interactive nature of social media to enhance greater engagement with citizens regarding public policy.

Although there are scholarly research which provide theories, frameworks, and models on the development and use of social media, there exists a gap in the literature in examining the relationship, or lack thereof, between social media usage and public policy communication. Most of the existing research on the use of social media has focused on its use in relation to private sector organizations and non-profit organizations. Unfortunately, there is limited research on the use of social media in public policy dissemination and policy feedback. This void is more pronounced in developing countries where the use and adoption of social media are rapidly increasing (Poushter, Bishop, & Chwe, 2018).

Despite the challenges in measuring the impact of social media technologies, Dalberg (2013) provided substantial evidence on how such communication approaches could help achieve both social and economic goals. Social media platforms appear to change how people access news and information daily as these platforms offer instant news with consistent updates on development (Anderson & Chaumont, 2014). The rate of dissemination of social media is fast and significant in such a way that many public and private organizations are restructuring how they engage their stakeholders and constituents. For example, media organizations like British Broadcasting Corporation,

Cable News Network (CNN), and Al Jazeera are tapping into the newsgathering potential of social media technologies to engage with their audiences and distribute news (Newman, 2009). As a public service organization, the Ghana Information Services Department (ISD) has the mandate to provide and disseminate information on government policies, programs, and activities to the public. It is therefore imperative to explore various ways to reach various target groups to make the maximum impact as possible. The channels and mechanisms of policy communication are very important to generate the kind of response that may inform policy or impact lives. Thus, the focus of my research was to explore how the government of Ghana, through its ISD, could harness the potential of social media use in policy communication as a form of social inclusion in the delivery of services and formulation of policies.

### **Background of the Study**

#### **New Media and Social Media**

In social research, the term *new media* encapsulates the constantly changing media landscape and has a long history, since the 1960s and 1970s, of being used by researchers investigating forms, uses, and implications of information and communications technologies (ICTs; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). Not only has the emergence and evolution of the Internet meant the abolition of the space-time dimension of communication by facilitating instant access to global information, it also marks a shift to a new phase/mechanism of communication by the Internet (Balaban et al., 2016). In particular, if the first generation World Wide Web (Web 1.0) provided internet-based communication primarily by e-mail and websites, the second generation World Wide

Web, (Web 2.0) released the social media era that offered new possibilities of interaction, information generation, and sharing (Balaban et al., 2016). One of the major changes caused by the emergence and spread of Web 2.0 is altering the role in media consumption and behavior of users (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). The key term governing web users' new status is *participation*, in which the communication process incorporates access to information consumption and feedback generation (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). In contrast to typical mass media users that simply received or consumed information, new media technologies have facilitated the active involvement of users enabling the generation and publishing of online content with minimal technical, financial, or communication resources. Thus, access to mass communication is essentially free for anyone who wants to produce textual content, audio, or video through communication tools such as weblogs, podcasts, or social networking (Baruah, 2012). Therefore, the role of the communicator changes as media consumption behavior changes. Active Web 2.0 users can assume roles in the communication matrix as the roles of content receivers and generators are interchangeable (Balaban et. al., 2016).

Consequently, Web 2.0 provides the opportunity to participate and be actively involved in the communication process both publicly and privately. The traditional forms of media functioned according to the principle of *few to-many*, meaning the designation of limited access to the media production process, selection, filtering, processing, and dissemination of information (Balaban et. al., 2016); social media overlaps the roles of information generator and content user. Mass media transcends the contours of unidirectional communication and opts for bilateral dialogue that allows unlimited and



unrestricted access to information (Balaban et. al., 2016). Within the context of new media with its varied tools and ways of communication, public administration, perceived as rigid and conservative, now has to align with the technological evolution in order to respond and engage with new societal needs.

### **Public Sector and Social Media**

As a prominent entity in the socioeconomic sphere, governments and other actors in the public sector seek to partake in technological advancement in general. The potential benefit of using social media technologies in meeting the information needs of the public, especially in policy communication, calls for further investigation. Social media has created audiences with demands for information that go beyond the traditional forms of information dissemination (Chapman, Raymond, & Powell, 2014). Most governments, in communicating with their constituents, gravitate from “top-down command government to devolved co-productive governance” (Firmstone & Coleman, 2015, p.681). As access to information does not guarantee public participation, the present dynamic social media environment offers collaborative forms of communication that policymakers can adopt to foster relationships with citizens (Chapman et al., 2014). These collaborative features of social media are relevant now as the traditional tools of communications are often one-way information dissemination tools and do not foster public participation.

Social media technology is increasingly becoming a requisite for social inclusion and economic growth at the heart of any inclusive growth strategy (Dalberg, 2013). Social media also has the potential for catalyzing behavior change (Chapman et al.,

2014). Therefore, it is imperative for policymakers to take advantage of the opportunity, which social media provides, to foster dialogue and an interactive relationship between government leadership and the public(Firmstone& Coleman, 2015).

Various studies into the use of social media by different organizations reflect an interest in the nature and practices involving social media (Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Mossberger, Wu, & Crawford, 2013; Zheng, 2013). However, the emergent field of social media usage by public sector organizations in public policy communication necessitates further study. I explored the impact social media technologies may have on public policy communication, bearing in mind the limitations in traditional forms of communication between government (public officials) and the citizenry.

### **Problem Statement**

Social media has changed the ways individuals and institutions convey information. Person-to-person communication facilitates immediate, unfiltered, and bidirectional correspondence between individual clients, group and associations (Zheng, 2013).). Indeed, public institutions and government organizations have started to respond to the public's new demand for more noteworthy correspondence by using online networking methods to connect with their constituents (Mergel, 2012). In general, person-to-person communication, which is another unique feature of social media technology, offers a unique opportunity for the government to interface with citizens. I explored the use of social media technologies as a mechanism of engaging the citizenry in the government's policy communication.

The ISD of Ghana, the state institution responsible for government public relations, is confronted with a real-time information society with limited ability to provide real-time policy information. This lack of timely policy information has created gaps in the flow of information needed by the public to decide on issues for popular support and compliance with government regulations; it has also affected the productivity of individuals, groups, and corporate institutions (Ahmed, Abed, Hassoon & Ahmed, 2016). For instance, in 2015, the lack of real-time information on mitigating plans by the government on the energy crises in Ghana negatively affected the productivity of both individuals and corporate organizations (Acquah-Hayford, 2015). Indeed, the channels and mechanisms of policy communication are vital to generate public involvement and acceptance. For example, on July 5, 2016, the Supreme Court directed the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) to publicize the list of deleted persons from the national voters' register with immediate effect (Electoral Commission Report, 2016). The standard practice was to publish the names in the newspapers or post flyers with the listed names in affected polling stations. However, the EC integrated technology and increased transparency by publishing the list of affected persons on the EC website and various social media platforms along with the procedure for correcting the anomaly (Electoral Commission Report, 2016). Such promptness, facilitated by the use of social media technology, provided the public with the appropriate policy information for them to take action. Most of the existing research on the use of social media has focused on its use in relation to private sector organizations and non-profit-organizations. There is limited research in the use of social media in public policy dissemination and policy feedback.

With this study, I sought to explore how government could use social media technologies in government's policy communication to encourage discussions that may generate feedback. This qualitative case study research will contribute to public policy literature by providing insightful research findings on the use of social media as mechanisms for policy communication, bringing governance closer to the constituents, and making the government more accountable and transparent.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how social media technologies were integrated in the government's policy communications to bridge the gap of supply and demand for real time information. The central phenomenon was the government's channels of engaging the citizenry in its policy communication. This qualitative research used the ISD, the government institution responsible for information communication, as the case for the study. I also examined how social media technologies affect government policy communication through exploration, description, and interpretation. The dearth of academic research in this area supports the need to fill this gap in the existing literature. In addressing the research questions, a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within the public sector setting was undertaken (Laureate Education, 2010). The policy implications from this study may serve as a guide to policymakers.

### **Research Questions**

The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the government use social media tools to engage citizens?

RQ2: How do social media tools complement traditional forms of communication to help in real time policy dissemination?

RQ3: How do policymakers harness the interactive nature of social media?

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The advancement of social media technologies has changed the public's consumption of information. Social media technology has facilitated new forms of engagement and social interaction with stakeholders. This new dynamic in public consumption of information calls for the adoption of different strategies by government in addressing the information needs of the public. One such strategy is using narratives in information communication. Narrative strategies are the mechanisms of which actors employ narrative elements to appeal to coalitions (Shahanan, Jones, Macbeth & Jones, 2013). Narratives also influence opinions, policy processes, and policy discussion of parameters at individual, group, and institutional levels, respectively (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

As technology evolves and social media advances in form, style, and use, its impact on public sector organizations also evolves. In examining how government policymakers could use social media technologies as a mechanism for policy communication, the narrative policy framework (NPF) provided a theoretical foundation for my study. The NPF identifies how a policy narrative influences policy changes and outcomes at the individual, group and institutional levels (Shahanan, Jones, & McBeth, 2011).

The NPF is fundamentally concerned with locating narratives in the policy process (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). Such narratives, when circulated by social media technologies, have the potential of forming the worldview on issues. The channel of communication is thus as important to the outcome as the narrative itself. Therefore, social media can be the channel for the transmission of issues and policies as well as a platform for garnering support from the public towards achieving policy success. The use of images, symbols, and words in narratives is an effective method toward appealing to target groups; consequently, narratives can produce coalitions due to the narratives' capacity to support a preferred policy outcome (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

The influx of competing policy narratives assisted by social media technologies has changed the dynamics of public discourse on policy issues in recent times (Shahanan et al., 2011). Unlike the traditional communication outlets, which scrutinize narratives, social media does not have such editorial obstacles before information is disseminated (Shahanan et. al., 2011). A clear example is how interest groups and government officials propagated their views following the United Kingdom referendum to exit from the European Union (i.e., Brexit) using social media. My study sought to investigate how government communicators take advantage of social media channels in conveying such narratives in policy debates, while expanding or containing coalitions.

### **Nature of the Study**

I conducted a qualitative research study using case study approach to understand the phenomenon of social media technology usage in public policy communication. The case study method was appropriate for this study as it intended to explore the use of

social media in policy communication in a natural setting over a period of time (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). The objective of this single case study was to understand how policymakers could use social media technology in policy communication. The case was the Ghana ISD, the government mandated public relations machinery. According to Creswell (2013), a significant feature of a good qualitative case study is that it provides a thorough analysis of the various sources of data. A case study approach is appropriate for this study as the methodology aims at describing contemporary event through observation of the event and interview of persons involved in the event (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), the essence of a case study is the ability to shed light on a decision or a set of decisions that answer the why and how questions to inform results. Through detailed in-depth data collection techniques, interviews, and observation, I described the case explicitly and identified themes present.

I selected the Ghana ISD for this intensive case study analysis of how social media technology affects policy communication because of its mandate. The mandate of the ISD is to provide policy information to the citizenry. I employed a purposive sampling technique to identify potential respondents from ISD and its clients (the public) to highlight different perspectives of the use of social media in policy communication. Five information officers from ISD and five respondents from the public in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana were selected to participate in the study. The respondents from ISD were officers responsible for the development and management of information in their agencies. It is important to note that the public sample was from the location of the ISD (i.e., the Greater Accra Region of Ghana).

As a qualitative research study, I was the main instrument for the data collection. The primary data collection tool was an in-depth interview of each respondent. Other types and sources of data included observation field notes as a participant-observer, examination of various websites' content, and analyzing media monitoring reports. The choice of multiple data collection tools was to generate different views on the phenomenon being studied (Maxwell, 2013).

I used coding as the data analysis strategy to address the research questions. I identified key words and phrases that summarized the actions and major themes noted down to generate codes. I used Nvivo11, a software program designed to analyze qualitative data, in the data management and analysis process through the aggregation of the data gathered. I also used manual content analysis to support the non-computerized data analysis technique.

### **Operational Definitions**

I used several terms found in the literature throughout the study to provide greater understanding of the central topic and its importance for analysis. These included the following:

*Blog*: Refers to a frequently updated internet site or web page, generally managed by an individual or small group and authored in a casual or conversational style (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

*Citizen, citizenry and public*: These terms were used interchangeably. They refer to all persons or group of persons living in the country in general. Although one can be a



member of the community's public without being a citizen in the traditional sense of the word, the distinction does not apply in this study.

*Citizen Participation or engagement and public participation:* These terms were used interchangeably in the study. It broadly describes the process by which members of the civil society participate in the decision-making and action taking processes in governance (Ertiö, 2013).

*Communication channels:* The specific mediums on which communications are provided or received (e.g., online, print, face-to-face) (Baghestan et. al., 2009).

*Communication tools:* Communication tools are used to receive or provide communications (e.g., Web page, brochure, and memo) (Baghestan et. al., 2009).

*Engagement:* Engagement characterizes Internet users' interaction with a brand by liking, commenting, sharing posts or images, and other corresponding behaviors (Ertiö, 2013)

*E-participation:* E-participation describes the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in public participation in government and governance processes like service delivery, decision-making, and policymaking (Ertiö, 2013).

*Freedom of Information Act:* The freedom of information act is a piece of legislation that provides public access to information held by a government agency or public authorities (Information Commissioner's Office, 2020)

*Governance*: Governance is a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether the government is democratic (Fukuyama, 2013).

*Government*: Government describes the formal institutions and processes through which binding decisions are made for society (Raadschelders, 2003).

*Information and communication technologies (ICTs)*: ICTs are mechanisms that provide access to information through telecommunications focusing primarily on communication technologies such as the Internet, wireless networks, and cell phones (Christensson, 2010).

*Mobile Participation (mParticipation)*: Mobile participation describes citizen's participation in different aspects of governance using mobile technology, smartphones, or tablets (Harris & Rea, 2019).

*Mobile Web*: Mobile web refers to browser-based internet services accessed from handheld mobile devices, such as smartphones or feature phones, through a cellular or wireless network (Harris & Rea, 2019).

*New media*: New media describes the wide variety of web-related communication technologies, such as blogs, wikis, online social networking, virtual worlds, and other social media forms (Friedman & Friedman, 2008).

*Policy*: Policy defines a statement by the government of intention to implement law regulations, rulings, decisions, orders, or a combination of these directives (Birkland, 2014).

*Public policy:* Public policy refers to the actions of the government and the intentions that determine those actions (Cochran et al., 1992 in United Nations, 2008).

*Public policymaking:* Public policy making describes the process the government undertakes to determine plans and actions that are intended to solve problems and improve the quality of life for its citizens (Cochran et al., 1992 as cited in United Nations, 2008).

*Social media:* Social media captures the range of communication technologies used for sharing information and opinions between or among individuals, groups, and organizations (Christensson, 2013).

*Social network:* Social network refers to a website or other application that allows people with similar interest to communicate with each other by sharing information, comments, messages, images or other media (Harris & Rea, 2019).

*Two-way communications:* Two-way communications refer to a system of providing and receiving communications.

*Web 2.0:* Web 2.0 is the term used to describe a variety of websites and applications that allow anyone to create and share online information or material they have created (University of Melbourne, 2008). A key element of the technology is that it allows people to create, share, collaborate and communicate (University of Melbourne, 2008).

### **Assumptions**

Although most methodologies are guided by specific philosophical positions, case studies have a versatile approach not limited to a fixed ontological, epistemological, or

methodological position (Rosenberg & Yates, 2007, as cited in Harrison, Franklin & Mills, 2017). I assumed a constructionist or interpretive worldview in exploring the use of social media technology in policy communication by the ISD. From a constructionist or interpretive perspective, the phenomenon was viewed on the premise that an inexhaustible number of realities and meanings existed which was derived from the researcher (see Harrison et al., 2017).

When information on a phenomenon is abundant as espoused from the literature review, and concepts relating to the phenomenon are abstract, it is important to employ processes that best advance the management of the information through interpretation and sorting, as well as modify research findings to reflect, clarify, and relevance of the results (Harrison et al, 2017). The focus was to interpret the respondents' narratives, probing to elicit the intended meanings, while being cognizance of the entire exclusivity of the process (see Tsang, 2013). The case, the ISD, was selected based on the focus of the research questions the study sought to address. ISD's mandate within the government structure is to provide policy information to the citizenry and to generate feedback to government.

The research therefore proceeded with my assumption that a qualitative case study design was the appropriate method to explore how social media technology is integrated in the government's policy communication. Another assumption was that the research instrument would provide reliable and unbiased data from the field. Equally, through the application of the inductive process, I assumed the results generated will

provide new insights into the validity of using social media technology in the communication by the ISD and, by extension, the Ghanaian government.

### **Scope and Delimitation**

This qualitative case study focused on the impact of social media on policy communication within the ISD of Ghana. The sample for the study was limited to (a) information officers who are responsible for the development and management of information in their respective public organization and regularly interact with clients to provide or deliver information and (b) clients who wish to receive more information on public policies provided by government through the ISD. Various data collection methods (i.e., interviews, observation, examination of website content, and media monitoring reports) were used to collect and analyze the use of social media technologies in terms of accessibility, interaction, and understanding of public policies.

This study was restricted to a sample with access to preselected social media platforms available at the research site on electronic (i.e., computers) and/or mobile (i.e., smartphones and tablets) devices. Reducing potential technological issues allowed the study focus to remain on the software component on the devices. By limiting the study to preselected social media platforms, the data was collected in an organized way to address the research questions.

### **Limitations**

The study was limited by the use of qualitative design that represents a limited sample size of employees and clients of the research site. ISD has nationwide presence, in terms of staff and clients, and it was impossible to sample all of the ISD clients and staff

due to constraints of time and resources. Additionally, access to other valuable information from the management and staff of ISD was difficult to obtain as some information were classified as confidential and the Right to Information Act (RTI) was not yet implemented. The RTI, the law which allows citizens access to information from public and other government institutions was passed into law by the Ghanaian Parliament in March 2019 and had a moratorium of 1 year before its' operationalization (Maiga, 2019). There was also the possibility for my personal experiences in public sector communication to influence the outcome of the research, especially in data gathering. The purposive sampling technique assisted in the elimination of biases on the part of the respondents in terms of their selection.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research may enhance communication between the government and citizens by addressing the effectiveness of using social media as a mechanism for policy communication. The significance of using social media technology in policy communication was situated within the scope of practice, theory, and social change.

### **Significance to Theory**

Social media's multimedia components (e.g., text, video, audio) make it a powerful tool for individual and group networking (Landsbergen, 2010). Although research has been undertaken in the use of social media technologies in communication, most studies have been focused outside the African continent. By investigating how government communicators use social media technologies in policy communication in one African country, the research stands to expand current discourse on social media use

by government organizations. Furthermore, the results of the study will inform policy decisions, as well as serve as a source of reference for other researchers in the subject area. The study contributes to public policy literature by providing insightful research findings on social media as mechanisms for policy communication. In so doing, bring governance closer to the constituents and make government more accountable and transparent.

### **Significance to Practice**

Social media technologies are changing the way people, groups, and organizations are accessing information and interacting with one another globally. Social media is an interactive tool that has the potential of promoting accountability and transparency, and a mechanism for generating feedback (Sharif, Troshani, & Davidson, 2015). Government-citizen interaction to a young democratic country like Ghana is important to the public policy cycle and processes. Implementation of a decentralized system makes it important as it offers policymakers the opportunity to identify the preferences of the electorate or the governed, thereby enhancing inclusiveness (Faguet, 2014). An informed society is able to identify policy options and make choices that benefit the individual, group, or society (Faguet, 2014). Through such government-citizen engagement, enhanced by social media technology, there is an improvement in transparency, and accountability by government, which in turn shapes the course of democratic governance (Song & Lee, 2016).

### **Significance to Social Change**

Through the social networking platforms offered by these Internet-enabled technologies, there are links to engage with citizens on public policy issues to improve social inclusion, transparency, and accountability in governance. Participation and transparency are foundations of every democratic government and the linking tool is communication between the governors and the governed. In 2008, when Ghana's National Information Technology Agency (NITA) was established, one of the objectives was to use Internet-enabled technologies such as social media to modify government administration, information communication, and service delivery (Dalberg, 2013). However, there is insufficient documented evidence to show the impact of social media use in government communication. The use of social media in public policy discourse, therefore, necessitates further exploration.

### **Summary**

Social media technologies are changing the way people, groups, and organizations are accessing information and interacting with each other globally. For this qualitative research I used a case study approach to understand the phenomenon of using social media technology to enhance policy communication. The study focused on the government institution, ISD of Ghana, which is responsible for information communication. I sought to explore how the government could use social media technologies as a mechanism of engaging the citizenry in its policy communication. Such engagements may provoke discussions that will generate feedback to inform that policy, thereby enhancing communication between government and the citizenry. Based on the



analysis of the data collected, various conclusions will be drawn. It is my intent that the conclusions drawn from the study prompts further study in this area. Chapter 2 will focus on a review of the extant literature and scholarly work on public policy and new media technology, especially the use of social media technology, in the public sector.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Research shows that the use of social media in organizations and institutions, both in the public and private sectors, has gained momentum (Bria, 2013; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014; Woods, 2016). This phenomenon has been propelled by global technological advancement augmented by increasing Internet access. Social media offers opportunities for local governments to address the challenges of increasing organizational transparency and improving citizen engagement. Yang and Holzer (2005) pointed out the erosion in public trust of government agencies in relation to citizens' perceptions of these agencies as inefficient at best and corrupt at worst. Moreover, Yang and Holzer argued that by demonstrating performance effectiveness, government agencies could restore the public's sense of trust. However, Mossberger et al. (2013) asserted that the successful adoption of social media by local government organizations in the United States and for that matter, Ghana, requires understanding and awareness of how to use social media tools; particularly, governments need to understand and implement strategies to achieve improved transparency that leads to increased and productive citizen engagement. Many studies have documented successful social media initiatives by government, but few researchers have focused on the investigation and documentation of best practices or identification of risks and challenges involved along with potential solutions.

The purpose of this chapter was to review relevant literature focused on public sector organizations' application of social media technologies to improve their engagement with the public. Literature from various disciplines including public policy,

political science, communication, public relations, information technology, and management were explored. The reviewed literature was obtained from books, peer-reviewed articles, published technical papers and relevant websites. In this chapter, I begin with an exploration of the theoretical foundation underpinning my study followed by an in-depth discussion of the evolution of social media technologies including its uses and benefits. I then present a review of literature on social media technology use in the communication mix of different institutions and organizations. I conclude with a summary of the chapter and preview the selected research methodology.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The Walden University's Library electronic databases that I used to search for the literature reviewed in this chapter were ProQuest, Political Science Complete, SAGE Political Science Collection, Academic Search Complete, Communication and Mass Media Complete, and Google Scholar. Search terms used to find relevant articles on the topic included *social media*, *social media networking*, *e-government*, *citizens' engagement*, *citizens' participation*, *government communications*, *web 2.0*, *public policy communications* and *public relations*. The search strategies used text words and relevant indexing to capture the concept of how public sector organizations can adapt social media technologies to engage effectively with the public. The specific data set of online databases determined what types of limiters were available. Limiters included the year range, which was between 2015 and 2019.

## Theoretical Foundation of this Study

### The Narrative Policy Framework

The NPF is a systematic approach to narrative policy analysis that can be applied in both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The framework was first presented by Jones and McBeth in 2010 when they defined key theoretical components as narrative structure and narrative content.

**Narrative structure.** A narrative has two basic components, the content of the story and the form used to tell the story (Jones & McBeth, 2010); the more common terms for these components are story and plot, respectively. The content of the story is simply the actions within the story as they may be described in chronological order (Jones & McBeth, 2010). The plot, however, refers to how the story is told; that is, plot determines how the actions follow in the story. Therefore, the plot is the arrangement of the story sequentially in order to make sense of a narrative. Jones and McBeth (2010) posited that policy narratives often have

A context, a plot that introduces a temporal element, providing both the relationship between the setting and characters, and characters that are the villains, victims, or heroes, and finally, the moral of the story, where a solution is usually offered. (p. 340)

Therefore, policy narratives must be situated within an existing situation with intent to generate an outcome.

Narratives become meaningful when they are expressed within a context (Jones & McBeth, 2010). That is, narratives must happen within the occurrence of an event. The

specific setting adds more meaning to the narrative. A character of a narrative plays a specific role in the story. The characters of a narrative are grouped into distinct categories including (a) those that cause the problem, (b) those that are affected by the problem, and (c) those that offer solutions to the problem caused (Jones & McBeth, 2010). One basic component of a narrative is the solution provided by that narrative. The moral is usually a swift act such as strategic clarification.

Shanahan et al. (2011) posited that policy actors use stories (i.e., narratives) to influence the policymaking process. Policy actors do so by summarizing complex policy issues into stories with settings, characters, plots, and morals that help people make sense of these problems. In the process of simplification, however, policy actors strategically construct narratives that are consistent with their view of the world to advocate for their preferred policy solutions (Jones, 2014; Shanahan et al., 2011).

### **Theoretical Propositions of the Narrative Policy Framework**

Jones and McBeth (2010) put forward seven hypotheses and found support for four of them by research. The first supported hypothesis theorized that there is very little reason for individuals to modify their attitudes and behaviors when the world is functioning as expected (Jones & McBeth, 2010). However, when policy narratives interfere with an individual's state of normalcy, the individual's expectations are challenged. Narrative theory refers to *canonicity* as the state where things are as expected; in contrast, a *breach* is the difference between narrative and expectations (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Indeed, Jones and McBeth stated that when the reach of the narrative is extended, its ability to convince the individual is strong.

In the second supported hypothesis, Jones and McBeth (2010) posited that when a reader is immersed in the narrative, the reader is affected by the narration. Referred to as the process of transportation, the narrative measures the impact on the reader by the outcome of being persuaded via the narrative (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Narrative transportation considers the level to which a reader becomes involved in the narrative being read. Therefore, the more an individual is transported into a narrative, the more that individual is likely to be persuaded by that narrative.

The third supported hypothesis is the suggestion that it is easy for individuals to process new information presented in narratives when the narratives are aligned with what is perceived as the normal sequence of life for the individual processing the information (Jones & McBeth, 2010). This goes to mean that people do not always act on decisions or process information based on only objective scientific evidence, but are influenced by their personal beliefs and emotional understandings of the world (Jones & Crow, 2017). In such instances, the narrative is aligned with the individual's belief system and, therefore, easily convinces or persuades the individual. Therefore, provided there is sustained consistency, the individual is likely to be won over by the narrative (Jones & McBeth, 2010).

The last supported hypothesis is that the trustworthiness, accuracy, objectivity, expert status, and ideology of a narrative influence a recipient's willingness to accept a message (Jones & McBeth, 2010). "A source's trustworthiness, accuracy and objectivity, expert status, likability and ideology influence a recipient's willingness to accept a message" (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p.344). In other words, the individual is more likely to

be persuaded by narratives as the level of trust increases. The importance of source effects is well noted as an important factor in message persuasion.

### **Literature-Based Analysis of Theory Application**

The NPF is an important theoretical tool in determining the impacts of narratives on public opinion. At the micro level, NPF is primarily concerned about the impact of narratives on individuals culminating in the larger public opinion. It is important to note that policy narratives and public opinion are not the same. Policy narratives, in terms of the features and structure of the NPF, embody and facilitate better understanding of the predominant public view (Shahanan et al., 2012, p. 551). At the mesa-level (i.e., intermediate-level), the NPF is interested in the manner in which narrative elements are crucial in forming public opinion and defines how organizations use these elements (Shahanan et al., 2012, p. 541).

Shahanan, McBeth, and Hathaway (2011) undertook an empirical study on media policy narratives revealing the two-fold impact of policy narratives on public opinion. First, policy narratives can garner support for the policy by strengthening the conviction of audiences as well as convert the opinion of others with different opinions. Second, policy narratives can have at least a short-term influence on an individual (Shanahan et al., 2011). Therefore, these findings support the NPF assertion that interest groups purposefully manipulate policy narratives to affect, direct, and influence public opinion for their own interests or benefit (Adams, 2013, p.22; Shanahan et al., 2011).

In a 2010 study to explore how narrative structure characters affect public opinion at the micro level (i.e., basic-level), Jones (2010) discovered that the use of the

protagonist character was powerful in shaping public opinion in policy narratives. This observation affirms the NPF hypothesis that the character portrayal of a policy narrative has a deeper impact on public perception and inclinations than scientific or technical information (Shanahan et al., 2011). NPF develops a strong definition of policy narratives and identifies the different classes of elements within a narrative. However, the NPF is still in the early stages of disentangling the individual elements and exploring how they independently affect public opinion.

Related to the literature review, the NPF helped to limit the scope of the relevant data by focusing on specific variables and defining the specific viewpoint that I took in analyzing and interpreting the data gathered, understanding concepts and variables according to the given definitions, and building knowledge by validating or challenging theoretical assumptions.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts**

#### **Social Media as a Phenomenon**

Social media is defined as a communication platform that allows for exchanges between the audience and the author (Yi, Oh, & Kim, 2013). However, individual users could double as audience members and, at different times, as writers (Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen 2012; Yi et al., 2013). It is a virtual socialization system that allows the connection of two or more people for different reasons (Lee & Kwak, 2012). In general, terms, social media can be viewed as a set of online tools designed and engineered for social conversation (Bertot et al., 2012; Lee & Kwak, 2012; Mainka et al., 2014). The barriers that existed in communication from traditional media to the public have been



attenuated by the characteristics of social media, particularly the increased bidirectional communication capability (Yi et al., 2013). Moreover, social media has not only made communication easier between individuals but has also further increased intimacy in conversations.

In broad terms, social media has been categorized into two main types defined primarily by purpose (Lee & Kwak, 2012): expressive social media and collaborative social media. Expressive social media provides a conduit for expressing one's self via texting, video, picture, and music. Prominent outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Flickr fall into this expressive social media category (Lee & Kwak, 2012). In contrast, collaborative social media provides an outlet for individuals to organize themselves into groups to pursue common tasks through interaction and social processes; specific examples include Wikipedia, Google Docs, and Dropbox (Lee & Kwak, 2012; Mainka et al., 2014). The ability to share media and ease of networking are the results of social media proliferation (Mainka et al., 2014). The growth and importance of social media are not limited to only the social aspects of humanity, but also profoundly affected economics, sciences, and other critical life disciplines. For instance, social media has become pivotal in the promotion of consumer awareness and their decision-making process as well as provide an outlet for communication between the public and businesses.

Various scholars have attempted to capture the multifaceted definition of social media. According to Berger (2008, as cited in Baruah, 2012), social media is the new electronic and web-based communication media including such forms as blogs, podcasts,

Wikis, chat rooms, discussion forums, websites, social networks, and other dialogue-creating media. Specifically, Berger (2008) was of the view that social media is considered electronic as it employs the use of computers and other mobile devices; further, social media is defined as web-based because it requires the Internet to be fully utilized. The Internet can be considered the greatest promoter of social media (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015). The availability of Internet connectivity is found in almost every place that humans exist (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015). Many people rely on the Internet and the use of their electronic devices to create and share information easily at an increasingly faster rate. The use of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram) has enabled one to identify a social circle and to create bonds with these people for information sharing.

Extending beyond the electronic focus, Huang (2010, as cited in Westover Jr., 2010) described social media as “web-based services that allow individuals and organizations to share information and link with others” (p.13). Information that is shared on social media includes, but is not limited to, the exchange of pictures, videos, news content and memoranda of organizations. By use of the World Wide Web, which is connected by the Internet, such information is easily transferred from one party to another regardless of distance or time zone. Further, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the philosophical and scientific foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the conception and exchange of user-generated information” (p. 61). Kaplan and Haenlein posited that Web 2.0 emphasized user-generated information compatibility with other technological devices and systems,

as well as ease of use by everyone including non experts. Unlike Web1.0, which limited users to viewing information without its ability to comment or express opinions, Web 2.0 allowed users to collaborate and dialogue with each other as the authors of the user-generated information in an Internet-based community (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) Web 2.0 features include social networking sites, social media sites, video sharing sites, web applications, and host services among others; some examples include Facebook, YouTube, blogs, Wikis, and Google Hangouts among others.

In other literature, the term social media is explained as the way people link up with others through virtual means (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). A report by Hitwise (2010) explained that social media symbolizes the idea of *online communities* of people who have common interests and activities, or who are concerned with exploring the interests and activities of others. Some of the social networks (e.g., Twitter; Facebook) are strictly designed for users to share their emotions, mood, and thoughts. Personal profiles, consisting of various details like name, age, gender, beliefs, professional lives, and other activities, can be created by any individual with Internet access. To be specific, social network sites refers to web-based services that makes room for people to form public or semipublic profile within a bounded system with the need to communicate with a group of people who share same connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 1; Bria, 2013; Razmerita, Kirchner, & Nabeth, 2014). Social network sites also offer users' the chance to view and negotiate their list of networks and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison 2007, p. 1; Bria, 2013; Razmerita et al., 2014). Social Networking Sites (SNS) display a platform page that gives different aspects of social

media services such as sharing content developed by the user, social networking, knowledge cocreation, and collaborative activities (Bria, 2013; Hitwise, 2010).

From a different viewpoint, Castells (2010 as cited in Bria, 2013) described social media as mass self-communication, which depicts a large amount of information produced by experts and non experts alike. Castells (2010 as cited in Bria, 2013) noted that social media is *self-communication*, because of the mutual or reciprocal actions which occur mainly among its users who broadcast personal news or updates to their friends and likely to a larger audience. Many consider the Internet as a resource for finding new ways of encouraging collective action through means of communication technologies. Large-scale self-communication occur using shared communication tools via social networks, subsequently fostering a culture that encourages consumers to “*live with the Internet*” (Bria, 2013). This makes it possible for its users to see the Internet as assisting them in their daily life especially for information, politics, entertainment, work, and many other aspects of life (Bria, 2013). According to Castells (2009 as cited in Bria, 2013), mass self-communication signifies the modern development of the Web due to fast and mobile broadband spread, open-source software expansion and applications, as well as advanced users' experiences.

One key characteristic of social media communication is referred to as “*viral*” because ideas and opinions spread at a fast rate through the network via word-of-mouth thus creating trust among users based on group resemblance (Bria, 2013). Social media acts as a medium for events, actions and values to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, facts, and judgment. Kirkpatrick (2011) drew the attention of internet users to the fact

that social media began long ago before the invention of the World Wide Web. This enabled users to create groups based on a definite topic. One such group created was the virtual communities as described by Rheingold (2002) to stand in for the beginning of computer-mediated ways of sharing information through networks with people.

What is now a network society has come about because of the ever-present nature of the internet, which is within reach of users' globally (Bria, 2013). Normal communication has therefore changed from the culture of letter writing and sending physical mail to a culture of omnipresent communication by simply pressing a button or touching a screen. In general, as social media is part of the natural evolution of the digital web towards a large interactive communication structure, it can be seen that it is not a seemingly new occurrence (Bria, 2013). Communication modes that existed in the past are being improved upon by constantly adopting new and better channels. For instance, online social networks to connect, improve, and grow communication and information capabilities that already existed in the past in the form of physical social networks (Bria, 2013). Users are able to add information to social media platforms specifically designed for user-generated content, and such platforms represent social contacts that enhance peoples' social aggregation (Baruah, 2012). Users' digital information and relationships are unrestricted, and provide insight into a user's network of connections (Baruah, 2012).

Lastly, in the area of academics, a well-known body of knowledge has placed emphasis on the definition, formation, and the evolution of social media, normally using diverse terms to refer to the differences within many digital media environments (Bria, 2013). *Social media* denotes the ability of consumers to be involved in and add to

information creation(Bria, 2013). The addition of any new content or information has led to the emergence of a more advanced digital sphere of communication on a many-to-many basis as compared to previous times of such a method of chatting with many people(Schwab, 2016). Hence, this has contributed immensely to the social media industry in the area of the creation of content and helped users to interact with each other thereby influencing the free flow of communication(Schwab, 2016). A network of social exchanges and personal associations can best be used to define social networking sites, which aid users in meeting and communicating with new people through an interactive and collaborative sharing context(Harris & Rea, 2019).

### **The Emergence of Social Media**

Social media has rapidly advanced and transformed communication, collaboration, and knowledge in both personal and business realms. Given its many benefits, social media has become ever present in daily life; however, its growth and development started in the late 1970s (Morrison, 2015). From the early technical development stages of newsgroups, *listservs*, and the introduction of early chat rooms, social media has effected change in the way people communicate, collect and share content, and, consequently, has given rise to a connected society (Morrison, 2015). In the mid-1990s, the first social media site emerged called SixDegrees, characterized by a collection of real relationships formed among its users who provided their identities (Boyd &Ellison, 2010). Users designed their profiles and disclosed their private personal information based on the potential benefits of participation. Social media has enhanced the creation of private connections that enhances the disclosure of private information.

This disclosure can give a broad picture of the individual, thus giving the user profiles a sense of genuine status. Despite that many chat applications and blogs have already been in existence, the year 2001 became known as the beginning of the “Golden Era” of social media according to the social media monitoring platform Simplify 360 (Morrison, 2015).

A steady stream of social innovation started in 2001 with the first crowd-sourced encyclopedia known as Wikipedia (Morrison, 2015). Subsequently, Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook appeared in 2004 followed later by Twitter in 2006 (Morrison, 2015). Many platforms were developed that provided an outlet for sharing knowledge and information (e.g., Facebook; Wikipedia; Twitter). Some researchers also noted that social media enables individuals to share their expertise among themselves (Friedman & Friedman (2013); Tajudeen, Jaafar, & Ainin, 2018). It also provides an opportunity for people to express their identity and beliefs to others without the limitations of physical space or time. Moreover, social media sites, such as YouTube, also began to provide a platform for sharing videos and pictures, which enabled interactions and self-expression (Morrison, 2015). Although Facebook and Twitter have since become the two primary social media platforms (Morrison, 2015), MySpace remains in quiet operation undergoing several transformations.

By 2003, the attention of organizations and mass audiences were drawn to social media and the widespread utilization enabled social media to become part of daily life (Baruah, 2012). The first of such social media platforms that gained this popular recognition was MySpace. However, soon after, YouTube and Facebook took over, leading to the formation of communities for sharing information online (Baruah, 2012).

This led to a different way of creating and organizing relationship networks. Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook in 2004 and it has become a giant amongst modern social media sites (Kapoor et.al, 2018). Though it came later than MySpace and Friendster, Facebook became a viable platform to grow and nurture businesses through advertisement(Baruah, 2012). Furthermore, the ability to grow a complex network of entrepreneurial relationships resulted in the building of strong connections for profitable business activities(Kapooret.al., 2018)

Social networking rapidly globalized, attracting many diverse users and notably changing daily life including how business is conducted (Boyd & Ellison, 2010; Bria, 2013). For instance, Internet-based applications were developed including virtual marketplaces (e.g., Amazon; eBay). Moreover, many organizations realized the capability to interact with their customers virtually and directly with the aid of the Internet (Bria, 2013). The majority of online businesses grow extensively because of the relationships formed with their customers regardless of whether the involvement is passive or highly interactive(Boyd & Ellison, 2010; Bria, 2013). For example, in Ghana, mobile markets such as Jumia and Kikuu have experienced massive growth due to the ability to connect with their customers via social media sites such as Facebook. Similarly, due to corporate and business practices, social media sites for business professionals were launched such as LinkedIn(Boyd & Ellison, 2010). On these platforms, social media users effectively present themselves and their areas of specialization, career and professional experiences, and achievements. These professional networking platforms allow users the chance to be connected to others of the same or greater caliber, thus broadening their social capital



(Szwajca, 2017). Further, credibility and integrity are established and strengthened as people share content on topics and areas where they have expertise (Szwajca, 2017).

Therefore, it is important in this modern day to be knowledgeable of new social media innovations and implications of managing one's online reputation.

### **Social Media and Communication**

**Public relations.** In a research conducted by Curtis et al. (2010) on the “adoption of social media for public relations by non-profit organizations,” social media tools have become beneficial methods of communication for public relations officers (p. 92). They noted that social media was being adopted by organizations with well-established public relations departments for achieving organizational objectives (Curtis et al., 2010). Public relation officers have resorted to the use of social media tools because they find them dependable enough to transmit information rapidly. Public relations practitioners have taken into consideration the effectiveness of social media in performing their tasks, its usage will increase more and more in reaching their target audience and in further developing communication strategies (Curtis et al., 2010).

Verhoeven et al. (2012) also undertook a study to examine how European public relations practitioners handle digital and social media. They found out that social media was becoming relevant in European organizations. However, Verhoeven et al. (2012) realized that print media was still the most important channel of communication for European public relations professionals. Further, Verhoeven et al. (2012) predicted that online communication generally was likely to take over from the print media, the leader of public communication in the next few years. Verhoeven et al. (2012) also found out

that just as in the United States of America, European practitioners are equally more comfortable with established social media tools, which was defined as digital communication, just like web blogs and micro blogs. Similarly, the use of social media in public relations had a positive relationship with the perceived strategic impact of public relations organizations (Skoric, 2016; Verhoeven et al., 2012).

In terms of the relationship between social media and public relations, one can deduce that there has been a significant change in the way most businesses communicate. Social media has played a vital role in the public relations industry. In a major report from eMarketer in 2011, 63.7% of Internet users and consumers in the US mostly use social networks (Hellickson, 2011). The report further noted that, there was an expectancy of a continuous rise in the number of social media users. As much as 63% of small businesses felt as though social networking had a notable impact on their sales and revenue (Hellickson, 2011). Social media has not only penetrated public relations, but public relations practitioners will be expected to ramp up their strategies in order to best involve audiences using the social web (Hellickson, 2011).

**Corporate communication.** Social media adoption at the corporate level has provided a variety of methods for assisting social processes alongside the management of both processed and unprocessed information, knowledge, and social media systems (Razmerita et al., 2014). As social media is emerging widely, modern terms like “Enterprise Social Software’ (ESS), social-software based knowledge, Enterprise 2.0, or social business” are emerging (Razmerita et al., 2014, p3). With the aid of social media, corporations are finding out new and better ways of attracting customers to their business,

which goes a long way to increase their success (Razmerita et al., 2014) . Furthermore, social media plays a major role in organizations as well. Janhonen and Johnson (2011 cited in Razmerita et al. 2014) emphasized that social media could help knowledge conversion and team performance. Despite the positive impact of social media at the corporate level, it also has some challenges regarding security, maintaining corporate reputation and image, privacy, and intellectual property rights. Most corporations need to form, develop, and facilitate an open organizational culture that encourages employees to share company knowledge, take notice of individuals within the work field, and encourage workers to make use of such media tools for wider growth in the corporate field (Razmerita et al., 2014).

Corporate organizations also use social media as a way of communicating with their audience through reports and other channels. Some findings showed that most UK-based funding of research businesses had adopted social media for corporate communications mainly via the sharing of videos, social networking sites, and micro blogging (Verhoeven et al., 2012). In building a dialogue with primary and secondary stakeholders, there is always a prime reason for social channels usage: sharing information. Moreover, Gómez and Chalmeta (2013) posited that the increasing popularity of social media has compelled many organizations to change and diversify their approaches to communication in order to attract more customers. There is a greater advantage with social media in allowing users to share and contribute content and ideas in diverse ways than hitherto with traditional media (Gómez &Chalmeta, 2013). It also shows a wide range of current sources of information that are created online to improve

communication(Gómez &Chalmeta, 2013). Online content are formed, developed, shared, and commented on by users in order for them to know and learn about various brand types, new products, and services and many others (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004 as cited in Khan & Jan, 2015).

Corporations can reap benefits from social media such as a competitive advantage, inexpensive collaboration, real-time communication, and online archiving (Mangold & Faulds, 2010 as cited in Khan & Jan, 2015). Social media is the present and the future; hence, it is vital to leverage social media to its maximum capacity for corporate communication campaigns and needs. These campaigns can help boost the goodwill image of the corporation amongst its active stakeholders and competitors (Khan & Jan, 2015). Further, corporations can use social media to initiate stakeholder dialogue and involvement. It is important to note that social media is still picking up in some countries, as such a well mix of both traditional and online social media adds to the recipe for effective use of public relations in corporate communication Khan& Jan, 2015). To make all this possible, the messages constructed in social media should be made attractive, precise, and concise to reach large online users in their numbers to gain maximum momentum.

### **Social Media and the Public Sector**

**Public sector communication.** Communication within the public sector, aided by social media technologies, has the potential to increase government participation, collaboration, and transparency in sharing content with its citizens(Song & Lee, 2016). In addition, the use of social media technologies by many government agencies is not

common; hence, the impact measured by a few digital interactions (Song & Lee, 2016). These modern ways of digital relations between government and its stakeholders have the potential to broaden democratic reach by accessing Internet users who previously were unable or not inclined to participate in policymaking activities (Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010 as cited in Criado, Sandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2013).

Social media technologies also serve as platforms for governments to disseminate vital information to its citizens and workers for appropriate policy practices to be adapted and reviewed (Song & Lee, 2016). Quite a number of public sector agencies are reluctant in measuring their interactions online or are inhibited by their interpretation of laws and regulations in existence (Mergel, 2013). For governmental processes to be more effective and efficient, the government must invest social and human capital into social media usage in order to acquire innovative knowledge from its stakeholders (Mergel, 2013). Notwithstanding, merely opening more routes to provide widespread information to inform the public, without providing a parallel mechanism for reacting to the public's feedback and attitude, could create loopholes in communication that might harm the government's image (Criado et al., 2013).

Social media technologies have had numerous impacts, both positively and negatively, on the public sector. A vital step in using the appropriate measures include a wider understanding of the behavior and social feature challenges coupled with social media data interpretations by public managers and media experts in government (Happer & Philo, 2013). In recent years, many public sectors started to use social media platforms to promote online information and keep in touch with their audiences. The definition of

social media also extends to the public sector as a collection of technologies that gives way to public agencies to foster agreement with citizens and other organizations using the philosophy of Web 2.0 (Criado et al., 2013). One way social media technologies have benefitted the public sector is the massive collection of data resources made known from interactive activities with the public, businesses, and many other government-related activities with ease due to media technologies (Criado et al., 2013). In conclusion, Chun and Luna (2012 cited in Criado et al., 2013) suggested that these technologies enabled the government have the ability to achieve productivity through search capabilities for employees to effectively identify knowledge and resources; this allows customers and employees to share relevant information.

Governments have been gradually moving towards social media due to its powerful attributes. Governments are increasingly using tools like blogs, wikis, and social networking to increase communication between the public and government at various levels, to solve problems and to exchange ideas on pressing national issues of mutual interest (Mainka et al. 2014). They enhance communication within organizations and help government agencies to remain informed with events in the fast-changing world (Mainka et al. 2014). Social network platforms like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn are the most common services used by government agencies (Mainka et al. 2014).

In theory, social media's evolution is deemed to be the perfect tool for increased transparency and accountability in public officers' discharge of responsibilities and duties and serves as a tool for encouraging citizens' participation in the sphere of public

policymaking (Eom, Hwang, and Kim 2018; Mainka et al., 2014). The facilitation of information flow reduces moral hazards and adverse selection in the public space and potentially reduces illegal solicitation by public officers (Eom et al., 2018; Mainka et al. 2014). Social media is accredited to have had an impact on transparency and accountability, but these are country specific (Eom et al., 2018); countries with adequate infrastructure and educated public servants turn to use more social media outlets in dissemination and sharing of information compared to countries without these resources. The criticism of this dogma is that it is defective when examined from the beneficial effects concept perspective (Eom et al., 2018). In addition, many of the discussions on this dogma seem unsupported by a lack of evidence on the impact of social media expansion on beneficial effects in the public sector (Eom et al., 2018).

On the other hand, social media is argued to have the ability to enhance public service output delivery (Bertot, Jaeger, and Hansen, 2012). The proponents of the idea postulate that social media presents an immense array of possibilities for the government to engage the public in government works thereby increasing openness in the conduct of government business (Lee & Kwak, 2012). At the same time, it enables for extension of governmental services, acts as incubators for the breeding of new ideas, assists with decision making as well as problem-solving (Bertot et al., 2012). They are particularly helpful in situations where governments are committed to increase openness in government business and eventually deepen transparency, participatory policymaking, and collaboration for social value co-creation and service delivery (Lee & Kwak, 2012; Scholl 2018).

Unsurprisingly, however, social media thrives in an environment where infrastructure comes in handy. In countries and cities where there are adequate ICT infrastructure and high internet penetration rates, such vicinities turn to integrate and prioritize social media in open government plans (Lee & Kwak 2012; Mainka et al. 2014). Those without social media infrastructure but value the potential contribution to governance often initiate programs aimed at providing such infrastructure (Uwamariya, Cremer, & Loebbecke, 2015). A typical example is the ICT revolution that has happened in Rwanda in the last decade (Uwamariya, Cremer, & Loebbecke, 2015). The availability of the required ICT enablers makes it easy for social media to reach high numbers of citizens (Lee & Kwak 2012; Mainka et al. 2014). Social media equally presents generic challenges including; privacy and security, inaccessibility, matters of information management, data management, and accessibility as well as lags in regulation (Bertot et al., 2012).

However, without the existence of modern ICT infrastructure, social media's relevance in social policymaking is only a dream especially that social media-based public engagement remains a largely unexplored area in many countries, and the general knowledge is abysmally low (Lee & Kwak 2012). In many such countries, citizens who already are benefiting from the social media revolution tend to press their respective governments for change (Lee & Kwak 2012). The continual pressing often results in many governments changing their dogmas on openness to increase transparency, participation, and collaboration in government business (Lee & Kwak 2012). In addition, many such countries and governments under pressure often embark on multiple open government



initiatives, and the result unclear (Lee & Kwak 2012). Multiple social media initiatives have failed to achieve the desired outcome because social media is predicated on high capacity as well as technological and infrastructure requirements (Bertot et al., 2012). These constraints make open government multiple models challenging to pursue (Lee & Kwak 2012). They require substantial time and resources, which many government agencies are unable to cope with which results in delays in generating feedback to citizens.

Given challenges with multiple government openness models, an Open Government Maturity Model (OGMM) was proposed. The vision of the OGMM is to have the needed mechanism, which purposely guides the journey to open government via social media and other technologies (Lee & Kwak 2012). The OGMM is built on logical sequencing methodology that minimizes risks in the open government ecosystem while harnessing social media's prowess for better and quality public engagement (Lee & Kwak 2012). The model's anchor is on the following; initial condition setting, data transparency stage, open participation, open collaboration and finally, ubiquitous engagement (Lee & Kwak 2012). The OGMM avoids the challenges of multi open government model substantially.

The advent of social media has provided a two-way participatory model to policymakers (Yi, Oh, & Kim 2013), rather than the model of traditional broadcast media such as radio, books, and television which is one-to-many (Bertot et al., 2012). Scholarship on social media use in the public sector has revealed strikingly positive effects on the promotion of democracy (Eom et al., 2018). With such positive

effects of social media, attention has been focused on expanding the frontiers to areas such as the direct benefit of social media to citizens (Eom, Hwang, & Kim 2018). The surge in research interest in social media is particularly interesting especially at the time that social media is also blamed for propelling “fake news” and thereby negatively influencing peoples’ decisions and views on matters such as elections, immigration and international trade(Jang & Kim 2018; Bovet & Makse 2018).

**Citizen engagement.** Civic engagement refers to actions citizens take in order to pursue common concerns and address problems in the communities they belong to (Zukin et al, 2006 cited in Skoric et al, 2016). Some examples of these include awareness of community issues and freely volunteering in charity work. Social media also helps in promoting reasons why citizens must engage themselves in taking up their duties and responsibilities as their rights to their nation (Skoric et al, 2016). It can also be used to enhance citizen engagement with government. Many activists have shown that the use of social media has a great positive link with engagement together with its three subcategories of social capital, civic engagement and political participation (Skoric et. al., 2016). Most scholars have also discussed extensively the use of social media in promoting political and civic engagement, but a conclusion on this matter necessitates analyzes. According to Bennette and Segerberg (2012 cited in Skoric et al., 2016), the advent of social media has modified the form of online interactions among citizens who have enabled new forms of personal public engagement that does not require very vital organizational resources and skills nor common identity and ideology. An example of such social media platforms is Facebook, which enables easy management of data despite

the large social network ties it has, as well as the provision of records of past social interactions for everyone that needs it at a particular period (Skoric et al, 2016).

Democratic participation and engagement, co-production, and crowd sourcing solutions and innovations are identified as crucial opportunities for technology via social media usage (Bertot et al., 2012). These opportunities are the redefining moments for citizen-government engagements especially at such a time where social media is increasingly becoming a part of grand electronic programs of various governments around the world (Bertot et al., 2012).

Social media has helped citizens participate in political or civic movements by creating and sharing information on individual political views; specifically, social media enables citizens to share personal opinions and freely express their reasons for, or against, any viewpoint (Skoric et al, 2016). In view of this, such expressed acts may not be so much political but may take forms of symbolic entertainment messages that can rapidly spread across online social networks (Skoric et al, 2016). The spread of these messages could bring up new discussion topics, debates, and some arguments formed which could lead to precise behavior results (Skoric et al, 2016). Before selecting a media platform, there is a need to analyze and identify which platform will assist both the government and citizens in communicating on a large scale with each other; the platform should take into account other inclusive factors like level of activeness, transparency, and simplicity. The ability of the citizen to understand and identify the type of media platform to use in order to get its full engagement is critical to citizen engagement (Skoric et al, 2016). In conclusion, citizens who engage widely in government issues using social media are

likely to produce online information regarding taking part in real-life political action (Skoric et al, 2016). Responses and results from citizens with high social media literacy are likely to show their confidence level in view of political content (Skoric et al, 2016). Such attitudes for politics and skills acquired online can be transferred to real life participation in politics (Skoric et al, 2016). One can therefore deduce that there is a positive relationship between social media and civic engagement.

### **Messaging, Technology, and Social Context**

A famous Canadian professor and philosopher by the name Marshall McLuhan is best known for his study of media theory and for using the expression “the medium is the message” (Bernado, 2018, para 1; Roncallo-Dow, & Scolari, 2016). Even though McLuhan did not create this theory in the computer age, his contributions mostly gave new communication perspectives to network platforms such as social media (Roncallo-Dow, & Scolari, 2016). He was always of the view that the medium used to communicate could effectively deliver the message to the right user for proper digestion of it and adequate feedback where necessary. The “medium is the message” theory explains that the way in which the message is drafted and communicated is greatly influenced by the mode or channel that is being used to disseminate (Roncallo-Dow, & Scolari, 2016). The feedback of the respondents will not only depend on statements, but the medium of delivery. The increasing usage of social media platforms has made it possible for one to deploy messages in accordance with the nature of the media platform being used in order to be productive (Roncallo-Dow, & Scolari, 2016; Bernado, 2018). For example, a company’s business-to-business social media marketing must carefully employ a

balanced mix across multiple channels to develop strong relations with its customers and generate qualified leads (Bernado, 2018).

Furthermore, using a particular media platform helps one to increase productivity in the area of business and many other areas where appropriate(Bernado, 2018). For instance, a media platform like Twitter is good for targeting certain kinds of users of a specific product. It has a limit of 280 words that aids in quickly capture attention in a precise and concise manner (Bernado, 2018). It is a medium noted for speed and adequate efficiency. This medium of communication enables its users to meet new people all the time and discover newer things around the world as well(Bernado, 2018). Instagram as a major media platform, on the other hand, focuses on the visual content of delivering its message to its users. Indeed, social media has a vital role in spreading the message to its audience(Bernado, 2018). In order to make social media messages more impactful, there is a need to stay engaged with users, thus message drafted should be straight to the point and very simple to the comprehension level of the audience(Verhoeven et al., 2012). Social media as a channel for communication offers the opportunity to directly respond and involve the audience where necessary (Verhoeven et al., 2012).

**Online and traditional channels of communication.** Communication may be defined as a way of expressing one's opinion through speech or actions. For the purposes of this study, I will concentrate on two channels of communication: (a) online channels and (b) the traditional channels. The online channels of communication include social media such as websites and e-mails, chats, and online discussion forums. Traditional channels of communication include print media, broadcast media, face-to-face, town hall

meetings, and billboards. Inasmuch as many people may prefer online communication channels to the traditional type, each channel has its advantages and disadvantages.

The online communication channel is widely used in an organization because of the channel's efficiency in the management of task-oriented events or meetings (Fensel et al., 2012). With this channel, immediate feedback is granted to support effective output. Knowing what communication channel to use is necessary in order to reach out to the appropriate audience at the right time with the right information (Fensel et al., 2012). A social media communication channel is a means of exchanging information in the online space (Fensel et al., 2012). For instance, Facebook provides around forty different methods of spreading information (Fensel et al., 2012). One major benefit of using the online communication channel is that it has the ability to broadcast static information (Fensel et al., 2012). That is, information reflecting the structure of the contents provided through the aid of websites and because of this provides users a better way to access this content (Fensel et al., 2012). Another basic benefit is the ability for its content to be constantly changed and flexibility. Malicious activities, such as modifying a large number of people's opinions through social media platforms, and the use of crowd-sourcing platforms are becoming very popular (Wang et al., 2011 as cited in Fensel et al., 2012). One demerit of online communication channels is the fact that it can make the users' feel isolated, especially for people who love to work in groups. This is because most of the focus is shifted from them to the Internet thus creating isolation. Online communication channels facilitate communication at a faster rate for managers thereby

saving them time and money, as well as a reduction in the overload of information for its consumers (Fensel et al., 2012).

Overtime, communicators use less traditional channels of communication because of the increase in the positive use of online channels. Traditional channels are the mode of communication through word of mouth or face-to-face interactions (Obiora, 2011). Some benefits of this model are that it can be used for effective grassroots mobilization and serves as communication tools for grassroots development (Obiora, 2011). It is also beneficial when one wants to observe the reaction of audiences. However, it does not effectively support two-way symmetry of communication; feedback is most often delayed (Obiora, 2011). It is also expensive to run a full communication activity. Therefore, it is necessary to have a blend of both forms of communication channels in delivering policy and public services. In summary, the traditional communication channel is very effective for grassroots development and mobilization which as compared to the online channel of communication.

**Social media and audience size.** Every user or consumer of social media gains a level of satisfaction whether at the individual, group, or corporate level. Individuals, groups, and corporate organizations try to exploit new levels of sharing ideas through collaboration and interaction with others (Sparrowe, Liden, Kraimer, and Wayne, 2001). Sparrowe et. al.,(2001) conducted a field study involving 190 employees in 38 workgroups with representatives from five diverse organizations; their results provided support that social networks are related to both positive and negative performance of individuals and groups. Specifically, individual job output using social media related

positively 'to centrality in the advice network' and related 'negatively to centrality in the hindrance network' (Sparrowe et al., 2001, p.320). Equally, the group performance related negatively to the 'hindrance network density' (Sparrowe et al., 2001). Most research results supported that social media at the group and the corporate level was similar in terms of their basic features (Sparrowe et al., 2001, p.320). However, at the group level social media usage could involve people within the range of 2 to 5 unlike usage at the corporate level, which recorded a higher range (Sparrowe et al., 2001, p.320).

Social media at the individual level normally is concerned with the extent to which individuals have access to resources by using some social media platforms specifically to gain task-related knowledge and confidential information about personal work activities (Sparrowe et al., 2001, p.320). With the central individuals, because of their greater links with other people, they have more relationships to draw from in acquiring resources and so are less reliable on single individuals (Sparrowe et al., 2001, p.320). From the above one can say a central individual is one that gains information from an all-round view while a single individual is just limited to one source of gathering information. A central individual can select from a wide range of alternatives in sharing resources that is of a higher benefit. Most individuals cannot think of communication and forgetting online-networks like its media platforms. Indeed, Spitzer (2012) stated that these new technologies allow humans, described as social beings, act out their vital feeling of belongingness accordingly (p.109). Using social media at the individual level equally has its own advantages and disadvantages as any other thing.



Social media at the individual level facilitates global communication in split seconds and plays very significant roles in e-commerce among individuals (Sparrowe et al., 2001).

At the group level, communicating channels have increased in line with social media popularity. Social media has emerged because of intergroup processes, and communication occurring within the media platforms and other likewise services (Carr, Varney & Blesse, 2016). Social media platforms have also offered long-distance groups the chance to come together to influence each other positively in diverse ways. In all these, the complex group communication within social media can be matched by the complex nature of social media itself (Carr et. al., 2016) One pressing challenge of this level is that these tools often enable users to concurrently present and interact via both personal and social identity cues (Carr et.al., 2016). Thus, an essential challenge of intergroup theory to its application knows when an individual within the group level is depersonalized and social identities are set, hence activating group stages and making the appropriate intergroup selection (Carr et. al., 2016). In as much as social media can bring groups together and facilitate these groups to reduce distance, it can also provide an avenue for these groups to isolate themselves. All these go a long way to strengthen the groups and cause an expansion in the intra-group distance.

### **Summary**

This chapter examined earlier empirical and theoretical studies on social media, focusing on the different fields of inquiry where social media is becoming an important subject of investigation and subsequently contributing to emergent theoretical frameworks in the field of public sector communication. Using social media platforms,

consumers and users are actively engaging in the creation of online communities based on affiliations and common interests and production and dissemination of virtual products and information. However, currently, there is no comprehensive management and organization theory on the impact or use of social media on public sector organizations. As noted from the literature review, different disciplines have focused their attention on specific aspects of social media, developing autonomous definitions and research perspectives. For instance, social scientists and media theorists have identified the role of social media in the social, political, and cultural context; further, they have studied the potential of social media to mobilize and build virtual communities for community actions. In contrast, computer science scholars focused on the technological and standards-making aspects of the social web while highlighting the linkages between innovation and industry dynamics. On the other hand, market researchers focused on the influence of social media on consumer behavior and their role in enhancing firms' performance. Through this review, I have consolidated and compared the phenomenon from the different perspectives to provide context as well as to identify future research areas for public policy scholars. The integration of the various linkages espoused in this literature review could serve as a starting point in exploring the use of social media in policy communication and investigating how the knowledge of this phenomenon will affect future research from a theoretical and empirical perspective. Chapter 3 outlines the case study methodology approach that was employed to investigate the research questions.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how social media technologies were integrated in the government's policy communication to bridge the gap of supply and demand for real time information, and thus encourage citizen engagement in policy communication. The mechanisms of policy communication are vital to generate public involvement and acceptance. However, the ISD of Ghana, the state institution responsible for government public relations, is confronted with the logistics dilemma of providing concurrent policy information in real-time. The paucity of timely policy information has created gaps in the information flow needed by the public to decide on issues for popular support and conformity with government regulations. This study provides a better understanding of the use of social media technologies to enhance government policy communication through exploration, description and interpretation. Moreover, in order to address the research questions, a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within the public sector setting was required. This chapter describes the method used to obtain the necessary data regarding this study including the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, population, sampling and sampling procedure, and research instruments used in data collection.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

In order to understand better the relationship between the uses of social media technology in government policy communication, the study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the government use social media tools to engage citizens?

RQ2: How do social media tools complement traditional forms of communication to help in real-time policy dissemination?

RQ3: How do policymakers harness the interactive nature of social media?

The chosen research tradition of the study was qualitative research through a case study approach as the selected design to understand the phenomenon of using social media technology to enhance policy communication. Qualitative research is primarily an exploratory inquiry to understand trends in thought and opinions while diving deep into the problem or phenomenon (see Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). The rationale for choosing qualitative research was primarily due to the analysis requiring unstructured information generated from in-depth interviews, participants' observation, and review of documents; the findings of this research will not be subject to quantification or quantitative analysis.

The study employed a case study approach to explore the use of social media in policy communication in a present-day, natural setting over a period of time (see Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). Through the detailed in-depth data collection through interviews and observation, I described the case explicitly and identified themes for analysis, conclusion, and recommendation. A case study involves a deep understanding through multiple types of data sources. Yin (2018) defined case study research as an empirical method that scrutinizes a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be obvious. In other words, my aim in this study was to understand how social media could be used in policy communication with the assumption that a conclusion of

this nature was likely to involve important deeply rooted conditions relevant to ISD in the discharge of their mandate (see Yin, 2018).

Other qualitative research designs (e.g., ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, phenomenological research) would not be appropriate for this research. Ethnography is the systematic study of people and cultures; it is designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the viewpoint of the study subject (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Similarly, as the intention of the study was not to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon by telling a story, narrative research was not appropriate (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Equally, grounded theory was an inappropriate match for this study's objective as this approach is the systematic generation of theory from systematic research involving a set of rigorous research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Lastly, the phenomenological design was inappropriate as it is often intended to describe a lived experience of a phenomenon. Phenomenology could be an alternative approach to this study; however, the study went beyond describing the lived experiences of the phenomenon and sought to identify emerging trends and theory within a specific case (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2006).

The objective of this single case study was to understand how policymakers could use social media technology in policy communication for information dissemination and citizen engagement. According to Creswell (2013), a hallmark of a good qualitative case study is the presentation of a comprehensive understanding of the case through the analysis of the multiple sources of data, such as in-depth interviews, observations, media

monitoring reports, and website reviews, subsequently converging in a triangulation fashion. The objective was to capture the perspective of the respondent while focusing on how individual views shed light on the topic of study (Yin, 2018). Like other forms of qualitative research, in a case study such as this, I sought to explore, understand, and present the participants' perspectives within their natural setting (Creswell, 2013). ISD was the case for the study to illustrate the use of social media technology in policy communication because of their institutional mandate within the government structure, which is to provide policy information to the citizenry.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative studies, the researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Creswell, 2013). In other words, the data is mediated through this human instrument rather than inventories, questionnaires, or machines. My role as the researcher was to observe and conduct unstructured, in-depth interviews with the targeted respondents. The interviews were organized according to a self-prepared interview guide, which outlined themes to be covered during the interview. The interview guide did not specify the exact phrasing of questions, but generally, questions were open-ended, and respondents were encouraged to elaborate in their responses.

Experiences, prejudices, and other factors account for the researcher being biased during the research (Patton, 2015). As a communications person in the public service, I have work and personal connections with the respondents and the case for the study. I kept a journal where I recorded how I might have influenced the results of each interview. The journal documented a first-hand account of any form of interviewer bias

and the preconceptions that could have influenced the findings. During the data analysis, the journal recordings served as a reference point to confront any form of prejudices or subjectivities and the impact of these potential influences on the credibility of the research outcomes.

### **Methodology**

I employed a purposive sampling technique to identify potential respondents from the case study (i.e., ISD and its clients) to highlight different perspectives of the issue. As the research was qualitative, I, as the researcher, was the main instrument for data collection. Five information officers from ISD and five citizens from the public in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana were selected to participate in the study. This section will provide an overview of the method for sampling, data collection, and data interpretation.

#### **Participant Selection Logic**

The information officers were selected based on their roles as being responsible for the development and management of information in their agencies. Another criterion considered was that information officers used social media as part of their tools in communicating with the public. Similarly, I targeted respondents from the public who had access to the Internet, used social media in seeking policy information, and regularly sought such information from information officers. The ISD was selected to illustrate the use of social media technology in policy communication given the institutional mandate to provide policy information to the citizenry and to facilitate two-way communication.

I used purposive sampling and snowballing to recruit respondents based on the criteria established. ISD provided me with the contact information of information

officers. I contacted 10 of the officers by telephone and, based on the stated criteria, subsequently, I reduced the number to five. I then followed up the telephone communication with face-to-face contact. Next, I used a subject-initiated snowballing process to recruit participants from the public. This technique was used in order to minimize the risks associated with the participant recruitment process. Specifically, I gently asked the initial participants (i.e. the information officers) whether they were willing to pass study information to other potential participants. For those who agreed, I provided them with an information sheet that they gave to people they thought might be interested and qualified for the study. These potential participants contacted me through my telephone number provided in the information sheet. After the potential participant agreed to be part of the study, I arranged and met them face-to-face.

In qualitative research, the basis for selecting respondents is their ability to reflect the diversity and breadth of the target population. To this end, a large sample size will not necessarily generate the expected output exhibiting the depth and the breadth of perspectives (Wilmot, 2005). Indeed, the selection of a qualitative sample size is dependent on the heterogeneous nature of the sample population or requirements of the data collection methods used (Wilmot, 2005). Several points led to this choice of purposive sampling technique. It is a technique often employed in qualitative studies, and respondents are often selected based on specific criteria including diversity and breadth of sampling population as well as having experienced the phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Wilmot, 2005).



## **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In this case study, the primary technique of inquiry was in-depth interviews; however, other data collection methods like observation field notes as a researcher-observer, an examination of various social media platforms, and media monitoring data were employed to take advantage of their strengths while limiting their disadvantages. In other words, the multiple data collection methods complemented each other to improve data quality and reduce any form of bias.

I conducted the in-depth interviews based on the three categories espoused by Patton (2015), that is, “informal conversational interview, general interview guide approach, and standardized open-ended interview” (p. 437). To begin with, the in-depth interviews generated data on the respondents’ perspective on the phenomenon of interest. To this end, general topics were explored, while I gathered feedback, verification, and clarification on points of interest.

Other types and sources of data included observation field notes as a researcher-observer, examination of various social media platforms, and analyzing media monitoring reports. The various data collection procedures gave me the opportunity to explore the main phenomenon while better understanding participants’ motivations, behaviors, and attitudes. The choice of multiple data collection tools was to generate different views on the phenomenon being studied (Maxwell, 2013). Such varied views and opinions greatly enriched the outcome of the findings. To ensure validity, my research instruments were

subjected to a review and approval by my dissertation research Committee and the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Upon receipt of IRB approval number 09-06-19-0455283, I collected data through in-depth interviews and field observations of all respondents who consented in writing to participate in the research. Interviews were completed at one sitting and lasted between 15-30 minutes. The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder for analysis and confirmation of written notes. There were no cases where I had to follow-up on the interviews. With regard to the data on the examination of various social media platforms, I visited the social media platforms information officers mentioned were part of their communication channels. This presented an opportunity to confirm some statements made by the information officers. All respondents had the opportunity to review the transcripts from the interviews to confirm or clarify their statements before I used the information. As a way of exiting the study, the respondents provided approval of the final transcripts.

#### **Data analysis and Interpretation Plan.**

I analyzed and managed the data through interpreting the varied complex data, exploring for thematic areas and pattern testing, and gaining access to the information when necessary (QSR International, 2015). I used coding as the data analysis strategy to address the research questions. I identified keywords and phrases that summarized actions and major themes noted down to generate codes. With respect to the management of the data generated, I transcribed all recordings and stored in data files for the analysis and report writing. Handwritten field notes, which provided contextual information

essential for the enhancement of the other data, were also appended to the transcribed files. Nvivo, a qualitative software program, assisted in the data management and analysis through the integration of the data gathered. I used manual content analysis as the technique for the non-computerized data analysis.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

To ensure credibility, the purposive sampling strategy used was implemented systematically to avoid respondents' selection bias. In addition, through the triangulation of the various data collected, the individual strengths of the methods compensated for their limitations (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Bias can occur at various stages of the research including data collection and analysis processes. I could not eliminate bias entirely in the study and therefore it is important to acknowledge shortcomings that I envisaged. Further, one-way of addressing ethical concerns is to get the full consent of each respondent before proceeding with any data collection method. I ensured that participants consented to participate as was required by Walden University's IRB.

An audit trail was employed to ensure dependability of the study results. This was done through a detailed description of the research process from data collection to analysis (Anney, 2014). The raw data from the interviews and observations were kept for crosschecking the research process (Anney, 2014). In addition, the triangulation of data generated from the multiple data collection instruments ensured some form of dependability. Confirmability was established through the audit trail of the inquiry process, the reflexive journal that was kept throughout the data collection process, and the triangulation of the multiple-sourced data (Anney, 2014).

I recorded and transcribed the in-depth interviews immediately to ensure the dependability of the research instrument and the data collection process. In addition, I applied Yin's (2018) three-step transcription process to maintain data dependability. To this end, the respondents were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure that I had captured their thoughts and concerns accurately and to make corrections and clarifications where needed. Once completed, the voice recording was compared with the transcriptions to ensure reliability. Finally, a detailed description of the background information and phenomenon has been provided to ensure trustworthiness as well as establish an opportunity for comparison (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004).

The first step in the ethical procedures was to receive the Walden IRB approval for the study. This was a mandatory requirement prior to embarking on any form of data collection. In line with Walden's IRB requirements, the informed consent form was used to explain the purpose of the study and to obtain voluntary consent and signature from the respondents. Before any interview, each respondent was assured that the information they would provide was only for research, and their responses and identities would remain confidential. As the protection of participant privacy is a basic principle of research ethics, the study respondents were protected by assigning each an alphanumeric code (Morse & Coulehan, 2015); that is, A1 to A5 and B1 to B5. Participants were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any point during the data collection process at no penalty or risk. Additionally, they were assured that any responses given

prior to withdrawal from the study would not be at risk of confidentiality and privacy issues.

### **Summary**

This chapter addressed the methods used to obtain the necessary data regarding this study. It included the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, the research instrumentation which was used in the collection of data for this study, data analysis, procedures for recruitment, participants and data collection, data analysis plan, as well as issues of trustworthiness. Chapter 4 presents interpretation of the data obtained from the information officers from ISD and the public citizens in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, observation field notes, observations from various social media platforms, and media monitoring reports.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This study was conducted to explore how governments can use social media technologies as a mechanism to engage the citizenry in its policy communication in an effort to generate public involvement and acceptance. Moreover, the availability of timely policy information will minimize the gaps in the flow of information needed by the public to decide on issues for popular support and conformity with government regulations. The study focused on the policy communication efforts by the ISD of Ghana, the principal public relations outfit of Ghana.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the government use social media tools to engage citizens?

RQ2: How do social media tools compliment traditional forms of communication to help in real time policy dissemination?

RQ3: How do policymakers harness the interactive nature of social media?

Chapter 4 begins with a description of the research setting followed by the socio demographic characteristics of the respondents relevant to the study. The subsequent sections detail the location, frequency, and duration of data collection for each data collection instrument. Data analysis follows with a description of the process used to move inductively from coded units to larger representations including categories and themes. I organized the results according to interview questions that addressed the three research questions that guided the study.

### **Research Setting**

I conducted the interviews in a setting chosen by the participants and based on their availability. A conference room at the George Padmore Research public library was secured for the interviews; however, only three out of 10 interviews were conducted there. I conducted the remaining interviews in other locations, which also assured privacy and the safety of the participants such as private offices and private interview rooms at the Ghana International Press Centre. There were no personal or organizational conditions at the time of the interview that would have influenced the participants, their experience, or the interpretation of the study results. Further, no participant expressed feelings of discomfort or exited the interviews.

### **Demographics**

Ten participants took part in the semi structured interviews, the main part of the data collection process. Five participants were information officers of the ISD and I recruited the other five participants from the public. The information officers were selected based on their roles as being responsible for the development and management of information in their agencies; additionally, the information officers must have identified that they use social media in their communication with the public. The selected information officers had an average of 12 years working experience with ISD. The selected participants from the public also indicated having internet access, being users of social media in seeking policy information, and regularly seeking policy information from information officers. Finally, the ISD was selected to illustrate the use of social media technology in policy communication because of the institution's mandate within

the government structure to provide policy information to the citizenry and to generate feedback to the government.

### **Data Collection**

The primary technique of data collection was in-depth interviews; however, other data collection methods like observation field notes as a researcher-observer and media monitoring reports were collected. The choice of incorporating multiple data collection tools was to generate different views on the phenomenon being studied (Maxwell, 2013). Data was collected through in-depth interviews and field observations of the 10 participants who consented in writing to participate in the research. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in one sitting with durations between 15 and 30 minutes. I recorded all the interviews with a voice recorder and later transcribed them for analysis and confirmation with written notes. There was no case where I had to conduct follow-up interviews. The participants were all given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts to confirm or clarify their statements before the information was used. To confirm that the information provided during the interviews were well captured and to exit the study, the participants provided approval of the final transcripts. I also obtained and analyzed radio and social media monitoring data from ISD. Moreover, I examined the various social media platforms employed by the information officers to corroborate the information collected during the interview. There was no variation in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3.



### **Data Analysis**

Each of the participants responded to a set of research-aligned questions. The information officers responded to 10 questions while the public participants responded to seven questions. The data obtained through the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Questions 1 through 5 for the information officers and Questions 3 through 5 for public participants were designed to gather data to examine the first research question regarding the government's use of social media to engage citizens. Questions 6 and 7 for the information officers and Questions 4 and 6 for public participants were designed to gather data to examine the second research question regarding the role social media use in real time policy dissemination. Questions 8 and 9 for the information officers and Questions 1 and 2 for public participants were designed to gather data to examine the final research question regarding the way in which policymakers harness the interactive nature of social media. Questions 10 and 7 for the information officers and public participants, respectively, were framed to reflect the research questions overall. Each participant was given an alphanumeric code to ensure privacy of identity. Alphanumeric code beginning with the letter A represented information officer participant and alphanumeric code beginning with the letter B represented participants from the public.

I used Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software platform, to organize the data into specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data analysis. Codes were developed based on the responses from the in-depth interview questions. In all, I identified 26 codes at the first level of analysis. These codes were corroborated with those identified through the observation field notes. Subsequently, the second level of

analysis resulted in the clustering or categorization of the 26 codes to identify emerging themes. The 26 codes were reduced to four key codes: access, barriers, complementary roles, and government communication machinery. Access included responses related to how policy information was received, delivered, and shared as well as feedback. Barriers included responses that connected censorship and politicization of the information process. Complimentary roles reflect responses that connected credibility, segmentation, and targeting. Finally, government communication machinery included responses that reflected the role of the ISD.

The third level of analysis process involved aligning the themes with the research questions. From the four key codes identified, four themes emerged:

- Traditional and social media complement each other in information flow;
- The choice of channel is informed by level of accessibility to policy information;
- ISD is pivotal in government information machinery;
- Barriers exist in policy communication cycle.

I received radio-monitoring data of five radio stations and social media monitoring data of two social media platforms for the month of August 2019 from ISD. I first undertook a manual content analysis of the radio monitoring data based on three aspects:(a) the top trending issues across the five radio stations; (b) the format via which the issue was covered(i.e., news story or in-depth radio discussion); and (c) the presence of a segment with public engagement or participation. Four issues were present across the five radio stations. These four issues had similar formats (i.e., news stories and radio

panel discussions) and levels of public engagement (e.g., SMS/text message, WhatsApp message, and traditional phone calls) across the five radio stations.

Table 1

*Media monitoring of trending issues in traditional media (Radio)*

Issues	Media Channel	Period Sustained
The Government of Ghana suspension of a concessionaire agreement with a consortium called Power Distribution Service (PDS)	Citi FM	7 Days
	Joy FM	11 Days
	Okay FM	7 Days
	Power FM	9 Days
	STARR FM	6 Days
The Police handling of the abduction of three young ladies in the Takoradi between August and December 2018	Citi FM	4 Days
	Joy FM	7 Days
	Okay FM	8 Days
	Power FM	7 Days
The shutdown of operations of Menzgold in September 2018 by the Ghana Securities and Exchange Commission and the subsequent lack of access to customers' investments, leading to demonstrations at its various branches	STARR FM	8 Days
	Citi FM	6 Days
	Joy FM	7 Days
	Okay FM	4 Days
	Power FM	9 Days
The Bank of Ghana comprehensive reform of the banking sector.	STARR FM	4 Days
	Citi FM	5 Days
	Joy FM	8 Days
	Okay FM	6 Days
	Power FM	3 Days
	STARR FM	9 Days

The content of the Twitter and Facebook social media platforms was analyzed based on first the four trending issues identified in the radio monitoring data. This was done to identify any form of consistency or similarities. Subsequently, a content analysis was taken to identify trending issues on the social media platforms based on the following criteria:

- Total reach, defined as the number of people who visited the post through viewing statuses, photos, links, or videos;
- Total engaged users, defined as the number of people who commented on, liked, shared, or clicked anywhere on the newsfeed;
- Targeted audience, defined as the number of people who matched the audience targeted that clicked anywhere in the post on the newsfeed;
- Negative feedback, defined as the number of people who gave negative feedback to the post on the news feed.

Four topical issues were identified from the social media content analysis. These differed from the topical issues identified in the radio monitoring data analyzed.

Table 2

*Media monitoring of trending issues on Twitter*

Topical issues	Public responses (views, comments, likes, shares & clicks)
The Bank of Ghana comprehensive reform of the banking sector	961
Government constructed 50 warehouses at various locations across country to reduce post harvest losses	944
Sod-cutting for UNOPS and Sustainable Housing Solutions 100,000 affordable housing scheme	588
Ghana's First Railway University Ready	542

Table 3

*Media monitoring of trending issues on Facebook*

Topical issues	Public responses (views, comments, likes, shares & clicks)
Ghana's First Railway University Ready	245,534
Government constructed 50 warehouses at various locations across country to reduce post harvest losses	41,563
Minister of Information Press Briefings in Kumasi on critical national issues	39,223
The Government of Ghana suspension of a concessionaire agreement with a consortium called Power Distribution Service (PDS)	33,529

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

A detailed background information and phenomenon description details the trustworthiness of the data as well as establishes a contest for comparison. The level of integrity was also accessed through the provision of an in-depth description of the methodology.

To ensure credibility, I applied and received Walden IRB approval before embarking on data collection. Further, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants to avoid respondents' selection bias. In order to minimize bias and any potential conflicts of interest, I remained in the role of a researcher throughout the data collection. As such, I avoided any questions that appealed to my expertise or experiences in this area of study.

To ensure dependability, an audit trail was employed through the detailed description of the research process from data collection to analysis. The raw data from the interviews and observations were used for crosschecking the research process. In

addition, the triangulation of data generated from the multiple data collection instruments ensured some form of dependability. To ensure dependability of the research instrument and the data collection process, the in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure that I captured their thoughts and concerns accurately, and to make corrections and clarifications where needed. Further, voice recordings were compared with the transcriptions again to ensure reliability.

According to Anney (2014) and Shenton (2004), confirmability refers to the objectivity of the study and is established when other researchers can confirm data findings and results by following the audit trail and research design. Confirmability of the research was established through the audit trail of the inquiry process, the reflexive journal that was kept throughout the data collection process, and the triangulation of multiple sourced data.

To establish the transferability of the study, I developed a broad description of the context of the study, (i.e. the background, research design, data collection, and data analysis). To ensure transferability of the study, the plan presented in Chapter 3 was followed accordingly. The interview protocol was general and applied consistently across all respondents. By documenting and describing the entire research process in detail, the study could be replicated in other public sector organisations.

Finally, to address ethical concerns, the full consent of each respondent was received before proceeding on any data collection method. As the protection of the participants' privacy is a basic principle of research ethics, participants were assured of

the confidentiality of information they provided verbally and in writing through the consent form provided. In addition, the confidentiality of the study respondents was protected by assigning each an alphanumeric code.

### **Study Results**

The first level of data analysis sought to determine the connection of interview responses, from the information officers and the participants from the public, to the study research questions. There were 26 codes identified in the first level of data analysis. Subsequently, these codes were clustered and categorized to identify emerging themes. Similarly, media monitoring reports were analyzed to explore how they affect policy communication. The following section outlines what the various responses and data reveal about the use of social media in the government's policy communication.

#### **Theme 1: Traditional and Social Media Complement Each Other in Information Flow**

In exploring the participants' responses concerning the usage of both social media and traditional media in disseminating policy information and other important announcements, all participants agreed that there was a need to blend both traditional and social media channels. They acknowledged it was a great opportunity to improve upon timely communication. The information officers especially revealed the adoption of such strategies in the communication modules in their interaction with the public:

They complement each other so that's where the word correlation comes in. You cannot say that now because social media is on the rise, when you developing your communication strategies, you are going to ignore the traditional media because

your audiences are diverse. You know the diversity of your audience and apply the proper channels to them (Participant #A1).

In other words, due to the diversity of audiences or target group, it is important for government communicators to use both social media tools and traditional channels in a complementary way.

Another information officer further espoused how the complementing nature of the social media helped in reaching the right target with the right information. He noted that even if one medium failed to capture some of the intended population, the other medium would definitely reach the missed population. As such, it is necessary to incorporate both traditional and social media in information dissemination:

In fact, most times they are used simultaneously because we believe that inasmuch as most of our stakeholders are aware of our social media platforms, because of its efficiency, it is likely you might have a stakeholder present on a particular one and not the other. And so if we rely on just one, the chances of you missing out on a particular stakeholder is higher so we usually will post whatever message intended for our stakeholder on all these platforms just so that if one happens to miss out on the other, you are rest assured that the person could fall on the other for very information you intend to share with such (Participant #A4).

Therefore, choice of channel used in communicating policy information is significantly aligned with stakeholder or target group accessibility to that channel. When a stakeholder is identified and reached through the appropriate channel, be it social media or traditional media, it is easier to generate an outcome for that policy information shared.



Responses from the public domain also demonstrated support of efforts to improve and ensure timely information delivery, by complementing traditional media with social media. For instance, Participant #B4 disclosed:

I would not limit it to any particular means of communication government policies because not everybody is technological savvy. They still must rely on the traditional ones but more emphasis on electronic platforms... reasons being that TVs and Radios are very transient. You listen to it and it's gone but on phones, you always come back to it again and read it over and over again till you get the full understanding of it.

Policy information disseminated through social media technology can be easily archived and retrieved. On the other hand, traditional media are quite transient in nature and therefore the information officer has to consciously archive the content. However this does not give social media tools an upper hand over traditional media considering the diverse background of target groups.

All respondents affirmed that social media tools complemented the traditional media by helping reach those populations who over-relied on social media to the disadvantage of traditional media, especially those in the urban areas and are mostly reliant on their phones for most information. As such, the ISD uses various social media platforms to reach out to those groups or population that rarely buy newspapers, listen to broadcast news, or not easily reached by the ISD announcement vans.

Another reason why social media and traditional media should complement each other is the fact that social media is limited in the amount of information or details it can

provide at onetime unlike traditional channels. Also, as Participant #B4 stated, “for in-depth analysis they have to do an interaction which can only be done on Radios and TVs or face-to-face and press conferences and Town-hall meetings.”

When it comes to credibility, the traditional media is often used as a reference point. Indeed, all participants from the public indicated that they relied on traditional media to confirm information on news received on social media platforms. Participant #A4 noted that “at times you will pick some information from social media but you will want to confirm it with the traditional media so that it gives it some creditability.” Participant B1 further elaborated by stating that:

Traditional serves as a reference point not reference but a check balance on social media. You most people go to the social media information but they revert back to the traditional media to check if what they are saying on social media is the same as what they are saying at the main stream media.

Finally, Participant #B5 sums up the relationship between traditional media and social media in communicating policy information:

But because of the abuse of social media where people are able to clone other people’s Facebook pages, Twitter pages and so on I will not wholly say that social media is the best because you will also have to be sure about the authenticity of the information you are receiving and the source of the information so you will have to balance it between the two.

Traditional channel and social media also complement each other in policy communication by adopting the advantages of using each channel, while minimizing the

disadvantages of using them. For instances each could act as forms of ensuring credibility of information shared.

Various reasons were cited by participants to reflect the importance of social media in the overall communication mix of policy information. Accessing policy information at any location over the internet through social media and other new media platforms without travelling was very convenient. Information through social media was easily available at any time as long as there was access to the internet and a handheld device. According to Participant #B4, he preferred seeking information through social media because of its “easy accessibility and is cheaper than traditional media, more convenient”.

Also social media platform had creative features of which some information officers took advantage. Participant #B1 said “with current scheme of things, most of the information pertaining to government activities is usually broken down into simpler forms through the usage of creative such as Artworks and other audio visuals just to enable you comprehend it better”. Policy information is made interesting and attractive to the audience when the text was accompanied by visuals and pictures.

The large number of people using smart phones has changed the way people receive information. According to Participant #B2,

Now smart phones are getting cheaper a lot more people are using it and you can even reach many people and even those using the ‘yam’ or whatever they call it, they are those who use radio, there is this technology it is audio, they get it in the

voice note and play it. There are others who will listen to radio on their phones if they have time.

It is also easier to undertake research on social media as they have features that support it. Participant #A1 explained that once information was placed on social media, there were comment sections where the receiver could access. “There are also ‘emojis’ that represents reaction such as like, love and hate”. The clicks helped the information officer know the number of people who liked or disliked the post. In addition, Participant #A1 stated that social media

gives people the opportunity to even write how they feel about the project and those comments are huge to at least analyze how or assess how people are thinking about the kind of thing that you put out there or policy that you put out there.

Further, Participant #A2 noted that:

Facebook has a feature known as Facebook live. If it’s happening and it’s live, you can determine the number of people even watching at that particular time. You can even determine the reach and also read comments.

In summary, social media technology has features that enhance information like infographics. It is also easy to incorporate interactive activities that enables information officer generate instant feedback that informs policy.

One important feature of social media that was reiterated throughout the interviews was timeliness of information flow. One information officer noted that it was important to respond to enquiries with immediacy and social media offered that unlike

the traditional media. According to Participant #B1, “Anytime a query is placed in, I think the minimum minutes it would take to get a response were forty-five (45) minutes”. Moreover, Participant #B3 expanded to say, “I should actually be able to feel and be part of governance by getting access to information on time”.

With the evolution of technology and, consequently, social media, the traditional mass media have developed mechanisms to attract and maintain their audiences. The radio stations have incorporated some social media tools into their services. I realized each of the five radio stations monitored had a corresponding social media platform and online presence. Specifically, these radio stations had websites as well as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube presence among others.

Therefore, they were able to attract a far-reaching audience who were physically far away from their radio frequencies but could tune in through the Internet; they could join in-studio discussions through telephone calls, Skype, texting, or commenting. The innovation of complementing traditional ways of broadcasting with social media tools has revolutionized interaction. In addition, there was a level of public engagement as listeners could call in to express their opinion or seek clarification on issues discussed. Some of the participants also revealed this during the in-depth interviews. For example, Participant #B3 noted that “nowadays when you compare traditional media and social media, social media is way bigger than normal because radio stations have to pipe in to social media to get the kind of response that they want to get”. Participant #A2 also corroborated this assertion when he revealed that:

Almost all the media houses that we have have also resorted to the social media channels because there is market there, there are audience there and for us as communicators wherever the audience are, we need to get them and send our message across.

Through their social media platforms, the radio stations undertook opinion polls. Comments and telephone interaction with programs also contributed to issues discussions over a period. Information officers were able to capture people's sentiments by monitoring how they discussed issues related to policy information.

I deduced from the data analyzed that, discussions on the top four issues identified were over a period from different angles. This is because most programs, like the daily morning shows, aired at the recurring times between 6:00AM and 10:00AM; therefore, one would conclude that they had different audiences. Without incorporating social media tools, broadcasting news and in-studio discussions would be one-way and consequently not attract much of a listening audience.

One important issue that came up was some level of censorship of content on the radio stations. The editors or program producers could easily cut a phone-in caller if his/her contribution sounded offensive to other listeners. In addition, editors could ignore or manipulate text messages and comments on various social media platforms, Participants affirmed this when Participant #A1 stated "for the traditional media, the editor or producer can decide that okay these calls coming in I'm going to pick these calls ... but for the social media aspect, anybody writes anything".

The data obtained from Twitter and Facebook revealed how a communicator could use social media for interactive purposes and for undertaking research. It was easier to monitor the reach, target group, and level of interaction, as well as, generated feedback through clicks and comments. This confirmed what the participants said in the in-depth interviews in relation to the impact and usage of social media tools in policy communication.

The lack of any form of censorship of content from social media was quite evident. The data was able to tell the numbers but not details. To get to know the details or explanations behind the numbers, there was a need to undertake further research. The in-depth interviews also disclosed this assertion. According to Participant #B4:

The danger there is the propensity to or likelihood receiving fake news is very high and when news has been properly released, people can still tamper with information before they now disseminate too. So, you would now have government policy being tampered with.

This was further emphasized by Participant #B5 who indicated that, “you just put information out somebody picks it and is able to read the algorithms behind your network and they are able to hack into it”.

In other words, the policy information providers have a responsibility to put in measures to counter any form of interference in the information flow. A form of censorship may be necessary to curb the incidence of fake news and other forms of interference in the information flow.

In identifying the preferred channel of communication, the responses were varied. All participants agreed that there was no prescribed preference for either traditional or social media. Both types of channels have their advantages and disadvantages. The participants preferred social media because of the number of social media users and the interactive nature of the social media platforms, which allowed for timely feedback to and from the public on policy narratives shared. Social media platforms had an advantage over the traditional media channels that are usually characterized by one-way communication pattern. This one-way form of communication lacks opportunity for feedback from the public.

The participants sampled from the public who also confirmed that the interactive nature of the social media platforms gave them an avenue to present and share their views and reactions to government policies supported this assertion. The public also revealed that the social media platforms released more timely information on policies and programs as compared to the traditional media and the institutional websites. This assertion was clearly expressed by Participant #B1 who noted that:

... I am always on the internet always on other social media sites trying to get information. I think that in recent times the Ghana Police Service has been very good with information. Recently they released a press statement and before you realized it is there and they released it on time, yeah and when you go to their Facebook page for example it is always updated. I think in Ghana generally we do more of Facebook...



Since the ISD is also interested in public feedback to modify policy contents or better understand public reactions to policy narratives, the social media platforms gave them better results as compared to the traditional media. Feedback provided a form of participatory governance within the nation. As such, the always ‘top-down’ approach to decision-making was no longer effective in ensuring participatory governance given technological advances; rather, opportunities for inclusive participation of the citizenry has been increased through the use of social media platforms. Participant #A1 revealed that:

...the key advantage of social media is the feedback mechanism that it gives unlike the broadcasting, the radio and the print. The print you read it and you are done. If you have any comment, unless you take pains to write it and you send it over there and even that one whether they will even publish it is another matter. We do not have any feedback whatsoever with print and same with radio. If you want to make any correction, you are calling-in with about thousands of people and it’s at the discretion of the host or whoever to allow you to make some clarification or the show doesn’t allow any feedback, it’s like whatever they are letting out to the people is what people are taking.

Thus, in determining the preferred communication channels being used by the state in disseminating policy information and consuming such information, information officer participants agreed that both traditional and social media platforms were important when taking into consideration their advantages and disadvantages. This goes to say that in

choosing the channel for disseminating policy information a variety of issues must be considered including access to channel and level of reach of the channel.

**Theme 2: The Choice of Channel is Informed by Level of Accessibility to Policy Information**

Participants disclosed that policy communication by the government to its citizens was vital to building and maintaining the trust of its electorates. Thus, to ensure the true reflection of democracy, engaging the electorates in decision-making was very important. In meeting its mandate, the ISD harnessed various channels, including traditional and new media, to connect and interact with their constituents in order to communicate the government's policy narratives. In choosing the channel of communicating with the public, the information officers indicated that one important factor considered was the stakeholders or target group involved. Thus, the content of the information and the targeted population were given great consideration in order to get the right information accessible to the right target group at the right time and through the right channel.

Specifically, Participant #A1 shared the view that

If you are developing a policy, you should know your stakeholders, you should know who they are, I mean you should be able to understand the dynamics of your stakeholders, the kind of stakeholders that you have. It is based on that that you are able to develop the channel of communication.

The participants asserted that, considering the varied background of the populace in terms of level of literacy and access to technology, the target group and location determined the channel of communication employed. Participant #A3 further explained,

“every policy is targeted to a certain audience. If the policy is for a certain audience in the rural areas, you know the kind of medium you are going to go for.”

In analyzing the various channels of communication, participants shared policy information with the public and received feedback through either the traditional media or social media. According to the participants, the traditional media in this sense usually referred to the communication channels that were mostly one-sided whereby information flowed to the public with less opportunity for the public’s feedback. Examples of such channels included; the newspapers, radio stations, television stations, information announcement centers in the villages, and ISD information vans. They referred to these channels as traditional, because they had been the initial and major choice of communication from years past before the advancement of technological platforms.

Participant #A2 elaborated on this point by stating that:

... Therefore, traditional media is very important. As a general communicator, you cannot relegate traditional media. When you come to work ...you begin to find out in the paper. Everybody reads paper. The elite or the middle age people, there are a certain people no matter what will read the paper. They will read what is going on in the print. Yes, so definitely you cannot also ignore that form of communication. And once the person is on the go in his or her car... chances are that, when you get into a car, the radio is turned on and so there too the radio is very important. When you get home and you drop your phone and your eyeballs are focused on the TV and you want to know what is going on.

The participants further affirmed that the choice for traditional media depended on the target population for the policies. Rural areas may experience more unstable internet connectivity; therefore, communication relied more on communication vans, local information announcement centers, community meetings, and newspapers. Traditional media was the best form of disseminating information from the central government.

Participant #A1 supported that:

Every policy is targeted to a certain audience. If the policy is for a certain audience in the rural areas, you know the kind of medium you are going to go for...social media doesn't come in when it is a policy for rural areas.

Therefore, in deciding on which channel to use, it is imperative to research and understand the target group, segment, and present appropriate messages. Participant #A2 further noted:

This is because, you have a country which has a huge population in the rural areas and ISD is noted for its famous cinema vans that can crisscross the entire country and penetrate the rural areas of the country. It means that whatever Governments want to send across, whatever Government wants to disseminate to the people of Ghana can be done easily with the cinema vans.

The information officer participants also affirmed that they made use of some social media communication channels to enhance the dissemination of policy narratives and information from the government to the public. With reference to their assertion of finding the right information outlet to communicate the right information to the right target group, they revealed that another group of the targeted population preferred the use

of social media platforms for communication compared to the traditional channels.

Therefore, these channels should be incorporated into the policy communication method in order to reach such stakeholders. Participant A1 indicated:

Social media plays an important role. Social media has come to stay because of its convenience and the population that we have on social media, especially the youth... and majority of them use social media in their daily activities so we believe that is an important channel we are not leaving at all.

Further, Participant#A2 emphasized, “we now use our social media handles, the Twitter handle, the Facebook page, and we have a dedicated WhatsApp line that we use in communicating with our stakeholders.” Moreover, Participant #A5 described the use of social media platform as follows: “At forums, we invite press men, we cover the activities, put them on websites, government of Ghana portal, the Ministry websites, we also use our Facebook channels, and we use WhatsApp at times too.”

Participants from the public were also divided in the type of channel they primarily use in getting information from government information officers. Almost all five participants from the public agreed that their first point is social media before the traditional channel of walk-in or face to face. Participant #B1 noted that it was difficult accessing information from websites or social media; for them, the most reliable way was to walk-in or telephone. Participant #B3 explained further that:

When you go there anything you want you will still have to come to the office or you will not get it at all so getting the information actually you will have to come to the offices themselves and come and get it from them. You know you actually

get the information from PROs or the office to get them ... they tell you that you have to go online or their website, Facebook page to get it, you go and you would not find it. Even if you find it, you download and it will be half, it will not be full so you actually have to make a step and go to them and talk to them before you the get the full document that you actually want.

From the responses given, it was clear that the ISD, which is the state department charged with the mandate of communicating information on government policies, adopted various communication channels to disseminate such information. Based on the accounts of the information officer participants, they disclosed that the major channels used were the traditional and social media platforms. They affirmed that the choice of media channel was dependent on the content of the information being disseminated and the target population.

The information officers interviewed revealed that social media platforms allowed them to reach an unlimited number of audiences within a short time, and as such helped circulate and get public attention and reaction on important issues. The interactive features embedded in the social media platforms made it easier for timely interaction. Participant #A4 said “I found out that you can just get all the frequently asked questions with the answers, upload them, and anytime they ask the answers will be generated. And so that is also helping”. This was emphasized by Participant #A3 noting that

There is an automated or automatic response to some of these things. And so anytime is that interaction and it so happens that I’m not by my PC, by my

handset or anything, the automated response that goes to the stakeholder. And so immediately that is done, the person will know that yes there is that interaction.

Equally, social media had some versatility that made it possible to produce and disseminate information in different forms. The graphics were an important attraction because a picture, a video, or infographics would capture the audience's attention and reactions. Access to mobile phones also has an impact on the level of interaction. With access to the internet on the mobile phone or other mobile devices, information officers were able to quickly respond to people frequently and build trust with the public.

Through constant interaction on social media, it is easy to manage a crisis situation before it escalates. According to Participant #A4:

Some hackers quickly took some data and started selling asking people to send money to them but because of the social media continuous interaction with a group of individuals, quickly somebody asked a question are we supposed to pay the money or which means, I said no we are not paying any monies. It's free. People started coming 'I have also received the message' social media, instant interaction so I stopped quickly issued a disclaimer, went to the particular institution that is collecting the money on behalf of the agent that we are not collecting money this is not for us. There and then within an hour it seized. If you have to now go to newspaper, go to a radio station you will know how the processes you will need to go to get all this but within an hour everything stopped.

Participants from the public noted that although they preferred interacting through social media, it was not frequent. Participant #B5 revealed that

Most of them will not deal with you on Social media when it comes to dealing with public issue. They will like for you to put in a call, they will like for you to send a request by email or even by, deliver a letter by hand.

He further emphasized that “as a journalist you cannot deal with government without dealing with the public or the information officers in the Ministries, Departments and Agencies MDAs because that is your first point of call when you are looking for information from the MDAs” (Participant #B5).

Although there seems to be a lot of emphasis on social media when it comes to interactions, the traditional channels also have interactive opportunities where information officers are able to collect instant feedback. These include town hall meetings, press conferences, and face-to-face meetings.

### **Theme 3: ISD is Pivotal in Government Information Machinery**

In trying to understand the efforts of the government in disseminating policy information, I explored the role of the state department responsible for fulfilling such a mandate. The responses revealed that the ISD had been established by the government to serve as the mouthpiece for the government irrespective of political affiliations. one information officer (Participant #A1) described the ISD as holding “a major role in government policy and dissemination especially in this country of ours,” Participant #A2 further elaborated that, “the Information Services Department, we are all aware, is the arm of government responsible for the dissemination of government programs and activities to the public, taking back to back feedback to influence government policies”.



Consequently, the ISD exists to ensure the timely and accurate delivery of any information government needs to circulate to the electorates. In demonstrating the relevance of the ISD in communication, the participants stressed the importance of this department to the Ghanaian populace as the designated department to play the role of communicating the government's intention to the citizens, and as such, were considered indispensable. Participant #A2 sums the role of ISD as follows:

ISD's role in government communication for me I see it as a pivotal because if you look at the function of the ISD and where they are able to reach, the sort of personnel, the quality, the professional skills they have, they are able to communicate irrespective of the political party in power ... so far as we don't toe down political lines ... I believe their role is very important when it comes to government communication because they've been there over the years and they can communicate directly with the people

One key feature of ISD that gave it prominence was its nationwide presence, which was mentioned by Participant #A3:

It is established such that you can find ISD offices in every nook and cranny of Ghana. By this I mean, if you go to every region, every district, it is possible that you will find an ISD office in every district, in every region because of its mandate. It is responsible for disseminating government information and so everywhere you go to so far as nation Ghana is concerned, you should find an information officer who is responsible for churning government information to the citizens.

In order for communication to be effective, the communicator must have a firm understanding of the issues so as to be a good advocate. Regarding the degree to which information officers are involved in the policy planning process, it was evident that although the information officers were in charge of the communication aspect of the policy process, they were completely uninvolved in the general policy formulation process. Participant #A5 stated that the communication of such policies that lacked the full participation of the information officer as

... affected in a way because it is important that communication person begins with the process so that we would be able to understand all the nuances and all the challenges that way we are able to plan well, devise appropriate channels for each group of various publics and then we can ensure that we achieve the purpose for which you are communicating.

All participants from the public expressed the fact that information officers had to be proactive in putting together and disseminating policy messages. This was to avoid citizens seeking such information elsewhere and being exposed to the risk of getting inaccurate information with its resulting repercussions. Participant #B5 added that in addition to timely information, the information should be clear and succinct. He further noted that:

We need to be proactive in delivering information. But you see it should also be the right information. Most of the times information put out by public sector organizations or even many organizations tend to be too loaded and the real

information being passed on to the public gets hidden in the rubble of words that are used.

Other participants from the public also suggested that information officers improve on their use and presence on social media and place them in the “centre position in government policy or information dissemination” (Participant #B3). Moreover, Participant #B3 added that “They should actually take social media very seriously and they should work on improving their communication regards to social media because people are connecting gadgets, they are connecting their phones everything to social media”.

Staying current with the evolving world of technology and social media requires constant capacity building for communicators. Social media platforms are constantly being updated and if the communicator did not understand the various evolving forms and concept of particular platforms, they may be using a particular tool at the wrong time. Participant #B5 stated that the government should “train the core of your information officers to be technology savvy in terms of the use of social media, in terms of how to maybe reach their audiences”.

Once there is a concentration on social media technology and well-trained communicators, the government agencies’ various websites will be consistently updated which will, in turn, drive traffic to the website. In other words, building the capacity of the individual or the cadre of information officers in the public sector to master the application of social media tools will enable them to take maximum advantage of their resources. This point was espoused by Participant #A3 stating:

So, if there are better ways we could explore and make it more efficient for all to appreciate I think it will serve us a lot of good and it will really enhance our work as far as the discharge of our duties as government communicators are concerned.

#### **Theme 4: Barriers Exist in Policy Communication Cycle**

Both groups of information officers and participants from the public revealed that there were certain barriers which impeded the free flow of information between the government and the public. For example, Participant #B2 stated that information flow from the government was difficult. He explained that:

It is difficult to get government own information that is supposed to be published from their own information officers because they are either economical with the message or the information or they will tell you that they cannot provide because they will need clearance from above and that is a bit worrying because I think information should be made public.

Participant #B2 further noted that sometimes the same kind of information could be accessed on private websites and not on the government agency's website. This kind of bureaucracy affected the authenticity of policy information since there was no timely information from a credible source.

Another barrier involved information officers not being fully part of the policy planning process. Participants were of the view that if information officers were not well-versed in the policy, it affects the overall communication of that policy. Participant #B2 captured this concern by saying that if the government sector:

go and develop policy and ask information officers to go and disseminate

sometimes they will go and be saying the thing they did not themselves understand and so when they are asked questions they do not know what to say and they even feel intimidated to even go and disseminate in the first place they know they cannot explain it in details. They should be involved from day one.

All participants agreed that lack of censorship on information from social media affects the credibility of the feedback generated there unlike the traditional media who have editors who act as gatekeepers. This lack of censorship has resulted in the influx of fake news widespread across the internet. Participant #B4 stated that “the danger there is propensity to or likelihood of receiving fake news is very high and when it has been properly released, people can still tamper with information before they now disseminate too”.

There was also the issue of security breach due to lack of censorship on information flow on social media. Sometimes government policy documents were tampered with to the benefit of a few, especially politicians in opposition. Participant #B5 explained that government had to:

Ensure that the information channels are protected from spies because of the growth of technology, you just put information out somebody picks it and then is able to read the algorithms behind your network and they are able to hack into it.

The information officers were of the view that, due to the politicization of issues in the country, when information on a government policy is disseminated either through social or traditional media it was difficult to get the real reaction or the real response of the people. Also when politicians take the role of government communication officers, it

raised a lot of credibility issues. The public becomes overwhelmed because they sometimes read propaganda instead of factual information. Participant #A4 revealed that “the politicians want to announce policies they want go on their own way to try to disseminate the policy try to educate people leaving the mouth piece of the country”.

### **Summary**

#### **Research Question 1**

How does the government use social media tools to engage citizens?

The level of accessibility to policy information determines the choice of channel for communicating policy information. Access in this study refers to the channel of communication, the convenience of using channels, creativity functions of the channels, and feedback opportunity of channels. For the government to derive maximum benefits of social media tools in engaging citizens, the target group for which the policy was developed should have easy access to the channel in terms of availability and convenience of Internet use. Feedback is very important to the government because it informs the government about how the public is receiving and responding to the policy. Social media is rapid; it’s interactive and gives immediate feedback. It is imperative for a communicator to undertake some research to identify which social media channel has the most appropriate and widest reach to the target audience as well as the ability to encourage engagement and opportunity to provide feedback.

#### **Research Question 2**

How do social media tools complement traditional forms of communication to help in real-time policy dissemination?

Social media and traditional forms of communication complement each other in terms of how they harmonize in areas of community or public engagement, the credibility of information, feedback mechanisms available and utilized, preference in choice, and the advantages of each. Almost all participants acknowledged the complementary roles of social media and traditional media. For instance, with respect to credibility of information, participants verified from traditional sources what they received from social media. Equally, social media has feedback mechanisms that make them timely in delivering responses and the public has access to interact freely without fear of disclosing their identities. Similarly, every policy targets a certain audience so government communicators ignore the proxy usage of social media and engage the people on a personal level. Through such face-to-face engagements (e.g. Town hall meetings and press conferences), communicators get to interact with the audience one-on-one using preferred languages. Blending social media and traditional forms of communication is critical, because there are various public audiences with different orientations, educational backgrounds, demographics, and levels of social media savvy. Additionally, others may be staunchly loyal to traditional media no matter what is happening globally.

### **Research Question 3**

How do policymakers harness the interactive nature of social media?

The interactive nature of social media breaks the barriers of time and space. Relative to the traditional modes of communication, social media's interactive nature provides an instant advantage through the two-way, timely flow of communication. Moreover, information officers can reach out to a much larger audience with social

media, compared to traditional media, at a reduced cost to both the sender and the receiver; further, feedback is easily generated. The key advantage of social media platforms is the feedback mechanism that is available unlike the broadcast media or print sources.

In harnessing the interactive nature of social media, the ISD should take advantage of its nationwide preference and the vital role it plays in the government machinery. Further, information officers should be involved in the policy planning processes. Likewise, information officers should be proactive in delivering policy information and feedback directly to the public. The government should invest in the development of the technical skills of its communicators.

For information officers to identify, develop, and implement various channels of communicating policy information, they must be aware that traditional and social media complement each other in information flow and, therefore, require planning. The level of accessibility to policy information informs the choice of channel. Information officers should also recognize that their role is pivotal in the government's information machinery. Finally, in using social media platforms, information officers must be cognizant of barriers (e.g., censorship and politicization) and formulate measures to mitigate those harmful effects.

In this chapter, I described the research setting and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents that participated in the study. The subsequent sections detailed how I collected and analyzed data from the in-depth interviews conducted for the study, as well as, the observation field notes and media monitoring reports. I used



Nvivo11, a qualitative data analysis software platform, to organize the data into specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data analysis. In all, I identified 26 codes at the first level of analysis. I corroborated these codes with those identified through the observation field notes and the media monitoring data. In addition, I analyzed the media monitoring reports to explore how they affected policy communication. The second level of analysis saw the clustering or categorization of the 26 codes, according to their interrelated connections, and led to the identification of four key emerging themes: access, barrier, complementary roles, and government communication machinery. The third analysis process involved aligning the themes with the research questions.

In chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the findings and detailed recommendations for how the government, through the ISD, can use social media technologies as a mechanism to engage the citizenry in its policy communication to bridge the gap of timely policy information to create a real-time, informed society.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how the government could use social media technologies as a mechanism to engage the citizenry in its policy communication. The channels and mechanisms of policy communication are vital to generating public involvement and acceptance of policy narratives. The study focused on the ISD of Ghana, the government institution responsible for communicating information.

The study was guided by three research questions:

RQ1: How does the government use social media tools to engage citizens?

RQ2: How do social media tools complement traditional forms of communication to help in real-time policy dissemination?

RQ3: How do policymakers harness the interactive nature of social media?

I generated data for this qualitative study from in-depth interviews, observation field notes, and media monitoring reports. Based on the analysis, four themes emerged which were then aligned with the research questions. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings and detailed recommendations proffered for how the government, through the ISD, could use social media technologies as a mechanism to engage the citizenry in its policy communication to bridge the gap of timely policy information for a real-time information society.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

All participants in the study agreed that the advancement of social media technologies has changed how information is disseminated and consumed. Social media

technology has facilitated new forms of engagement and interactions between and among people. This calls for information officers to be strategic in the adoption of different channels of communication strategies to satisfy the information needs of the public.

### **Relationship to Previous Literature**

The findings of this qualitative single case study confirm or extend current knowledge in the discipline; each theme presents examples of issues discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. For instance, Verhoeven et al. (2012) predicted that online communication generally was likely to take over print media, the leader of public communication in the next few years. This assertion was elicited in the study as information officers took into consideration the effectiveness of social media in their policy communication.

As social media penetrates the public communications field, practitioners will be expected to ramp up their strategies in order to best involve audiences using the social web (Hellickson, 2011). It is important to note that social media use is spreading throughout the country, and, as a result, a mix of both traditional and online social media adds to the effectiveness of policy communication. To make this possible, the policy narratives and key messages constructed in social media should be made attractive, precise and concise to reach large online users in their numbers to gain maximum momentum and impact.

Segmentation and targeting are very important in policy communication. All information officer participants highlighted the importance of segmentation and targeting. Knowing what communication channel to use is necessary in order to reach out to the

appropriate audience at the right time with the right information (Fensel et. al., 2012).

Using social media communication channels offers the ability to broadcast static information, which can be a better way for some citizens to access the content. Another basic benefit of social media is flexibility; its content can be changed all the time to incorporate feedback generated from the public. Despite its advantages, government communicators have to be wary of malicious activities, such as modifying the public's opinion, which may not give an accurate representation of feedback from policy narratives. Another demerit of this channel is the fact that it lacks personal contact, unlike the traditional face-to-face channels.

The increased use of online channels for communication has led to the underuse of more traditional methods, particularly with younger target audiences. However, traditional channels of communication can serve to catalyze grassroots development and mobilization (Obiora, 2011). The data analysis revealed that information officers have to depend on the traditional channels of communication in order to reach particular target groups. Although it does not effectively support two-way symmetry of communication, traditional methods are beneficial when one wants to observe the reaction of audiences. In terms of feedback, which is important to policy communication, two-way communication is most often delayed when using traditional channels of communication. However, it is also expensive to run a public policy communication activity. Therefore, it is necessary to have a blend of both forms of communication channels in delivering policy and public services.

As voiced in the in-depth interviews, over the past few years, many public sectors have begun to use social media platforms to promote mostly online information as well as keep in touch with their audiences. Within the public sector, communicating with the aid of social media technologies has the potential to increase government participation, collaboration, and transparency in sharing content with citizens. The spread of policy narratives could give rise to new topics of discussion, debates, and arguments, which could lead to precise behavior results (Skoric et al, 2016).

The results of the study tend to concur with McLuhan's statement "The medium is the message" (Skoric et al, 2016; Bernado, 2018, para 1). Indeed, the medium used to communicate could determine the effectiveness of the message being delivered to the appropriate user, comprehension of the information, and adequate feedback opportunity as necessary. Policy narratives channeled through the right methods, either traditional or social media, have the possibility of reaching the right target in the right form at the right time for adequate feedback.

Recently, social media has been blamed for propelling "fake news" and thereby negatively influencing peoples' decisions and views on matters such as elections, immigration, and international trade (Bovet & Makse, 2018; Jang & Kim, 2018); this growing negative reputation consequently raised the issue of credibility and trustworthiness of the source. Social media equally presents generic challenges including privacy and security, inaccessibility, matters of information management, data management, and accessibility as well as lags in regulation (Bertot et. al., 2012). It is therefore imperative for government communicators to blend the use of communication

channels in order to maximize the positive benefits of each channel while minimizing the disadvantages.

### **Results Relative to Narrative Policy Framework**

In this qualitative study, I employed the NPF as the theoretical foundation to examine how government policymakers could use social media technologies as mechanisms for policy communication. According to Shahanan et al. (2011), the NPF identifies how policy narratives affect policy changes and outcomes at the individual, group, and institutional levels. The NPF aligns with the main aim of policy communication to inform and educate, consequently leading to changes in attitudes or behaviors culminating in a call to action at the individual, group, or institutional level.

Narrative strategies are the mechanisms employed as elements to appeal to coalitions (Shahanan et al., 2013). The data analysis suggests government communicators could take advantage of social media platforms in conveying policy narratives by incorporating traditional mechanisms into the approach for policy communication thus yielding a wider audience and capturing more feedback. This synergy of methods will support efforts to expand or contain coalitions towards a policy objective.

Shahanan et al. (2011) noted that policy actors use stories to influence the policymaking process. In this study, I likened the policy actors to the information officers. Information officers summarize complex policy issues into simple narratives that help people understand what is being conveyed. In the process of simplification, however, information officers strategically construct narratives that are consistent and

advocate for a preferred policy solution. Public policies are developed to address or enforce issues affecting the public good.

Jones and McBeth (2010) found support for four of their seven hypotheses related to factors affecting the effectiveness of narratives and policy communication. The first supported hypothesis concluded that as the reach of the narrative is extended, its ability to convince the individual is also strong. Indeed, the target of policy information most often requires a wider audience and information sustained over a period. By blending social media platforms with traditional methods of communication, there is a higher chance of attaining the required impact of the policy information.

The second supported hypothesis posits that when a reader is immersed in the narrative, the reader is affected by the narration (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Therefore the more an individual gets mentally transported into a narrative, the more that individual is to be persuaded by that narrative. For example, the audiences' attention to the policy narratives can be sustained over a period of time through the use of social media creative techniques like videos, infographics, '*voice pops*', and music. Further, given the level of the reader's immersion, there is also the possibility they will share and spread the absorbed information to others who do not directly access such policy narratives. Thus, the target audience may end up being a conduit for policy information dissemination.

In the third supported hypothesis Jones and McBeth (2010) posited that it is easy for individuals to process new information presented in narratives when the narratives are aligned with what is perceived as the normal sequence of life. In such instances, the narrative is aligned with the individual's belief system and therefore easily convinces or

persuades the individual. Public policy cuts across boundaries and, in order to reach target groups, it is important to undertake some level segmentation to channel the policy narratives in the right language to have maximum impact (Jones & McBeth, 2010). For example, it is important to consider that the communicator could segment Ghana according to level of economic development, literacy, age, ethnicity, language, and culture among others. The narrative convinces when there is sustained consistency in the delivery of the policy narratives, the individual is.

The last supported hypothesis posited that the trustworthiness, accuracy, objectivity, expert status, and ideology of a narrative influence a recipient's willingness to accept a message (Jones & McBeth, 2010). In other words, the source effect is an important factor in message persuasion. The ISD plays a vital role in government information communication machinery and acts as a credible source of policy information. Indeed, the participants from the public emphasized the fact that they often seek clarification and confirmation of policy information from government sources. When the public interacts with information officers face-to-face at forums, town hall meetings, and press conferences on policy information, they get first-hand information directly from the sources. This direct communication may largely determine the public opinion of the policy narratives. Across these four findings, the NPF asserts that interest groups purposefully manipulate policy narratives to affect, direct, and influence public opinion for their own interests or benefit (Adams, 2013, p.22; Shanahan et. al, 2011).



### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited by the use of a qualitative design that represents a limited sample size. The choice of research design gave an insight into the phenomenon studied and not a representative of the population. Secondly, access to other valuable information from the management of ISD was quite difficult given its confidential nature. The ISD was not obliged to give out that information, especially as the implementation of the Right to Information Act had not commenced. The RTI law passed into law by the Ghanaian Parliament in March 2019 had a moratorium of one year before the operationalization (Maiga, 2019). Another limitation with respect to the data analysis was the inability to explore the data collected from the social media platforms from a variety of perspectives (i.e., Twitter and Facebook). Further research will be required to explain the meanings or stories behind the numbers. There was also the possibility for my personal experiences in public sector communication to influence the outcome of the research, especially in data gathering. The purposive sampling technique assisted in the elimination of biases on the part of the respondents.

### **Recommendations**

Future research expanding the current knowledge of social media technology use in policy communication should implement either a mixed-method or a quantitative design. The foundational research produced in this study could form the basis for future expansion of the work within ISD, other government institutions, and other similarly structured organizations. Further research in this area would also help policymakers have a greater depth of understanding of policy communication within their organizations. The

findings from that research study compared with this will confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline.

Multiple social media initiatives have failed to achieve the desired outcome because social media is predicated on high capacity as well as technological and infrastructure requirements (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). For example, social media requires substantial time and resources that many government agencies are unable to cope with which results in delays in generating feedback to citizens. Another recommendation is for government to prioritize investments in technology and infrastructure required for the smooth implementation of multiple social media initiatives. The government should also develop social media policies that will provide guidelines and some level of security.

The ISD should position itself as the source of public policy information and narratives that are credible, trustworthy, accurate, and objective. Information officers should exhibit expertise at all times and this can be enhanced if they are fully involved in the public policy planning and implementation processes. There should also be a conscious effort to invest and improve the technical capacity of information officers and government communicators to be able to blend the multiple channels of communication to meet the ever-growing information-rich societies.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study stands to enhance communication between government and citizens by addressing the effectiveness of using social media as mechanisms for policy communication. The significance of using social media technology in policy communication was situated within the scope of practice, theory, and social change.

**Significance to Theory**

Social media's multimedia interactive features like text, video, and audio makes it a powerful tool for individual and group networking (Landsbergen, 2010). By investigating how government communicators use social media technologies in policy communication, this study expands current discourse on social media use by government organizations, especially within the African context. Furthermore, the results of this study will inform policy decisions while acting as a pilot study for a future comprehensive study by the ISD. It will also serve as a source of reference for other researchers in the subject area. The insightful findings on social media as a mechanism for policy communication will contribute to public policy literature.

**Significance to Practice**

Globally, social media technologies are changing the way people, groups, and organizations access information and interact with each other. An informed society is better able to identify policy options and make choices that benefit the individual, group, or society. As government-citizen interaction is important to the public policy cycle and processes, implementation of a decentralized system of interaction through multiple channels of communication makes it more important as it offers policymakers the opportunity to identify the preferences of the citizens thereby enhancing inclusiveness (Faguet, 2014). Transparency and accountability are improved through various government-citizen engagements, enhanced by social media technology, thereby shaping the course of democratic governance (Song & Lee, 2016).

### **Significance to Social Change**

Mechanisms, or channels, for engaging citizens on public policy issues are employed through social networking platforms offered by the internet-enabled technologies. Such engagements improve social inclusion, transparency, and accountability in governance. Participation and transparency are hallmarks of every democratic government with the key factor being communication between the governors and the governed.

In 2008, when Ghana's National Information Technology Agency (NITA) was established, one of the objectives was to use internet-enabled technologies such as social media to modify government administration, information communication, and service delivery (Dalberg, 2013). This study has provided documented evidence to show the impact of social media use in policy communication.

### **Conclusions**

This study sought to investigate how government communicators take advantage of social media channels in conveying policy narratives while expanding or containing coalitions. With the positive effects of social media, attention has been focused on expanding the frontiers to areas such as the direct benefit of social media to citizens. For government policies and processes to be more effective and efficient, the government must invest social and human capital into social media's usage in order to generate the necessary feedback that will inform policy.

It is becoming necessary, especially for a growing country like Ghana where the future is focused on the youth, to target younger populations with policy information in

prevalent channels such as on social media. Therefore, it is important to identify and engage them through social media channels. Equally, traditional communication channels are effective, compared to online channels of communication, for critical areas of grassroots development and mobilization. It is imperative for the traditional communication channels and social media channels to complement each other in information flow and feedback mechanisms for the public sector.

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### Appendix A: Potential Participant Information Sheet

My name is Winnifred Nafisa Mahama and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I invite you to participate in a research study on how government through the Information Services Department can incorporate social media in their policy communication mix. The purpose of this study is to explore the use of social media technology in policy communication to bridge the gap of demand and supply of real-time policy information.

You can help further my research by allowing me interview you on this subject. I have a set of questions to ask you, but I am also interested in your opinion on social media and policy communication that is not covered by my questions. The duration of the interview will be approximately 45minutes. The interview can be held at a location that is convenient for you; however, the George Padmore Research Library at Ridge is the preferred location. There is no risk involved as the interview will be conducted in a professional manner. A transcript of the interview will be given to you for your stamp of approval before its inclusion in my research work.

If you are interested in participating in this research, kindly contact me on ... or at...

Thank you for your time.

## Appendix B: Secondary Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear [Initial Participant],

Thank you for your interest in a research study about how government through the Information Services Department can incorporate social media in its policy communication mix. I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to pass along the enclosed information to any person or persons who may also be interested in learning about this research study and are qualified to participate. You are under no obligation to share this information and whether or not you share this information will not affect your relationship with the researcher and the Information Services Department.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Winnifred N. Mahama  
Doctoral Student

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

## Information Officers

1. Tell me about ISD and your role in the organization. How long have you served in your present capacity?
2. What do you see as ISD's role in government communications?
3. Are you involved in planning and implementing policy communications campaigns?
4. What are the channels used for the organization's policy communication campaigns? Which of them do you consider most effective to generate the necessary feedback and why?
5. Which social media technologies/tools are you familiar? Which of them do you use regularly in engaging your clients/publics?
6. In your opinion, do social media tools add value to your communication mix in your policy communication campaigns?
7. Do you think social media tools/technologies compliment traditional forms of communication? How?
8. How do you harness the interactive nature of social media?
9. How do you assess public reaction regarding policy communicated?
10. Do you think social media tools make positive impact in the overall communication mix for public policy? How?

## Clients / Public



1. Where are you currently getting your information regarding government policies?  
How do you access information from government organizations? (Websites, print resources, in-person contacts etc.)
2. Do you engage government information officers in seeking policy information?  
Why and how?
3. Which social media technologies/tools are you familiar? Which of them do you use regularly in engaging with information officers and other government organizations?
4. Thinking of the traditional tools and social media tools, if asked to make a choice, which of the two forms of engagement meets your expectations? Why and how?
5. What suggestions will you offer government information officers in respect of social media technology?
6. What do you think government agencies can and should do to help meet the information needs of the public?
7. In the future, where and how would you like to get your policy information?  
(Websites, print resources, in-person contacts etc.)

## Appendix D: Field Notes Protocol

*Social Media Technologies in Policy Communication: A Case Study of Ghana's Information Services Department.*

Date:

Location/Venue:

Participant:

Time and Length: Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes on the description of the activity will be recorded before and during the sessions.

The remaining sections of reflections, emerging questions, and future action will be completed once data is collected and analysis is ongoing. This approach follows the three dimensions of fieldwork, i.e. descriptive, interpretive, and reflexive. In addition, the researcher's perspectives, which are guided by prior experience, knowledge, and perspectives will be incorporated. Below is template for the notes taking.

## NOTES

Description of Activity	Reflections	Emerging Questions/Analysis	Future Action

\*the field notes protocol is for both observations and interviews.