
USING THE VIRTUAL PUBLIC SPACE FOR THE 2020 ELECTIONEERING CAMPAIGN

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECH IN GHANA'S 2020 ELECTIONS WITHIN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

OUTLINE

- **Introduction and background**
 - **Tech application in elections**
 - **Challenges**
 - **Solutions**
 - **Conclusion**
 - **Recommendations**
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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- Era of global COVID 19 pandemic
 - Significant changes across all spectrums of our lives
 - Democracy is being tested
 - Over 50 countries have postponed local or national elections with more to follow
 - Technology is creating opportunities for coping with this pandemic though it comes with challenges
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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- New digital technologies now indispensable for the conduct of better elections
 - Politicians are increasingly turning to technology in order to reach out to voters, with COVID 19 Public health guidelines and restrictions fuelling this development.
 - Limiting face-to-face contact plus the need for physical distancing means face to face interactions are being replaced with virtual opportunities eg “virtual” campaigns
 - Challenges include how to police, control and regulate this growing virtual electoral space
 - Need to situate this discussion within the context of broader information society issues
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Ghana's virtual space

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2020

DIGITAL AROUND THE WORLD IN 2020

THE ESSENTIAL HEADLINE DATA YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND MOBILE, INTERNET, AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

TOTAL
POPULATION



7.75
BILLION

URBANISATION:

55%

UNIQUE MOBILE
PHONE USERS



5.19
BILLION

PENETRATION:

67%

INTERNET
USERS



4.54
BILLION

PENETRATION:

59%

ACTIVE SOCIAL
MEDIA USERS



3.80
BILLION

PENETRATION:

49%



we
are
social



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GHANA

THE ESSENTIAL HEADLINE DATA YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE STATE OF MOBILE, INTERNET, AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE



GHANA

TOTAL
POPULATION



30.75
MILLION

URBANISATION:

56%

MOBILE PHONE
CONNECTIONS



39.97
MILLION

vs. POPULATION:

130%

INTERNET
USERS



14.76
MILLION

PENETRATION:

48%

ACTIVE SOCIAL
MEDIA USERS



6.00
MILLION

PENETRATION:

20%



we
are
social



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MOST-VISITED WEBSITES (ALEXA)

RANKING OF TOP WEBSITES BY AVERAGE MONTHLY TRAFFIC ACCORDING TO ALEXA



GHANA

#	WEBSITE	TIME / VISIT	PAGES / VISIT	#	WEBSITE	TIME / VISIT	PAGES / VISIT
01	GOOGLE.COM	12M 09S	14.6	11	AFRTRK.COM	0M 40S	1.1
02	YOUTUBE.COM	11M 44S	6.7	12	JUMIA.COM.GH	7M 11S	4.8
03	GHANAWEB.COM	7M 57S	3.7	13	PEACEFMONLINE.COM	5M 24S	2.8
04	BETWAY.COM.GH	8M 59S	3.6	14	AMAZON.COM	9M 41S	9.0
05	FACEBOOK.COM	17M 48S	7.8	15	CELEBRITIESBUZZ.COM.GH	3M 39S	2.1
06	YAHOO.COM	4M 34S	4.4	16	FLASHSCORE.COM	15M 15S	11.6
07	YEN.COM.GH	5M 42S	2.0	17	TONATON.COM	9M 13S	7.0
08	GOOGLE.COM.GH	5M 53S	4.9	18	INSTAGRAM.COM	7M 07S	6.8
09	MYJOYONLINE.COM	5M 23S	2.2	19	BLOGSPOT.COM	3M 32S	2.7
10	WIKIPEDIA.ORG	3M 55S	3.0	20	GHPAGE.COM	9M 06S	3.4

SOURCE: ALEXA (JANUARY 2020). ***NOTES:** 'ALEXA' IS THE NAME OF AMAZON'S INSIGHTS ARM, AND DATA SHOWN HERE ARE NOT RESTRICTED TO ACTIVITIES ON 'ALEXA' VOICE-POWERED PLATFORMS. 'TIME / DAY' FIGURES REPRESENT ALEXA'S ESTIMATES OF THE AVERAGE DAILY AMOUNT OF TIME THAT VISITORS SPEND ON EACH SITE, ON DAYS THEY VISIT EACH SITE, MEASURED IN MINUTES AND SECONDS. **ADVISORY:** SOME WEBSITES FEATURED IN THIS RANKING MAY CONTAIN ADULT CONTENT. PLEASE USE CAUTION WHEN VISITING UNKNOWN WEBSITES.

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SOCIAL MEDIA OVERVIEW

BASED ON THE REPORTED POTENTIAL ADVERTISING REACH OF SELECTED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



GHANA

TOTAL NUMBER
OF ACTIVE SOCIAL
MEDIA USERS



we
are
social

6.00
MILLION

SOCIAL MEDIA USERS
COMPARED TO
TOTAL POPULATION



global
web
index

20%

CHANGE IN SOCIAL
MEDIA USER NUMBERS
(APR 2019 TO JAN 2020)



+12%
+629 THOUSAND

PERCENTAGE OF ACTIVE
SOCIAL MEDIA USERS
ACCESSING VIA MOBILE



98%



JAN
2020

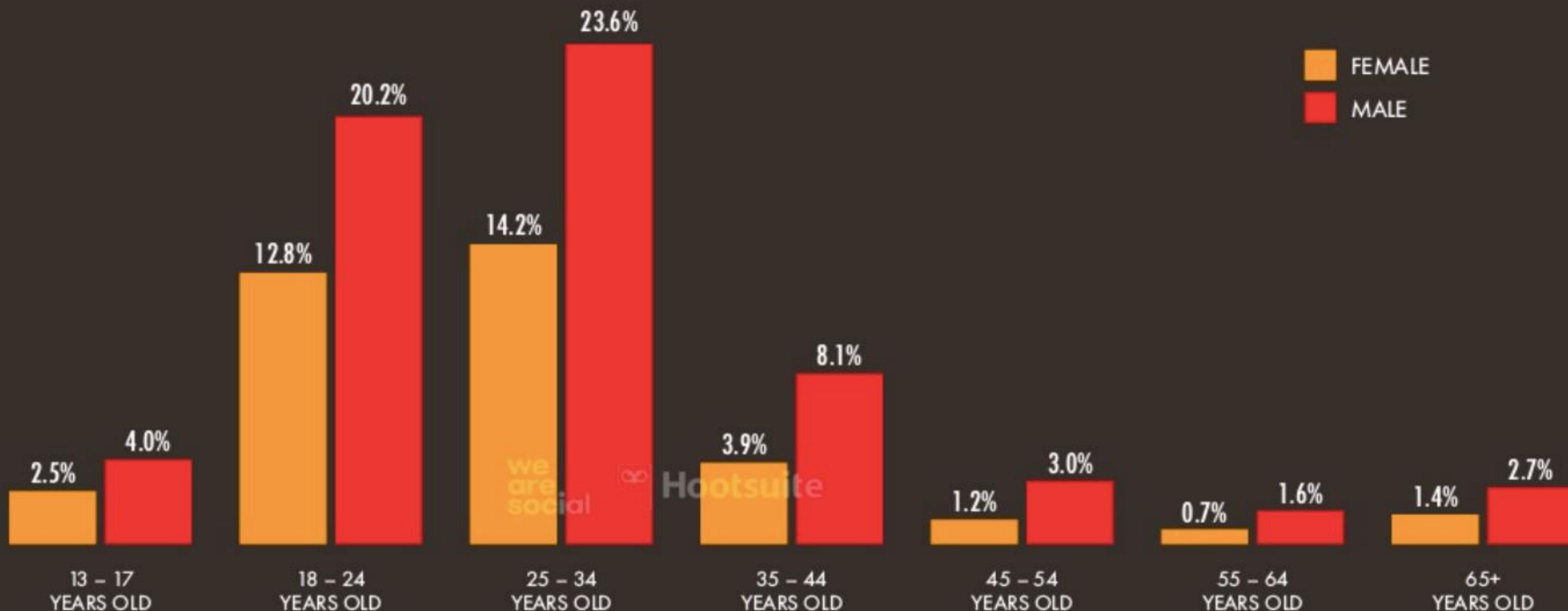
SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING AUDIENCE PROFILE

SHARE OF THE TOTAL ADVERTISING AUDIENCE* ACROSS FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, AND FB MESSENGER, BY AGE AND GENDER



GHANA

Clip slide



SOURCE: EXTRAPOLATIONS OF DATA FROM FACEBOOK'S SELF-SERVICE ADVERTISING TOOLS (JANUARY 2020). BASED ON ACTIVE USERS OF FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, AND / OR FACEBOOK MESSENGER. ***NOTES:** FACEBOOK'S TOOLS DO NOT PUBLISH AUDIENCE DATA FOR GENDERS OTHER THAN 'MALE' OR 'FEMALE'. ***ADVISORY:** DATA ON THIS CHART REPRESENT THE SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING AUDIENCE ONLY, AND MAY NOT CORRELATE TO RESPECTIVE SHARES OF TOTAL MONTHLY ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS. **◆ COMPARABILITY ADVISORY:** BASE CHANGES.

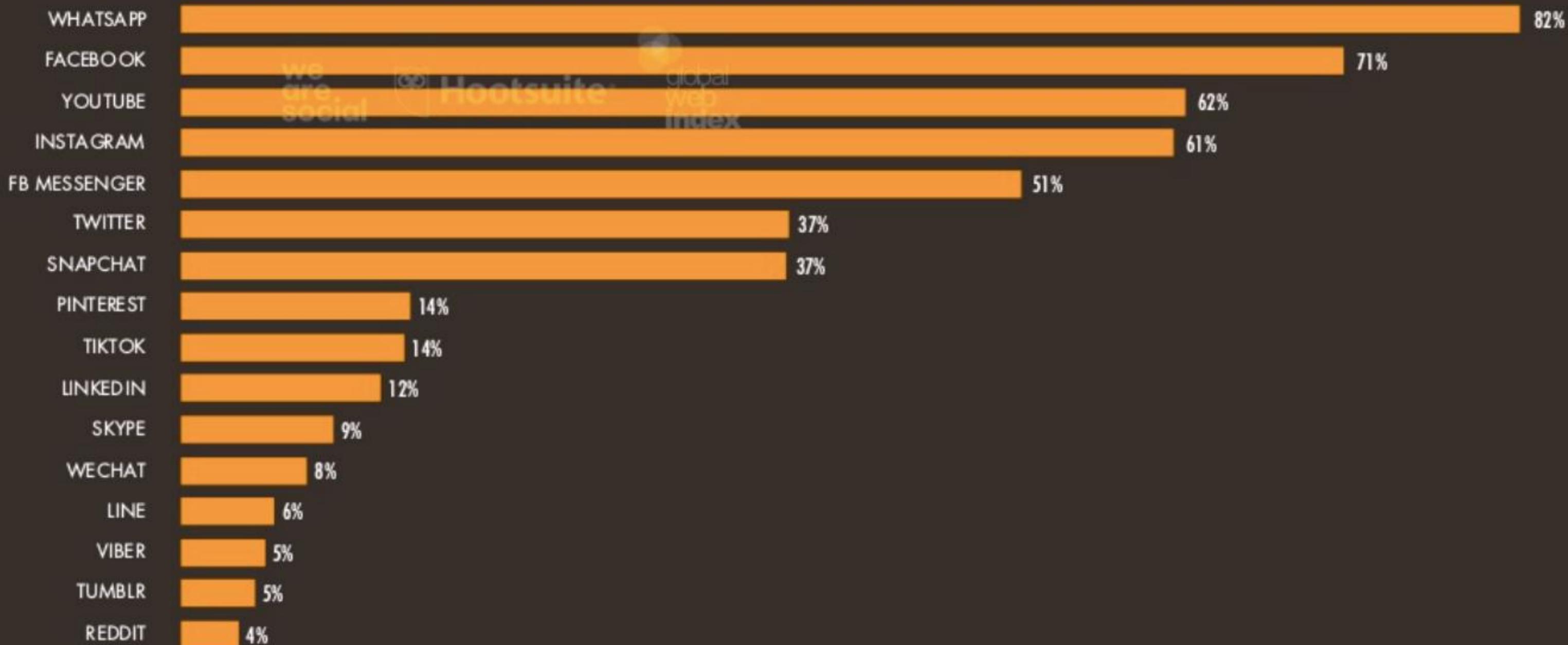
JAN
2020

MOST-USED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

PERCENTAGE OF INTERNET USERS AGED 16 TO 64 WHO REPORT USING EACH PLATFORM IN THE PAST MONTH



GHANA



TECH APPLICATIONS IN ELECTIONS IN GHANA

- 2004 elections saw the genesis of major use of information, communication technologies in Ghana's elections
 - Each elections records significant growth in the application of new digital technologies by all stakeholders (political parties, electoral management board, civil society, media, citizens)
 - Year 2020 elections was set to witness unprecedented applications of technologies
 - COVID 19 Global pandemic means new digital technologies is now deeply woven into our electoral fabric
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VOTER REGISTRATION IN GHANA TODAY

- Disappointing - Ghana's EC is not taking advantage of technologies to ensure safer voter registration
 - End to end online registration is now possible with integration of biometric and facial features
 - Partial online registration with persons showing up to complete the process within a shorter time, use tech for registration crowd management, facilitate better one to one communications
 - Civil society actors are not using the opportunities offered by technology to mobilize citizens to participate in this important civic duty
 - Political parties mostly through the use of WhatsApp and social media are encouraging their supporters to get out to register
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TECH APPLICATIONS IN GHANA'S 2020 ELECTIONS

- The power of the Internet and social media as a tool for political mobilization is now established
 - Find and communicate with voters, fundraising, virtual events(campaign rallies, town hall meetings) door to door(target one to one interaction/messaging), call to action, debates.
 - Serial callers giving way to “digital foot soldiers”
 - Increased in “elections time newspapers” being replaced with news websites aligned to political interests
 - Traditional media (radio and Tv) is still important. All media strategy : Social media, WhatsApp, e-mail, cell phones, SMS & websites to connect and mobilize voters plus traditional media
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TECH APPLICATIONS IN GHANA'S 2020 ELECTIONS

- Messaging platforms especially WhatsApp as a tool for campaigns especially community - management
 - Visualization
 - Short videos
 - Interactive sessions using Facebook live & talk show on social media
 - Micro-targeting voter : Behavioural segmentation(demographics and geographic) using principle of largest vote-share gains anchored on the use of algorithms to predict political interest of voters via social media especially Facebook.
 - Political misinformation and elections time disinformation
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TECH APPLICATIONS IN ELECTIONS

- Application of Artificial Intelligence(AI)
 - Political application of data science & “persuasion science”
 - More data, better algorithms = personalized ad targeting of voters, especially ones sitting on the fence.
 - Geotargeting : sending voters ads on their phones based on their location to alert them about political event or closest voter registration centre.
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CHALLENGES

- Current regulatory framework is not up to the task – digital platforms are not subject to those rules.
 - Any formal regulation of online/social media spaces is very complex- underlying structure of the Internet is premised on openness and inherent lack of a central control
 - Trade off between regulation, censorship and maintaining freedom of speech remains a thorny issue
 - Defining inappropriate content is not a walk in the park
 - Difficulties in maintaining public order in virtual spaces
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CHALLENGES

- Cross-border regulations of virtual spaces is problematic.
 - Implementation of any regulations or laws is very expensive, opportunity cost could be hospital(s) !!!!!
 - Misinformation/disinformation including fake news – spread further and faster and are more impactful.
 - Readily available software for creating “deepfakes,” - head of one politician is digitally swapped onto the body of another to put him or her in bad light
 - Scepticism of political communication and mistrust in politics
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CHALLENGES

- Data protection and privacy Issues
 - At citizens' level, exacerbate inequalities in representation and voices due to lack of connectivity, costs and ability to use tools
 - Increasing campaign costs for political actors using virtual spaces- cut corners leading to inappropriate content
 - Established political parties and candidates are better placed to invest and benefit from virtual spaces thereby entrenching inequalities
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REGULATORY- EXTREME OPTION

- China- Great Fire wall : laws and technologies to regulate the Internet
 - Twitter, Google and WhatsApp are blocked in China with internal Chinese services such as Weibo, Baidu and WeChat – better control
 - China's ability to restrict the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPN) which users can use to bypass blocked websites.
 - The Cyberspace Administration of China - close down and clean up offending mobile apps.
 - Hundreds of thousands of cyber-police, - monitor social media platforms and screen messages based on list of censored words
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REGULATORY OPTION - SELF GOVERNANCE

- Social media companies (Google Youtube, facebook, twitter, Instagram, etc - Self-governance: removal of inappropriate content.
 - Premised on user terms and conditions, community guidelines and sometimes laws/regulations in-country
 - Inappropriate content : illegal content, "revenge pornography" extremist material, hate speech, fake news, violence, terrorism, cyber-bullying and child abuse. etc
 - Inappropriate Detection/Removal - Automation and humans
 - But self governance is just scratching the surface of this big problem
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REGULATORY OPTION - SELF GOVERNANCE

- Facebook approach - largely hands-off approach while twitter is more proactive in removing or labelling content
 - Facebook is the world's largest purveyors of information therefore a vehicle to spread disinformation, misinformation etc
 - Under siege - regulatory landmine - permitting fake news, conspiracies and hate speech on their platforms
 - StopHateforProfit- over 400 companies, stop or planning halt advertising on how it handles hate speech and other harmful content.
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REGULATORY OPTION - SELF GOVERNANCE

- Facebook's stock went down by more 8% = erasing \$56 billion US from its market value. Zuckerberg is estimated to have lost more than \$7 billion of his personal net worth
 - Facebook is making some changes, though not radical enough including -labelling posts from politicians who break the rules including President Trump. Labelling and block ads from state-controlled media outlets targeted to US users
 - Twitter - Labelling two tweets as making false and misleading claims about mail-in voting.
 - Bad regulation example : President Trump signed an executive order -limiting the broad legal protections enjoyed by social media companies
 - Political actors must consider self governance very seriously
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LEARNING FROM COVID-19

- Social media companies are taking down content they consider to be misleading COVID-19 content based on World Health Organization(WHO) data
 - In the same way, fake news or false information about democratic process or against a candidate can be removed, with validity provided by electoral management bodies, civil society and trusted media houses to ensure efficacy of the electoral process.
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REGULATORY OPTIONS - POLICIES AND LAWS

No.	Country/Region	Regulatory framework	Description
1	Russia	Sovereign internet(2019)	Wide-ranging powers to restrict traffic on the Russian web
2	Australia	Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material Act (2019)	Criminal penalties for social media companies, possible jail sentences for executives for up to three years & financial penalties worth up to 10% of a company's global turnover.
3	Europe Union (EU)	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018)	Rules on how companies, social media platforms, store and use people's data.
4	Egypt	Press , Media, and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR), Law 2018	new media and cybercrime measures including personal social media account, blog or website- 5,000 plus followers, a media outlet and subject to media law.
5	USA	Honest Ads Act (In works)	Transparency and accountability to online political ads and help prevent foreign interference
6	UK	New Powers for the media regulator Ofcom to police social media(2020)	Companies protect users from content(violence, terrorism, cyber-bullying and child abuse) through removal
7	South Africa	Cybercrimes and Cybersecurity(2017)	Police malicious messaging (WhatsApp)
8	Senegal	Electronic telecommunications law(2018)	Authorize or enforce any data management measure it deems necessary to notably preserve competition in the electronic telecommunications sector and ensure the impartial treatment of similar services
9	Germany	NetzDG (2018)	Complaints Review Procedure - removal of illegal content within 24 hours
10	Nigeria	Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation(in works)	Regulatory control over conversations on social media platforms especially to fight fake news

REGULATORY LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY PYRAMID



SOLUTIONS

no	issue	solution	comments
1	"Fake News"	Fact Checking	Does not go far enough - Hosepower of fake news is stronger than garden hose of factchecking Fact checking must be predictive and in real time increased Investment required in media, information and digital literacy from birth.
2	Invisibility of Policing	Increase visibility of police on social media	Need to be physically present at a police station to report an online issue . Online users = an online system of reporting
3	Lack of information on the nature of the problem	Increase citizens interest and ability to self report Research	Regulators and state actors can learn from tech companies how they run self reporting mechanisms No scholarship nor practioner led research efforts
4	Policy and regulatory	Enlarge or expand the powers of existing institutions or legal framework	Complexity of regulating internet and social media means less rigid laws rather more flexible and adaptive policies recommended. Regulatory collaboration is key
5	Government interaction with tech companies	Policy to drive government interaction with social media companies	Irrespective of what gains Ghana can achieve in its regulatory quest, social media companies are very powerful to derail these regulations
6	Low citizens participation	Pathways should be created for citizens to participate in debates and policy making process	Securing citizens participation can go a long way to help in the successful implementation of any law or policy -since online space management requires deep user support

GROWING PAIN

- Globally , 2020 is going to record significant usage of online campaigning tools and this situation is expected to remain the norm for years to come and Ghana is no exception
 - There will be radical increase in the volume of data and information linked to elections and political discussions with attendant challenges in terms of control and regulations
 - Left unresolved these challenges including regulatory issues can lead to long term impact on democracy as a whole and elections in particular
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CONCLUSION

- Regulations/Standards should be set at the level of principles with concrete rules/laws/institution evolve organically
 - Self governance/regulations are not performing well, largely because social media was not created to aid democracy, but as a tool to harvest users' data and monetized this through adverts
 - Facebook 'Supreme Court' for content moderation is yet to see any results
 - Internet and social media shutdown and restriction are not a tenable solution to regulatory quagmire
 - Context matters - social media is not designed as a “serious tool” but more of a “silly tool “ providing social connectivity
 - Laws and policies can be considered only and only if they do not destroy freedom of speech, most of them unfortunately fall into this trap.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ **Civil society**

- Should instigate a process, culminating in political parties and candidates pledging to adhere to best practices in virtual spaces through out the electoral cycle, while advocating for self regulation.
- Mount Campaigns – to protect freedom of speech in light of any regulations or laws

➤ **Regulatory agencies**

- Investigate ways they can extend and support regulations in virtual spaces through public discourse
 - Electoral Commission should have a policy of zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour by candidates/parties
 - Colloboration between all regulatory agencies (National Media Commission, National Communication Authority, Data Protection Commission, National Cyber Security Centre etc)
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RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Donors**

- Research, capacity building for political parties as well as monitoring.

- **Citizens**

- Provide input to debates as well report incidences of abuse

- **Political Parties**

- Invest in system and technologies to enable them take full advantages of new digital technologies
 - Self regulations
 - Ensure their virtual strategies are inclusive
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RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ **Government**

- Policies and laws
- Maintain proactive relationship with social media companies
- Invest in mass digital and information literacy for all citizens from infancy

➤ **Media**

- Work towards setting good examples and provide education & information
 - Hold political parties and candidates to account
 - Self regulation
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THANK YOU

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