UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

CYBERACTIVISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESS FREEDOM IN GHANA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

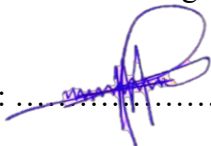**GEORGE YAW OPOKU**
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A thesis in the Centre for Conflict, Human Rights and Peace Studies,
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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, George Yaw Opoku, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works, which have been duly identified and acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE: ……………………………………….

DATE: ………………………………………

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the School of Graduate Studies, University of Education, Winneba.

Dr. Seth Tweneboah (Supervisor)

Signature: …………………………………

Date: …………………………………

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

ACHPR:	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
CAT:	Convention against Torture
GLC:	General Legal Council
ICCPR:	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR:	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
MAI:	Multillateral Agreement on Investment
MFWA:	Media Foundation for West Africa
NGO:	Non Governmental Organisation
NMC:	National Media Commission
QCA:	Qualitative Content Analysis
RSF:	Reporters Sans Frontieres (Reporters Without Borders)
SNSs:	Social Network Sites
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
WTO:	World Trade Organisation

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyse the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic. Using a qualitative research approach and archival design, a purposive sampling technique was employed to sample four cyber activists who have cyberactivism sites which focus on issues relating to Ghana. The study found out that cyberactivism takes the nature of online petitions; social networks; blogs; and micro-blogging. While cyberactivism promotes freedom of expression, the study revealed, it also has negative consequences such as threats to national security, intimidation and assassination of activists. The study further revealed that, political mobilization is made easier through the use of hashtags. Based on the findings, the study concludes that cyberactivism is a powerful tool that has redefined press freedom in the Fourth Republic of Ghana. The study recommends among others that there should be a balance of rights. Freedom of expression and press are essential human rights ideals and guaranteed under the 1992 Constitution. As such, the state has no business interfering in the actions of cyberactivists. However, albeit a constitutional requirement, given that it has negative consequences, the study proposes that this right ought to be used responsibly for purposes of safeguarding national security.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an introduction to the entire study under the following sub-themes: background to the study; research problem; the purpose of the study; objectives of the study; research questions; the significance of the study, the scope of the study, operational definition of terms and organization of the study.

1.1 Background to the Study

A democratic society's foundation is, among other factors, a free press. It has been argued that freedom of the press is essential to private and public liberty (Koomson, 2013, Saunders, 2019). Despite this, when these freedoms and rights are unrestricted, abuses are likely to occur. This is typically exemplified in the many reported episodes that occur online. Indeed, academic literature is well established on the fact that the internet has a significant impact on all aspects of social life. Yet the internet functions as a double-edged sword with diverse consequences when it comes to activism.

As a matter of fact, the debate over whether the internet has resulted in societal progress or regress continues, but one thing is certain: the internet's impact can be seen in our politics, economics, behaviours, and mass communication. The internet has become a national and transnational mechanism for expressing, exposing, and sharing views, ideas, opinions, and values both within and outside the borders of a country. As the internet became more widely available, journalists transitioned from traditional to cyberspace journalism, spawning a new field known as online journalism (Koomson, 2013).

The online transition aided in the reduction of many undemocratic government restrictions and increased the level of freedom in many countries. Today, the internet serves as a global barometer for measuring a country's freedom (Koomson, 2013).

As already noted, it is increasingly becoming a common knowledge that press freedom is what makes democracy operate across the world. A totally free press is intended to improve citizens' political, social, and cultural outcomes. Liberal theorists have long argued that a free and independent press is critical to the process of democratization because it contributes to the right to freedom of expression, thought, and conscience, strengthens government responsiveness and accountability to all citizens, and provides a pluralist platform and channel of political expression for a variety of groups and interests (Koomson, 2013, Saunders, 2019).

Given its valuable role, significant regional and international human rights documents such as the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Conventions on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights have all regarded freedom of expression and information as a fundamental human right. The media is viewed as a window into events and experiences, as well as a reflection of societal and global events. It is for this reason that some have even labelled the media as the Fourth Estate (Schiltz, 1998). Yet the internet has been described as a double-edged sword when it comes to the rights of citizens.

This study is therefore, motivated to examine the implications of online activism on press freedom in Ghana's fourth republic. The freedom and independence of the media under Ghana's Fourth republican regime are constitutionally entrenched in Chapter 12 of the 1992 Constitution particularly in Article 162. The first clause

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expressly declares that media freedom and independence are safeguarded. The second clause states that there must be no censorship in Ghana, subject to the Constitution and any other law not conflicting with the Constitution. The Constitution also mandates that there should be no barriers to the creation of private press or media, clause three states, and in particular, no regulation requiring any individual to seek a license as a precursor to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal, or other media for mass communication or information.

Under the constitution and other laws of Ghana, editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media must not be subject to government control or intervention, nor will they be penalized or persecuted for their editorial ideas and views or the substance of their publications, reads the fourth clause of Article 162. It further mandates that all media agencies shall, at all times, be free to defend the ideas, provisions, and aims of this constitution, and shall uphold the government's obligation and accountability to the people of Ghana. Article 162 (6) stipulates that any means for public dissemination of information that publishes a statement about or against any person should be required to publish a rejoinder, if any, from the person in respect of whom the publication was made. It is also worth noting that these principles are among those enshrined in Article 289 of the 1992 constitution, which means that changing them will be difficult. As a result, the constitution has largely protected press freedom and independence.

Despite the fact that all of these freedoms were codified in Ghana's fourth republican constitution in 1992, press freedom has remained a key concern. Why is it that, while making comparable progress in promoting and protecting press freedom in Ghana, press freedom remains a key challenge? This study is interested in interrogating the

nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's fourth republic, the effects of cyber activism on press freedom in the fourth republic, and the role of cyberactivism in mass mobilization grassroots political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

A recent report shows that Ghana has declined thirty places in the World Press Freedom Index for 2022. Ghana was ranked 60th in the 2022 Reporters without Borders (RFS) rating, up from 30th in 2021. This is Ghana's lowest position in 17 years, following rankings of 66th in 2005 and 67th in 2002. Ghana's indicative points dropped from 78.67 % to 67.43 % in the latest assessment, compared to last year. Although the country is seen as a regional leader in democratic stability, journalists have faced increasing challenges in recent years, according to the report (Boakye, 2022). The Information Ministry welcomed the RSF study as a baseline reference document against which the country's press freedom may be measured in the coming years, according to a statement released on Wednesday, May 4, 2022. The government statement, on the other hand, focused primarily on RSF's approach in the ranking, claiming that the shift in methodology accounted for a substantial decline. Portions of the government stated that: "Due to this development, four (4) of the countries (Netherlands, Jamaica, Switzerland, and New Zealand) that ranked top ten (10) in 2021 significantly dropped in ranking, slumping out of the top ten (10) in the year under review."

It is worthy of note that Ghana's dip in the ranking was largely influenced by two of the new parameters, namely, the Economic Context and Safety of Journalists where the country scored 47.22% and 62.25% respectively (Boakye, 2022). Concerning the protection of journalists, the ministry stated that non-state actors' activities may be factored into the assessment of press freedom. Excerpts of the statement indicated

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that: It is also striking that the new report took into consideration the effect of opinion media, propaganda, disinformation, and fake news and their adverse impact on press freedom ranking for affected countries. This is a result of growing political and social tensions leading to information distortions and the publication of false news, particularly across social media platforms." It is against this background that this study is motivated to analyze the effects of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's fourth republic.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It has been argued that freedom of the press is essential to liberty. When these freedoms and rights are unrestricted, abuses are likely to occur. A totally free press is intended to improve citizens' political, social, and cultural outcomes. Liberal theorists like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes have long argued that a free and independent press in every society is critical to the process of democratization because it contributes to the right to freedom of expression, thought, and conscience, strengthens government responsiveness and accountability to all citizens, and provides a pluralist platform and channel of political expression for a variety of groups and interests (cited in Koomson, 2013).

The freedom and independence of the media in Ghana are explicitly established in Chapter 12 of the Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana, Article 162 (1-6), and several international and regional human rights instruments that Ghana has rectified such as the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Despite these, press freedom has remained a key concern. A recent report shows that Ghana has declined thirty places in the World Press Freedom Index for 2022. Ghana was ranked 60th in the 2022

Reporters without Borders (RFS) rating, up from 30th in 2021. This is Ghana's lowest position in 17 years, following rankings of 66th in 2005 and 67th in 2002. Ghana's indicative points dropped from 78.67 % to 67.43 % in the latest assessment, compared to 2021. Although the country is seen as a regional leader in democratic stability, journalists have faced increasing challenges in recent years, according to the report (Boakye, 2022).

However, there does not appear to be enough information when it comes to research on the phenomenon of cyberactivism and its implications for press freedom. Indeed, scholars such as Breuer (2012) have examined the role of social media in mobilizing mass political protest using the evidence from the Tunisian revolution. Segado-Boj and Díaz-Campo (2020) have analyzed equally social media and its intersections with free speech, freedom of information, and privacy. In a more recent work that focuses on what is popularly known in Ghana as the #FixTheCountry movement, Brobbery, Da-Costa, and Apeakoran (2021), paid an especially attention to the communicative ecology of social media in the organization of social movement for collective action in Ghana. This notwithstanding, significant gaps remain thereby necessitating additional research. Importantly, most existing studies focus on the role of cyberactivism in the mobilization of a social movement for collective action. These studies, however, say little about the nature of cyberactivism and prominently, the exact implicat`ions of cyberactivism on press freedom. It is for this reason that the current study is motivated to carry out an investigation into the phenomenon.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following research objectives:

(i)   To examine the nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

(ii)   To analyze the effects of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

(iii)   To examine the role of cyberactivism in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

(i)   What is the nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic?

(ii)   How does cyberactivism affect press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic?

(iii)   What roles does cyberactivism play in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic?
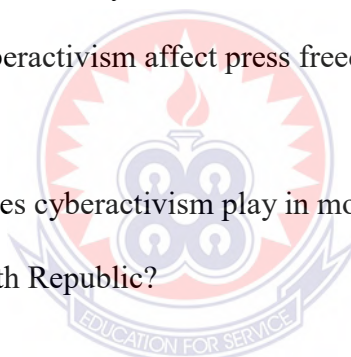
1.6 Significance of the Study

The growing use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter has provided social activists with a new way to communicate with their targets. Several studies have focused on the role of social media in activism and how specific activists in other countries used it. The purpose of this study is to add to the growing body of research on social media and activism by looking at the issue in a developing democracy like Ghana.

This study contributes to scholarship in terms of knowledge as it seeks to bridge the effects of cyberactivism on press freedom that have largely been ignored in existing studies (Breuer, 2012; Segado-Boj and Díaz-Campo, 2020; Brobbery, Da-Costa and

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Apeakoran, 2021) by analyzingthe effects of online activism on press freedom in Ghana's fourth republic.

The findings of this study serve as guide to policymakers in reviewing and implementing numerous existing policies on press freedom in Ghana. The current study clearly establishes the linkage between press freedom and national security by advocating for the promotion of balance rights. This will enable media personnel, activists and bloggers to discharge their activities responsibly bearing in mind the consequence of their actions or inactions on the larger society.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study is limited to cyberactivism under Ghana's Fourth Republican regime which started from1992. The study fundamentally explores the human rights implications of online activism especially in relation to press freedom.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Cyberactivism: In this study, cyberactivism and onlineactivism will be used interchangeably to refer to the use of electronic communication technologies such as social media, e-mail, and podcasts for various forms of activism to enable faster and more effective communication by citizen movements, the delivery of particular information to large and specific audiences as well as coordination.

Press Freedom: Press freedom in this study refers to the fundamental principle that communication and expression through various media, including printed and electronic media, especially published materials, should be considered a right to be exercised freely.

Human Rights: Human Rights are conceptualized in the current study to mean claims we have by virtue of the fact that we are human beings rather than citizens of a country.

Human Rights Violation and, or Abuse: These terms are used concurrently or interchangeably in this study to mean the intentional act of causing losses, harm, or hurt in the aspect of human rights.

Fourth Republican: Fourth Republican is conceptualized to mean a period from 1992 to 2022.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five (5) chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the entire work under the following sub-themes: Background to the study; the research problem; the purpose of the study; the objectives of the study; research questions; the significance of the study and the organization of the study. Chapter two concentrates on a review of theories for a better understanding of online activism and press freedom. Chapter three presents the methodology under the following sub-themes: research paradigm; research approach; study design; population; sampling design (sample size and distribution and sampling techniques); data sources and instruments; data management and analyses; ethical considerations and safety protocols adopted in the study. Chapter four will concentrate on the discussion of the results and findings of the study. Chapter five ends the entire discussion by presenting the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents relevant extant literature on cyberactivism and its implications for press freedom. The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first deals with a theoretical review. I employed the Technological determinism theory and network society theory (1991) by Jan van Dijkgive a vivid account and interpretation of how cyberactivism is redefining press freedom in contemporary Ghana. The second section looks at an empirical review of relevant related literature which further elucidates the phenomenon of online activism.

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 The Network Society Theory

The theory employed in this study is the network society theory. The term network society was coined by Jan van Dijk in his 1991 "Dutch book De Netwerkmaatschappij" (The Network Society) and by Manuel Castells in the Rise of the Network Society (1996), the first part of his trilogy the Information Age. In 1978 James Martin used the related term 'The Wired Society' indicating a society that is connected by mass- and telecommunication networks. Van Dijk defines the network society as a society in which a combination of social and media networks shapes its prime mode of organization and most important structures at all levels (individual, organizational and societal). He compares this type of society to a mass society that is shaped by groups, organizations, and communities (masses) organized in physical co-presence.

Technology advancements in recent years have enabled us to communicate in exciting new ways. For example; the internet has been at the centre of this, providing a new platform for networks of all kinds to exist, function, and expand. As a result, new forms of activism have emerged, providing greater opportunities for social movements to mobilize, influence, and infiltrate mainstream society. Bennett (2003) emphasizes this point by describing recent history as one of impressive levels of global activism, including mass demonstrations, sustained publicity campaigns against corporations and world development agencies, and the rise of innovative public accountability systems for corporate and governmental behaviour. All of these activities appear to be linked to the internet in various ways. Our networked society fosters new forms of activism, with these social movements, not only products of, but also expressions and manifestations of a technologically connected society, with information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the internet serving as critical communications and operational tools.

The Network Society Theory is appropriate for the current study because, it facilitates the organization of new forms of activism, owing largely to the technology at the movement's disposal. Using this as a reference point, the current study seeks to analyze the effects of online activism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

2.1.2 Technological Determinism

Technological determinism theory is another theory that is employed in the analysis of this study. Technological determinists understand technology more specifically, communications technologies, as the basis of society in the past, present and even the future (Logan, 2010). They hypothesised that technologies which have an impact on, for example, the television or the printing press have been 'modified' in its most

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excessive form; the whole of society is being defined by technological improvements: new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals (Chandler, 1995). At the least a wide range of social and cultural phenomena are shaped by technology. 'Human factors' and social arrangements are seen as secondary (Chandler, 1995).

The theory is useful to this study in a number of ways. First, because of the emerging technologies such as social media, it is shaping and transforming how activists interact with their target audiences (McLuhan, Gordon, Lamberti, &Scheffel-Dunand, 2011). Second, building on this concept this study will demonstrate that the internet has characteristics which allow its users to interact with the messages and each other. It also enables users not only to receive information, but then gives them the ability to send to other people in their networks, fostering participation and interactivity.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Understanding the Concepts of Freedom of the Press

Many thinkers and scholars regard freedom as the most important human value (Kant, 1996).Because of its significance in human life, freedom has been the subject of numerous writings ranging from poetry, philosophy, psychology, and history to politics, economics, and religion.In his work, on *Liberty*, John Stuart Mill (1869), one of the most prolific thinkers of the nineteenth century, argues that freedom is the absence of coercion. Mill is well-known for separating the concept of liberty from theology and natural rights to the realm of social welfare. "In terms of the social value of living truth," he writes, "liberty (freedom) has a shape and is not infinite" Mill (1869). In fact, Mill emphasizes the freedom of thought and discussion in relation to

press freedom, which, in his opinion, should improve rational and reasoned debate that benefits society (Gleason, 1990).

Isaiah Berlin, a nineteenth-century political philosopher and historian of ideas, distinguished between two concepts in his famous essay "Two Concepts of Liberty." Positive freedom refers to having the ability or means to do things, whereas negative freedom refers to being free from tyranny and the arbitrary exercise of authority (as cited in Winter, 2007). Freedom is "the condition of being able to choose and carry out purposes" (Merrill, 1989). Merrill claims that freedom should be free of external constraints and provide effective power to do whatever one wants. Thus, freedom should include both negative (freedom from restraint) and positive (freedom to achieve some good) freedoms. The concept of freedom in the context of journalism is difficult to grasp because it implies that complete freedom exists somewhere between "compulsion and inertia" (Merrill, C1989).

Freedom of expression encompasses a wide range of actions, including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly (Abbas & AlFadhly, 2005). In comparison, Gastil (1979) broadens the civil definition of freedom to include "press freedom, the openness of public debate, the existence of organizations separate from the government, an independent judiciary, and the absence of political imprisonment."

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, many philosophers associated liberty with freedom of speech and freedom of the press, with no distinction between the two (Lichtenberg, 1990). According to Lichtenberg (1990), the concept of "oneness" is still relevant today, especially because many people regard the press as a powerful voice equal to individual voices; defending free press is essentially defending individual speech freedom.

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Lichtenberg's analysis has some validity, but there are some significant differences between press freedom and individual speech freedom, which are highlighted when they clash (Cullen & Fu, 1998). According to Ansah (1991), the meaning and function of press freedom in society is to disseminate information and ideas through mass media without government control.

Ansah (1991) contends that the concept of a free press is neither carefully defined nor accurately applied in the public's consciousness. In fact, this conflation distorts the distinction between freedom of information and freedom of expression in relation to Lieberman's three rights: 'to know,' 'to find out,' and 'to tell.' To complicate matters further, many national press systems are restricted in their degree of freedom, fuelling the notion that not only is the universal concept of press freedom unfeasible, but it may be impossible (Ansah, 1991).

The concept of press freedom, like most revolutionary ideas, is fraught with controversy. Some argue that a country's national security, government reputation (libel and slander), citizens' privacy (public figures and public officials), and the criminal justice system (pre-trial publicity vs. fair trial, and journalists and their sources) are all causes for concern. Hocking (1947) contends that two constraints should always be mentioned in any discussion of press freedom.

The first limitation is the incompatibility of the ideal press's factors, and the second limitation, according to Hocking, is that press freedom is not an isolated value that varies depending on its social context. Another theory of freedom advanced by some intellectuals is that it is simply access to resources.

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According to Lessig (2002), the concept of "free" connotes different fundamental meanings; a resource is free when an individual intends to use it without permission or when permission is granted neutrally. Lessig goes on to say that free resources are at the heart of innovation, creativity, and democracy. In fact, he regards the internet as the most powerful tool for demonstrating the value of free resources. Nonetheless, Lessig contends that the internet's positive characteristics and potential make it vulnerable and weak when confronted with financial, social, and political forces of control. Lessig (2002) argues that the internet creates innovation commons (free resources for others to use), but that the Internet is losing these innovation commons due to our ignorance of its changing norms and technical architecture.

McQuail (2005) agrees with Lessig (2002) that internet freedom represents the freedom of access to resources. He claims that the context of internet freedom is too diverse, encompassing all types of freedoms that are equally important. In another proposed theory of freedom, Castells (2001) claims that freedom corresponds with the Internet due to the natural composition of its infrastructure. The internet's architectural and social organization is based on the concept of "openness" (Castells, 2001, p. 26). This concept explains how the internet creates enabling environment for cyberactivist to observe, participate, and innovate, on both the core internet infrastructure and major online services. The literature reviewed above help us to understand how the internet infrastructure promotes wider participation and press freedom.

Ghana has been a point of reference for many countries in the African continent in terms of legal framework that protects and safeguards press freedom. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana explicitly enshrines the right to freedom of speech and expression, encompassing the freedom of the press and other media outlets (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, Art. 21(1) (a)). This constitutional

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provision serves as a cornerstone for fostering an open and democratic media environment.

Despite these constitutional guarantees, challenges to press freedom persist. Human Rights Watch has raised concerns about the potential misuse of criminal defamation laws, which could pose threats to free expression (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Instances of harassment, intimidation, and violence against journalists, particularly when covering sensitive issues such as corruption or human rights abuses, have also been documented (Freedom House, 2021).

Ghana's media landscape, however, remains diverse and dynamic. Media entities such as Joy FM, Citi FM, and Daily Graphic play pivotal roles in informing the public and promoting accountability. Community radio stations, in particular, have emerged as essential platforms for local voices, enhancing community engagement within the media landscape (Reporters Without Borders, 2021). Economic challenges within the media industry have not gone unnoticed. Financial difficulties faced by some media outlets raise concerns about their editorial independence. The combination of economic pressures and occasional political interference underscores the ongoing need for efforts to fortify media sustainability and resist external pressures (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2022).

International assessments further attest to Ghana's commitment to press freedom. The World Press Freedom Index consistently positions Ghana among the top countries in Africa, a testament to the nation's dedication to creating an environment where journalists can work without fear of censorship or persecution (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

Ghana has made significant strides in upholding press freedom, but challenges persist. The legal framework provides a strong foundation, yet ongoing efforts are essential to address issues such as harassment, economic pressures, and potential legal restrictions. Ghana's commitment to democratic values places it at the forefront of press freedom in Africa, requiring collaborative efforts from the government, civil society, and the media industry to further strengthen and safeguard this fundamental aspect of democracy.

2.2.2 Activism and social justice

Keck and Sikkink (2014) define activists as a group of people coming together to achieve a common goal. Activism can take many forms and manifest itself in a variety of economic, political, social, and occupational contexts.

According to Bennett et al. (2004), activism can range from civil disobedience, protests, occupations, campaigning, boycotts, and demonstrations to more traditional forms of activism such as lobbying, writing letters, internet activism, petitions, and attending meetings. Another obvious example is the use of Facebook and Twitter to mobilize people during the Arab Spring, which resulted in significant political and social changes (Sandoval-Almazan& Gil-Garcia, 2014). When discussing and speaking with people about activism, the term is frequently applied to actions such as protests, street marches, and riots. This is one of the most common misconceptions about activism. Activism is a broad topic that employs a variety of tools to achieve its goals. The goal of activism is to effect social or political change. Protests or similar actions alone will not result in the desired change. To achieve the goal of causing change, good activism must be thoughtful and planned (Sandoval-Almazan& Gil-

Garcia, 2014). Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. It is not always necessary for citizens to take to the streets to effect social or political change. Activism entails deliberate efforts, campaigns, and involvement to achieve specific goals, which are usually political or social of seeking justice. The notion that activists are simply people who hold street protests and brand placards is a misunderstanding of what activism entails. Relying on this notion, this study seeks to analyze the implications of cyber activism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

Cyber activism involves using digital tools and platforms for activism purposes. As Kavada (2015) observes, it is characterized by "the use of digital technologies for political mobilization, organization, and protest" (Kavada, 2015).Social media platforms play a central role in cyber activism, serving as catalysts for information dissemination and mobilization. Castells (2015) argues that social media allows for the formation of networked social movements, enabling rapid and decentralized organization (Castells, 2015).

Jordan and Taylor (2004) explore the concept of "digital direct action" in their work, emphasizing the use of hacking skills for activism purposes (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). Cyber activism transcends geographical constraints, providing a global platform for activism. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that online platforms empower grassroots movements by offering accessible tools for communication, organization, and advocacy (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Cyberactivism leverages digital platforms to mobilize individuals and groups by providing accessible channels for information dissemination, collaboration, and coordination (Earl & Kimport, 2011). Social media, in particular, acts as a dynamic

space for the rapid dissemination of advocacy messages and the recruitment of like-minded supporters (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Cyberactivism often centers around issues of press freedom, with advocates utilizing digital spaces to raise awareness about threats to journalistic independence, censorship, and attacks on journalists. The global reach of online platforms enables the amplification of voices advocating for a free and unrestricted press (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

Online spaces facilitate collaborative activism, allowing diverse individuals and groups to join forces in advocating for press freedom. Digital campaigns, petitions, and collaborative projects enable participants to pool resources and expertise, transcending geographical boundaries (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005). Hashtags on social media platforms become rallying points, fostering a sense of unity among advocates for press freedom. The viral nature of online content enhances the visibility of issues, attracting attention from a wider audience and compelling traditional media coverage (Lotan et al., 2011).

While cyberactivism empowers advocates, it also faces challenges, including the risk of online censorship, cyberattacks, and government surveillance. These challenges can hinder effective mobilization efforts, requiring activists to navigate a complex digital landscape (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, & Zittrain, 2010).

Cyber activism in Ghana faces challenges related to internet access disparities and digital literacy gaps. Tsikata (2015) acknowledges these challenges but also highlights the potential of cyber activism to bridge geographical divides and foster connections among diverse communities in Ghana (Tsikata, 2015). Ghanaian cyber activists utilize various online platforms for political expression. Blogs, social media campaigns, and online petitions serve as avenues for engaging in political discourse. Ayittey and

Arthur (2015) explore how digital spaces become platforms for political expression, particularly during events like the 2012 Presidential Election in Ghana (Ayittey & Arthur, 2015).

Online Campaigns and Movements in Raising Awareness about Threats to Press Freedom

The pervasive use of digital platforms, particularly social media, has empowered activists to disseminate information rapidly and globally (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Online campaigns leverage these platforms to reach diverse audiences, effectively bringing threats to press freedom into the public consciousness.The strategic use of hashtags in online campaigns has emerged as a powerful tool for issue visibility. Hashtags serve as rallying points, enabling users to follow and engage with discussions related to threats against press freedom. This form of hashtag activism contributes to the viral spread of information and increased awareness (Lotan et al., 2011).

Online campaigns often transcend geographical boundaries, allowing activists, organizations, and concerned individuals to collaborate on a global scale. Collaborative platforms facilitate the pooling of resources and the development of a collective narrative that resonates with international audiences (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Online campaigns often incorporate citizen journalism, allowing individuals to share firsthand accounts of press freedom violations. Eyewitness narratives, supported by multimedia elements, contribute to a richer understanding of the challenges faced by journalists and media outlets (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014).

While online campaigns can be effective, they are not without challenges. Online spaces may be susceptible to manipulation, and there is a need to navigate issues such

as online censorship, disinformation, and the spread of false narratives (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019).

Cyberactivism in Democratic Discourse and Public Participation in Political Processes

Cyberactivism platforms, ranging from social media to dedicated online forums, serve as dynamic spaces for democratic discourse. These platforms provide individuals with avenues to express opinions, engage in discussions, and deliberate on political issues, contributing to the formation of a robust public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001). Social media platforms, in particular, have become significant amplifiers of political voices. Users can share opinions, news, and political content, creating a decentralized network of information dissemination. This decentralized nature allows for a diverse range of voices to be heard, contributing to a more inclusive democratic discourse (Bode & Dalrymple, 2017).

Dedicated online forums provide spaces for in-depth deliberative democracy. These platforms facilitate constructive discussions, allowing participants to engage with complex political issues in a more nuanced manner. This enhances the quality of democratic discourse and promotes informed decision-making (Coleman & Moss, 2012). Cyberactivism platforms play a pivotal role in mobilizing individuals for civic engagement. Through online campaigns, petitions, and activism events, these platforms empower citizens to actively participate in political processes. This mobilization contributes to a more vibrant and participatory democracy (Chadwick, 2006).

One of the notable advantages of cyberactivism platforms is their ability to transcend geographical boundaries. Users from diverse locations can participate in discussions,

share perspectives, and collaborate on political initiatives, fostering a sense of global democratic engagement (Kavada, 2015).

2.2.3 Digital Journalism

Unlike traditional print or broadcast, digital journalism is also referred to in the literature as netizen journalism or online journalism is a type of contemporary journalistic mechanism in which editorial content is disseminated through the internet. The literature is clear on the idea that the internet's invention advances two new communication models while building on two previous paradigms. Previous modes of communication included interpersonal communication, which includes 'one-to-one' or face-to-face modes of communication such as phone calls, e-mails, and letters. The second mode of communication is the "one-to-many" mode, which refers to the traditional mass media communication model. The most recent communication models are 'many-to-one and many-to-many.' The many-to-one communication model refers to an individual retrieval of a large database that is made available in this manner in conjunction with a computer, a database, and the Internet. The 'many-to-many' communication model, on the other hand, allows information to be received and accessed by a large number of people (Burnett and Marshall, 2003). Online journalism is defined by Deuze (2003) as "journalism that is produced more or less exclusively for the World Wide Web." Personal online writers, weblogs, and forums are all included in this study's definition of online journalism.

Initially, the Internet was used for information sharing such as file transfers, sending and receiving bits of information, and text discussion groups. However, no one could

have predicted that the Internet, as we know and understand it today, would generate a "public arena" with multimedia utilities and easy access (Campbell, 2004).

Some academics argue that the internet has surpassed television and news publications in its ability to influence mass behaviour (medium & users) (Webster and Lin, 2002). Because of its unlimited space and unique combination of print, visuals, and sound, some see the Internet as a direct threat to television (Reddick and King, 2001). While digital journalism shares many of the same values as traditional journalism, it also has some distinct differences.

Multimedia, for instance, is an essential element of digital journalism. The merger between older media organizations and newer media companies helps to provide online news that is complete with graphics, photographs, animations, audio streams, and video footage (Deuze, 2003). Advances in digital technology reduce all multimedia formats (video, audio, text, graphics and pictures) so that it may complement digital journalism production. Digital journalism can be easily sorted, retrieved, edited, reshaped and distributed (Domingo, 2006).

Interactivity distinguishes local media from online news media because it allows users to switch from one part of a story to another while accessing information on another Web page (Dimitrova and Neznanski, 2006). Interactivity allows the user not only to receive information, but also to disseminate it (Kopper et al., 2000). Deuze (2003) divides digital journalism interactivity into three categories, a) navigational interactivity, which occurs when a user navigates through content in a structured manner; b) functional interactivity, which occurs when users interact with other users and news outlets via discussion and e-mail; and c) adaptive interactivity, which occurs when the user customizes the site's content to reflect the user's preferences. Users

interact one-on-one and many-to-many via emails, Web forums, chats, or instant messaging as part of interpersonal communication (Domingo, 2006). Hypertext is one of the characteristics of online news that allows for multiple perspectives on facts and events. It is a non-linear Internet structure that allows users to navigate news Web sites and connect to related articles both within and outside the Web site; it presents complex social realities that cannot be presented in the inverted pyramid (Domingo, 2006). Hypertext provides an infinite amount of space for online news to write information that is both open and conducive to real-time updates and direct access to related documents.

Immediacy is one of the main distinguishing features of digital journalism that distinguishes it from traditional news. Stovall (2004) claims that online news outperforms traditional news media in four ways in terms of immediacy. For starters, there is a wide range of online news.

Stovall defines online news variety as the ability to address multiple related breaking news issues at the same time. The second way that online news outperforms traditional news mediums is through expansion. The ability of online news to hold and display old and new information about an event as it unfolds is referred to as expansion. Another way that online news is superior to traditional news media is the ease with which mistakes can be corrected as soon as they are posted. Finally, Stovall contends that context exists in online news. He defines context as the immediacy of portraying a complete picture of an event within a background and perspective.

Apart from its entertainment appeal, the internet has grown in popularity because it is free and simple to use the interface, it allows the transmission of massive amounts of

qualitative and quantitative data, it is efficient and effective, and it facilitates tools for all types of businesses and organizations (Reddick and King, 2001).

The Internet's ease of use and interactive communicative capabilities have forced many traditional print media to convert and repackage previous information to coincide with online offerings, resulting in the decline of newspapers (Herbert, 2001). Newspaper production has progressed from simple repackaging to more complex offerings. The development of the 'matrix,' which is the style used with various hyperlinks layers for each story to be "comprehensible on its own terms to have value to the user and to allow them to construct the new account in whatever way they chose," helped to usher in this transition (Campbell, 2004).

Digital journalism, in addition to providing news and commentary, is a medium that directs readers to information. Furthermore, digital journalism is a forum for 'many-to-many' communications with the potential to strengthen and sustain democracy (Ye and Li, 2006).

Traditional media primarily employs 'push' strategies to direct audiences toward specific content and even to deliver news directly to users' mobile phones, whereas digital journalism employs a 'pull' strategy, which provides users with a search engine from which news can be retrieved (Campbell, 2004, p. 252). Another advantage of online newspapers over traditional newspapers is that they are less polluting (no printing and distribution) and remove geographical boundaries (Pack, 1993).

Online newspapers have the advantage over print media especially when it comes to the use of Internet monitoring technology to track user behaviour, which provides editors and managers of online newspapers with immediate statistical feedback on the

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most read stories, allowing them to select news stories that are most interesting to their readers (Mensing and Greer, 2006).

Furthermore, the adaptability of online newspapers can assist traditional newspapers in maintaining their role as cultural "standard-bearers" for the community through online versions.

For example, in some communities, online newspapers can help disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, disabled, or individuals who are geographically isolated in society by providing a sense of connection between these individuals and the communities (Hofstetter, 1998).The above point to how cyberactivism provides sense of belonging to the disadvantaged people in our societies today.

2.2.4 Citizen Journalism

Also known as collaborative media, participatory journalism, democratic journalism, guerrilla journalism or street journalism, citizen journalism simply connotes the idea that "every citizen is a reporter." Citizen journalism involves non-professional individuals engaging in news reporting, utilizing digital platforms to share information. Gillmor (2004) describes it as "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information" (Gillmor, 2004). The rise of digital technologies, including smartphones and social media, has empowered citizens to document and share news events in real-time. Allan and Thorsen (2009) emphasize the role of digital technologies in facilitating citizen journalism, allowing for immediate and widespread news dissemination (Allan & Thorsen, 2009).

Citizen journalism dwells on the principle that the general public also plays "an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and

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information" (Bowman and Willis, 2003). The creation of citizen journalism is a significant new feature that the Internet and information communication technologies have brought to activism, social movement, and social change. This was not always the case. Participation in social movements was traditionally limited to "professional activists" before the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies. Today, general citizens who may not consider themselves activists are participating, ordinary citizens risen to the challenge. Seattle has been called the "birthplace of a global citizen's movement for a new global democracy" (Gopal, 2001).

Citizen journalism is widely regarded as an informal term, and there is debate over whether these individuals can truly be called journalists in all senses of the word. The debate is ongoing, and I would not wade into this. Egyptian Citizen Journalists, on the other hand, made an undeniable statement to the world that they are a force to be reckoned with (Sheedy, 2011).

In theory, citizen journalism has existed for a very long time in online mobilization (Hara, 2008). According to some, the origins of citizen journalism can be found in the debate over the normative nature of journalism. However, it was not until the advent of new media technologies that it exploded globally (Banda, 2010). Technology has been a major driving force in the global revival of citizen journalism. Its technological innovation fits a trend in which technological developments reduces intrinsic costs of mobilization and organization while increasing extrinsic costs of repression, (Banda, 2010).

Citizen journalism, while democratizing information, faces challenges related to credibility and verification. Hermida (2010) discusses the need for traditional media and citizens alike to critically assess and verify citizen-generated content to maintain

journalistic standards (Hermida, 2010). Citizen journalism has a global impact, particularly in regions with restricted media environments. Bruns and Highfield (2012) highlight how citizen journalism can act as a crucial alternative in countries with limited press freedom, providing diverse perspectives and challenging official narratives (Bruns & Highfield, 2012).

2.3 Perspectives of International and Regional Laws on Freedom of Expression

The literature is clear on the fact that freedom of expression is critical to the protection and promotion of human rights and the development of a democratic society (Hussein, 2008). It is in everyone's best interests to keep it, as long as it does not jeopardize other important rights. All rights, however, come with responsibilities, especially when those who exercise them have the potential to affect the lives of others. For example, in some cases, communications may cause more harm or bring disrepute than the value of protecting the right to express oneself. States have the authority to limit freedom of expression. This does not, however, imply that states have complete discretion over how and when to limit the right. According to international law, the legitimacy of any restriction on this fundamental right should be evaluated in accordance with international human rights standards (Hussein, 2008).

International instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the African Charter, though using different terminology, propose a three-part test to determine the legitimacy of restrictions on freedom of expression (Hussein, 2008). Article 29(2) of the UDHR expressly states that the restriction must be "for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order, and the general welfare in a democratic

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society," Article 19(3) of the ICCPR equally states that the restriction must be "provided by law" and "necessary for respect of the rights and reputation of others." Furthermore, the Johannesburg Principlesstate that no restriction on freedom of expression may be imposed on the grounds of national security unless the government can demonstrate that the restriction is mandated by law and is required in a democratic society to protect a legitimate national security interest (Mendel, 2003).

The primary component of the "three-part" test requires that restrictions on freedom of expression be imposed only by law. As a result, the right cannot be limited at the whim of a public official, and the legislature, the elected representatives of the people, is the only legitimate body to limit the right for a legitimate reason.108 Other public actors, such as police, government, or military officials, may not restrict free expression unless they are acting in accordance with the law.

To limit the right to free expression, there must be a legitimate goal. The ICCPR's Article 19(3) exhaustively lists the legitimate goals that justify restrictions on the right. Respect for others' rights and reputations, national security, public order, public health, and morals are all on the list. As a result, only these interests can be used to justify a restriction on free expression, and other interests cannot be used to justify a restriction on the right. International courts have rejected as illegitimate interests such as getting people to vote in an election, praising the enemy(which was not deemed to threaten national security), and promoting a strong economy

2.3.1 Cyberactivism and Human Rights

With the growing reliance on the internet as part of contemporary social life, scholars have paid attention to the ways in which cyber justice, for example, has become a viable approach for promoting good governance based on human rights norms. Mihr

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(2017), for instance, has shown the manner in which with the increasing growth of communications and interactions in the internet, human rights and governance regimes can be adapted to cyberspace. Mihr noted that this has become necessary as a means to ensure more accountability, transparency, and interaction among those who use the internet and those who manage and provide internet services.

In the fight for realization, internet technology is used as the primary means of communication and information dissemination. Most importantly, Social Network Sites (SNS) are frequently used as an instant and low-cost means of widely disseminating news of human rights violations and seeking a prompt response to violations. It has rapidly evolved from more traditional methods of human rights work, which always relied on well-developed communications strategies, to become a key tool for the human rights movement.

The expansion of the Internet's capacity and reach has attracted new actors, namely digital activists, for human rights advocacy and mobilization (Mihr, 2017). It also allows for interactive communication among the various components of the human rights movement, with local groups able to contact international partners directly without the need for intermediaries (Hick, Halpin, and Hoskins, 2000). It also allows activists to communicate directly with their target audience all over the world at the same time.

Digital human rights activists attempt to protect and promote human rights by disseminating information about human rights violations, mobilizing the online community for the greater good, and instigating collective action. Human rights activism has become more efficient, effective, and cost-effective as a result of the Internet. Technology has no geographical boundaries, human rights organizations and

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cyber activists can reach a much larger audience and garner international support than traditional media (Katz-Lacabe and Lacabe). Cyber activism plays a crucial role in documenting human rights abuses through digital tools. Social media, blogs, and online platforms enable individuals to share firsthand accounts and evidence. Ron (2017) explores the impact of digital technologies on human rights documentation and advocacy (Ron, 2017). Digital platforms enable activists to reach a global audience, garnering support and solidarity. Della Porta (2015) discusses how digital media contributes to the globalization of protest and human rights activism (Della Porta, 2015).

The active participation of vibrant human rights activists on social media is increasing in modern Ghana. Ghanaians can now share human rights violations on Facebook and Twitter, prompting both local and international responses. The overwhelming response to the trending video in which a two-year-old boy was mercilessly flogged is a prime example of Ghana's growing recognition and importance of digital activism for human rights. The online campaign brought the issue to the public's attention, which helped to strengthen the foundation of human rights activism and maximize the sustainability of human rights advocacy.

While cyber activism provides opportunities for human rights advocacy, it also presents challenges. Gurses and Ulu (2018) examine the risks associated with cyber activism, including censorship and surveillance, emphasizing the need for digital security in human rights work (Gurses & Ulu, 2018).

2.3.2 Online Activism and Freedom of Expression

A differing medium of communication is essential for facilitating the exchange of opinions, ideas, and information, as well as fully realizing the right to free expression. As a result, free expression activists have focused their efforts on the structure and regulation of the media environment, as it serves as a primary platform for public expression, ranging from print to digital media (Puddephatt, 2011).

Digital technologies do not fundamentally alter the definition of freedom of expression; rather, they alter the social conditions under which people express their opinions. Certainly, the introduction of the Internet and other digital media platforms would not fundamentally redefine the concept of the right; however, it has far-reaching implications in terms of its application.

Previously, being able to publish or broadcast meant being able to communicate ideas to a large audience. As a result, anyone's work was moderated by an established system with rules and guidelines. Any form of expression, whether through publication or broadcasting, was subject to strict editing and censorship. As a result, the introduction of the Internet has allowed for more permissive free expression. Furthermore, the Internet has transformed freedom of expression from a primarily private to a primarily public phenomenon. It constitutes an unprecedented free participatory forum for free expression. It gives each of us the ability to express ourselves, learn from others, and promote our points of view.

The Internet allows people to communicate in a variety of ways and forms, including text, images, voice, audio, and video, without regard to geography (Nunziato, 2009).

It accommodates diversity well by allowing not only people affiliated with mass media organizations, but also people from diverse social, economic, and political backgrounds to create their own audience and engage with the masses (Balkin, 2009). In the last decade, the Internet connected the world's population, which grew from millions to billions. During the same time period, social media has become a fact of life for civil society around the world, involving a wide range of actors, including ordinary citizens, activists, national and international NGOs, and governments (Shirky, 2011).

Social media platforms serve as central hubs for the dissemination of news and information, influencing public agendas (Chadwick & Dennis, 2019). These platforms wield significant agenda-setting power, with the ability to highlight specific issues, events, or perspectives, shaping the public discourse (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Social media platforms empower individuals to act as citizen journalists, contributing to the creation and dissemination of news (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014). The user-generated content on these platforms introduces diverse perspectives, challenging traditional media narratives (Bruns, 2018).

The viral nature of content on platforms like Twitter and Facebook facilitates the rapid amplification of political messages (Rogers, 2016). Algorithms on these platforms play a crucial role in determining the visibility and reach of political content, contributing to its impact (Tufekci, 2014).

Social media platforms have been linked to the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, contributing to political polarization (Sunstein, 2017). Users tend to be exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs, reinforcing ideological divides (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). Social media platforms provide avenues for political activism, mobilizing individuals and groups around social and political

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causes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The real-time nature of social media allows for immediate and widespread engagement in political events and movements (Lotan et al., 2011).

Ghanaians are increasingly joining popular social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter, which are known for their user participation and user-friendly features. Social media has broadened the arena for exercising individual freedom of expression, and Ghanaians are finally finding some space to express themselves.

The technological evolution of free expression is not limited to the presence of popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Anyone with a computer can easily create a blog and begin communicating with a potential audience of over two billion people (Cerf, 2012).

Blogging is crucial to the free flow of information around the world. It enables true information exchange in ways that traditional media did not previously. It enables the instant dissemination of information to a diverse audience through interactive sharing and commenting tools. Digital activism is an alternative form of media and citizen journalism, as well as a solid manifestation of the realization of freedom of expression.

2.3.3 Cyberactivism and National Security

In practice, the pursuit of national security and human rights is frequently pitted against one another. The sub-Saharan region has increasingly become a target of terrorist attacks in recent years. As a result, the issue of national security has become a priority for the Ghanaian and most of government. To be sure, real and potential threats in countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Benin, and neighboring Côte

d'Ivoire, Togo, and Burkina Faso where aggressive armed groups and militias are identified has significantly put Ghana on its readiness toes. In the fight against this threat, the internet has become a key tool. One of the major fronts on which online expression is restricted in Ghana is in relation to the state's national security.

While cyber activists see their missions as legitimate online protests, the government may view their actions as a breach of online security or a threat to national security. However, there is no clear line between what is and is not a legitimate expression of an idea. The ambiguity of this interaction and its consequences can make it extremely dangerous for human rights activists to campaign for and defend their actions in court.

2.3.4 Cyberactivism and Civil Disobedience

Recent studies have identified the internet as a platform for civil disobedience (George, 2013). Some studies have noted that governments frequently regulate speakers in the public interest to ensure that they do not cause a nuisance (Tucker, 1985). If the content of an online expression is offensive or provocative, it may cause annoyance. It usually happens when it infringes on the legitimate activities of others.

When directed at a specific target for illegal activity and likely to cause imminent danger, an online expression may lose its constitutional protection from criminal prosecution. People sometimes use social media to advocate for illegal, dangerous, or violent behavior (Edward and Morin, n.d). For example, a Facebook post encouraging illegal or violent opposition to government policies poses a clear and present danger to the Constitution. In situations where the speaker's expressions violate the legitimate interests of a third party and the well-being of the public at large, the government has the responsibility to intervene if it carries a legitimate goal.

2.3.3.1 Mobilization

One of the most widely discussed applications of online technologies in activism has been mobilization (Surman and Reilly 2003). In this context, mobilization refers to the Internet's ability to bring people together for a specific reason, whether in virtual communities or in physical locations. In my opinion, there would be no discussion about the Internet being a powerful tool for activism if it did not possess this power: the power of mobilization. This is supported by empirical evidence from various acts of activism that have occurred around the world.

It is difficult to discuss the impact of new media on activism in modern history without mentioning the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1993 and the Multilateral Agreement on Investments in France in 1997.

The use of e-mail and the web for the Seattle World Trade Organization protests and the global fight against the MAI demonstrate how well the internet has integrated with traditional campaigns and protests (Surman and Reilly 2003). The role of new media in organizing the WTO protests was critical. The Internet was thought to be a less expensive and less congested way to mobilize.

Furthermore, the Internet-enable people outside of public institutions and political organizations to join the movement (Siddall, 2010).

2.3.3.2 Communication

In an article for Al-Jazeera, Joseph Stiglitz stated, Globalization and modern technology now allow social movements to transcend borders as quickly as ideas can (Stiglitz, 2011). Communication would undoubtedly be critical in any situation involving a group of people who share the common goal of creating activism in order

to effect some form of change. Online communication differs from one-way communication such as television, radio, and newspapers in that users can respond to messages in real time rather than just receiving them (Sheedy, 2011). Because of the real-time nature of Internet technologies and social media, a more enhanced communication medium is possible. Digital communication has become more real-time as new media platforms are constantly developed. Online instant messaging, chat rooms, and post commenting have made online communication more interactive. This feature is also available to mobile phone users. The instant nature of Internet-powered communication has been greatly aided by mobile phones.

The Internet's communication opportunities are inextricably linked to its ability to mobilize people for a specific movement. Communication is essential for achieving organizational strength (Sibbernsen, 2012). Mobile phones and the Internet both offer exciting new possibilities for one-to-one and one-to-many communication (Sarazin, 2011). A single user has the ability to reach hundreds of thousands of people.

This increases the ability to organize. Even beyond the scopes of Internet activism and mobilization, hundreds of people meet new people on the Internet every day. Anonymity is a feature of the Internet that encourages mobilization. Internet users can maintain and control their personal anonymity and weak ties with other people. It is extremely advantageous for strangers to collaborate in this manner. People are more likely to open up and cooperate when they believe their identity is somewhat protected. New media technologies also enable activists and ordinary citizens to circumvent physical barriers erected by governing institutions and regimes (Sibbernsen, 2012). This can be seen by studying the Cameroon protests.Cameroonian youths took to the streets of Cameroon in February 2008.The protestors were

dissatisfied with the country's economic conditions and the constant rise in fuel prices. The majority of these young people were born during the presidency of President Paul Biya, who served as Prime Minister from 1975 to 1982. It should be noted that demonstrations are illegal in Cameroon. The uproar of the youth surprised the majority of Cameroonians. This was by far the most violent protest staged in Cameroon in recent memory. What I want to highlight is how the government reacted in the midst of the protests. The government closed down major private media companies, including television, radio, and print media Suifon (2008).

Cameroon experienced a surge in anti-government protests in February 2011. This time, the protestors demanded that their president resign.During the protests, the government shut down all private media outlets once more.Foreign and international journalists were barred from working in the country.A media blackout occurred (Sarazin, 2011).There was no unusual report about Cameroon in any international media outlet. Apart from football, search engines returned no results. Twitter, on the other hand, was telling a different story.

Tweets from Cameroon claimed that a revolution was in full swing. These tweets drew attention to Cameroon, and international human rights organizations soon descended on the country. Prior to the presidential elections in Cameroon in October 2011, the government suspended access to twitter (Sarazin, 2011).

2.3.3.3 Online Publishing

Even if they are working alone or in isolation, one Internet user can attract the attention of other users online and spark reactions that lead to activism. When researching the benefits of the Internet, it is clear that online publishing has significantly increased activist activities all over the world.

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Aside from professional journalists and writers who have established an Internet presence, there are many people all over the world who have become "Internet journalists and writers," reporting and writing about issues in their societies. This relatively new trend of online publishing has evolved into an important supplement to print publication. In many cases, it has not only supplemented but also replaced it. The days of sending out printed newsletters are quickly passing, and they are being replaced by electronic formats (Surmann and Reilly 2003).

The backbone of citizen journalism has been online publication. The rise of citizen journalism is primarily due to technological advancements (Kelly, 2009). Technology advancements have made online information very mobile and portable. The ease with which online publications can be shared has greatly aided the growth of activist activities around the world. Online publication has also contributed to an increase in the number of alternative media channels that tell stories that are not covered by the mainstream media. This is due to the low cost of establishing a credible web presence, which has enabled them to 'exist' without the traditional trappings such as an office, staff, and even funding. This is their strength and power, which translated into large-scale mobilization and the ability to quickly spread a message around the world (Surmann and Reilly 2003).

Ordinary people did not have the opportunity to share their findings and opinions about a topic with a large group of listeners (or readers) in the past (prior to the introduction of the Internet and web technologies). To reach hundreds of people, capital-intensive investments in printing presses, television transmitters, and radio transmitters were required. As a result, the twentieth century became known as the century of wealthy media barons (Kelly 2009).The material requirements for effective

information and communication production are now owned by a much larger number of people than the basic means of information production and exchange were only two decades ago (Benkler, 2006).

In this chapter I reviewed relevant extant literature on cyberactivism and its implications for press freedom. The chapter was divided into two main sections. The first section dealt with a theoretical review. I employed the Technological determinism theory and network society theory (1991) by Jan van Dijk to give an account and interpretation of how cyberactivism is redefining press freedom in contemporary Ghana. The second section looked at an empirical review of relevant related literature which further explained the phenomenon of cyberactivism.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach upon which the entire study is carried out. It specifically covers the philosophical underpinning, research paradigm, approach, design, the population of the study, study setting, sampling techniques and sample size, sources of data, data collection technique and data analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and ethical issues.

3.1 Philosophical Underpinning

In this study, I employed the interpretative research paradigm. The interpretative research paradigm assumes relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, a naturalist methodology, and balanced axiology (Kivunja&Kuyini, 2017). The ontological stand of interpretivism is relativism. Thus, the reality is subjective (Scotland, 2012). The central goal of using interpretivism in this study is strategic as it helps us understand the subjective world of human experience (Kivunja&Kuyini, 2017). As people differ in varieties of ways and different people have different opinions on the same subject, they can have different perspectives on a social reality (Wahyuni, 2012). The role of the researcher is to become a part of the subjects being studied so as to understand the contextual meaning that the subjects are making. A complete effort is made to understand the viewpoint of the subjects being observed rather than the viewpoint of the researcher. It is also referred to as the constructivism paradigm because reality is socially constructed (Kivunja&Kuyini, 2017).

The epistemology of interpretivism is transactional and subjectivist where the researcher and subjects under investigation are assumed to be linked interactively and

findings are created as the investigation progresses (Guba& Lincoln, 1994). Knowledge is derived culturally and over a period of time. The interpretive paradigm does not question ideologies and accepts them as they are (Scotland, 2012).

Interpretive methodology tries to understand the phenomenon from an individual perspective, keeping in mind the historical and cultural context the individual is placed (Scotland, 2012). The interpretive researcher relies on qualitative data methods or a combination of qualitative and quantitative (Mackenzie &Knipe, 2006) for the analysis of data. The different methodology used in interpretivism is case studies, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ethnography (Scotland, 2012) just to mention but a few.

This paradigm was appropriate for the study because I sought to understand how cyber activism is redefining press freedom in Ghana. This best fits the assertion of Dieronitou (2014) that the interpretive paradigm employs qualitative methodologies to interpret and describe social realities.

3.2 Research Approach

The study used a qualitative research approach. The primary goal for my use of qualitative research is to understand experience as closely as possible to how the study participants experience it. Qualitative research, then, is employed to comprehend the fundamental causes, viewpoints, and motives of participants. It offers an understanding of the issue or aids in formulating concepts or theories for possible quantitative studies (Yauch&Steudel, 2003).

Focus group interviews, projective techniques, and in-depth interviews are frequently employed. Qualitative research data describe an object's attributes or characteristics.

Qualitative data are usually gathered by observation, interviews or focus groups, and projective techniques, but may also be gathered from written documents and through case studies. In qualitative research, there is more emphasis on describing the qualities or characteristics of human behavior, emotion, personality characteristics, user behaviors, needs, desires, and routines (Yauch&Steudel, 2003). Participants in qualitative studies often involve smaller numbers of tools including and utilizing open-ended questionnaires and interview guides. This type of research is best used to answer how and why questions and is not well suited to generalizable what, when, and who questions (Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

3.3 Research Design

This study primarily adopts an cyber ethnographic design and supplements it with interviews. Ethnography is a qualitative research method that provides a detailed description of a specific culture and society (Agafonoff, 2006). The cyber ethnographic design also referred to as the online ethnography or netnography primarily involves critically studying and immensely oneself into online culture in other to have a deeper insight and understanding into virtual interactions and activities within the existence of the cyberspace. Skagey (2011) asserts that, the cyber ethnography provides researchers with the opportunity to collect data from an online community. The cyber ethnography allows for the heterogeneity of the participants as researchers are exposed to people of multiple and diverse cultural background. It also enables researchers to gather data on the virtual social world (akturan, 2015). Kozinets (2010) opines that the cyber ethnographic design is cost effective that personal interviews, focus group discussions and the traditional ethnography, the cyber ethnography gives the opportunity to the researcher to elicit responses through

online means such as online observation of participants, online interviews and the extraction of electronic materials such as videos and photos from virtual platforms.

By employing this design, it allowed for the successful collection of data from cyber activism sites with Ghanaian content. The data collected within the cyberspace were augmented with face-to-face interviews with senior media personnel. This was essential not only in verifying the data collected from cyberspace but also get firsthand information from these key actors of the media space. It also made it possible for me to seek clarification on existing media items about the activities of activists.

In the current study, I collected data from different credible cyber activism sites; these media sites include Loud Silence TV (With all due respect), Captain Smart (OnuaMaakye, Onua TV), KwabenaAsareObeng (A Plus TV), and Twene Jonas TV. Doing so made it possible for me to compare records on issues of national interest (governance, entertainment, economy, education, social justice, development, crime, etc.) reported on these cyber activism sites.

I read and watched the same stories closely from different activism platforms for the purpose of triangulation. A second strategy according to Welch (1999, p.10) is to conduct interviews with key stakeholders' participants. This strategy was also pursued in the current study. Interviews were found to be valuable, not simply because it was possible for me to check my interpretation of the records against the recollections of the key actors: an additional advantage was that some of the informants had personal documentation of their own such as Facebook live videos which they made available to me and which supplemented the records available in cyberspace.

3.4 The Population of the Study

The population in this study was all cyberactivists whose focus is on activities in Ghana's Fourth Republic. The population of interest in research is the study's target population it intends to study or treat (Majid, 2018). The target and accessible population for this study was all cyber activists who have cyber activism sites created purposively to discuss issues of national interest in Ghana.

3.5 Study Setting

3.5.1 Brief History of Ghana

The Permanent Mission of Ghana to the UN describes Ghana as one of the most stable countries in West Africa since its transition to multi-party democracy in 1992. It was formerly known as the Gold Coast. In 1957, Ghana became the first self-governing country on the African continent, under President Kwame Nkrumah. The Ghana flag incorporated the Pan-African colours. These colours (red, yellow, green and black) represent an ideology of political unity between all who live in Africa. Ghana's coat of arms was created to proudly display the black star, a symbol of Ghana's emancipation, and the national currency was changed from Pounds to Cedis. The country is named after the great medieval trading empire that was located northwest of the modern-day Ghana until its demise in the 13th century.

Ghana shares boundaries with Burkina Faso to the North, Cote D'ivoire to the West, Togo to the East and the Gulf of Guinea to the South. Ghana covers a land area of about 238,533 sq km (92,098 sq miles) with an estimated population of 30.8 million (GSS, 2021). The populations of Ghana live in a cosmopolitan metropolis, and the government recognises a host of indigenous languages as national languages.

The regions of Ghana constitute the first level of sub-national government administration within the Republic of Ghana. There are currently sixteen regions, further divided for administrative purposes into 216 local districts. The former ten regional boundaries were officially established in 1987 when the Upper West Region was inaugurated as the state's newest administrative region. Although the official inauguration was in 1987, the Upper West Region had already functioned as an administrative unit since the break-up of the Upper Region in December 1982, prior to the 1984 national census. The referendum on the creation of six new regions was held on December 27, 2018. All proposed new regions were approved (The Permanent Mission of Ghana to the UN).

3.5.2 Brief History on Media in Ghana

The history of media in Ghana can be traced to 1882 when Ghana was known as the Gold coast. The Royal Gold Coast Gazette was started as the official newspaper for the government by the then-British governor Sir Charles Mccarthy, who was in charge of the nation when it was still a British colony. Afterward, in 1987, Charles and Edmund Bannerman's African-run newspaper also began to be published.

The founder of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), Kwame Nkrumah, later entered journalism and founded the Accra Evening News, Sekondi Morning Telegraph, and Daily Mail newspapers in an effort to advance the ideology of his own party (CPP).

In the same vein, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), another influential political group at the period, founded the National Times, Talking Drums, and Ashanti Pioneer publications. It is notable that in 1962, the CPP government bought the daily graphic newspaper on behalf of the nation. Additionally, the government used the newspaper licensing statute, which mandated that newspaper editors and

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publishers renew their licenses with the government annually, as a tool to exert complete control over the growth of private news media (Twumasi, 1981).

Regarding electronic media, broadcasting in Ghana is said to have begun in the colonial era dating as far back as 1935 when the then Governor of the Gold coast; Sir Arnold Hodson established the first and the only wired radio distribution system in Accra. It was later given the name station ZOY and started service on 31 July 1935. The period between 1946 and 1953, saw station ZOY being administered by the public relations department of the colonial Government (Alhassan, 2005). In 1953, the station's name was changed to Gold Coast Broadcasting Service (GCBS) and transformed into a separate department of government. The (GCBS) was later renamed the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). Television was introduced in Ghana in 1965 as part of the services and operations of the GBC.

Other commercial television networks that are now broadcasting free-to-air include TV3, METRO TV, TV AFRICA, NET2 TV, VIASAT1, CRYSTAL TV, and MULT TV. The year 1995 was a watershed year for independent, non-profit private broadcasting. In accordance with the 1992 constitution, which provides freedom of speech and freedom of ownership of the means of expression, whether they be print or electronic, the long-standing monopoly held by the state-owned GBC was broken. This was not without difficulty because the NDC government was reluctant to issue permits to individuals at the time. It all began on November 19, 1994, when the Independent Media Corporation of Ghana (IMCG) launched the nation's first private radio station Radio EYE.

But on December 4, 1994, the police seized radio EYE's offices, took them to an Accra circuit court, and accused them of running a radio station without a permit and

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written permission (Ayitevie, 1996). The Ghana Frequency Registration Control Board (GFRCB) assigned a number of frequencies for private FM radio and TV transmissions following a number of public objections and legal actions (Sakyi-Addo, 1996). Today, there are numerous television stations operating, along with dozens of newspapers, including two state-owned publications. Radio is the most popular medium with more than 300 FM stations operating nationwide.

3.6 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Qualitative sampling is made up of small sampling units studied in-depth (Bryman, 2012). The appropriate number of participants chosen for qualitative research depends mainly on the type of research question, the type of approach used in the study, material and time resources available to the researcher as well as the number of researchers involved in the study (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). In this study, I purposively sampled some cyberactivists who have cyberactivism sites which focus on issues relating to Ghana. The sample size of the study was determined by data saturation. According to Lichtman (2010, p. 142), for instance, given the nature of qualitative research and the type of data collected, there are no "hard" rules for how many units should be included in the research sample. It is accepted by scholars that in a qualitative study, the sample size could be determine when the responses from participants are the same, and there is no difference opinion or theme to be drawn out of the interview (Nsfconsulting, 2021). In a similar vein, Morse (2015) posits that data saturation is embraces by many researchers to be the yardstick of qualitative rigor, thus, the research can interview or gather data to the point where they think no new idea or knowledge has been unearth from the data collection section.

3.7 Data Collection Technique

For the purposes of this research, an observational online content analysis was conducted on four personal online writers' homepages namely: Kelvin Taylor (Loud Silence TV "With all due respect"), Captain Smart (OnuaMaakye, Onua TV), Kwabena Asare Obeng (A Plus TV), and (Twene Jonas TV). The research considered observable contents on the internet from January 2015 to July 2022. In particular, this analysis is focused on published contents related to freedom of the press that emphasizes a series of historical events: For example; the attack on SanleyNiiBlewu and Joseph Amstrong, two TV3 reporters on 12 August 2020, and the murder of Ahmed Hussein-Suale, a member of the investigative journalist's group Tiger Eye Pi on 16 January 2019 in Ghana.

The rational for choosing the period between 2015 and 2022 was that online journalism during these periods played a crucial role in informing and communicating with the local citizens and hence affected the Ghana government's political decision to accept the public's demand. Following the death of Ahmed Hussein-Suale, for example, online journalism was the main source of updated news and political analysis.

The topic areas were defined to specify the boundaries of the content analysis to be consistent with the research questions and related to the goals of the study. The areas include news, articles, themes, political analysis, illustrations and pictures, opinions, discussion, videos, local press reaction to what is published online, and any information related to freedom of the press.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research has received many criticisms from quantitative researchers, perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be catered for in the same way in naturalistic work (Shenton, 2004).

Notwithstanding, scholars on research methods, Silverman (2001), for instance, has demonstrated how qualitative researchers can incorporate measures that deal with these issues, and investigators such as Pitts (1994) have attempted to respond directly to the issues of validity and reliability in their own qualitative studies. Many naturalistic investigators have, however, preferred to use different terminology to distance themselves from the positivist paradigm. One such author is Guba (1981) who proposes four criteria that he believes should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study. By addressing similar issues, Guba's constructs correspond to the criteria employed by the positivist investigator: a) credibility (in preference to internal validity); b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalisability); c) dependability (in preference to reliability); d) Confirmability (in preference to objectivity) (Guba, 1981).

Guba's constructs have been accepted by many. In this study, I adopted Guba's constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and further explained the strategies I employed.

3.7.2 Credibility

Credibility is a criterion in qualitative research that deals with the question: "How congruent are the findings with reality?" Some argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1981). To ensure credibility in the current study, I did the following:

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First, I ensured prolonged engagement of cyber activism sites as recommended by Guba and Lincoln. I read and watched the contents (activities) of the materials retrieved from the archives several times to familiarise myself with the data to ensure a better understanding of how cyber activism is redefining press freedom in the Fourth Republic of Ghana. Second, I booked frequent debriefing sessions between my supervisor and me. These debriefing sessions widened my scope of cyber activism. Such collaborative sessions were used to discuss alternative approaches, and my supervisor drew attention to flaws in the proposed course of action. The meetings also provided a sounding board for possible testing of developing ideas and interpretations, and probing from my supervisor helped me to recognize my biases and preferences. Third, I kept a "reflective commentary," which is a written record kept by the researcher during the study process. The specifics of what the researcher did, thought and felt while assessing the data are recorded in a reflective notebook. The reflective commentary was used to record the initial impressions of each data collection session, patterns appearing to emerge in the data collected and theories generated. The commentary played a key role in what Guba and Lincoln (1981) referred to as "progressive subjectivity," which is a technique whereby a researcher archives their changing expectations and assumptions for a study. Another important role commentary plays is that it allows for the monitoring of the researcher's own developing constructions, which writers consider critical in establishing credibility.

3.7.3 Transferability

According to Shenton (2004, p.69), external validity "is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations". In positivist work, the concern often lies in demonstrating that the results of the work at hand can be applied to a wider population. Since the findings of a qualitative study are specific to

a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. Erlandson et al (1993) note that many naturalistic inquirers believe that, in practice, even conventional generalisability is never possible as all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur. A contrasting view is offered by Stake (2006) and Denscombe (2010), who suggest that, although each case may be unique, it is also an example within a broader group and, as a result, the prospect of the transferability should not be immediately rejected. To ensure the transferability of the study outcome, I ensured that a sufficient thick description of the phenomenon under investigation is provided to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations.

3.7.4 Dependability

In addressing the issue of reliability, the positivist employs techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004, p.71). In order to address the dependability issue more directly, I ensured that the processes within the study were reported in detail to enable future researchers to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. Thus, the research design may be viewed as a "prototype model". Such in-depth coverage allows readers to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed.

3.7.5 Confirmability

The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity. Here steps must be taken to help ensure, as far as possible, that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the

characteristics and preferences of the researcher. The role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must again be emphasised, in this context to reduce the effect of investigator bias (Shenton, 2004, p.72). To ensure confirmability, I acknowledged all beliefs underpinning decisions made and methods adopted. In terms of results reporting, preliminary theories that ultimately were not borne out by the data were discussed.

3.7.6 Reflexivity

Many critiques of qualitative work include complaints such as difficulty reproducing the procedure, difficulties with the generalisability of findings, and a lack of scientificity and methodological rigor (Patnaik, 2013). In response to these criticisms, I observed methodological reflexivity.According to Patnaik (2013), methodological reflexivity attempts to guarantee that standardized methods have been followed in the conduct of research while respecting the researcher's relationship with the research. In conducting interviews with participants, an interactive questioning strategy was adopted in order to develop rapport and encourage participants to reveal more about their life.

3.8 Data Analysis

The study employed the Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is widely used in various academic fields such as psychology, sociology, political science, and communications (Weare and Lin, 2000). This method of analysis is particularly important for this study because what is needed is a systematic and replicable process (Stemler, 2001). In order to have reliable results from the content analysis, the research should be consistent, free from ambiguity of words, and possess well defined and coded words (Weber, 1990). Content analysis reveals the number and the pattern coverage of an

organization's values concerning daily news and whether it contradicts its stated mission and purpose.

Furthermore, online content analysis measures similar standards used in print coverage, but it includes elements vital to online journalism such as story postings, story layers, and audience behaviours (McLellan & Porter, 2007).

Weare and Lin (2000) explore several methods that researchers can use to overcome the Web challenges like content authenticity, source verification, accuracy of news reporting, and journalism norms and standards. They conclude that the internet reduce the cost of data collections, made new sources of data available, introduced new areas of research and helped improve the quality and validity of content analysis. However, due to the structure of the internet such as the fast growth, fast change, scope of information, and its chaotic structure, there is a tendency on the part of journalists and columnists to confuse the messages and the representative sample of population, which can threaten the external validity of online research (Weare & Lin, 2000).

Audio-visual materials were drawn from cyber activism sites and subjected to qualitative content analysis (QCA) to explore the nature of cyber activism in Ghana from 2015 to 2022. Attention was devoted to analysing the implications of cyber activism for press freedom in Ghana and also examining actions against cyberactivists by the State. The QCA was done in four stages. In the first stage, all selected videos were watched and re-watched in order to be conversant with the reports. I noted as many credible or reasonable initial ''open codes'' as possible across the entire data set that was generated.

The second stage focused on watching the videos more closely and approving a set of initial codes which were considered very relevant to the data in order to reduce the

number of words and phrases to allow a manageable list of headings that account for all the data in the materials. Thirdly, there was an integration of all relevant generated initial open codes that have a resemblance to initial codes used for categorization.

In the last stage of the analysis, data were reviewed and refined from the themes and selected extracts that supported and described the themes, meanings were assigned to emerged themes and categories in relation to theory, previous related studies, and the general Ghanaian socio-cultural context. To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis process, I thoroughly discussed codes and themes with my supervisor before further analyses were done. Cross-validation and group interpretations were done to reduce bias and increase the credibility of the research findings.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Most research studies involve human participants and this makes it imperative for human research ethics to be followed for the protection of the dignity of the participants. According to Blumberg et.al (2005) ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the conduct of people and guides the norms or standards of behavior of people and their relationships with each other. Akaranga&Makau (2016) defined ethics as social norms for conduct that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Research ethics is a branch of applied ethics and also defines rules of conduct for researchers. Fouka&Mantzorou (2011) argued that research ethics are the guidelines to be followed by researchers to protect the dignity of their participants and publish well the information that is researched. They suggested that such ethics must be followed by researchers to prevent the abuse of participants and protection of human rights in research.

It is vital that a researcher observes appropriate research values at all stages to avoid research misconduct. This study relied on ethical considerations such as informed consent and voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, and risk of harm and plagiarism (Burns & Grove, 2005; Denzin& Lincoln, 2011 and Kumar, 1999).

3.9.1 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Denzin & Lincoln (2011) argued that informed consent and voluntary participation is the pillar on which the data collection process in a research study is built. In affirmation, Fouka&Mantzorou (2011) also suggested that informed consent protects a participant's right to autonomy as it gives an opportunity for participants to know more about a research study and voluntarily give their consent to either be part or decide otherwise. Informed consent and voluntary participation, therefore, frown on researchers coercing participants for a study and gives the power of freedom of choice to participants to decide whether to participate in a study or decline.

The core argument of this principle is that individuals can make informed decisions to voluntarily participate in a research study only if they have information on the possible risks and benefits of the research. Thus, it requires full disclosure of the intent of the research study, the information required of participants, and the possible physical harm or discomfort participants are likely to face. This is to allow the participants to make informed choices regarding their participation in a study.

In this study, I sought the consent of the participants by giving full details and thorough explanations to participants on who the researcher is, the purpose of the study, the kind of data required from the participants, the significance of the study, the mode of data collection and the participants rights to withdraw from the study at any point in time they choose to do so.

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3.9.2 Risk of Harm, Anonymity, and Confidentiality

In this study, the principles of anonymity, confidentiality, and risk of harm were preserved by using appropriate coding systems in the data collection, analysis, and interpretations of the findings.

Anonymity and confidentiality are important steps in protecting the participants from potential harm. Denzin& Lincoln (2011) stated that participant anonymity means the participant's identity is unknown to the researcher. On the other hand, participants' confidentiality means the participants' identities are known to the researcher but the data was de-identified and the identity is kept confidential. It is important the identity of the participant is kept confidential or anonymous to avoid the potential harm to participants on the sensitive information they give. Again, the researcher must consider the potential harm to the participants, the researcher, the wider community, and the institution under study. Denzin& Lincoln (2011) argued that such harm can be discomfort or physiological, emotional, social, and economic in nature. Paying attention to these potential harms will help researchers come out with adequate measures to eliminate, isolate, and minimize the risk.

Plagiarism

Akaranga and Makau (2016) defined plagiarism as the practice where an author or researcher has to ensure that their work is original and devoid of texts, results or even expressions that are borrowed, manipulated, or used from other authors or publications without duly acknowledging the source. Plagiarism they argued is research misconduct and has the potential to affect the integrity of the researcher. To avoid being caught up in the plagiarism web, the researcher has duly referenced all documents of other people used in this study.

This chapter presented the methodological approach upon which the study was conducted. It specifically covered the philosophical underpinning, research paradigm, approach, design, the population of the study, study setting, sampling techniques and sample size, sources of data, data collection techniqueand data analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and ethical issues.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and presentation of results in line with the objectives of the study and existing literature. The study was set to analyse the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic. The study was guided by the following research objectives: First, to examine the nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic. Second, to analyse the effects of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic, and third, to examine the role of cyberactivism in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic. In line with the research objectives, the following research questions were posed: First, what is the nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic? Second, how does cyberactivism affect press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic? Third, what roles does cyberactivism play in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic? The data analysis is done within the remits of the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed earlier in chapter two by employing the network society and technological determinism theories for a detailed analysis of findings.

4.1 Nature of Cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic

To ensure a better appreciation of the nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic, I was interested in understanding the forms and tools of cyberactivism in the Fourth Republic of Ghana. The data gathered from cyber sites on the internet and interviews with purposively identifiable media personnel revealed that the tools used by digital activists are vast and changing constantly as technology evolves. These

include online petitions; Social networks; Blogs; and Micro-blogging. Below, I detail these.

Online Petitions

Earlier in chapter two, it was indicated that communications technologies, are the basis of society in the past, present, and even the future (Logan, 2010). My review of the literature suggested that technologies that have an impact on, for example, the television or the printing press have been 'modified' in their most excessive form; the whole of society is being defined by technological improvements: new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals (Chandler, 1995). At the least, a wide range of social and cultural phenomena are shaped by technology. 'Human factors' and social arrangements are seen as secondary (Chandler, 1995). Emerging technologies such as social media are shaping and transforming how activists interact with their target audiences (McLuhan, Gordon, Lamberti, & Scheffel-Dunand, 2011).

Relating these concepts to the study, the internet has characteristics that allow its users to interact with messages and each other. It also enables users not only to receive information but then gives them the ability to send it to other people in their networks, fostering participation and interactivity.To be sure, information I selected from cyber sites suggested that cyberactivists employ websites such as Change.org**,** ipetitions.org, and Avaaz.org for their online activism, where they communicate with others worldwide regarding their cause. For example; Myjoyonline (2022) reported that: "Ghanaians have begun an online petition to the General Legal Council (GLC) against its decision not to call Ghanaian YouTuber, ElormAbabio, popularly known as Ama Governor, to the bar this Friday despite the successful completion of her law

program." In this particular instance, ElormAbabio received a letter from the General Legal Counsel (GLC) secretary advising her that she would not be admitted to the bar. The GLC made its judgment in response to a complaint from a "concerned citizen" who complained that Ababio "lacks good character." This situation prompted online activism regarding the plight of Miss Ababio. A few days after receiving her letter, a Twitter-circulating online petition that sought 9,000 signatures gathered 8,982 respondents. This suggests that online petition has the potential of promoting and protecting press freedom.

Figure 1: Justice for Ama Governor

Source: Myjoyonline (2022)

Figure 2: Justice for Ama Governor
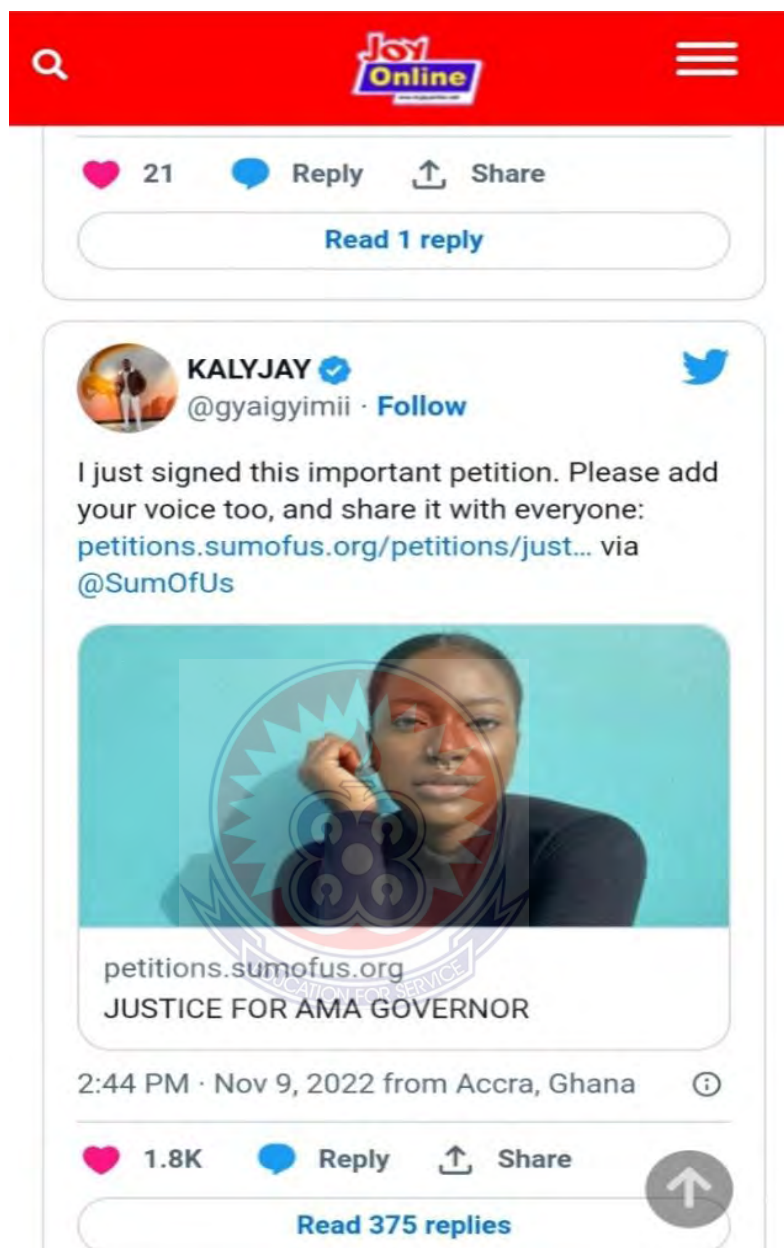
Source: Myjoyonline (2022)

Social networks

High traffic websites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have been successful in promoting a cause, gaining support, and shedding light on issues that might otherwise go unnoticed by the traditional media outlets. Facebook, for instance, had a role in organizing and publicizing the 2011 anti-government protests in Tunisia and Egypt. Additionally, social media helped organize participants in Hong Kong's pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019 and linked environmental activists from around the world as part of Extinction Rebellion or Fridays for Future.

In Ghana, social networks have played a significant role in social, cultural, political and economic role with significant human rights implications. For instance, on Wednesday, 4th August 2021, thousands of protestors marched in Accra, the capital of Ghana, with the hashtag "#FixTheCountry," marking the most remarkable demonstration against President Nana Akufo's administration. The protesters marched through the city center while wearing red and black and screaming patriotic songs. Particularly worried about the worsening economic and political situations in the country, the protestors carried signs that read, among others: "Corruption begets Poverty" and "Fix Our Education System Now" (Aljazeera.com, 4 Aug 2021).The anti-government protest on Wednesday 4th Aug 2021 marked the most recent one following the Supreme Court dismissal of the main opposition party's attempt to have Akufo-reelection turned down. With a slim majority in parliament, Akufo-Addo was successful in winning a second term.

The protesters complained of the many hardships in the country and the lack of sanity in the public sector. According to Frederick Koomson a 28 year old demonstrator as reported by the media, "nothing is working" (Aljazeera.com, 4 Aug 2021). The protest

thus became a forum for drawing the attention of the government to the need to become aware of the many happenings of the country leading to hardship. Significantly, in a region plagued by political unrest and religious bloodshed, Ghana is frequently praised as having one of the most comparably reliable democracies. But the hotly disputed election from the previous year heightened political tensions. During this period too, the government introduced and implemented new taxes. Besides, rising fuel prices led to an increase in the price of several essential commodities and services. Against this backdrop and many other happenings at the time, the #FixTheCountry protest on Twitter, led by social media activists, sought to draw attention to fiscal issues and poor government administration. Fatima Mensah, a 35-year-old political activist, said, "If the political authorities won't fix this country, we want to inform them that we are capable of ruining their career since we put them in power."   (Aljazeera.com, 4 Aug 2021). To be sure, what started as a small online activism, eventually garnered significant national and international media attention as pictured below.
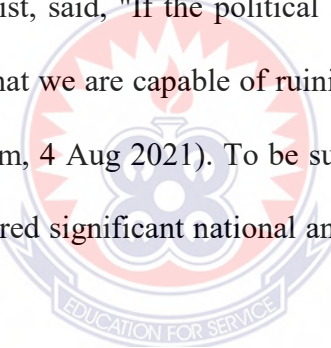
Figure 3: Ghana's #FixTheCountry Protesters take to Accra's Streets.

Source: Aljazeera (2021)

Blogs

Blogs are essentially a type of citizen journalism for the people. Blogs has the advantage of offering a useful way of directly communicating with an audience about any subject without filtering and have been employed in a number of internet campaigns. Twitter and other micro blogging platforms are therefore used to raise awareness of a problem or an activist event. Frequently used as a digital tool for message dissemination is Twitter's hash tag feature, which enables users to have their tweets contribute to a multi-user conversation by typing a keyword or phrase preceded by a hash tag.

Given its powerful activist potential, in many weak democratic jurisdictions where human rights standards are largely ignored, state agencies have found ways of censuring its usage. A very typical example is Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter. This activist platform is rigorously censored by the Chinese government, but users get around this restriction by employing code phrases when posting about topics that might be controversial to the government. Other well-known movements, like #metoo, #blacklivesmatter, and #fridaysforfuture, used the hashtag to quickly distribute a message throughout the globe while using social media as a tool for disruption and resistance.

4.2 Implications of Cyberactivism on Press Freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic

The aforementioned discussion has demonstrated the manner in which social media is useful for social, economic, and political mobilization. In the ensuing discussion, I demonstrate the implications of these fora in relation to press freedom in Ghana. I do so by seeking to address a central research objective in the current study. It seeks to analyze the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana particularly

during the fourth republican regime and specific threat to national security and human rights.

Promotion of Freedom of Expression

As already illustrated in chapter two, freedom is "the condition of being able to choose and carry out purposes" (Merrill, 1989, p. 19). Citing Merrill, it was indicated that that freedom should be free of external constraints and provide effective power to do whatever one wants. Thus, freedom should include both negative (freedom from restraint) and positive (freedom to achieve some good) freedoms. The concept of freedom in the context of journalism is difficult to grasp because it implies that complete freedom exists somewhere between "compulsion and inertia" (Merrill, 1989, p. 24).

In Ghana, freedom of expression is considered as a fundamental human rights issue. Given its crucial importance, Ghana has ratified several international instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention against Torture (CAT), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). In addition, Ghana has incorporated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) into its 1992 Constitution.

Thus, at the national level, Ghana's domestic legal foundation is provided by the 1992 Constitution. This Constitution dedicates an entire chapter (Chapter 12) to the freedom and independence of the media. Thus, it provides for freedom of speech and expression, including freedom of the press and other media. In addition, the

Constitution mandates the media and the public to hold the state accountable to the people. The latter responsibility, in this sense, entails the provision of information to enable the media and the public to play its watchdog role. Article 162(2) provides that "there shall be no censorship in Ghana."

In spite of these remarkable provisions, there have been reported cases of violations of freedom of speech by state and non-state actors without the state investigating the incidents or providing an effective remedy. For example, the Media foundation for West Africa reported that "Ghana recorded the highest cases of violations against freedom of expression in the West African sub-region between January and April, 2014" These reported violations have mostly been in the form of physical attacks, arrests and detentions, threats, censorship, etc. It is against this background that in recent times, cyberactivism has become a key weapon against such unrests.

A key finding of this study reveals that cyberactivism promotes freedom of expression on national issues (political, social, cultural, educational, crime, sports, etc.). For instance, Kennedy Agyapong, a Member of Parliament for Ghana, started a campaign of animosity towards the Tiger Eye team after Tiger Eye's investigation, which showed systemic corruption in African football was broadcast, claiming he was upset by its undercover methods. Agyapong demanded that Anas the principal investigator be hanged in the open. He attacked Hussein-Suale and revealed the journalist's most securely held secret (his face) on his own television station weeks after the documentary was shown, in June 2018. Part of Agyapong's statements included; "That's him," said Agyapong, as images of Hussein-Suale appeared on the screen. "His other picture is there as well, make it big," Agyapong revealed Hussein-Suale's name and the neighborhood he lived in. "If you meet him somewhere, slap him… beat him," Agyapong said. "Whatever happens, I'll pay" (Gunter, 2019).

Ahmed Hussein-Suale, the Ghanaian investigative journalist was assassinated on January 16, 2019, in Accra, close to his home. According to Ghanaian police, he was killed because of his work. Many people's hearts were broken by the terrible news of the sudden death of Ahmed Suale, a well-known Ghanaian investigative journalist, on January 17, 2019, as Ghanaians continued to fight for justice on behalf of the deceased's wife and defenseless children. Even though the majority of well-known politicians and journalists claimed to have proof of the main suspect who was responsible for the untimely death of the well-known Ghanaian investigative journalist Ahmed Suale, nothing seems to have been done to seek justice for the deceased after three years passed since the terrible incident occurred.

Considering the political twists to the incidence, many traditional journalists became unwilling to interrogate the incidence or discuss it. Online activism, rather became a terminal channel for discussing this issue. A well-known American-based Ghanaian broadcast journalist, Kelvin Taylor, is noted to have taken this issue up by pulling off the unexpected, sending another stern message to Ghanaian journalists. On the incident of the death of Ahmed Suale's third anniversary, Taylor expressed his extreme disappointment in the Ghana police force and the current administration for their failure to bring the main suspect responsible for Suale's death to justice.

According to Taylor, Ahmed Suale was killed three years ago while carrying out his duties as an investigative reporter. However, Ghana's media has not pushed the incumbent government to identify the main suspects responsible for the dead man's brutal murder. Taylor recently used the opportunity to address all journalists around the nation, notably Anas Aremeyaw Anas, in a strong statement regarding the

untimely death of investigative journalist Ahmed Suale, which occurred as Ghanaians observed the victim's third anniversary.

> "For the so-called journalists who have become monitor lizards and see or hear no evil, that could be an indication that sooner, when they have no one else to go after, they will come after you too", Kelvin Taylor emphatically stated (Bright, 2022).

Following his persistent calls, many Ghanaians turned to social media to endorse Taylor's plea for the country to pursue justice for Ahmed Suale and his family after the murder, as well as to share their thoughts on it.

Below are screenshots of some of the sentiments expressed on various online sites. These graphics demonstrate how people communicate their opinions on matters of national interest to a bigger audience and serve as motivation for activists to carry out their social revolutionaries' activities.
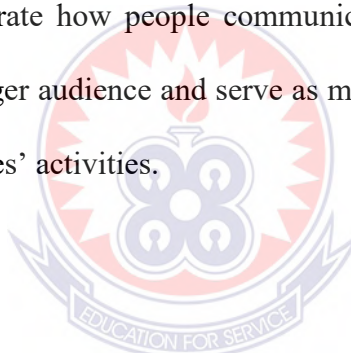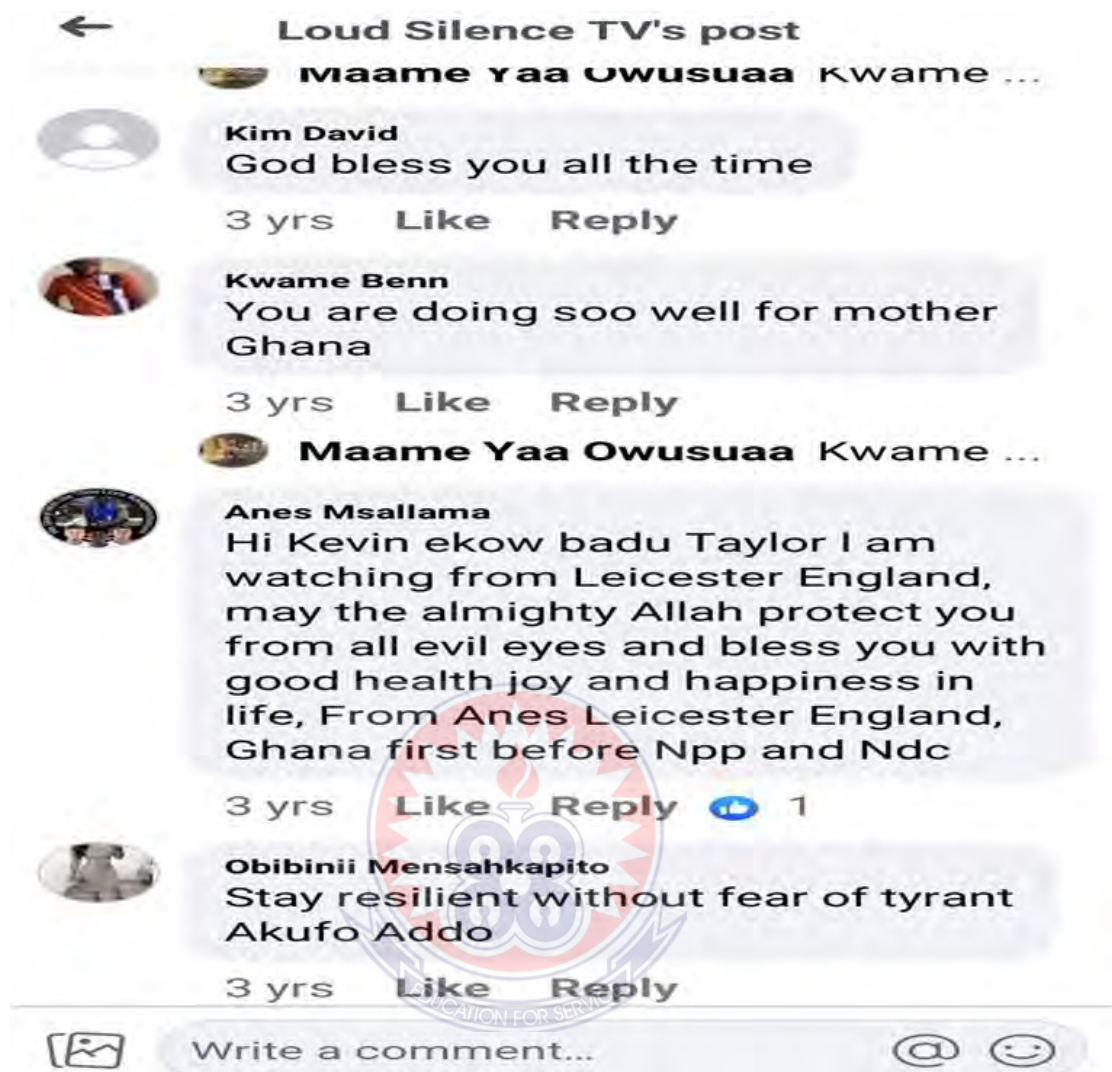
Figure 4: Who killed Ahmed Suale? Kevin Taylor

Source: Loud Silence TV (2020)

Figure 5: Who killed Ahmed Suale? Kevin Taylor.

Source: Loud Silence TV (2020)

Figure 6: Who killed Ahmed Suale? Kevin Taylor

Source: Loud Silence TV (2020)

Figure 7: They'll Come After You Too: Kelvin Taylor Boldly Speaks Over Ahmed Suale's 3 Year Anniversary


Sources: GH Ghana News (2022)

Similarly, A-Plus, a young Ghanaian musician noted for his political activism and commentary, used his social media platforms to ask investigative journalist AnasAremeyawAnas three questions. A-Plus sought to clarify a few things regarding the passing of Anas's colleague Ahmed Hussein-Suale. Regarding Anas' actions inrelation to Ahmed's death, A Plus indicated that he has three questions for Anas. He asserts that Anas needs to understand that, despite his perception of himself as a knowledgeable man, Ghanaians are also capable of doing research on a variety of topics.

The first thing A-Plus inquired about was when Anas learned about Ahmed's passing. Second, A-Plus wondered how Anas had time to locate a film, edit it, and make it public soon after Ahmed passed away. The third query from A-Plus focused on Anas' decision as a prosecutor to make judgments regarding a murder before any investigations had even begun. He continued by saying that Anas' actions following Ahmed's passing give the impression that Anas had planned a number of actions in advance. In January 2019, the death of Ahmed Suale was solely blamed on Member of Parliament for Assin Central, Kennedy OheneAgyapong. This, A-Plus argues that while some people may hold Agyapong, a Ghanaian politician and a business tycoon accountable for Ahmed's passing, Anas should let the security services do their duties.

Figure 8: A-Plus poses 3 serious questions to Anas over murder of Ahmed Suale
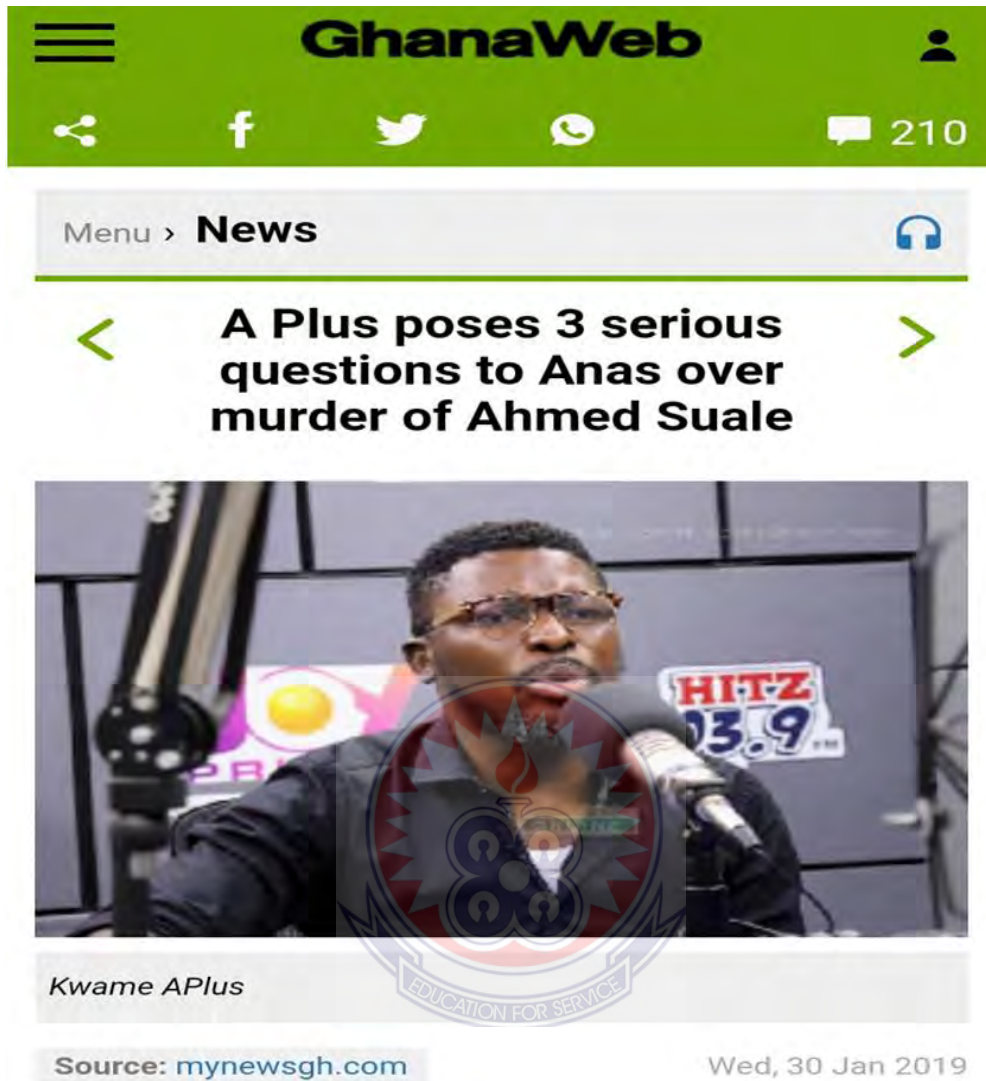
Source: GhanaWeb (2019)

Threat to National Security

This study shows a strong link between cyberactivism and national security threats. It is important to reecho how the literature reviewed revealed the ways in which the sub-Saharan region has increasingly become a target of terrorist attacks in recent years. As a result, the issue of national security implications has become a priority for the Ghanaian government and most of its people. To be sure, real and potential threats in countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Benin, and neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Burkina Faso where aggressive armed groups and militias are identified have significantly put Ghana on its readiness toes.

The study has revealed that in the fight against this threat, the internet has become a key tool. The study suggests that, as already noted, in spite of the constitutional and other legal provisions for freedom of expression, cyberactivism has had to be limited on diverse grounds. Such limitations, ironically also have their constitutional backing. For instance, Article 12 (2) of the 1992 Constitution states that; "Every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this Chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest".

One of the major fronts on which online expression is restricted in Ghana is in relation to the state's national security. While cyber activists see their missions as legitimate online protests, the government may view their actions as a breach of online security or a threat to national security. Thus Article 21 (4)(c) of 1992 constitution provides for the imposition of restrictions that are reasonably required in

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the interest of defense, public safety, public health or the running of essential services, on the movement or residence within Ghana of any person or persons generally, or any class of persons. However, there is no clear line between what is and is not a legitimate expression of an idea. The ambiguity of this interaction and its consequences can make it extremely dangerous for human rights activists to campaign for and defend their actions in court. For example, Captain Smart, the host of the morning show on Onua TV and FM, was detained by the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB). On October 19, 2022 the outspoken broadcaster was taken into police custody. His detention was thought to be related to his remarks regarding the inefficiency of President Nana AddoDankwaAkufo-Addo galamsey's campaign. Prior to his arrest, in a statement issued by the Ministry of Information and signed by Deputy Minister FatimatuAbubakar, the government expressed its displeasure with the comments and announced that it has filed a complaint with the National Media Commission (NMC) and may consider legal action as a possible remedy (Otchere, 2022). However, Smart, the courageous presenter argued that,

> *There are reasons why Nana is a gallamsey kingpin. OsafoMarfo is a Senior Advisor to the President but asked us to allow Aisha Huang to go because of 2 billion when she was arrested. Is 2 billion more important than our lands? Secondary, Chairman Wontumi is doing galamsey but still at post. Meanwhile, KwabenaAgyapong, Sammy Crabbe, and Paul Afoko were suspended for doing things against party. They didn't do anything to the State but the party. But Wontumi is doing something that is against the country. Is the party more important than the country? Smart stated.* (Okyere, 2022).

He maintained:

> "*Also, the Mineral Commission boss has said that Wontumi had no license to enter the TanoNimiri forest. But the only thing government was able to*

> *do was to ask some small boys to put some old equipment there for them*
> *to burn to suggest they have taken any action. If you are not kingpin, sack*
> *Wontumi" Smart indicated* (Otchere, 2022).

The State, however, described his claims as false and malicious and accused him of engaging in unethical and irresponsible journalism (Otchere, 2022). The Smart's video was interpreted as encouraging disaffection in government and impede efforts to tackle illegal mining in the country, some argue the government expressed concern over false and misleading materials being circulated under the guise of journalistic discretion and free expression, according to the ministry. In addition, it stated that the allegations were unfounded and posed a severe threat to the nation's peace and security by impugning the character and integrity of the president, as well as the credibility and devotion of his battle against illegal and irresponsible mining.

Intimidation and Assassination

Up to this point, it has been made clear that the internet and alternative forms of media have facilitated a sort of global, yet grassroots, political mobilization. Particularly in chapter two, the literature and the theoretical framework revealed that innovations in internet technology have transformed the ways in which communities, societies, nation-states, governments, multinational corporations as well as citizens are able to communicate, transact, and socialize. These innovations are also useful tools for activism. Activism, we said, can range from civil disobedience, protests, occupations, campaigning, boycotts, and demonstrations to more traditional forms of activism such as lobbying, writing letters, internet activism, petitions, and attending

meetings (Bennett et al., 2004). Speaking with people about activism, the term is frequently applied to actions such as protests, street marches, and riots.

Unsurprisingly, cyberactivism with its associated actions such as protests, streets, and riots have in many jurisdictions had diverse human rights implications including episodes of intimidation and even assassination. In other words, these actions put the lives of protesters in danger and render them vulnerable to threats of assassination. In Ghana, there have been reported cases of threats of intimidation and even assassination attempts. For instance, on 16th August, 2022, the Media General and morning host of OnuaMaakye of Onua TV/FM popularly known as Captain Smart, whose story we earlier narrated, alleged of a plot to arrest and assassinate him in cells owing to his incessant reportage of activities of the government. He reiterated this as follows:

> … *I know that some people in the government are currently scheming to implicate me and arrest me. The Intel I have is that they will put a knife in a loaf of bread and bring it to someone where they will be taking me for the person to use to gravely wound me. I was just looking for a reason to believe and understand the issues, and my recent attack in Ada confirmed this. They broke into my car. There were blood stains, they took everything in the car. Every thief is afraid to die. I'm not a thief, and so I am not afraid to die. What I want to tell every politician in this country is that my life is in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit resides in Jesus Christ, and Jesus is in God Almighty. You (those planning to attack him) will not get me* (Ghanaweb.com, 16 August 2022).

Similarly, on 1st January, 2021, AnasAremeyawAnas, an undercover investigative journalist, released a press statement on the controversy and tension on social media surrounding murder threats against journalists in Ghana.

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> *Just recently, Manasseh Azure Awuni informed JoyNews about a death threat against him from an unknown person following his opinion article on the elections and its surrounding brouhaha.UTV presenter AfiaPokuaa has also registered her displeasure over the adamant gesture by the Ghana Journalists Association over the threats against the lives of journalists* (Dwomoh, 2021).
>
> *It was also reported that renewed broadcaster and host of Angel AnopaBofo show, Captain Smart's house was raided by armed robbers.* (Dwomoh, 2021).

Anas pleaded for justice and security for key journalists and activists such as Manasseh Azure Awuni, Edward Adeti, AfiaPokuah, Captain Smart, Abdul HayiMoomen, David Tamakloe, and others who received death threats, violent threats, or intimidation. These actions, in Anas' opinion, are alarming and need to be denounced since they are evidences barbaric and backwardness. This illustrates the difficulties that online activists face when trying to advance press freedom through social revolution. The entire press release can be found in appendix 1.

The attack on activists in the course of exercising the fundamental human rights have variously been discussed in the public sphere. A good example of this is the situation in which the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) strongly condemned the entry of Citi TV's offices by seven armed security guards on May 11, 2021, in an effort to arrest Zoe Abu-Baidoo, a journalist for the Accra-based media outlet. In this particular episode, the female broadcast journalist was accused of receiving certain video files from Caleb Kudah, a colleague who had earlier been detained for allegedly filming some vehicles on the grounds of the Ministry of National Security without permission. The violent invasion and arrests, according to Citi TV/Radio General Manager Bernard

Avle, traumatized the journalists and left the team in despair. *"Besides we are a recognized media house and you know people here, so if you want to talk to Zoe about information she has, this is not the way to do it,"* Avle told *citinewsrooom.com* (Apinga, 2021).

MusahTankoZakaria, a journalism lecturer and legal practitioner told the MFWA that:

the police can restrict journalists' work including filming only on grounds of public safety, or when the journalists trespass into areas designated as security zones, interfere with an arrest, violate privacy rights, or otherwise fail to respect legitimate measures by law enforcement to control riots or disorder or prevent interference in their operations. In all cases, the restriction should be proportionate and legitimate and aimed at achieving a specific objective that is in the public interest (Apinga, 2021).

The raid on Citi FM in the style of Rambo brings back memories of a National Security operative-led raid on the ModernGhana.com offices in 2019. After detaining two journalists from the media organization, one of whom reportedly was abused in custody, the invading officers reportedly took laptops and mobile phones as loot (Apinga, 2021).

SelormGborbidzi, a reporter for the Accra-based *The Finder newspaper*, was stopped and arrested by a police officer on January 14, 2021, Sergeant Solomon Tackie, for recording a fight between him and a commercial vehicle driver. Similar situation can be said of journalists who were covering a protest at La in Accra on April 15, 2021, and were attacked by some soldiers. Again, at the Tema Station in Accra on August 12, 2020, a soldier by the name of Lieutenant Frimpong attacked TV3 cameraman Stanley NiiBlewu. The soldier, who was supervising a cleanup exercise at the bus station, also took Blewu's camera and

the phone of Joseph Armstrong, a reporter for TV3, before wiping the devices clean of all records.

Incidents like these reveal the manner in which despite the various human rights provisions activists have suffered diverse forms of threats of and actual intimidations from state agencies. Importantly they also provide evidence of the decline in Ghana's press freedom ranking from being first in Africa and 23rd in the world in 2018 to 3rd and 30th respectively over the past three years (Ghanaian Times, May 5, 2022).

4.3 The Role of Cyberactivism in Mobilizing Political Protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic

Previous studies on political mobilisation and revolution have largely stressed the role of the state at the expense of analyzing the conditions of citizen mobilization. Skocpol (1979), for example, has downplayed the potential of civic activism alone to produce political change. Yet the discussion so far has shown that indeed, with the advancement of internet technology, the agentic value of the citizenry has increased with diverse instances of political mobilisation. In this section, therefore, I seek to address a key research objective for this study, one which seeks to examine the role of cyberactivism in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic. In chapter two, the literature provided us with an appreciation of the role of cyberactivism in mobilizing protesters. This has further been demonstrated with evidence from this study as already discussed in the preceding sections. Citing Surman and Reilly (2003), we have found out that one of the most widely discussed applications of online technologies in activism has been mobilization. For instance, it is difficult to discuss the impact of new media on activism in modern history without mentioning the

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protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1993 and the Multilateral Agreement on Investments in France in 1997.

The use of e-mail and the web for the Seattle World Trade Organization protests and the global fight against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) debate demonstrate how well the internet has integrated with traditional campaigns and protests (Surman and Reilly, 2003). The role of new media in organizing the WTO protests was critical. The Internet was thought to be a less expensive and less congested way to mobilize. Furthermore, the internet enable people outside of public institutions and political organizations to join the movement of a particular political cause (Siddall, 2010). As is well known by now, I have sought to examine how cyberactivism contributed to the successful mobilization of protesters in recent times in Ghana. In the discussion below, I pay attention to specific cases of political mobilization through the use of Hashtag.
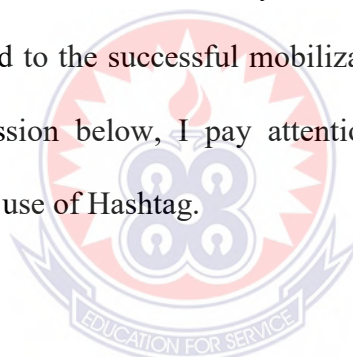
Hashtag

In November 2021, the global web giant Twitter, inaugurated its headquarters in Accra as part of its efforts to coordinate all its platform's activities for Africa. Announcing its reasons for choosing Ghana, the company indicated that: "As a promoter of democracy, Ghana supports free speech, online freedom and the open Internet, of which Twitter is also an advocate" (Agenzianova, 2022). Indeed, over the last couple of years, Ghana's Twitter community has been exploding with hashtags related to governance and the development of the nation at the start of May 2021. Among others, they include #OccupySaglemiNow, #FixtheCountry, #NameandShame, #Fixyourself, #HeisFixingIt, and #FixMotherGhana. The most notable of these, as already discussed, is #FixtheCountry, which is essentially an

online protest urging the Ghanaian government to address problems like the country's unpredictable power supply, locally known as "Dumsor," lower and eliminate the nuisance tax, build roads, build schools and hospitals, and raise wages and salaries, among other things. Checks as of May 5, 2021, showed that the online protest resulted in 141,000 tweets with the hashtag #FixtheCountry (Agenzianova, 2022). Numerous media websites, including citinewsroomonline.com, myjoyonline.com, starrfm.com.gh, and television networks Joynews, Tv3, UTV, GhOne, Metro Tv, and AdomTv, all ran stories about #FixtheCountry.

For over a week, it was the topic of conversation throughout the country. The hashtag #FixtheCountry has changed in name but not in purpose. New hashtags including #FixtheCountryNow, #NameandShame, #FixIt, #FixtheCountryGhana, and #WeareAngry have emerged as a result of #FixtheCountry. Many of these protesters said that the reason for the frequent hashtag changes was that Twitter had flagged their initial hashtag, #FixtheCountry, which they did not think to be appropriate or relevant. Some users asked Twitter's Jack why their hashtag had been flagged in tweets they sent to him. The hashtag modification was made strategically to capitalize on Mother's Day, which was celebrated on May 9, 2021. #FixMotherGhana was the day's hashtag.

It is not surprising to see counter hashtags from government officials and other pro-government actors as it is a protest against the government of Ghana and is also taking place in a nation that is often considered as the beacon of African democracy. Instead of calling on the government to fix the country, #FixYourself's opponents simply advised demonstrators to change their views by, for example, ending bribery and paying taxes, to name a few. The #FixYourself counter-hashtag, which included comments like "respect your elders," was seen by #FixtheCountry users as

irresponsible and demeaning. For this reason, the majority of the responses to the #FixYourself tweets were negative.

Given its political implications, the authors of the #FixYourself tweets also deleted them and apologized. Despite this, some users of social media continued to exchange offensive tweets. Thus, in spite of its small drawbacks like fake news, hate speech, and concerns over unauthorized government spying, it marked the beauty of digital freedom in Ghana. The Ministers of National Security, Finance, and Justice organized a conference to which the government invited the organizers of #FixtheCountry. Oliver Barker-Vormawor, a lawyer and the convener of #FixtheCountry, said during a segment of JoyNews' Newsfile program that preparations were being made to file a lawsuit against the government for improper spying.

He claimed that after their meeting with the authorities, a member of their team's android phone had been cloned. He posited that all calls to that number have been forwarded to another number. When their phones were taken by national security before they entered the conference, this was realized. The Ministry of Information, on behalf of the Ministry of National Security, released a statement disputing the claim that phones had been copied. They reiterated that the collection of phones is compatible with the ministry's established procedures. This occurs at a time when concerns about digital surveillance are rapidly emerging in Africa, and as a result, advocates for digital rights are awaiting the outcome of the intention to sue by the conveners of #FixtheCountry. Find below some of the comments by some twitter users on the fix the country hashtag on Ghana's twitter community.

Figure 9: Twitter users' comments on #FixTheCountry Hashtag.


Source: With All Due Respect- Loud Silence Media (2023)

Figure 10: Twitter users' comments on #FixTheCountry Hashtag.

MacJordan (2019)

4.4Conclusion

This chapter has presented the analysis and presentation of findings in line with the objectives of the study and existing literature. The study was set to analyse the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic. The study was guided by the following research objectives: First, to examine the nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic. Second, to analyze the effects of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic, and third, to examine the role of cyberactivism in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic. In line with the research objectives, the study found that cyberactivism in the Fourth Republic of Ghana takes different forms including; online petitions, social networks and blogs. Also, it emerged in the study that, cyberactivism has many implications for press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic which included; Promotion of Freedom of Expression,Threat to National Security and Intimidation and Assassination. In addition, the study identified Hashtag as a major medium for mobilizing political protesters.
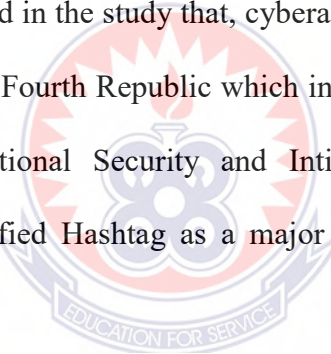
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study. It puts together information gathered from the research objectives, reviewed literature, research methodology and the major findings generated out of the field data. It also presents conclusion based on the findings of the study and proposes some recommendations to address the challenges identified in the study.

5.1 Summary

The cyberspace is a growing avenue that helps cultivate, promote, and maintain democracy in contemporary societies. In recent times, the internet has become useful in facilitating the protection and promotion of democratic values such as free press, free speech, and free market economy. In particular, with the liberalization in the use of the internet, there has been an increasing freedom of speech. This situation has played a significant role towards ending government control over human liberty, human rights, and human dignity. Yet the attempt to do so has yielded to some crucial human rights challenges which have not gained the needed academic attention they deserve.

In this study, I was interested in interrogating the nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic. The study was particularly interested in the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom especially under the fourth republican regime, and the role of cyberactivism in the mass mobilization of grassroots political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

To demonstrate this, the study was guided by three specific research objectives. First, I examined the nature and scale of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic. Second, I analyzed the effects of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic, and third, I examined the role of cyberactivism in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

The study was organized into five chapters. Chapter one looked more broadly at the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study which informed the research questions, significant of the study, scope of the study and organization of the study.

Chapter two focused on relevant extant literature on online activism and its implications for press freedom. The chapter was divided into two main parts; the first dealt with a theoretical review which employed Technological Determinism and Network Society Theories (1991) by Jan van Dijk to give a vivid account of and an interpretation of how online activism is redefining press freedom in contemporary Ghana. The second part looked at an empirical review of relevant related literature which further explained the phenomenon of online activism.

Chapter three presented the methodology upon which the study is conducted. An interpretive research paradigm and a qualitative research approach were employed in the study. The study adopted an archival design and supplemented with face-to-face interviews. I purposively sampled four (4) cyber activists who own and operate cyber activism sites which focus on issues relating to Ghana. Also, I purposively sampled five (5) senior media personnel for interviews for the purpose of data triangulation. The sample size of the study was determined by data saturation. An observational online content analysis was conducted on four personal online writers' homepages

namely: Kelvin Taylor (Loud Silence TV "With all due respect"), Captain Smart (OnuaMaakye, Onua TV), KwabenaAsareObeng (A Plus TV), and (Twene Jonas TV) including other related online sites. The research considered observable contents on the internet from January 2015 to July 2022. In particular, this analysis is focused on published contents related to freedom of the press that emphasizes a series of historical events. I also employed one-on-one interview sessions as the data collection technique to elicit the primary data from the five participants purposively sampled. I relied on the four major tenets given by Guba& Lincoln (1994) as the criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These measures were necessary for two main reasons. First, it was to improve the validity and reliability of the data collection instrument. Second, it was to enhance the usefulness and integrity of the research findings. The qualitative data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis method.

Chapter four presented the discussion of the results and findings of the study. To offer detailed analysis of the phenomenon understudy, I concentrated on the most relevant themes to the research objectives. Namely: nature of cyberactivism in Ghana's Fourth Republic; the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic, and the role of cyberactivism in mobilizing political protest in Ghana's Fourth Republic. Taken these themes together, it emerged in the study that, the nature of cyberactivism in the Fourth Republic of Ghana is complex. The data gathered from cyber sites on the internet and interviews with purposively identified media personnel revealed that the tools used by digital activists are vast and changing constantly as technology evolves. These include online petitions; Social networks; Blogs; and Micro-blogging. I have also demonstrated the human rights implications of cyber

activism especially in relation to press freedom in Ghana. I have done so by seeking to address a central research objective in the current study. It sought to analyze the implications of cyberactivism on press freedom in Ghana, particularly during the Fourth Republican regime. Above all, the study has paid attention to specific cases of political mobilization through the use of hashtags.

5.2 Conclusion

A totally free press is intended to improve citizens' political, social, and cultural wellbeing, which are essential to the flourishing of their human rights. Liberal theorists have long maintained that a free and independent press is essential to the process of democratization in every nation because it promotes the right to freedom of expression, thought, and conscience, strengthens government responsiveness and accountability to all citizens, and offers a pluralistic platform and channel of political expression for a range of groups and interests. A key question of interest posed in this study was; why is it that, while making comparable progress in promoting press freedom in Ghana, press freedom remains a key challenge? To achieve this, I have analysed the nature of cyberactivism, the implications of cyberactivism and the role of cyberactivism in political mobilization in the Fourth Republic of Ghana. It emerged in the study that, the nature of cyberactivism in the Fourth Republic of Ghana is complex.

Data gathered from cyber sites and interviews with purposively identified media personnel revealed that the tools used by digital activists are vast and changing constantly as technology evolves. These include online petitions; social networks; blogs; and micro-blogging. Also, the study revealed that cyberactivism poses potential and actual threats to national security.

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The study further found out that political mobilization which is an essential means to protect individuals' freedom from governmental infringement, is made easier through the use of hashtags. Based on the findings in this study, I have argued that notwithstanding the seemingly positive role of cyberactivism on the promotion of press freedom and economic growth of Ghana, if pragmatic steps are not put in place to monitor the activities in the cyberspace in Ghana, terrorist groups, political extremist, and other insurgence groups may use the internet to pose a major security threat in Ghana through political mobilization causing national unrest leading to political instability.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations on cyberactivism in the Fourth Republic of Ghana are proposed. A key finding of this study reveals that cyberactivism promotes freedom of expression on national issues (political, social, cultural, educational, crime, sports, etc.). It is therefore prudent to make a good use of the internet platforms to promote good governance through constructive criticism of government policies.

Moreover, this study shows a strong link between cyberactivism and national security threats. As a result, the issue of national security implications should be a major priority for the Ghanaian government and of its people. Real and potential threats in countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Benin, and neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Burkina Faso where aggressive armed groups and militias are identified have significant security threats on Ghana. The implication is that, while everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and while freedom of the media is crucially significant for the protection of all other human rights, important steps must

be taken to monitor and safeguard this right. The study notes that if pragmatic steps are not put in place to monitor the activities in cyberspace in Ghana, terrorist groups, for example, may use the internet as an avenue to destabilize and threaten the security including political unrest and instability in Ghana under the pretext of political mobilization.

I further recommend that there should be a balance of rights. Freedom of expression and press are essential and guaranteed under the Constitution. Therefore, the state has no business interfering in the actions of cyberactivists. The media offers a forum for a variety of voices to be heard. It serves as the watchdog, activist, and protector of the public on a national, regional, and local level. It also serves as an educator, an entertainer among others. A democracy's foundation must include press freedom. Journalists must be free to report on topics of public concern without worrying about being detained or subjected to various types of interference because they serve as the people's eyes and ears. However, this right which has been defended above must be used responsibly for purposes of safeguarding national security. For Example, Article 21 (4) (e) of the Constitution of Ghana provides the conditions under which certain rights can be curtailed as follows:

Nothing in, or done under the authority of, a law shall be held to be inconsistent with, or in contravention of, this article to the extent that the law in question makes provision:

"That is reasonably required for the purpose of safeguarding the people of Ghana against the teaching or propagation of a doctrine which exhibits or encourages disrespect for the nationhood of Ghana, the national symbols and emblems, or incites hatred against other members of the community." I therefore conclude that it is

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crucial that there must be a balanced of rights. The state must not interfere and citizens must be responsible.

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APPENDIX 1

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1st January, 2021

PRESS RELEASE

Tiger Eye P.I stands in solidarity with media colleagues in demanding protection and justice for Manasseh Azure Awuni, Edward Adeti, Afia Pokuaah, Captain Smart, Abdul Hayi Moomen, David Tamakloe, and others who have either been threatened with death or violence and/or intimidation. These acts smack of barbarism, and backwardness; they are disturbing and have to be condemned.

Anonymous and open threats when not dealt with breed impunity in our society. Ahmed Hussein Suale was openly threatened by a law maker and nothing happened. The next move was his murder.

It is a terrible thing to practise journalism under conditions such as these, and it is even dangerous when nothing is done, and the perpetrators get to carry out their threats.

The murder of Ahmed Suale is still fresh on the minds of all journalists and sympathisers in this country. Never again should any journalist suffer the horrible experience of Ahmed Suale. No journalist in the country can survive the bullets of their assassins if ever they become targets. Assassins appear to be highly skillful, tactful and are masters of their trade. Suale's murderers shot him at close range on his neck and twice at his chest while driving home.

Suale could not even have a second to turn on his body cam; he simply lost control over his body. His murderers pursued him and then shot him twice in the chest at close range. This is how good contract-killers are at their job, and therefore they must be checked, tracked and apprehended whenever they threaten anybody with death messages.

Tiger Eye P.I calls on the government to condemn these threats and careless utterances be it from a lawmaker, a government official or opposition groups, in the strongest terms yet. The security agencies must proactively investigate the sources of death threats and arrest the criminals. The security agencies should not be seen or be used to perpetuate any such attacks or intimidation.

Finally, we appeal to the National Media Commission and Ghana Journalist Association to do more, particularly in engaging political parties and journalists who pursue public interest journalism.

Signed

Anas Aremeyaw Anas

www.tigereyepi.org

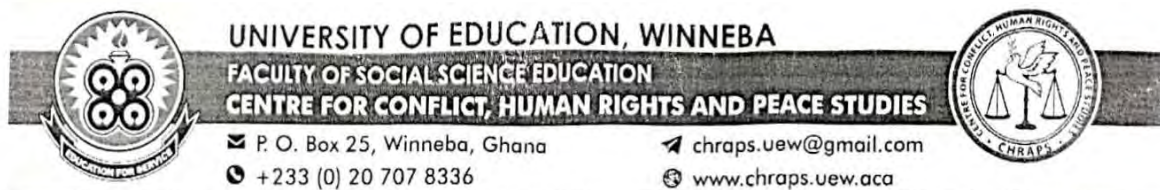**APPENDIX 2**

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Our Ref: CHRAPS.44/VOL. 2/13

Your Ref: September 20, 22

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

GEORGE OPOKU - 220011937

We write to introduce to you, George Opoku with index number 220011937 pursuing Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) in Human Rights, Conflict and Peace Studies at the Centre for Conflict, Human Rights and Peace Studies of the University of Education, Winneba.

He wishes to collect data for his thesis on the topic **"Online Activism in Ghana's Fourth Republic and its Implications on Press Freedom"**.

We would be grateful if he is given the needed assistance from your outfit, please.

Thank you.

PROF. GEORGE HIKAH BENSON
Ag. Director