Fake News and the Political Economy of the Media in Ghana: The era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirement for

the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCE

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR. NKOSINATHI L. SELEKANE

2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Mr. & Mrs. Kwode Kabah and to my humble, but beautiful family.

DECLARATION

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I declare that this thesis is the original product of my research work, and that all sources consulted have duly been acknowledged in acceptable referencing. I also declare that this thesis has been assessed for originality and that it meets the acceptable criteria. I further declare that this thesis has not been submitted to Unisa for any degree or to any other institution anywhere for another qualification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

This study investigates fake news and the political economy of the media in Ghana in the interplay of convergence of technology in the era of the fourth industrial revolution. It adopts the exploratory sequential mixed-method approach that is anchored on the critical realism philosophical foundations. This ensured that triangulated data were collected using in-depth interviews and questionnaire in obtaining empirical data. With a qualitative sample of five news editors and a sample of 230 journalists for the quantitative, the mixed study had a total sample size of 235 journalists, all based in the Greater Accra region, the capital city of Ghana. The study which makes significant contributions to existing literature on fake news and political economy of the media, exposes a number of intriguing issues on the subject and could contribute in curbing the phenomenon of fake news in the mainstream and social media sphere. Findings confirm the hypothesis that economic and political reasons are responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news in the country. This is aided by the fourth industrial revolution technologies making fabricated content to easily disseminate. The study discovered that fake news spread exponentially during the 2020 elections and at the peak of Covid-19 in Ghana. This is done in blatant disregard to laid down ethical procedures in journalism and existing laws that frown on fake news in the country. The study acknowledges the critical role ethical journalism plays as a self-regulatory mechanism in checking excessive dissemination of fake news amidst policy constraints in fighting the technological weaponisation, with its concomitant effects on the country's fragile democracy. Respondents expressed frustration as journalists who want to remain relevant as they battle untrustworthy information spread in social and mainstream media. The study suggests the need for Government to balance the need of legislating fake news and the rights of people to freely express themselves. It also calls on the government to take rightful decisions at mitigating the increasing threats of fake news camouflaged in propaganda spins.

Key words: Fake News, Political Economy, Fourth Industrial Revolution, Media, Ghana, Journalists, Propaganda,

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List of Abbreviations

AI- Artificial Intelligence

CDD- Center for Democratic Development

CPP- Convention People's Party

CPEM-Critical Political Economy of the Media

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

GJA- Ghana Journalists Association

NCA- National Communication Authority

NDC- National Democratic Congress

NMC- National Media Commission

NPP- New Patriotic Party

MFWA-Media Foundation for Wet Africa

RSF-Reporters Without Borders

4IR-Fourth Industrial Revolution

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This study explores a significant topic of fake news and the political economy of the digital space. This significant subject of fake news owes its current state to the growing transformations in journalism, which has become more involving, through the fourth industrial revolution technologies. This digital development is making the work of journalism easier, and faster, but also presents a challenge to the sustainability of the journalism profession. The public sphere is now more democratic since everyone can self-publish (Dominick, 2014). This research aims to explore how the media's sphere has been marred and dominated by self-publishing tools by citizen journalists challenging the hegemonic position of power brokers in the economy of the media in Ghana. While Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019) postulate that the transformation in news production using new technologies is responsible for fake news, Barclay (2018) avers that fake news is a subset of propaganda where interested parties can intentionally produce and disseminate any information to achieve their goals.

There is no standard definition for fake news but a number of definitions by some scholars could be employed here. Barclay (2018) sees fake news as a form of propaganda intentionally created to achieve either political, organisational or commercial purposes. He indicates that fake news is a subset of propaganda where interested parties can intentionally produce and disseminate any information to achieve their goals. McGonagle (2017) posits that fake news can be any fabricated and deliberate dissemination of information with the aim of misleading others to believe in falsehood or doubt verifiable facts. To this end, any information created by an individual or groups of persons with an intention to profit from it financially, politically or ideologically can be regarded as fake news. This implies disinformation which is information purposively created to achieve certain objectives, either political, ideological or commercial, can be classified under this definition.

Another definition of fake news is "information fabrication" (Posetti and Matthews, 2018). Among the many definitions of fake news is an outstanding categorisation by Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) who argued that a message should only be considered as fake news when it is low in its facticity, created with intention to deceive and is presented in a journalistic format. Fake news

should, according to them, not be applied to all forms or phenomenon of falsehood but rather applied only to false publications in journalistic environments. Again, they distinguished between news published with malicious or negative intentions to mis-dis-inform and 'false news' which might not necessarily be deliberate. This dimension of the publication is the prior determinant of fake news in this instance. This definition of fake news is also supported by Lazer et al. (2018) who see fake news as fabricated information that mimics news media's content but lacks news media's editorial norms and processes for accurate and credible ethos of information dissemination.

Hirst (2017) asserts that recent debates over fake news have rekindled interest in the critical political economy of the media because, in this epoch, the paradigm of news production is unclear. "Only a critical political economy approach can adequately deal with the assertion that capitalism relies on mass ignorance for its survival" (Hirst, 2017:91). This study attempts to contribute to the paucity of debate on the critical political economy of the media in Ghana and in particular the global South where scholarship has not adequately addressed issues of fake news and political economy of the media.

Morgan (2018) avers that fake news is not only a form of freedom of expression but a challenge to the media by citizen journalists who are competing strongly for a voice in the public sphere. This makes misinformation and disinformation proliferate along with mainstream media in the public sphere. Creech (2020) adds that the presence of fake news in virtually every social media and digital platform is an indicative that the public sphere is no longer safe. It thus foregrounds the view that technological companies wield enormous power in contemporary society. This unwavering power of tech giants is however contrary to the principle of democratic governance which expects equal and fair opportunities for citizens to communicate and share ideas. There is therefore the need to begin questioning the power of technological companies over the rest of society (Lule, 2014; Hirst, 2017). Some scholars are of the view that such excess power and probably reckless abuse of people's rights through fake news needs to be regulated in democratic systems. This makes the current study relevant as it seeks to explore how fake news proliferates social and mainstream media in Ghana and the regulations that exist to protect citizens' rights.

Ghana traces the foundation of its media to 1822 when the first newspaper, *The Gold Coast Gazette* was established by Sir Charles McCarthy (Ansah, 1993, Anyindoho, 2016). Since then, the country's media, after a series of political upheavals, have transitioned into a liberal democratic

press supported by the 1992 Constitution, which guarantees enormous press freedom and independence of the media from governmental control. The media consist of mainstream and social media but significantly deregulated in a space where many print and electronic stations exist and operate either privately or as state-owned. The existence of multiple media institutions operating in a democratic space has created competition through innovations where there exist a fusion of new technologies with contemporary media in a common space. Murthy (2013) is of the view that social media plays significant roles because of its advantage of delivering frequent and immediate messages. Its unique qualities make it a good partner to mainstream media in the current digital technological space. The influx of new technologies is influencing the way people live and engage in social and political activities (Gyampo, 2017). It is within this milieu that fake news rears its ugly head with many wondering what exactly motivates the production of misinformation and disinformation as fake news has come to be known for.

Lule (2014: 302), laid bare the challenges of social media when he stated that, "much of the information on the Internet is not the work of professional authors, but of amateurs who have questionable expertise. On the internet, everyone can self-publish, so the vetting that usually occurs in a traditional medium-for example by a magazine's editorial department, rarely happens online". This is because of the revolution of technology; thus creating a renewed thinking towards re-examining the exponential changes currently taking place in the communication ecosystem. These changes are influencing the nature of the flow of communication from the hitherto sender to receiver to a world where a single sender could send messages to mass audiences in what is described as 'mass self-communication'. McQuail and Deuze (2020) are of the opinion that as such changes take place, the media becomes a battle ground for disinformation as fact-checked information lessens. Along these lines, this study further aims at understanding the changes brought about by new technologies that are affecting the practice of journalism and communication in particular.

Schwab (2016) described the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) as a world where individuals move between digital domains and offline reality with the use of connected technology enabling management of lives. It is within this environment that Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019) investigated journalism in the era of mobile technology in changing patterns of a thriving culture of fake news in Ghana and Pakistan. They contended that mobile journalism, an aspect of the 4IR technology

application has made the work of journalism easier and faster and giving rise to a proliferation of fake news and the lack of accuracy and truthfulness in the stories journalists produce. Umair (2016) equally affirmed the negative effects of fake news in democratic governance. As a growing democracy, Ghana is faced with numerous challenges just as any democratic country in the world, especially the uncomfortable threats of misinformation and disinformation, and it is pertinent to investigate the effects of fake news on the country's democracy. This would contribute greatly to consolidating the gains in maturing its democracy.

Conventionally, some nations have already made attempts at curbing the spread of fake news. Such decisions have often been criticise as attempts to gag free speech. Enacting laws to curtail the dissemination of fake news could infringe on citizens' rights to freedoms of free expression (Ahiabenu, Ofosu-Peasah & Sam, 2018). Despite the concerns, fake news still persists in the mainstream and social media in Ghana irrespective of verifications and gatekeeping processes in place (Ibid). There is certainly a motivating factor pushing producers of these falsehoods in the media. This researcher is interested in understanding the motives or factors that motivate citizens to produce and disseminate fake news in the public sphere and the political and economic implications of such dissemination.

Recent arrests, detention and prosecution of some journalists and other citizens in Ghana over publication and dissemination of alleged fake news is making this study timely. In November 2021, Nhyiraba Paa Kwesi Simpson, a journalist with a Takoradi-based radio station, Connect FM, was arrested in connection with publication of fake news. Again, Kwabena Bobbie Ansah, a journalist with an Accra-based radio station, Power FM, was also arrested in February, 2022 for publication of false information. Other citizens arrested for similar offences include Mensah Thompson, a civil activist and Kwame Baffoe, a politician, were also arrested in February, 2022 for publication of false information (Myjoyonline, 2022). All these arrests, detentions and prosecutions were in accordance with the country's Electronic Communications Act (Act 775, section 76, of 2008) and the criminal offences act of 1960. These developments are creating serious concerns in the country. A number of civil rights organisations and individuals have condemned the recent criminalization of speech and are of the view that those happenings were a draw-back to the successes chalked in press freedom stressing that the criminal libel law was repealed two decades ago. One of such persons who openly expressed dissatisfaction of the criminalization of speech is a communication scholar, Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo, who believes the security agencies

must not be involved in such cases and cautioned journalists to be mindful of their professional conduct arguing that irresponsible journalism and outright false publications must be condemned (Myjoyonline, 2022). She suggested a civil litigation instead of criminalisation of such offences since speech has been de-criminalised in the country since 2001.

Mutsvairo and Bebawi (2019) suggest the need for African and Middle East countries to focus on regulatory mechanisms aimed at eradicating fake news in the social and contemporary media. They contend that fake news creates credibility challenges for contemporary media. This challenge demands collaborative efforts including research on workable policies for redress. Aside, studies on fake news have largely focused on social media, elections, and on the ability of journalists to spot fake news. Mutugi, Nyamboga and Matu (2020) observe that few studies have been done on TV journalists spotting fake news. They recommend the need for media institutions to invest in expert training for journalists to spot fake news. This is another lacuna being explored by this research. This study encompasses contemporary and social media in establishing whether there are mechanisms in checking fake news in Ghana. Moreover, this researcher is adopting a mixed research approach where surveys and in-depth interviews will be used in investigating the motives for producing fake news, a factor lacking in most studies on this subject and making the current study germane.

Mutugi et al. (2020) found that most Kenyan fake news producers adopt modern technologies such as algorithms and digital media in dissemination of such falsehood. This implies that expert knowledge of fourth industrial revolution technologies in news organisations is essential. Soe (2018) also confirms the need for journalists to be abreast with the modern technologies such as algorithms and online reverse search engines to enhance their profession. This is in response to the fast revolution of technology spearheading media and communication operations as a result of the digital revolution. This study explores the use of the 4IR technologies that aid the publication of fake news in Ghana, as Ghana is a third world country with limited technological infrastructure. This will be strengthened by making recommendations as safe guide measures to enhance the monitoring and tracking of fake news dissemination in mainstream and social media in the country.

The Minister of Information, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah in October, 2018 hinted publically that the government was strategising to formulate legislations that will curtail the production and spread of fake news in Ghana just as some countries including Kenya have done. The minister was

obviously responding to the surge in incessant fake news publications in the country. Along this line of thinking, this study investigates further to understand if there is any available legislation or measures taken by the Ghanaian government in dealing with the phenomenon of fake news dissemination. Even if measures have been put in place, it is expedient to understand how effective such measures have been in ameliorating the canker of fake news. Since science and facts are best debated through empirical studies, this study intends to establish the legal basis on which fake news is produced or flagged in Ghana.

In a nutshell, this study, seeks to comprehensively investigate issues around fake news and the political economy of the media in Ghana to understand how new technologies are aiding the production and dissemination of fake news. The basic tacit argument of the political economy of the media is that the mass media is an industrial commercial organisation that produces and distributes commodities (Murdock & Golding, 2016). They argued that any major analysis in recent times must revolve around digital capitalism, communicative capitalism and cognitive capitalism. This is an approach this study will explore further. The study will also examine the regulatory mechanisms that protect the work of the media or undermines its performance given the fact that various ideologies could change the fortunes of the media's operation.

The critical political economy of the media (CPEM) surfaced at the time the mass media was also emerging. This theory which became popular in the 20th century, will be applied to this study. Wasko (2014) described the critical political economy of the media as an approach where the media is seen as a marketing conglomerate for selling transnational commercial commodities. With the growth of the internet and digital media, this development has expanded the frontiers of public relations and advertising, accompanied by consumer culture in what is termed "cultural capitalism". Although the media is in a digital era, Wasko believes CPEM remains the same philosophy because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it.

Using Facebook and Google as the basis, Azhar (2017) argues that these giants sell promotional media commodities in the digital space. This space remains relatively understudied in Ghana as long as capitalist production predominates the physical and the virtual worlds. Dahlberg (2015) however claims that social media stratify users through exploitation and undemocratic tendencies. To what extent this exploitation affects the democratic rights of citizens remains unanswered. This study aims to address this exploitation of the citizenry by interrogating fake news dissemination in the context of political economy of the media. Its focus is to understand the factors that motivate

fake news producers or publishers to relentlessly carry out their trade despite public outcry against false news in an era of a global pandemic such as covid-19.

This study contributes to the body of literature on fake news, the political economy of the media and the 4IR. It will also rejuvenate interest in the critical political economy of the media in Ghana and add a new paradigm to global debates on critical political economy. With the growing rate of digitalization across the globe especially in the media frontiers, this study will explore the influence of digital technologies on the media and how that affects the local geopolitics and the public sphere. Contextually and theoretically, the political economy of the media in Africa particularly Ghana is under-studied. Being an exploratory study, it is envisaged to generate interest in fake news and the political economy of the media in Ghana.

The overall goal of the study is to develop a framework and an implementable document to provide a structure in a form of practical ideas to address issues of fake news and how to reduce or possibly curtail the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

1.1 The Research Problem

This study explores the proliferation of fake news in the social and conventional (mainstream) media in Ghana amidst the fourth industrial revolution technology which is disrupting news production. News production is therefore no longer the preserve of professionally trained journalists, but converged backpack, mobile, and citizen journalists, who all participate in the news production process. Dissemination of news is no longer a monopoly of specialised news organisations but a profession flexible enough for everyone to engage in it (Dominick, 2014). To the understanding of Barclay (2018), fake news must be seen as a form of propaganda intentionally created to achieve either political, organizational, or commercial purposes. A number of studies on fake news have been conducted in Africa (Umair, 2017, Ofosu-Peasah & Sam, 2018, Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019, Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2019, Mare, Mabweazara & Moyo, 2020, Wasserman, 2020), but none focused on the political economy of the media and the 4th industrial revolution (4IR). This therefore makes this study unique and necessary.

Mare et al. (2019) argue that Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter are major social media platforms commonly used by political propagandists to disseminate fake news and have contributed in marring elections in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. Although this practice of

political interference using technology is becoming a common trend in global politics, it is exacerbated in the Global South by the poor information literate populace, who just share any information without authenticating whether the information shared is true or not. This development is coming at a time when Ghana's political structure is experiencing unparalleled scrutiny from citizens, civil society and political opponents. It is uncertain how fake news could filter through such heated political upheavals since it bears similar political and socio-cultural contexts with the rest of the Sub-Sahara Africa where fake news is said to influence the political systems.

Mutsvairo and Bebawi (2019) are convinced the catchphrase "fake news" is becoming a common norm in the world today, potentially weakening and challenging credible voices in news organization and production. This creates a credibility challenge for both conventional news stories and those published on social media. Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019) discovered that several contemporary media rely on social media and online platforms for their news production using smartphones in a bid to cut cost and in some cases to beat deadlines. Analysts have argued that reliance on social media by mainstream media challenge the latter's credibility and performance and that it affect its operation. This relates to Wasko (2014) believe that the growth of the internet and digital media in recent years has revived intense interest in the media economy. The approach where the media is seen as a marketing conglomerate for selling transnational commercial commodities deserves critical analysis. Wasko called for intensive study particularly in third world countries such as Ghana focusing on the critical political economy and the digital media.

Another major lacuna identified from previous studies is the non-existence or non-availability of literature or scholarly works on fake news and the political economy of the media in the Ghanaian context. The paucity of studies on the fourth industrial revolution in the Ghanaian context is also clear from the literature reviewed. Although there is literature on the political economy of the media in the Global North, little is known about the political economy of fake news and the media in Africa. Regrettably, none of the literature reviewed touched on the political economy of the media or political economy of fake news in Ghana. This study which explores the subject in perspective from the critical realism worldviews using the mixed method approach, intends to fill the gaps in literature on fake news and political economy of the media.
Available literature from varied scholars on fake news and the political economy of the media across the world indicates that the qualitative method and content analysis were the dominant

research approaches employed. Fake news and the political economy of the media is a complex phenomenon that is best understood from the mixed method approach as both descriptive and narrative text can be analysed (Creswell, 2014). The mixed method approach being employed by this current study is highly recommended for an elaborate analysis of this phenomenon. The use of the mixed method will enable triangulation of data and ensure the validity of the findings from this study. The use of the mixed method is complemented by the critical paradigm which will assist in investigating the issues holistically and in integrating the findings broadly.

Another deficiency in the reviewed literature is the over reliance on secondary data which does not give a clear picture about the complex subject of fake news and political economy of the media particularly in the African context where the subject is not comprehensively studied. The use of primary data or a combination of secondary and primary data as this study attempts to do is most preferred. This is because of the multi-dimensional approach which will offer better insights to the phenomenon of fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana.

The descriptive method of analysis is chiefly employed in the reviews analysed but the inferential analysis is also used because of its strengths in a study such as this current one. In order to generalise findings, inferential analysis offers generalisation from quantified data but is incapable of explaining motives behind the numbers and behaviour. The descriptive on the other hand, elucidates the motives behind the numbers or phenomena but lacks generalisation qualities. To address the pitfalls, triangulation is adopted to analyse data collected from respondents of this study who are mainly journalists and news editors in the Greater Accra region of Ghana, the capital city of the country. The study in this respect, makes room for both descriptive and inferential analysis to ensure the researcher does not only understand the motives behind the numbers but also to extrapolate the findings to similar demographics.

The review of studies on fake news in this section also indicates that most authors considered the political utility of fake news without specific contextualization. The studies failed to point out the disparities of fake news experienced in the Global North and the Global South. This necessitates the need to explore the phenomenon of fake news in a specific context of Ghana. This is much so in the context of the non-existence of an elaborate study in this geographic environment. This study is not only bringing new dynamics to the study of the subject but is also adding to the existing literature on fake news and the political economy of the media especially in this era of post-truth

coupled with advanced technological development and usage across diverse industries and contexts.

Consequently, the mixed method research which is being used by this study appears to be the best approach in the research traditions. It contains the weaknesses and strengths of the qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, researchers are able to gather elaborate data about a phenomenon and subject such data to rigorous analysis inductively and deductively.

As a results, this study is guided by four (4) research questions. Firstly, the study investigate the economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana, secondly, it seeks to examine the 4th industrial revolution technologies aiding the production and dissemination of fake news and its economic ramifications in Ghana, thirdly, it tries to understand how government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana and lastly to explore how the media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication.

1.2 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to explore the economic and political motives for the production of fake news as it relates to the public sphere of Ghana. The specific objectives are as follows;

1. To explore the economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana.

2. To establish how the 4th industrial revolution technologies aid the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

3. To examine how government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana.

4. To investigate how media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication.

1.3 Research questions

1. What are the economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana?

2. How are 4th industrial revolution technologies aiding the production and dissemination of fake news and what are its economic ramifications in Ghana?

3. How are government regulatory policies impeding or promoting fake news production in Ghana?

4. How do media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication?

1.4 Hypotheses

H_1 Economic and political reasons are responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

H_2 Economic and political reasons are not necessarily responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

1.5 Rationale of the study

The researcher's interest in research started at a tender age as his inquisitiveness never fades but rekindled when this researcher had the opportunity to work as a journalist. This interest was again given new meaning when the opportunity came to pursue doctoral studies. With the experience as a journalist, this researcher decided to research into fake news and the political economy of the media especially when compared with a highly ethical journalism experienced with the Ghana News Agency, then as a reporter to what currently pertains in the media. In practice, truth, accuracy, fairness and balance reporting were cardinal principles that guided the conduct of professional journalism. Along the line arose a certain pattern of journalism which fell short of these cannons. Further readings on literature around the subject opened the researcher's mind to many gaps in the literature and informed the need to explore the phenomenon of half-truths and sometimes entirely fabricated stories in the media. This need to understand fake news production and dissemination in the political economy of Ghana was heightened by the exponential evolution in the digital technology. This new stage in the digital space, described as the fourth industrial revolution otherwise, industry 4.0 for short, is a momentous element for the production and dissemination of fake news in the public sphere.

As a disturbing phenomenon, fake news affects virtually every sphere of life. Its production and dissemination is of major concern to conventional journalism whose primary role is to give credible, truthful and unbiased news and information to the general public for them to make informed decisions. With the emergence of fake news, the role of mainstream media is now in doubt because the public tend to mistrust journalists to provide them with accurate, reliable and factual information. This is worsened by the average citizen who regards any form of publication as a piece of journalistic work. Fake news is also a worry to policy makers, governments and civil society organisations. This is because much efforts and resources are needed to adequately disseminate information to the citizenry on government policies and programmes. The presence of fake news can easily divert the public's attention away from reliable information from state institutions.

Given that the aforementioned are nightmares brought about by fake news, it is incumbent to explore the motivating factor(s) necessitating the production and dissemination of fake news in the country's media. This does not preclude consideration of political and economic factors as key candidates to the likely primary factors influencing fake news production. It is also pertinent for this study to interrogate the legal framework of Ghana to understand how publishers might be taking advantage of its flexibility to publish what is injurious to the public. As the phenomenon of fake news is currently generating intense research interest in the Global North, literature on the subject in the Global South particularly in Ghana is still at the infantile stages. These factors made it apparently necessary for this researcher to explore the subject in much detail with the aim of adding a new perspective of academic knowledge to the literature of fake news and political economy of the media.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study explores fake news dissemination in the context of the media of Ghana. The study is premised on the fourth industrial revolution era where the use of high velocity technology in the processing and publication of news and information is common place. It is again anchored on the critical political economy of the media and public sphere theories. The study aims at exploring fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana from the democratic conception of public sphere. Fake news involves the process of dissemination of false information in the public

sphere, against the conception that the media is supposed to be a source for informed and unbiased forum for the exchange of credible information. It must be noted that "the media are the dominant social institution in contemporary society, supplanting the influence of older institutions, such as schools, religion, and sometimes even the family" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019:28). If the media fails the citizens with its responsibility of providing them with undiluted information and inefficiently supplants society, where then will the public seek refuge in times of crisis?

It is this question and many others that this study attempts to seek answers to from the perspective of the practitioners-journalists in the city of Accra to understand the economic and political motives for the production and publication of fake news in Ghana. As technology is leading the world in contemporary times, the study wants to establish how the 4IR technologies aid the production and dissemination of fake news. Media does not operate in isolation, the state and its legal frameworks serve as a cover but how these affect the operations and contents of the media is of interest to this study. This research also examines how government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana. Additionally, the study interrogates the gate keeping processes adopted by media organisations as part of measures to weed off fake news in the processing of news. This is achieved through empirical analysis of data collected using a mixed method research approach anchored on the critical and the interpretative worldviews.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

There are a number of key terms used in this study which require clarity to ensure the terms are not misinterpreted. A few of these terms have therefore been operationally defined.

Fake news: Fake news is a form of propaganda intentionally created to achieve either political, organisational or commercial purposes (Barclay, 2018). As a subset of propaganda, fake news can be produced and disseminated to achieve the goals of its producer. McGonagle (2017) thinks fake news can be any fabricated and deliberate dissemination of information with the aim of misleading others to believe in falsehood or doubt verifiable facts. Mills, Pitt and Ferguson (2019) identify three drivers of fake news. One of it is inadvertent disinformation and, in this case, fake news is accidently produced without rigour of accurate reporting usually required of journalistic piece. The second driver is ideological disinformation where fake news is produced to propagate or advance a course of action and the last is exploitative disinformation where fake news is created for

financial motives. This study incorporates these definitions of fake news and advance further that fake news can be considered as any distorted and fabricated information disseminated intentionally or unintentionally by individuals or groups in the public sphere. This implies that disinformation, which is information purposively created to achieve a purpose whether political, ideological or commercial, and misinformation which is false information spread unintentionally, can both fit the description of fake news.

Political economy of media: Political economy of the media is a model that explains and interrogates the intellectual underpinnings of the political, economic and social relationship of the media and government in a given society. Murdock (2015:733) explains the term further to mean that "political economy set out to understand how capitalism worked and accessed its consequences for the organisation of social and political life". Political economy of the media is used in this study to explain the power dynamics and control of media resources and contents. Political economy critiques that class of people in society who control the political and the economic powers of the media and as such can influence the content of the news and programmes that are produced, broadcast or published by the media.

Fourth industrial revolution: The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), otherwise known as industry 4.0 refers to the "smart factory" or a virtual copy of the physical and decentralised worlds where decisions can be made. The 4.0 is used in this study to describe the use of technological application in the processing of information in the digital environment expeditiously. It can also be described as a situation where the physical systems relate and communicate with one another in relations with humans in real time and enabled by artificial intelligence (Morrar, Arman and Mousa, 2017). The use of digital technology in the manufacturing of robots, and artificial intelligence in producing news stories could all be linked to the possibility of 4IR.

Social media: Social media is a common feature of the 21st century media. Social media is simply any social network service such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Whatssap, Instagram, and among others that provide people with the opportunity to socially interact from person-to-person on the Internet. Lule (2014) specifies that social media allows unprecedented volume of personal, informal communication in real time from anywhere in the world. This allows users to always be in touch with friends all over the world and keep conversations as casual as possible. Social media which can be accessed on the personal computer, laptops, netbooks, tablet computers

and smartphones by any average person using the smartphone is the commonest feature of today's information age. Many citizens rely on social media for information and updates on current happenings in society.

Internet: The Internet is a multiplicity tool for mass communication. It has unique and elaborate functions that include the production and distribution of messages, processing, exchange and storage of all forms of communication, and as a new media tool, it offers both private and public means of communication for users without limitation. The internet, unlike the mainstream media, is less formal as its operation is less organized bureaucratically. This in principle makes the internet to be a communication tool available to all and to some degree, free from governmental control. The internet has innovative features that set it apart for mass communication purposes (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). The internet is powered by web 1.0 that enables the general public to surf and browse the net for virtually anything they need to know under the sun.

Public sphere: Public sphere is premised on a democratic space for the general citizenry to deliberate and discuss government policies and programmes in an opinion formation that would influence transformation of policies. Willems (2012) indicates that the theory refers to the new space or sphere for the exchange or communication of ideas or deliberation of public issues without constraints. Public sphere in this study is both a theory as propounded by theorists and a concept. As a concept, public sphere describes the democratic space that enables citizens to communicate and exchange views, ideas and opinions on matters of public interest.

Citizen journalism: Citizen journalism is the execution of journalistic tasks by ordinary citizens who have little or no professional training in journalism. Citizen journalism refers in this study to that amateurish form of journalism that has become common in today's technological world making it possible for virtually everyone to produce a piece of journalistic work. Citizen journalism is more participatory for both trained journalists and citizens with the flair for writing or producing an art of journalism. The concept describes a situation where citizens themselves "report the issues confronting them" (Noor, 2017:55) as though they were journalists. The concept is also described as participatory or democratic journalism. It is not clear where the concept of citizen journalism emerged however, (Gillmor, 2008 and Cokley, 2008 as cited in Noor, 2017) in the early parts of 2000, citizens started engaging in gathering and disseminating information on events on spot. This trend has grown to become another vocation where bloggers and 'vloggers' now compete with mainstream media for breaking news (Dominick, 2014; McQuail & Deuze,

2020). This appears to be so because of the new technology which is making access to transmission devices such as the mobile phone easier. This also enables almost everyone to manipulate, produce and disseminate messages at will. This practice where ordinary citizens produce works of journalism as if they were journalists is referred to as citizen journalism. Dominick (2014) attributes the trend of citizen journalism to the development of the digital media and the-easy-to-access internet that makes it possible for everyone to produce videos and other contents with their cell phones.

Mainstream media: Mainstream media otherwise known as traditional media refers to the conventional sources of news such as radio, television and newspapers. Broadly, mainstream media are categorized into print and electronic media where the print media includes newspapers, magazines and books whiles the electronic media are exemplified by radio, television and other audio and visual devices. These serve as channels for dissemination of news for mass audiences. Social media is the new form of media of mass communication that is gradually replacing the role traditionally reserved for mainstream media.

1.8 Structural overview of the thesis

This thesis presents eight chapters in all. The first part of the study consisted of giving a general background of fake news discussions around the world and narrowing down to the pros and cons of fake news existence. The chapter establishes the lacuna in literature of the study by indicating the scarcity or non-existence of a study of this magnitude in the Ghanaian context, hence the current one is an exploratory in nature. It was also emphasised among the research gaps that this study is different in methodological approach as it adopts the mixed method approach as against the available studies which tilted towards the qualitative paradigm. The chapter also dealt with the objectives of the study where it was established that the political and economic motives for the production and distribution of fake news were the overriding aims of the study. The first chapter of the thesis ended by emphasising that the study sought to contribute to enriching the available intellectual discourse on fake news and the political economy of the media in the global South, with Ghana as the context.

The second chapter of this research concentrates on the reviews made on secondary literature relating to this study. The chapter focuses on literature that is related to fake news, the political

economy of the media and the fourth industrial revolution. The chapter, in an integrated and synergic manner, reflects holistically on discussions on fake news and its conceptual underpinnings. Reflections are made on the origins of the technologies that influence the proliferation of fake news. Discussions are also made about the powerful economic and political utility of fake news as experiences from the Global North and Global South demonstrate how technology could be used to influence decisions. Among the sub-topics analysed in the chapter include; the evolution of the internet and social media, internet access in Ghana, conceptualising fake news, the fourth industrial revolution, citizen journalism and fake news, fake news and democracy, effects of fake news, and an insight on the media of Ghana.

The theoretical underpinning of this study is examined in chapter three. The Critical Political Economy of the Media (CPEM) and Public Sphere are used to ground the ideas promulgated by this study. Political economy of the media explains the economics and political relationships of the media and buttresses the fact that the media is an exploitative tool used by capitalists to perpetuate exploitation of the poor. In the 21st century where technology mainly drives media messages, the capitalists have found it expedient to exploit the poor the more through technological giants such as Google and Facebook. These technologies equally fuel fake news dissemination aided by artificial intelligence and robotics. Public sphere sees the media as a forum, platform for public discourse. This forum must be seen as space where both the powerful and the less privileged in society have equal opportunities to discuss public policies and debates dispassionately.

Chapter four of this thesis outlines the methodology used in conducting the study. A research methodology can be described as a technique or strategy used in investigating or understudying a phenomenon. To investigate a complex phenomenon just as this study, a strategic approach needs to be used. Such a design is described as a framework that enables researchers to collect and analyse data. In this study, both secondary and primary data were collected from various sources using acceptable ethical procedures. In this respect, the sequential mixed research method was used for this study. This enabled the researcher to explore the nuances of fake news and political economy from diverse data collection perspectives. The study is also underpinned in the critical philosophical foundation or worldviews where in-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaire were used to collect data. Data was inductively and deductively analysed and interpreted. This makes the descriptive and inferential data meaningful for better understanding of the chapter five and subsequent ones.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter of the study focuses on the review of literature and works that are related to fake news, political economy of the media and the fourth industrial revolution. This literature is integrated in a synergic manner to reflect holistically the discussions on fake news and its conceptual underpinnings. For a better understanding of fake news, it is prudent to delve into technologies that make it easy for fake news to be produced, distributed and made common to the general populist. Among the sub-topics analysed in the literature include the evolution of the internet and social media, internet access in Ghana, conceptualising fake news, the fourth industrial revolution, citizen journalism and fake news, fake news and democracy, effects of fake news and an insight on Ghanaian media.

2.1 The Internet and social Media

The Internet is a democratically decentralised medium of communication which evolved in the 1970s. The internet can be described as a network of computers that are connected with several other computers to operate as a single unit. Its evolution is greatly linked to the US military. In 1973, its Defense Advanced Research Project Agency conducted a study with the result being the ability of computers to communicate over a distributed network which later produced packet-switching technology and then making it possible to send small bundles of data to a receiver uninterrupted. Lule (2014) indicates that the shared protocols and the new technology produced, enabled computer-to-computer transmission to be possible where a single large message could be sent through entire web of connections stressing that what directs traffic is the host, which is a physical node connected to the Internet. "The early Internet was called ARPANET", (Lule, 2014:278).

It is instructive to note that the evolution of the Internet occurred at the raging time of the Cold War. This made it possible for the Department of Defense, of the US to innovate an idea to prevent its computers from exposure to the vulnerabilities of nuclear attacks. Dominick (2014) indicates that this led experts to decentralise the computers through a network system, in a web of computer

networks that enabled them (computers) to communicate to one another as if they were humans. This gave birth to ARPANET as the first Internet. The usage of the internet was initially limited to scientists and computer experts until in the late 1980s when the National Science Foundation created computing centers in U.S. universities. The systems were expensive at the time and that made only five computers to be built initially but later on, chains of regional networks were finally linked to a supercomputer which gave birth to the modern model of computers and the Internet. Dominick (2014) stressed that the birth of the Internet gave students, scientists, government workers and indeed many others the opportunity to have access to greater amount of information which serves as a communication link for scientists to share data and potentially increased traffic for all within a shorter period. The development of the World Wide Web (WWW or web) in 1990 and browsers in 1993, simplified usage and navigation on the Internet. An additional utility vehicle that made the Internet navigable is the search engine that scans the Internet and displays data and information according to a predetermined criterion. Google and Yahoo are common and convenient search engines that turned the Internet into a valuable tool of information for everyone to make good use of. Lule (2014) is of the view that Web 1.0 came to light when hypertext and hyperlinks were introduced as newer features of the internet. Hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) was the new communication protocol which interpreted hypertext documents on browsers.

What actually makes social media services interactive is Web 2.0. The term refers to "the increased focus on user-generated content and social interaction on the web as well as the evolution of online tools" (Lule, 2014:285). This enables virtually anyone with the technology, whether trained or untrained to be able to communicate and report on happenings anywhere in the world. In this process where everyone can communicate and process information, citizens generally engage in transmitting information without the information being filtered through professional organisations nor being censored by governments. This democratic potential brought about by the use of Web 2.0 to cause unimpeded interaction in the social and mainstream media is the subject of numerous research projects (Umair, 2017, Ofosu-Peasah & Sam, 2018, Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019, Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2019, Mare, Mabweazara & Moyo, 2020, Wasserman, 2020). In our part of the world, especially in Africa where literacy is still low and internet access still growing, it is uncertain the level of utilization of social media by citizens to participate in democratic governance in general.

One distinguishing feature of the internet is its multiplicity role. This multiplicity nature of the internet sets it apart as unique from all forms of mass media. McQuail and Deuze (2020) drew emphasis on the multiple functions of the internet to include the production and distribution of messages; it processes, exchanges and stores all forms of communication, and as a new media tool, it offers both private and public means of communication for users without limitation. The internet, unlike the mainstream media, is less formal as its operation is less organized bureaucratically. This in principle makes the internet a communication tool available to all and to some degree, free from governmental control.

McQuail and Deuze (2020) noted that the internet has innovative features that set it apart for mass communication purposes. They enumerated a number of roles played by the internet as against the old media (mainstream media). They intimated that authors who wish to publish can take advantage of the internet to either blog, vlog or do other autonomous acts depending on the author's interest. The fear however, about the internet as a tool for authors, is that it may not be too good a platform for them because of copyright issues and other associated challenges. Publishers in the internet too are not left out in this troubling internet era because of the ambiguous forms of publications that present challenges to traditional forms of publishing. The significant process of publishing, which include gatekeeping, editing and validation of authorship is dynamic in this era because of the introduction of algorithms in this process.

McQuail and Deuze (2020) identified a more complex role for the audience in the internet media stressing that the audience here is either a member of a self-chosen network or a special public or an individual. The audience in the internet media is engaged in multiple tasking such as reception to security, interacting and publishing in a convergence manner. This singles out the audience as a user. McQuail and Deuze (2020) averred that the increasing importance of artificial intelligence in the internet and mass communication makes such disciplines great areas of interest to researchers. For instance, there is the need to interrogate who the authors, publishers and audience or users of fake news are. This is even more significant in the Ghanaian context where it is unclear who the authors and publishers of fake news are. This makes the present study not only timely, but an important contribution to the ongoing debate on the inter-relationship of the internet and fake news.

Social media is a common feature of the 21st century media. Social media is simply any social network service such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Whatssap, Instagram, among

others that provide people with the opportunity to socially interact from person-to-person on the Internet. Lule (2014) explains that social media allows unprecedented volumes of personal, informal communication in real time from anywhere in the world. This allows users to always be in touch with friends all over the world and to keep conversations as casual as possible. News on social media can be instantaneously delivered making news organisations to harness bloggers as sources of real-time news. This form of crowdsourcing does not give much depth to the news thus throwing a bigger challenge to the traditional sources of news.

Dominick (2014) described social media as an incommodious task but indicated that the technology enables us to participate in activities online, converse or comment on someone's post, create and share posts on sites of individual choice, collaborate in creating content with other members and link up with friends and those with similar interests. Dominick (2014) indicates that social media continue to increase in popularity because of the variety of access. Social media can be accessed on the personal computer, laptops, netbooks, tablet computers and smartphones; an average smartphone user spends at least 20 percent of their time visiting social network sites to engage in one form of communication or the other.

Ever since social media became part of the news delivery process, the manner and process of news production and dissemination have never been the same. From yesteryears when people waited for news to be written by reporters, the reverse appears to be the reality where reporters will now be competing with social media in breaking the news and in most cases relying on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp for breaking news. Alejandro (2010:09) explains further that "…a lot of tips or leads these days are from the web or what is trending in social networks like Twitter, Facebook or its popularity ratings". This is the remarkable influence social media is playing in journalism and society in general. Journalists do not have the luxury of time anymore for holding on to a story nor bloggers and citizen journalists have the patience to wait for journalists to break the news; they are fiercely competing with journalists on daily basis. No media can afford to wait. What is now becoming the norm in organised media organisations is the tendency to give the audience bits of the information at a time as soon as the information is available. The speed with which today's news flies, makes it imperative for journalists to adopt strategies to not only remain relevant but ethical in the discharge of their duties.

Despite the ubiquitous presence of social media in Africa, Paterson (2013) sees Short Message Service (SMS) as not social media, it is the commonest form of participatory journalism and could

be described as more social than the Internet-based. The mobile phone is a common utility that serves both the poor and the middle class by occupying a central point in the discourse of participatory media of this class of people. Social media also presents the opportunity for users to be politically engaged thereby influencing information flow despite the underdeveloped telecommunication infrastructure and limited bandwidth in many areas of the region. This researcher is of the conviction that SMS-based citizen journalism must be given the space to shift journalism away from purely urban and national political scene to bringing journalism to the continent's most disenfranchised citizens. This will enable free expression not only to be done but to be well manifested.

Alejandro (2010) believes the coming of social media presents enormous opportunities in the current technological landscape. These opportunities however also present pitfalls as hearsay and hoaxes or ramours and fake news are becoming a common phenomenon. These ramous, fake news and hearsays could lead to financial losses and insecurity. For instance a CNN iReport poster reported the hospitalisation of Apple's CEO, Steve Jobs in 2008. This turned out to be false but the harm had already been caused. Apple's stocks in the US suffered a major financial loss as a result of just a single fake news story. As if this is not enough, the risk of errors brought by social media and web 2.0 is not only challenging to journalism but has a serious effect on society in general since people can no longer trust the information disseminated. "Barriers to entry have been lowered since anyone with a PC, iPhone or Blackberry can be their own publisher. They can blog, tweet or facebook it anytime, anywhere" (Alejandro, 2010:10).

Scholarship has been theorising the internet in a number of concepts. McLuhan (1992) envisaged the role of technology earlier when he indicated that "the medium is the message". Technological determinism and social constructivism are the dominant theories that aptly explain the evolution of the internet. The social construction view holds that the structures, forces and ideas in the society are largely produced by humans who continue to recreate them for changes in society. McQuail and Deuze (2020) see the media as a significant part of this social construction of society through the functions it play in interpreting human action and meaning in a change that seems unending. The social construction notion of technology simply "emphasises the social construction of technology, focusing on the role of active human agents in ultimately determining how technology is developed and used" (Croteau & Hyones, 2019:35). This means that social forces and technology are interdependent. Forces such as the cultural norms, economic pressure and the legal

system influence how technology is used and its successes or failures are all depended on these forces.

In contrast to social construction perspective of technology which sees change in society to emanate from humans, technology determinism sees social change in society as fueled by technology itself. "Overall, the history of communication technology underlines the capacity for communication more readily to cross barriers of time and space" (McQuail & Deuze, 2020:133) Technology determinism epitomizes social change to have been influenced by technology largely. The approach sees "technology or technological developments as the central causal elements in processes of social change" (Croteau & Hyones, 2019: 28). Critics of the theory suggest that technology cannot develop itself and that it is humans who cause things to happen through the choices and actions they undertake. It appears the debate will continue to linger on over whether technology or social construction influences societal change as we are currently experiencing with the internet. Whether technological determinism or social constructionism influence change in the 21st century, it is clear that the current age is in a social transition characterised by a new communication technology that is influencing change at all levels. The internet and social media are at the heart of this information age where possession of information is a significant means of survival.

2.1.1 Internet Access in Ghana

Ghana is one of the few countries in Africa to have had internet access early since the technology was produced. According to Sey (2011), internet access reached the country in 1989-1990. The penetration of internet has been increasing since then until the social media era where many youth have taken advantage of the new developments to either participate or get involve through various social interactions with peers or friends. In recent years, the number of Ghanaians who have access to the internet has increased tremendously. In January 2021, the internet users were approximated to be 16 million (Statista, 2021). Internet penetration for the 2021 also stood at 50 percent from the 48 percent penetration registered in the previous year. As at January, 2020, there were 14.76 million internet users in the country. This is an increase by 1.0 million users which translates into 7.5 percent between 2019 and 2020 while the penetration stood at 48% of the population in the same period (Internet World Stats, 2020). This is a significant increase in internet access and penetration in the country within a short period. This is a development that must be commended in a continent where technology advancement appears slower.

The improvement in internet users and penetration rates has had a corresponding increase in the number of social media users. The number of social media users has equally been increasing to the extent that the figure has reached 6.00 million social media users in Ghana as at January, 2020. This is an increase of 629,000 between April, 2019 and January, 2020. The social media penetration also stood at 20% in January, 2020. Most of the social media users are arguably the youth and the literate population of the country and if their usage of the internet is increasing, it certainly has a corresponding effect on social mobility, the literacy rate, and the density of the population's youth (Internet World Stats, 2020).

In an Afrobarometer report undertaken by Sanny and Selormey (2020) and commissioned by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), it was discovered that 22 percent of Ghanaians were dependent on social media for their news consumption and 19 percent on the internet, which demonstrates a steady increase in the use of digital sources for news and information. This is a great rise from the two percent of internet users recorded in 2008 by the same Afrobarometer report. The study indicates that the number of Ghanaians dependent on social media and the internet as sources of news is increasing faster, although the people trust these sources less than the traditional media sources such as television, radio and newspapers.

The study also points out that a greater number of Ghanaians are against any restrictions to the access of social media and internet. Sanny and Selormey (2020) found in their study that the level of educational attainment correlates with the use of social media and access to the internet, stressing that the use of digital media increases sharply with their educational level and socio-economic status. The study explaines further that the usage of digital media also has gender and age dimensions. Young adults were identified to prefer digital sources of news more than the elderly population do. Also, men and rural-urban residents prefer digital media more than women and rural residents do. These findings nonetheless, only four (4) in 10 Ghanaians do not trust information from digital media as against 55% who believe news from private and public media as trustworthy.

Mobile phone access has also been increasing in the country. There were 39.97 million connections in the country as at January, 2020. This is an increase of about 825,000 from an equivalent of 130,000 of the population in 2019. The number of mobile phone connections supersedes the total population of over 30 million citizens. This therefore means that many people own more than one mobile phone in Ghana. Similar developments about the mobile phone's penetration are taking

place across the African continent. In sub-Sahara Africa alone, there were about 747 million SIM connections, which represents 75% of the population. The volume of the population having access to the mobile phone correlates with internet usage and connectivity. This implies a higher level of participation in internet and social media forms of communication. This could increase penetration and access to mobile phones in Ghana and likely impact on the production, distribution and dissemination of fake news.

Sey (2011) indicates that the increase in internet access has been an ongoing development in Ghana for a while now, which makes it easy for many citizens to join the process. The growth and access to the internet and social media ultimately has an effect on the spread of fake news. As many more people are exposed to these technologies especially the internet and social media, it opens their vulnerability to people who might want to take advantage of them either to re-orient them or indoctrinate them to their (perpetrator's) advantage. This is in line with the fact that the internet promotes and enhances electronic and democratic means of communication and free expression. This form of communication is interactive, social and costs less, thus affordable to make it possible for many people to participate in the process. As many participate in the unending exchanges, it makes it easier for misinformation, disinformation, rumour and fake news to fly easily and rapidly. This makes the current study novel as it explores the reasons behind the production, distribution and dissemination of fake news in Ghana. This is necessary in understanding the political and economic relationships of fake news in the country as literature in this area is quite scarce.

Boateng (2019) categorise users of the internet in Ghana to include the elites, politicians, students, civic actors and many others who influence interactions on social, political and trending issues in the country. Generally, there is a surge in on-line interactivity and communication in Ghana. This surge in interactivity is mostly centered in the urban metropolises where it is assumed many duelers have the means to participate. This is notwithstanding the infrastructural challenges associated with telecommunication infrastructure the country is battling with. Sey (2011) believes the infrastructural challenge affecting internet access is being address by the expansion in mobile broadband telephony where network providers are improving their networks with robust technological developments. This will enhance the efficiency of the services they render.

Boating (2019) observed that, despite improvements in internet access and communication technology in Ghana and Africa in general, the digital divide between the Global North and the Global South and subsequently between the information-rich and information-poor in many

countries in the continent continues to widen. The digital divide in terms of access to the use of social media and the digital inequalities infrastructure in Ghana especially among rural folks and urban settlers is quite high. This continues to marginalize those without the means to utilize broadband and internet services since they are left out of the social media conversation.

In some circumstances, factors such as high cost of data are denying many citizens the opportunity to participate in political discourse, thus limiting their democratic potentials. As a result, government's policies such as the ICT for Accelerated Development Policy and the Ghana Open Data Initiatives project are aimed at accelerating Ghana's socio-economic development that will not only transform the country but also widen access to new communication technologies. This appears to be yielding fruitful dividends, reasons many Ghanaians are shifting from traditional sources of news media to social media. This will enable users to interact and share news, pictures and videos. In this process of interactive exchanges, fake news thrives easily.

2.2 Conceptualising Fake News

Fake news has a long history, which implies it is not a recent phenomenon. Many scholars have attempted various definitions for fake news. Barclay (2018) sees fake news as a form of propaganda intentionally created to achieve either political, organisational or commercial purposes. He indicates that fake news is a subset of propaganda where interested parties can intentionally produce and disseminate any information to achieve their goals. McGonagle (2017) posits that fake news can be any fabricated and deliberate dissemination of information with the aim of misleading others to believe in falsehood or doubt verifiable facts. To this extend, any information created by an individual or groups of people with an intention to profit from it financially, politically or ideologically can be regarded as fake news. This implies disinformation, which is information deliberately created to achieve a certain purpose, either political, ideological or commercial can be classified under this definition.

Another definition of fake news is "information fabrication" (Posetti and Matthews, 2018). Among the many definitions of fake news is an outstanding classification of the phenomenon by Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) who argue that a message should only be considered as fake news when it is low in its facticity, created with intention to deceive and is presented in a journalistic format. Fake news should according to this definition, not be applied to all forms or phenomena of falsehood but rather applied only to false publications in journalistic environments. Again, they distinguish

between news published with malicious or negative intention to mis-dis-inform and 'false news' which might not necessarily be deliberate. This dimension of the publication is the prior determinant of fake news in this instance. This definition of fake news is also supported by Lazer et al. (2018) who see fake news as fabricated information that mimics news media content but lacks news media's editorial norms and processes for accurate and credible ethos of information dissemination. Whichever definition that is applied, one thing is common; fake news is false publications; they can be created with malicious intent or not, yet their consequences are dire to citizens and society in general.

Several scholars (Posetti and Matthews, 2018, Lazer et al., 2018, Mills et al. 2019) trace fake news to ancient times and described it as a feature of human communication. They reference a historical incident of a meeting of Antony and Cleopatra in Roman times where Octavian spread negative information to destroy Antony as a clear case of propaganda which can be referred to in modern times as fake news. In this very classic example, short sharp slogans were written on coins in a style which can in modern times be termed as tweets used to describe Antony as a womanizer and a drunk who had had an affair with Cleopatra. This was a strong propaganda strategy that enabled Octavian in some respect to become the first Roman Emperor.

Scholars believed the invention of the Gutenberg's printing press in 1455 which enabled systematic publications at the time, contributed significantly to information dissemination and consequently the spread of disinformation and misinformation. The first printing press was equally the turning point in mass communication since it resulted in the mass production of various printing materials such as books and pamphlets. The printing press increased literacy rates and information spread as it is linked to the Great Moon Hoax. The publication of the 'The Great Moon Hoax' of 1835 is considered as one of the first large scale publication of fake news in human history as it projected the discovery of life on the moon as a reality. This was later to be proven false.

In the 20th century, the one-to-many communication surfaced with radio and television being the new discoveries. This again created room for fake news to thrive in a form of satirical news which is often mistaken as the real thing in the consumers' minds. The later part of the 20th century and the 21st century saw the development of the internet and social media respectively. These new discoveries in the information dissemination systems, resulted in a new wave of fake news which can simply be described as the riskiest moments in disinformation, misinformation, propaganda

and mischievous false publications or hoax news era. "Errors and fraudulent content now go viral through peer to peer distribution while news satire is regularly misunderstood and re-shared as straight news by unwitting social media users" (Posetti & Mathews, 2018:12).

Fake news in recent years has assumed an enviable stature in journalism and mass communication space because of the computational propaganda, weaponisation of information and state sponsored disinformation that in most instances mimic legitimate news sites and manipulates audio and video content to represent reality. McGonagle (2017) indicates that the current hype on fake news is not a new phenomenon stressing that the partisan press has historically been peddling falsehood and biased stories in democratic states. This, in most circumstances, affects the legitimate legal and ethical performances of the watchdog role of the media because of its ability of duping the public with dramatic results.

Lazer et al. (2018) indicate that the 20th century information technologies have given rise to fake news because they offer opportunity to information distributers who lack credible and accurate ethical guiding principles of traditional journalism to openly ply their trade through the use of the internet. This accordingly contributed to the abandoning of traditional news sources and "general trust in the mass media has collapsed to historic lows in 2016, with 51% of Democrats and 14% of Republicans expressing 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' of trust in mass media as a news source" (Lazer et al., 2018:14) in the United States. This is likely to create bigger challenges for the practice of journalism in many countries across the world since technological advancement is a global phenomenon. The situation in Ghana is still unclear since research on the effects of fake news and the trust of journalists to deliver credible, unbiased and objective news stories is fragile and unavailable.

The Arab world experienced a bigger devastating effect through fake news and cyber propaganda in 2010. This political propaganda was used in Tunisia and later spread to Egypt and Syria. The Arab spring also confirms that social media and the internet evolution could either be used to serve democratic governance or be used to consolidate authoritarian regime through propaganda. Yerlikaya (2020) indicates that there is a relationship between social mobilisation and social media technologies. This is based on the rationale that the emergence of newer technologies has made the communication environment more open and pervasive in promoting democratic campaigns in favour of users. Morgan (2018) thinks the use of sophisticated technology to manipulate information is similar to authoritarian rule. The current happenings in Western democracies where

technology and social media are ruling the decisions of people is similar to what takes place in authoritarian regimes where public discourse and democracy is undermined in favour of the creators of the disinformation.

What made fake news a topical issue in recent global discourse was the United States elections in 2016, but Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) traced the emergence of fake news to the evolution of digital media and changes it has brought to modern architecture of media democracies. This is further exacerbated by disaggregated digital media and the journalistic environment in which competitive journalism in respect to ethical standards in mainstream media is seen by many as an archaic and elitist practice. It is seen as an ivory tower by bloggers, citizen journalists or alternative media. These bloggers and citizen journalists write and produce news stories that fail to meet journalistic standards. Their stories are hurriedly written with little or no editing hence riddled with fake news.

Yerlikaya (2020) notes that the techniques used in creating and manufacturing of fake news are smart in manipulating people in society towards political and ideological lines. This is exemplified by the 2016 presidential elections in the US where distorted signals defeated the truth. "Fake news has been labelled as demonising by traditional news organisations…by distorting social reality and by being utilized intensely, fake news strengthens the claim that we have entered a post-truth" (Yerlikaya, 2020:181). There is therefore no gain saying that fake news is a political tool used by politicians to outwit the gullible citizens. Many a time, the producers and disseminators of fake news know the objectives for producing their craft and this is mostly achieved because of the low literacy rate among Africans, most of who fail to be critical with information they come across.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Mare, Mabweazara and Moyo (2020) stressed the need for re-centering of the research agenda to bridge the intellectual divide between the North and South. This will focus on how fake news and cyber-propaganda are produced in different political, ideological and demographical contexts. This is borne out of the contention that most studies in this area tend to be one-dimensional along a Western perspective that glosses over global experiences. The Western-centric conception of fake news should not be seen as universally applicable, and so there is the need to frame alternatives to dismantle the intellectual imbalances between Africa and the West. This study seeks to add to the existing scholarly discussions in the African context in understanding the nuances of fake news and its political economy in Ghana.

2.3 The Fourth Industrial Revolution

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), otherwise known as industry 4.0 refers to the "smart factory" or a virtual copy of the physical and decentralised worlds where decisions can be made (Morrar, Arman and Mousa, 2017). It can also be described as a situation where the physical systems relate and communicate with one another in relations with humans in real time and enabled by artificial intelligence. There is a growing debate about the global impact of industry 4.0 because of the digital revolution, smart knowledge and systems and the Internet of things that is overwhelming the entire universe. Virtually every field is experiencing new changes in terms of technological changes and other transformations, a characteristic most scholars admit is extraordinary in the evolution of human society.

This is heightened by the global covid-19 which has compelled humans to rely on technology in resolving the challenges affecting society and mankind. In the current milieu, the pandemic has not only resulted in huge traffic on social media but has also created newer versions of social media such as the use of 'zoom' as one of the significant discoveries for interface communication. Vargo, Zhu, Benwell and Yan (2021) indicate that more than 15 hardware and 50 software technologies were used in combating covid-19. This greatly helped the health system to detect, track and contain the rate of infection and spread of the disease. Zoom, facetime and WhatsApp were identified as the most used software video communication tools, aiding different forms of communication in the height of the pandemic which was still ongoing as at the time of undertaking this study. These technologies are all products of the fourth industrial revolution which are aiding society to carry out various functions with ease.

Skilton and Hovsepian (2018) give a broader definition of the fourth industrial revolution. "The convergence of industrial production and information and communication technologies. Industry 4.0 relates to the convergence of Internet of things (IoT), the Internet of people (IoP) and the Internet of everything (IoE)". These terms were further explained to mean that the internet of things consists of the sensors of network systems relating to the critical infrastructure at corporate and national levels. These include the robust security control systems that support the automated machines, medicines and among others. The internet of people refers to the personal data and human centric network of products and services focusing on privacy and personal centric internet.

These have resulted in astronomical growth in learning which ultimately leads to the fusion of technologies making every industry more complex and smarter.

Technology is at the core of scientific application of knowledge for practical purposes especially in this century. The change of the 4IR is not only a technological change but it encompasses increased population growth in the world, migration, rising climate change, emission and weather pattern changes which culminate to give rise to food security concerns and energy security to support populations in these ongoing changes. The business forces are also transforming as well as the social, as well as the political transformation of society. The deep structural changes in the ecosystem are not left out with the twenty-first century being the first century to experience these convergences of technology which fuse the physical and the biological (Skilton & Hovsepian, 2018). The revolution of society, and much so technology will continue to be a part of human society.

The 4IR gained momentum through the World Economic Forum in 2016. The objective of this revolution is quite simple as it is aimed at developing the world in a new order championed by new technologies which will automatically change the way we live, work and relate to other things in the universe. The transformation which is unparalleled, is envisaged to be complex and comprehensive, integrating all sectors including private and public stakeholders as well as the academia. The media which is the focus of this discussion is equally experiencing a similar transformation as news production and distribution is fast changing in many respects. It is in this respect that this study explores the use of the 4IR technologies in the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

It is imperative to note that the first industrial revolution used steam and water to mechanize production while the second used electric power to mass produce. The third industrial revolution which has been occurring since the last century is a digital one characterised by fusion of technologies which blurs the lines of physical, biological and digital spheres (Schwab, 2019). The 4th industrial revolution which analysts believe is already taking place, is exponential in its velocity, scope and system impact which disrupts every sector of development, thus, transforming systems of production, management and governance. In this exponential rate of technology manufacture, distribution and usage, it is argued that its dissemination, is likely to be tainted with both wanted and unwanted content where falsehood could play critical roles. It is on this basis that

this study remains cardinal in not only contributing to the debate on the fourth industrial revolution but in understanding which technologies are responsible in influencing the production and distribution of fake news in the Ghanaian context.

Schwab (2019), indicates that there is currently unprecedented processing and storage power of mobile devices in the hands of billions of people with access to unlimited knowledge, and that such possibilities would be "multiplied by emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, material science, energy storage and quantum computing. Already, artificial intelligence is all around us, from self-driving cars and drones to virtual assistants and software that translate or invest" (Schwad, 2019:41). The new era however presents challenges and opportunities for all sectors of the world. Analysts believe this new era presents great opportunities for all sectors of society including agriculture, education, governance, and media among others. Some have argued that the presence of fake news could be one of the challenges brought by this revolution and appears to a challenge to the media ecosystem in Ghana. This and many inconclusive reasons occasioned this study to explore holistically the effects of fake news in the political economy of the media.

Whittaker (2019) argues that the work of journalists as news providers is being affected and will continue to face more challenging times in the coming years. This is due to artificial intelligence, robotics and algorithms which are being introduced into journalism. He indicates that much of the content in journalism is already being produced automatically noting that it was not going to be possible to have the entire news production process replaced by machines or robots as thought earlier by some scholars. He instead proffered "augmented journalism" where human activity could be supplemented by algorithms, apps and software in a suitable journalistic manner. In supplementing the news production, certain errors including ethical blunders could be minimised in news dissemination because robots lack sensory activity and cannot feel human emotions, and these reasons make them unsuitable for all contexts.

The role of automation in news production in the current transformation in communication and journalism industry cannot be underestimated. That notwithstanding, software can only play rule-restricted tasks better but will fail in performing cognitive tasks compare to humans. Whittaker (2019) posits that delimited parameters and non-repetitive cognitive tasks will still continue to require human activity and skills to accomplish. Pavlik (2016) shares a similar view that

journalism's future appears uncertain given that its economic sustainability is declining with much speed because of the introduction of algorithms and robotics making news production faster and cheaper while tech giants also deny mainstream media of advertising revenue. Despite the speed with which technology is associated with the production of news, ethical concerns relating to such news production have not been well addressed.

Pavlik (2016) is of the view that algorithms, Big data, and artificial intelligence will continue to change and transform journalism and how journalists operate their trade. This notwithstanding, some do not see this transformation as a threat to journalism but an opportunity to re-invent journalism for network, mobile and digital journalism to incorporate innovation and new ideas that would supplement and augment news reporting and storytelling. This new transformation in the field of journalism will affect the work of journalism researchers who will have to acquire new methods of enquiry. Again, journalism educators will have to restructure their curriculum to conform to the new paradigm of journalism, in view of this, to make them relevant in the challenging task AI is introducing into journalism. This will eventually redefine who a journalist is and what journalism is.

Ahead of the changes 4IR is likely to bring onto journalism, Fuchs (2018) is warning that robots, algorithms and other digital technologies should not completely replace human labour in the interest of the capitalist class otherwise several challenges are bound to come. Some of the challenges relate to privacy issues, data protection and surveillance, especially when people transact business through the internet, because technology systems are not faultless. In the case of news production for instance, how robots will be able to decipher an unethical news story especially on privacy, objectivity and balance remains to be answered. This is where the spread of fake news needs broader attention.

The two scholars Pavlik, (2016) and Fuchs, (2018) seem to be on the same page. The use of robotics and artificial intelligence in news reporting and production is becoming a common place in this 21st century journalism. Whittaker (2019) is of the view that much has changed in news production and distribution systems in the Western media since cable and satellite broadcasting was introduced. In recent years, social media is taking over the primary role of the news influencer while advertising is disrupted by big techs. Technology clearly changes behaviour (Whittaker, 2019). Aside that, Pavlik (2016) on the other hand postulates that algorithm, artificial intelligence (AI) and big data are converging to generate a new digital newsroom with the potential of

completely changing the face of journalism. While that may be a good innovation, it is imperative to combine new technologies with human journalists for efficient news gathering, production and distribution. Analysts believe these developments of introducing algorithms and automated journalism into the craft of writing and producing news is responsible for the surge in fake news. This study explores how the 4IR is aiding the production and distribution of fake news in the public sphere of Ghana.

While acknowledging the great contribution and diversity of technology in news production, Dalgali and Crowston (2018) maintained that such technologies should not be the only determining instrument in news production because of ethical concerns. Algorithms journalism could deal with huge data and process it faster for news to be spread quicker. These are positive indicators for the 4IR technologies, but "violations of transparency, verification, privacy, bias" (Dalgali & Crowston, 2018:05) are major ethical concerns that cannot be easily resolved by the use of algorithms. Further worrying about the use of algorithms and 4IR in journalism is the concern about who should be held responsible over a news item that goes bad. It must be noted that most of these stories produced by robots lack bylines therefore who to hold responsible becomes quite cumbersome. Since robotics and artificial journalism is a new development in the journalism profession, their impact in the 4IR era is worth investigating especially as fake news is becoming a common concern in this arena.

Touching on the current evolution of technology in news production, Croteau and Hoynes (2019), borrowing ideas from Winner and Hughes on the autonomous technology and technology momentum respectively, indicated that technology is shaped by political, economic, social and cultural conditions with unintended potential in effecting change in various dimensions. It is also imperative to understand that technology, once deployed, is difficult if not impossible to stop. Since the culture of technology is difficult to stop as argued by Croteau and Hyones (2019), there must be a synergy of the social, human and technology interplay for journalism to remain relevant. It is logical to hope that journalism as a profession and vocation will not be destroyed by the use of technology innovation but to make journalism better through transformation. Despite the use of algorithms and artificial intelligence in the processing and dissemination of news across the globe, it is not certain that AI, robots and algorithms are used in news processing in Ghana. It is not clear whether such possibilities of using artificial intelligence and robots in gathering news exist. This study will examine these possibilities and associated challenges if any.

In the developed and advanced democracies, such a change is already creating challenges for news production and journalism in particular (Pavlik, 2016; Whittaker, 2019). This is because of the postulation that algorithm, artificial intelligence and big data are converging to generate a new digital newsroom with the potential of replacing human journalists. How such transformations will impact on journalism and the political economy of the media in Ghana remains understudied. This notwithstanding, some scholars have suggested that there should be a combination of the new technologies with human journalists for efficient news gathering, production and distribution. As to whether the combined human and artificial efforts will reduce or eliminate fake news remains to be seen.

Fuchs (2018) is skeptical about the 4.0 and his reasons are simple. The fourth industrial revolution's complex relationship of de-industrialisation and re-industrialisation is not positive in the inherent structural challenges of the capitalist world. While acknowledging automation and dehumanization in sectors of manufacturing and production, he indicates that the capitalist's quest to make profit will reduce humans to a controllable cog which will create consequences on unemployment. Human loss of the control in the means of production would limit labour's automation and decision power to robots without dissent to make wage claims such as increases, welfare conditions and strikes and will therefore limit working class struggles. "Digital automation faces in capitalism an antagonism between profit interests and human interests" (Fuchs, 2018:284). On the general outlook of the 4IR, Ayentimi and Burgess (2019) indicate that despite the seeming challenges posed by the 4IR to the world, sub-Sahara Africa and the continent in particular appear to have positive indicators such as having a very youthful demographics and endowed with material and natural resources as key drivers for development for the sub-region. They advance arguments that the 4IR holds prospects for all industries including the media industry such that production and productivity will be up-scaled to rejuvenate economic restructuring. This will enable the informal sector to leap-frog its industrialisation drive in exporting digital services in intra-regional and re-industrialisation of the continent. This cannot be achieved without specific policy directions to manage technological changes occasioned by the 4IR. What is imperative is the policy direction towards revolutionising how news is gathered and distributed in this age. It is possible for the sub-region's media industry to be automated to replace human journalists with robotic journalism and this could have far reaching implications for human journalists.

Ayentimi and Burgess (2019) recommend the need for African countries and the sub-region in particular to adopt proactive-deliberative strategies and reactive policies in response to technology and innovation to address key issues such as poor internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure gaps to ensure that the internet-access-for-all initiative is realised. The need to develop and shape education to hunt for talents is critical in this direction. The sub-region should focus more on newer energy generation and storage, application of robust infrastructural technology to improve societal structures that will rejuvenate growth in all industries. To this end, the need to begin advocating for Africanisation of journalism as advocated by Wasserman (2020) and Chiumbu and Radebe (2020) to address media specific issues in the African context is timely.

2.4 Fake News and Democracy

McGonagle (2017) holds the view that fake news is becoming common because of the quest by citizens to participate in the democratic process. To participate in public discourse, mainstream media has often been the means through which individuals and minority groups are able to participate and engage in debates in the public sphere. As these engagements continue, divergent ideas are brought onboard leading to opinion formation. This scenario is however changing in recent years due to ubiquitous social media where fake news easily slips in, in the absence of strict gatekeeping processes. The journalist and the media have a responsibility and the task of feeding the masses with credible information on matters of public interest while the public has the right to receive same. This accordingly does not preclude the public and other actors from engaging in surveillance of the public purse as watchdogs capable of exposing wrong doings and corruption through the same or similar mediums used by the journalists and the media. This is where McQuail and Deuze's (2020) argument of the earlier press of the 1920s remains relevant. The press according to them was embedded with political and social ideologies that provide the masses with the means to understand happenings within their immediate environments and proffer solutions to lingering problems.

This is more so because opinions and value judgments constitute contributions of free expressions. This does not limit the public to only factual expressions but opinions which could be fake news. "It is not possible to prove the truth of opinions or value judgment" (McGonagle, 2017:209). Yerlikaya (2020) sees the recent happenings of political manipulation by social media using fake news as a contradiction to the dominant approach earlier held about the internet and social media.

It was believed that such innovations will lead to more transparency by eliminating all obstacles to democracy and libertarian societies. It was thought that the internet and new technologies would lead to more autonomy and opportunities for voters to connect across the world to form a global political entity that will promote democratic principles.

Journalism thrives on ethical performance and everyone who exercises the right of free expression has certain duties and responsibilities as contained in Article 21 and 41 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. This right or freedom of expression however varies from one context or country to another expressly in respect of the rights of others. Rights of free expression are therefore not the same as having the obligation to tell the truth and that is why erroneously, citizen journalists and some journalists report on certain issues with incomplete facts which can simply be classified as fake news or disinformation.

Chambers (2020), writing on truth, deliberative democracy and the virtues of accuracy in relation to fake news, notes that democracy is not entirely about truth tracking but features such as deliberative or discursive perspectives where open debate, critical public sphere, an independent, active and accessible free press, complements the process. This pragmatic view of truth-tracking (testing of truth claims) in a democracy makes it impossible to rule out the potential role of fake news in a democratic society. In order to understand fake news in the context of social media, the public sphere, which "refers to a sphere of political communication that stands between civil society and the state" (Chambers, 2020:08) must be understood differently. This is because of the influence of social media, which has become a vital permanent component of the public sphere, thus enabling many people meet their daily information needs. Despite the essential role of social media in the public sphere, its contents can be deliberatively mediated and manipulated to form public opinion in a form of fake news.

Chambers (2020) admits that fake news undermines democracy through the public opinion formation process where intentional manipulation of information can be used to reverse the communication process from the periphery to the center. This is done to push elitist agenda as the voice of the people. He observes further that the public tend to believe these manipulations of falsehood in the public sphere thereby undermining public opinion because such opinions may not be a true reflection of the public but the opinion of a few elitists, which tend to demoralise the process of truth-tracking. Chambers (2020:09) states: "Imagine if totally fabricated scientific data make it past the gatekeepers and become part of the scientific discourse". This in no doubt causes

irreparable damage to society given the fact that scientific data is often relied upon by governments in making policy decisions across the world. The presence of fake news in the media is enough reason for people to lose trust and confidence in the democratic process.

Morgan (2018) avers that the healthy public sphere where citizens engage each other in significant debates in deepening democratic credentials is under strain. Fake news in recent times, is a fundamental challenge facing journalism in democratic countries. This is aggravated by foreign meddling and classic tactics of disinformation seen in emerging Western countries where insecurity of citizens is fueling politics in several dimensions. In order for democracy to strive, Morgan thinks there should be urgent solutions to halt the excesses of fake news. This will enable democracy sustain itself from intentional tactics of using fake news to undermine public discourse and democracy. The purpose of introducing technologies in politics and social life seems to have taken a negative turn as there has been structural changes since new technologies and the internet were introduced into politics. "While social networks are expected to contribute to the process of democratization, they should also be considered as the most important threat to democracy today" (Yerlikaya, 2020:193).

Morgan (2018) argues further that the happenings in online public sphere is a complex one. This complexity is compounded by the widespread disinformation and fake news which seeks to manipulate the online sphere for reasons best known to actors. The motivation for fake news and disinformation is sometimes purely deliberate to spread false information and at other times, it is motivated by financial interests by advertisers to raise revenue (Morgan, 2018). These factors have created credibility challenges for established sources and institutions. As it stands, people struggle to accurately identify false news and this contributes as fertile grounds for actors to manipulate public opinion towards a particular direction.

Morgan (2018) believes the media landscape has been altered to the extent that media revenues no longer go to the media to enable it carry out its social responsibilities fully but rather technology companies (tech giants) who are taking over advertising revenues instead of the media, especially newspapers. This is intriguing for the fact that those tech companies are not regulated as media organisations or public utilities that serve the public interest. Morgan explains further that the intermediary liability protections internet companies enjoy, facilitate free expression online where citizens, bloggers and citizen journalists freely engage in public discourse without restrictions. But the fact that a few tech giants control the internet and the online space, creates suspicion in a sense

that artificial intelligence and technology have the potential to transform and alter the economy in a manner against public interest. What this means is that those who control the internet, equally have the power to sway public opinion against the interest of the general good. This also implies, whoever controls the internet in Ghana equally has a responsibility to play when it comes to the control of fake news dissemination.

Carr, Sanchez and Daros (2020) state that the interplay of the internet and technology has made the mainstream media lose its monopoly of information in coexistence with other bodies such as the state, elites and the bourgeois. Fake news therefore does not only question the professionalism of journalism and the legitimacy of the mainstream media, but who controls and dominates over information as a necessary ingredient in a democratic environment. This confluence of fake news-democracy complicates and saturates the ecosystem in which digital technology and algorithms reposition the availability of news. Political and economic interests are at the center stage of the phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation where networks of actors direct their opinions, beliefs and perceptions of citizens. Fake news, it was discovered from the study, indisputably encourages or discourages decision making and political participation in democratic systems. Carr et al. (2020) claim that toxic narratives against immigration policies in some parts of the world result in xenophobic politicking, populism and vilification of the 'other'. Consequently, in the quest for electoral advantage, advanced and sophisticated fake news was used as the springboard to reduce immigration challenges.

Ponono (2020) posits that South Africa has an interesting narrative on misinformation which dates back to the apartheid days. It was refashioned as a propaganda tool during the reigns of Jacob Zuma, whose regime used spin machination and propaganda to turn a seemingly unconstitutional breach of using state funds to finance his private residence as normal. Another case of fake news uproar in South Africa is the case of the British PR firm, Bell-Pottinger's alleged professional misconduct of dabbling in fake news and hate campaign. "The dump gave South Africa a greater purview of not only the extent of the looting of public entities, but also the extensive use of disinformation by those in power to hide their skullduggery" (Ponono, 2020:05).

Fake news is sometimes produced to fulfill ideological, political and economic functions as reference to recent world politics in the UK's Brexit, and in France, Germany and Kenya. All these countries were influenced and affected by fake news in different ways. The recent happenings of political manipulation by social media appear to be contrary to the dominant approach earlier held

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about the internet and social media that such innovations will lead to more transparency in governance by eliminating all obstacles to democracy and libertarian societies. It was thought that the internet and new technologies would lead to more autonomy and opportunities for voters to connect across the world to form a global political entity to promote democracy. Yerlikaya (2020) says the presence of fake news amplified by social media and the internet therefore defeats the dominant approach since democracy is under threat as a result of these technologies. It is evident that fake news has consequences for both advanced and growing democracies.

2.5 The Context of Fake News in Political Propaganda

Political communication remains a significant part of modern politics and in contemporary global politics, the use of diverse strategies such as social and mainstream media campaigns are critical components of the strategies. What is also becoming a part of this enterprise is the use of slant, fabricated and fake messages to woo voters. Posetti and Matthews (2018) traced the political and propaganda use of fake news to ancient times. Historically, the case of Antony and Cleopatra in Roman times as illustrated in section 2.2 of this chapter is a critical reference point of how propaganda and fake news are bird fellows.

In 2010, political propaganda was used in Tunisia and later spread to Egypt and Syria. The Arab spring also confirms that social media and the internet evolution could either be used to serve democratic governance or be used to consolidate authoritarian regimes through propaganda. Yerlikaya (2020) indicates that the dominant approach is based on the notion that there is a relationship between social mobilisation and social media technologies. This is based on the rationale that the emergence of newer technologies has made the communication environment more open and pervasive in promoting democratic campaigns in favour of users. Morgan (2018) thinks the use of sophisticated technology to manipulate information is making Western democracies to experience what takes place in authoritarian regimes where public discourse and democracy is undermined in favour of the creators of the disinformation.

Yerlikaya (2020) elaborates that fake news was hugely used to project Donald Trump over his contenders in the 2016 US elections. Many have even argued that Trump would not have won that election but for fake news. "Today, the use of social media tools, which have important effects in shaping political processes, have become widely used for disinformation and propaganda" (Yerlikaya, 2020:184). This implies that creators of these manipulations use strategies that

manipulate the minds of voters towards the direction of the manipulators. What makes fake news more fearful is the allegations that Russia influenced the 2016 elections of the US through various tactics in favour of Trump.

There were allegations that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were used to influence the US elections although the claim is yet to be proven. This confirms the view that fake news is a political propaganda tool. Croteau and Hoynes (2019) support this argument in their analysis of the effects of misinformation in American democracy in recent times. They argue that mainstream journalism was under severe threat in the US during the Trump administration. Journalists who held contrary views from the Trump administration were either seen as traitors or labelled as "fake news". This led scholars to begin asking whether democracy could survive the wave of distortions in the information relay.

As a political propaganda tool, fake news was used to destroy and assassinate the character of Hillary Clinton in favour of Trump. Yerlikaya (2020), and Croteau and Hyones, (2019) argued that fake news was used to paint a picture as if Hilary Clinton was so sick to shoulder the responsibilities of a president. This was even supported with pictures to deepen the stands of the creators. Other news such as "Clinton selling arms to ISIS and that she was involved in the Pizzagate scandal" (Yerlikaya, 2020:186) suggests a strong effect of fake news on politics and a propaganda tool. Croteau and Hoynes (2019) state further that traditional journalism was under threat in the US during the Trump administration leading to a series of twist operations on social media. These spiral operations were aimed at massaging information and spreading negative propaganda through fake news and the results paid off for Trump.

In the UK, political propaganda was common during the Brexit and the run-up to the 2017 elections. The involvement of tabloids in circulating such fake news in the UK is raising concerns among critics that the media is losing its time tested values of accuracy, and objectivity which aided in shaping the political life of citizens. Chadwick et al. (2018) mention *The Sun,* the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* as tabloids that strongly advocated and campaigned for Brexit and at a point misrepresented certain facts. These misrepresentations were shared countless times on social media. Yerlikaya (2020) indicates that fake news was used to manipulate the referendum in UK stressing that the British Parliament even acknowledged the devastating effects of fake news on the democratic system of that country after it was used to influence the voting preference. One group that comes to mind in all these propaganda machination is the 'Leave Group' who seriously

used social media and fake news to manipulate people's mind in the Brexit campaigns. Britain later decided to make regulations to check the excesses of social networks including imposing new taxes on them.

Germany and France equally had their share of the use of fake news which gravely affected the democracies and political systems of those countries. In the case of Germany, fake news, social bots and foreign interferences were the classic cases where virtual propaganda was used in the federal elections of 2017. Yerlikaya (2020) reports that the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a right wing political party, successfully used social media to penetrate the political system leading to their entering the Bundestag for the first time since World War II. As a result of the propaganda danger of fake news, regulations have been put in place to deal with sensitive social media in Germany.

In France, disinformation, attrition campaigns and false allegations were used against Macron. These propaganda machinations included the use of unrealistic surveys and "Facebook suspended around 30,000 automatic accounts during the election period on the grounds that they were circulating disinformation regarding political events" (Yerlikaya, 2020: 188). After the 2017 elections, France subsequently passed a draft law to deal with fake news and social media propaganda. The use of cyber propaganda is very pervasive such that everyone is a victim to it especially in the context of cyber propaganda for political purposes (Maweu, 2019).

In the African context, the use of social media to cause political propaganda is very common too. A typical case is the 2017 elections in Kenya where Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga were the contending parties. Maweu (2019) indicates that the main contenders for the 2017 elections used explicit propaganda fueled with hate speech and fake news against each other stressing that Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp platforms as well as print and broadcast media were highly used to propagate fake news by the Raila and Kenyatta camps. These were in an attempt to sway public opinion for votes stressing that a photoshopped video of the BBC Africa and CNN emerged close to the 2017 elections creating the impression that Uhuru Kenyatta was in the lead. The videos were subsequently denied by the two organisations. Again, there was also a 90-s video circulated to depict Raila Odinga as a violent and tribal bigot who would plunge Kenya into war once he wins. Maweu (2019) indicates that although internet technologies have given democratic participation to minority groups to break the media hierarchy of traditional media, it is equally affecting election integrity negatively.

"The involvement of foreign firms such as Cambridge Analytica that use social media to mount far-reaching propaganda shows that new media technologies have provided the political elite with additional avenues to manipulate the masses" (Maweu, 2019:75). In this era, citizen journalists rather than professional journalists break the news thus widening the disinformation and fake news campaigns. One must understand forensic verification skills better and the ability to identify fake websites in order to fight against fake propaganda. Mawue (2019) says Kenya has taken steps to minimise the spread of political propaganda and disinformation by criminalising fake news in a new law. The Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act was passed in 2018, imposing a fine of US$50,000 and ten years in jail to offenders. Critics of the law claim it interferes with free expression and restricts or undermines media freedom in Kenya.

Political actors and politicians now do not waste resources in ventures better than they do to political marketing techniques. They employ communication and media-savvy technocrats to mold and shape public opinion in a way to influence the masses to ensure the politician gains. A form of political propaganda known as spin where actors use diffuse messages to create a consensus is commonly being used with the aid of digital technology across many democracies. "Public relations experts who employ such news management tactics are sometimes called spin doctors" (Croteau & Hyones, 2019:322). The engagement of a 100 digital staff in addition to using the Cambridge Analytica to target people with customized and tailored ads by the Trump team in 2016 suggests the reality that influencing voters through digital technologies is possible. Propaganda is not only achieved by using such technologies but can be orchestrated to achieve a desire end if properly utilised. The question as to whether society should continue to be spectators for the politician to be manipulating the citizenry using technology remains to be answered. As a country which just returned from elections in 2020, it is imperative to understand the use of propaganda through fake news in Ghana's just ended elections and the entire governance of the country.

2.6 Economic Capital of Fake News

A number of scholars (Dahlberg, 2015, Bakir & McStay, 2018, Morgan, 2018, and Croteau & Hyones, 2019) have written extensively on the economic capital of fake news. The economic capital of fake news must be seen from different perspectives. The tangible gains in material terms and the intangible aspect in the form of ideological selling and advertising. Bakir and McStay (2018) trace fake news dissemination on Facebook to 2010 when it introduced Edgerank as an

algorithm newsfeed which tracked what users engage in on the platform such as what they like, comment, share, view and click. The proliferation of fake news is meant for political and economic purposes in the digital ecology. Bakir and McStay (2018) believe there is a decline of the legacy media because of loss of revenue as audiences continue to be disloyal towards news brands thus giving free access to news online. Digital media is now gaining immensely from advertising revenue with Facebook, Google, Yahoo and Twitter all profiting through integration of news into their offerings. As these platforms thrive for immediacy in news delivery, they favour fake news proliferation in the public sphere.

Bakir and McStay (2018) aver that some individuals have taken advantage of social media to make economic living out of the digital behavioural advertising. This group profit from fake news through clickbaits. This is done by creating a web content to attract online advertising revenue relying on sensational headlines and eye-catching pictures to get click-through, shares, comments and likes. These sensationalists achieve this at the expense of truth and accuracy which surge fake news in the eco-system. A typical example of how individuals make money from fake news is the use of fake news websites by undergraduate computer science teenagers in Vele, Macedonia in 2016. The pro-Trump websites they created, generated several fake news stories which attracted large audience in return for money instead of propagation of messages (Bakir and McStay, 2018). Similar other profit-making fake news websites also proliferated in health and well-being sites, sites to praise celebrities and sites promising blockbuster movies, which all sprang up to gain advertising revenue.

Bakir and McStay (2018) indicate that the economic model used by digital media and Facebook makes them favourite of advertisers. "Google's doubleclick ad network spans over two million websites that reach over 90 percent of people on the internet. Small and large publishers alike benefit because ad networks give publishers a way to profit from their advertising spaces without having to make the effort of selling individual slots to advertisers" (Bakir & McStay, 2018:166). They stress the need for advertisers to devote interest in a healthier advertising environment that will be devoid of fake news and create content that can be trusted. Government's policy directions towards the sector is also necessary in engaging diverse international actors in waging war against fake news and to make it unprofitable to promote content for economic gains.

Mills, et al. (2019) identify three drivers of fake news. One of it is inadvertent disinformation and, in this case, fake news is accidently produced without rigour of accurate reporting usually required

of journalistic piece. The second driver is ideological disinformation where fake news is produced to propagate or advance a course of action and the last is exploitative disinformation where fake news is created for financial motives. Mills et al. (2019) argue that fake news is largely supported by monetary motivation through advertising dollars. This is made easier by the use of new digital technologies to create look-alike websites that end up populating those sites with bogus news stories mixed with advertisements. Interestingly, online advertising is based on numbers, "the more traffic these individuals can drive to their websites, the more potential clicks they receive" (Mills et al., 2019:04). These stories are usually written to arouse surprise, fear, anger and anxiety and are therefore irresistible for consumers of news to read. The more these stories are clicked, the more the creators make money from the ads placed.

Mills et al. (2019) indicate that each of the over 100 websites created at Veles, Macedonia in the lead up to the 2016 US elections made as much as $2,500 revenue daily from ads. "The primary driver behind the recent explosion of fake news online is advertising income" (Mills et al. 2019:04). This is based on the logic that fake websites can be created by individuals and use Google Ads in a form of programmatic advertisement to encourage chasing of traffic using intermediaries. Another strategy used by fake news websites is to seed their content on social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to attract traffic back to their sites using sensational stories to ensure visibility. What is worrying is the effects on brand marketing. Most brands do not want to be associated with questionable content such as fake news. Fake news can be negative to reputational capital when associated with unethical sites. In the context of Ghana, literature on the economic viability and operational strategies of fake news is not available for us to compare or for analysis. This study will explore the economic motivation for the creation and dissemination of fake news.

Dahlberg (2015) sees the economic capital of social media and its related propagation of fake news where he argued that there is an empowerment divide associated with social media platform ownership because these platforms are owned and dominated by a handful for-profit corporations. This, Dahlberg (2015) indicates LinkedIn, Twitter, Wikipeadia (non-profit) and YouTube are owned by Google. The ownership structure covers their physical infrastructures such as server farms and intellectual property such as data analysis and processing systems, data, platform software and user profiles. Again, Facebook, which is another platform owner, is in this category of empowerment divide as people no longer use web browsers but rather access the internet

through mobile phones to connect to a text-based Facebook interface. These smartphone users, most of who are in the Global South, are hooked on Facebook on their devices; they may not even have email addresses, but have Facebook pages. This phenomenon is making Facebook synonymous with the internet to some people in the global divide. The platforms in turn take advantage to economically and surreptitiously exploit the user. Interestingly, these platforms dominate in the production, spread and sharing of fake news.

This form of ownership empowerment translates into ownership divide which leads to control divides through platform rules and codes which give explicit control over platforms usage to owners of the platforms instead of users. Owners can modify, censor content and application whichever way they want without consent to the user. Dahlberg (2015) indicates that platforms also carry out surveillance on users. These platforms are in the habit of tracking and following users around the web and covertly collect data from other Internet users for the purposes of advertising revenue. This surveillance information could be handed to the government when demanded from the platforms. This form of selling users profiles to advertisers is an economic and political capital that results in the exploitation of the user. These platforms also stratify visibility inequalities between users leading to deepening of inequality of users. Dahlberg (2015) proposes the need for intensive digital divide research to examine the political and economic context on how social and cultural contexts shape digital technologies that feed these inequalities among users. More interesting to this study is the need to understand the ownership structure of the media of Ghana and what owners use their corporate ownerships of the media for in the context of the political economy of the media.

Domenico, Sit, Ishizaka and Nunan (2021) indicate that social media has become a brand for marketing activities such as services and product development. The side effects of fake news to brand marketing however could be severe including the fact that it could create doubts over prior knowledge and create disbelief about a product or service. It could tarnish the corporate identity and reputation of companies and consequently create financial difficulties for firms. Domenico et al. (2021) found that users equally engage in the spread of fake news knowingly or unknowingly. Those who spread fake news intentionally either do so for political or ideological reasons while others maliciously spread fake news for monetary gains. They indicate that other users share fake news in order to gain acceptance among their online friends and then to reinforce group camaraderie. This solidarity with group members is based on the principle that people create and

share fake news based on prior beliefs. All these Domenico et al. (2021) posit, affect brand marketing negatively. This is done to change consumers mind against a firm and cited Pepsi, McDonald and Coca Cola as companies that have suffered from smear campaigning through fake news. Fake news will therefore affect firm products and consumer's knowledge and attitude leading to reputational damage and boycotts. Domenico et al. (2021) are of the view that fake news does not only affect consumers and firms but the society in general, and they urge firms to invest in strategies that will lead to positive outcomes for their firms.

Financial motives, according to Morgan (2018), drives people to engage in fake news publications with the aim of using click baits and targeted advertising to raise revenue. Croteau and Hoynes (2019) elaborate that advertisers make money by selling ads to viewers. They cited the case of a 22-year student in Georgia who fabricated click-bait stories in 2016 to promote Donald Trump as a case of using fake news for economic gains. The student had earlier tried to promote Hilary Clinton but failed to attract traffic. He turned his attention to Trump. He is reported to have increased revenue by attracting traffic on a headline which said, "Oh My God! Trump to Release Secret Document That Will Destroy Obama!" (Higgins, McIntire and Dance, 2016 as cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2019). This financial motivation could largely account for the consistent and persistent production and dissemination of fake news across the various media in some parts of the globe. What is motivating creators of fake news in Ghana is unclear hence this study attempts to fill the gap especially in our geographical and political context.

2.7 Effects of Fake News

There is a general agreement by scholars that fake news is a widespread phenomenon with both negative and positive consequences on governance, democracy and credibility of mainstream journalism. Morgan (2018) observes that the level of trust in the media is declining because people capitalize on the free expression in democratic societies to disseminate fake news and propaganda deliberately to sow doubts in people's minds. Croteau and Hoynes (2019) support this argument in their analysis of the effects of misinformation in American democracy in recent times. They argue that traditional journalism was negated in the US during the Trump administration leading to series of disinformation on social media. A section of the misinformation partly claimed Pope Francis had endorsed Trump. This single act of dragging a religious icon into politics using fake

news has awakened researchers to explore ways to sustain the survival of democracy in the midst of the distortions in the current information age.

Yerlikaya (2020) indicates that the emergence of newer technologies enabled by Web 2.0 and the internet has made the communication environment more open and pervasive in traditional and social media. This has made people more democratic and uncontrolled in the equitable space created by these networks. It also confirms that social media and the internet evolution serve dual purposes by enhancing democratic governance, but they could also be used to consolidate authoritarian regions. "The argument that social media tools deeply affect politics and social life first appeared in 2010 after the Arab revolutions that began in Tunisia and spread to Egypt and Syria" (Yerlikaya, 2020:179). This is based on the Manuel Castells' notion that there is a relationship between social mobilisation and social media technologies.

Fake news not only makes propaganda to flourish, but it can also influence and redirect the public's attention from issues that might be important for the public to know. This is achieved through inter-media agenda setting. Inter-media agenda setting concerns itself with how content transfers between news media take place. Harder et al. (2017) indicate that the mainstream media is now being controlled by social media in the agenda setting process. This is done through inter-media agenda setting where dominant issues of social media are brought to the mainstream media to be discussed and deliberated upon. This relegates television and newspapers as traditional media for agenda setting. Radio though remains one key medium in projecting issues, but platforms without schedules appear to do the inter-media agenda setting better. News websites, twitter and other social media platforms are faster in amplifying the impact of the news leaving the offline media to reinforce and legitimate the news. This is why it is necessary to agree with Morgan (2018) that fake news makes propaganda to flourish and this influences and redirects the public's attention from issues that might be important for the public to know. This calls for urgent steps to be taken against the role played by fake news to ensure media messages are well received.

Political propaganda is not the only reason why fake news is promoted. Morgan (2018) indicates that monetary value is a great motivator for people to engage in fake news creation and dissemination. This argument is also endorsed in Croteau and Hyones (2019) analysis of how clickbaits could be used to increase advertisers' revenue. Sensational headlines such as these attract many readers to such cites only for the creators of the message to rake in revenue. In some instances, the headline has nothing to do with the story presented.

Franklin (2014) indicates that journalism is increasingly facing threats in the era of the digital media causing many media organisations to fold up while others are finding innovative means of survival. These risks are increasing as fake news continues to strive for space in the social and mainstream media creating poor quality with low adherence to ethical standards in journalism. This is made worse in situations where some traditional media (mainstream media), due to non-adherence to professional standards or weak journalism, end up disseminating similar misinformation content as would have been done by fake news generators. These errors, mostly arise as a result of poor research, sloppy verification and partisan bias on the part of journalists and media houses (UNESCO, 2018)[1]. There must therefore be proper verification and monitoring regimes in all media organisations to prevent weak, unprofessional and poor journalism from eroding the gains and credibility journalism has earned over the years. Despite the need to adhere to ethical journalism, Croteau and Hyones (2019) think good journalism does not sell. This is because almost all the traditional journalists are adapting to stay in business. This way of adapting is though characterised by unethical conduct, yet that is what the users prefer as they are able to navigate to news stories, watch funny videos and get themselves entertained better on these platforms. Digital journalism and distributed content are significantly changing the practice of journalism.

Morgan (2018) observes that fake news is greatly contributing to loss of advertising revenue for the mainstream media (traditional media such as radio, tv, newspapers) because of the use of high tech strategies where tech platforms are now receiving advertising revenues which used to go to traditional news publishers and newspapers. These technology companies adopt a strategy of sensationalising the news to grab the attention of audiences.

This invariably enable these tech giants get access to the public's mind as it becomes a tool to be use by advertisers. This strategy which is commonly used in advertising culminates in producing either a totally fabricated story or a half-truth. According to Morgan, (2018) though most Internet companies are not regulated as media companies, they exploit the free expression to rake in huge profits to the detriment of the democratic space. Visentin, Pizzi and Pichierri (2019) identify advertisement of big brands in automated platforms as one major reason fake news is continuing

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[1] United Nation Educational, Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2018 launched a handbook entitled; "Journalism, Fake news and Disinformation" as a manual for training in journalism education, specifically on fake news. It is seen as part of efforts to fight and minimize the rate of fake news among mainstream media and society at large.

to enjoy patronage stressing that the trend will proliferate as the Internet continues to replace the traditional sources of news such as radio, television and newspapers.

Croteau and Hoynes (2019) see the coming of the internet and digital platforms as seriously affecting journalism in many respects. Knowing the risk associated with the new technology, traditional journalism knowing the risk associated with the new technology, has tried to modify strategies including using pay walls to regain lost revenue through advertising and the use of pivot to video as means of attracting readers but it appears users still prefer the platforms better. This is because the audiences are able to navigate to news stories, watch funny videos and get themselves entertained better on these platforms. Clicks or distributed content are significantly changing journalism. This implies that the platforms are evolving from distribution channels to taking over from traditional journalism. "Print journalism jobs continued to plummet, newspapers closed, and the rise in internet-based journalism employment did not come close to keeping up with job losses" (Croteau & Hyones, 2019:332). Some scholars (Alexander, Breese and Luengo, 2016, as cited in Croteau and Hyones, 2019) however think otherwise. They claim digital journalism is attracting more experienced hands from the profession because the journalists themselves see digital journalism as the new emerging field for the profession. Meanwhile critics are already worried that digital media cannot hold policy holders more accountable as done by print media. The impact of the digital media on the Ghanaian mainstream media has not been given adequate academic attention. There is therefore the need to explore this phenomenon.

Nounkeu (2020) opines that most news stories on social media lack the basic elements of reliability and verifiability associated with journalistic pieces. This confirms the belief that propagation of fake news is backed by financial or political interests. What makes citizen journalism lack authenticity, according to Nounkeu, is the absence of gatekeeping processes that ensure news stories meet certain minimum ethical standards. All mainstream news stories pass through this stage where the input and output stages create the enabling environment for verification and cross-checking, but social media allows all manner of junk information to be disseminated leading to the publication of fake news either intentionally or accidentally. The affordability and accessibility nature of social media in the view of Nounkeu (2020) makes them prone to fake news and disinformation with the negative effect on those who consume such content.

Visentin et al. (2019) state that fake news presents negative consequences for brand marketing because it influences brand trust, brand attitude and behavioural attitudes towards a brand, has and

other consequences such as purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth referrals. This implies that consumers' perception about a brand are negatively affected by fake news dissemination regardless of the source of the information. They indicate that fake news has significant implication for marketing and companies' reputation and suggest the need for companies to understand the appearance of fake news or misleading content close to their brands since it had the likelihood of affecting brand attitude and behaviour. Domenico et al. (2021) indicate that people engage in the spread of fake news sometimes without knowing they are spreading disinformation. This is irrespective of the harm such fake publications could cause to society. Does fake news equally play a role in the political economy, how is that done, and who are the players in this direction? To fully understand these dynamics relating to fake news, this study explores these gray areas of the subject.

Yerlikaya (2020:184) states that "the instrumentalisation of social media tools by both state and non-state actors in the service of propaganda and manipulation poses serious risk for democracy" in this instance, the use of computational propaganda has important effects in shaping the democratic process to a desired direction through computer technologies. Yerlikaya (2020) stresses that the strategy used by those actors start with the creation of fake websites that look similar to mainstream media websites. The creators of fake news also develop bots and trawl accounts which are then used to share and promote the fake messages produced to countless of users. Contents of these fake websites then become agenda of the mainstream media thus expanding the scope to the masses. In the Ghanaian context, the creators and their strategy still remain unknown. This study will uncover whether the creators similarly use computational propaganda or a totally different strategy is used.

Another effect of fake news is a situation where it is eroding the gains of mainstream media through misrepresentation of newspaper content on social media. Chadwick et al. (2018) indicate that there is a correlation between people who share tabloid news on social media and their likelihood to promote disinformation and misinformation. Such people are more likely to engage in democratic dysfunctional behaviour of sharing any sources on social media to promote fake news. Chadwick et al. (2018) posit that tabloid newspapers affect civic life negatively through social media because it provides fertile resources for misinformation and disinformation to take place. They add that users who are politically like-minded are more likely to promote and share disinformation without being challenged because of the hemophilic network among such users.

This, overtime, could decrease people's awareness to pay extra care for credible news in favour of fake news or fabricated news content which could undermine civic culture.

Those who spread fake news intentionally, either do so for political or ideological reasons while others maliciously spread fake news for monetary gains. They indicate that other users share fake news in order to gain acceptance among their online friends to reinforce group companionship. This solidarity with group members is based on the principle that people create and share fake news based on prior beliefs. All these, Domenico et al. (2021) aver, affects brand marketing negatively. This is done to change consumers mind against a firm, and they cited Pepsi, McDonald and Coca Cola as companies that have suffered from smear campaigning through fake news. Fake news will therefore affect firm products and consumer's knowledge and attitude leading to reputational damage and boycotts. Domenico et al. (2021) conclude that fake news does not only affect consumers and firms but the society in general and they urged firms to invest in strategies that will lead to positive outcomes for their firms.

UNESCO (2018) has observed that fake news, misinformation and disinformation are harmful to a growing society giving many the reason to feel increasing mistrust for journalism to show an increasing mistrust for the profession. Due to easy access to new technologies which enable fast and prompt publications of fake news, private and commercial individuals indulge in covert partisan publications to promote politicians and their interests. Governments, public relations practitioners and advertisers are equally guilty of using covert propaganda including fake news to promote products as well as promote politicians to the detriment of journalism. This is because the general public who are not information literate enough, associate this conducts with journalism thus making the profession to loss fair grounds and receiving existential attacks. This environment of digitally fueled disinformation risks eclipsing journalism if pragmatic measures are not taken to address the phenomenon immediately. One then wonders if this country has taken steps to deal with fake news and how effective such measures are.

The effects of fake news on journalism are telling because of the central role of social media in the 21st century world. Social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Wikipedia among others provide people with opportunities to socially interact person-to-person on the Internet. Lule (2014) explains that social media allows unprecedented volumes of personal, informal communication in real time from anywhere in the world. This allow users to always be in touch with friends all over the world and to keep conversations as casual as possible and in this

process, fake news stories easily sails through undetected. This is made easier by the real-time and instantaneous spread of news on social media mostly by bloggers and citizen journalists with little depth to the news produced. This form of crowdsourcing which does not give much depth to the news, throw a bigger challenge to the traditional sources of news.

Alejando (2010) indicates that the process of news production and dissemination has never been the same ever since social media became a part of modern communication. People no longer waited for reporters for the news. Reporters now compete with social media in breaking the news and in most cases relying on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sources for breaking news. Alejando (2010:09) states that "a lot of tips or leads these days are from the web or what is trending in social networks like Twitter, Facebook or is popularity ratings". This is the remarkable influence social media is playing in journalism and society in general. Journalists do not have the luxury any more for holding on to a story nor bloggers and citizen journalists have the luxury of time to wait for journalists to break the news; they are seriously competing with mainstream media on a daily basis. In the process of trying to be the first to break the news, they hurriedly write, fail to cross check facts and throw ethical principles to the wind leading to misinformation or at best allowing fake news stories to slide through.

2.8 Citizen Journalism and Fake News

The work of journalism is becoming participatory for both trained journalists and citizens with little knowledge of the profession. This appears to be so because of new technologies that make access to transmission devices such as the mobile phone easy. This also enable almost everyone to manipulate, produce and disseminate messages at will. This practice where ordinary citizens produce works of journalism as if they were journalists, is referred to as citizen journalism. The concept describes a situation where citizens themselves "report the issues confronting them" (Noor, 2017:55) as though they were journalists. It is not clear where the concept of citizen journalism emerged however, (Gillmor, 2008 and Cokley, 2008 as cited in Noor, 2017) indicate that citizen journalism started in the early 2000s when individual citizens began to collect news materials on disasters and breaking events for publishers due to constraints. This trend has grown to become another vocation where bloggers and 'vloggers' now compete with mainstream media for breaking news (Dominick, 2014; McQuail & Deuze, 2020).

The trend of citizen journalism is attributed to the development of the digital media and the easy to access internet that makes it possible for everyone to produce videos and other contents with their cell phones (Dominick, 2014). It is highly encouraged by the mainstream media to the extent that the CNN has iReport, Fox News has uReport and CBS has EyeMobile. All of these are channels that encourage citizens to publish their amateur news stories although they have no professional training in journalism. This situation conflicts with the more professional news stories produced by professionally trained journalists.

A number of reasons account for the popularity of citizen journalism in the mainstream media. Dominick (2014) explains that cutting cost by media owners is one of the reasons since the media industry is already facing declining audience and revenues to sustain their businesses. Another reason is that citizen journalism is free and therefore a source of cheap labour for the mainstream media. The justification to sacrifice a profession so dear to society's progress to any tom, dick and harry without professional know-how is a bane to journalism. Journalism thrives on truthful, objective, accurate and balanced reportage (Ibid). Adherence to fairness and other ethical cannons of the profession sets journalism apart. These are painstaking exercise lacking in these amateur reports emanating from citizen journalists. Even so, Dominick (2014:315) says "citizen journalism does empower the audience. News organisations no longer have a monopoly on what gets reported or how it's reported". This explains why citizen journalism is a double edged-sword with both positive and negative implications. Some scholars have blamed the proliferation of fake news on citizen journalism because backgrounds and motives of those who peddle falsehood on social and mainstream media could largely be citizen journalists because they are not accountable, unlike professionals.

Citizen journalism has been seen as a democratic means by which ordinary citizens in society exercise their civil and political rights by participating and contributing their ideas towards a public course. Nah and Yamamoto (2020) emphasise that citizens are not only consumers of news nor regarded only as audience of news but can also be considered as producers of content for which reason their role in shaping society is cardinal. The participation of citizens in journalism is multidimensional as it includes them participating in debates in the media in the form of writing and submitting blogs, sharing videos and other news stories. Domenico et al. (2021) indicate that fake news dissemination starts when creators develop fake profiles on social media and use such identities to spread fake news or falsehood online. This fake news which is uploaded online is then

shared and re-shared by other users through social behavioural processes influenced by the online community members. A more disturbing sharing of fake news on social media is promoted by both human and non-humans such as robots or algorithms that mimic human behaviour and perform a diversity of roles in a sophisticated and smart manner. Domenico et al. (2021) elucidate that social bots are designed and programmed to spread fake news in the early stages and target users to increase the rate of the spread.

Nah and Yamamoto (2020) assert that citizen journalism has a direct relationship with civic participation stressing that citizens who participated in the media or contributed to online platforms in the form of comments, photos, videos and news stories, tend to be active in political and community issues with fellow citizens. With the pivotal role citizen journalism conveys, news organisations are urged to create space to make it possible for the citizens to engage, interact and contribute in public discourse as part of the democratic engagements by citizens. News media sites can serve as discussion spheres for common interests where citizens can share their opinions and contribute to public debates and decision making.

The strain of citizen journalism on the mainstream journalism is enormous. Lule (2014) identified credibility challenges as a major effect social media has brought to mainstream media. People who are not media literate often confuse and associate any information in the public sphere to journalists. As a results, even when bloggers and propaganda twitter accounts produce highly propaganda pieces which turn out to be fake or untrue, journalists are blamed for this disinformation although such pieces of information fall flat of objective professionalism that journalism stands for. "These days, kids can't tell the difference between credible news by objective professional journalists and what they read on a random website" (Lule, 2014:287). This phenomenon of wrong judgment associated with mainstream media is largely attributed to citizen journalism. What makes citizen journalism lack authenticity according to Nounkeu (2020) is the absence of gatekeeping processes that ensure news stories meet certain minimum ethical acceptance before publishing. All traditional news stories pass through this stage where the input and output stages create the enabling environment for verifications and cross-checking but social media paves allow all manner of junk information to be disseminated. This leads to the publication of fake news either intentionally or accidentally. The affordability and accessibility of social media by all persons, in the view of Nounkeu (2020) makes them prone to fake news and disinformation.

2.9 Ghanaian media and the digital era

The media of Ghana consists of mainstream media and social media, both significantly deregulated in a space where several print and electronic stations exist and operate either privately or as state owned. The existence of multiple media institutions operating in a democratic space has created competition through innovations where there is fusion of new technologies with conventional media in a common space. The economic and political history of Ghana is interwoven with its media development.

For political expediencies, the establishment of the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette* in Cape Coast was for political reasons. It was then the nation's political capital when it was a colony of Britain. It was probably located in Cape Coast to ensure easy and efficient communication from the colonial master to the people of the Gold Coast (as Ghana was then called). The paper was a monthly publication and hand-written. Published between April, 1822 and December, 1823, with Captain Gordon Laing as one of its editors. It was a semi-official organ of the colonial government and provided information to European merchants and civil servants in the colony. Although there were few literates at the time who could read newspapers, its establishment set the tone for other nationalists and some businessmen to venture into the establishment and ownership of media organisations in colonial Ghana (Ansah, 1993, Anyindoho, 2016).

The *Accra Herald,* a manuscript newspaper, was published by Charles and Edmund Bannerman, who were brothers. The publication was located in Accra and appeared fortnightly from September, 1857 to 1859. The *West African Herald*, a weekly newspaper, was initially established in Freetown and later in Cape Coast from 1859 to 1872, by the same Charles and Edmund Bannerman (Ansah, 1993). These were papers operated and owned by indigenous Ghanaians unlike the first newspaper which was established and operated by the colonial masters. The Bannerman brothers are very popular in the historical discourse of African journalism. Their contributions to the fraternity are remarkable as they are noted to have set the basis for local ownership of the media. Their father was a British lieutenant governor and their mother, a princess of the Asante royal family. The successes of their publications stimulated a proliferation of African-owned newspapers agitating for independence in the 19th century. They operated their newspapers purely on economic basis. This was a test case for the economic viability of the newspaper business. As a business, the *Accra Herald* and the *West African Herald,* carried adverts

since their clientele included merchants in the colony who either read the ads for their personal benefits or placed ads in the paper for their businesses.

The preceding years saw spectacular growth of newspapers as the political temperature began to take shape in the country. Many of these papers were established by the few educated businessmen and the elite indigenes. The *Gold Coast Times,* appeared fortnightly in Cape Coast in March 1874 to November, 1885 and was owned by James Hutton Brew. The *Government Gazette* was published in Accra and was owned by the Gold Coast government. It was a monthly publication and surfaced in 1878. Notably among other newspapers that also operated in the Gold Coast at the time included the *Gold Coast Assize, Gold Coast News*, and *Western Echo*. The *Gold Coast Methodist* and later the *Gold Coast Times* were established from 1886 to 1896 by the Methodist Mission as part of the Church's mouthpiece. The *Gold Coast Echo* which operated from 1888 to 1889 was owned by J.E. Casely Harford, a known political activist of the Gold Coast. The *Gold Coast Chronicle,* appeared in 1890 to 1896. The weekly *Gold Coast People* owned by James Mensah Sarbah, a lawyer and a known nationalist, surfaced in 1891. Political and economic motives cannot be ruled out as reasons for the establishment of some of these newspapers (Ansah, 1993, Anyindoho, 2016).

As many more people gained western education, their interest in politics and economic preferences changed in tandem with their new found status. As a results, newspapers with vested interest such as the *Gold Coast Independent, Gold Coast Observer, Gold Coast Herald, Gold Coast Express, Gold Coast Aborigines* and the *Gold Coast Free Press* were set up. All the aforementioned newspapers were all established in the 19ᵗʰ century in the Gold Coast, a time when nationalism activities were beginning to take shape to later agitate for political freedom from colonial masters. Newspapers were indeed the mouthpiece and pace setters for the fight for independence. It is also believed that the establishment of several newspapers in the colonial period did not only increase the locals' interest in agitating for independence but created reading and literacy enthusiasm among the indigenes.

At the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century, there were interesting narratives on the growth and expansion of newspapers in the Gold Coast. The *Gold Coast Leader* appeared from 1902 to 1929. The *Gold Coast Advocate, Gold Coast Courier* and the *Gold Coast Nation & Aborigines* were also added to the numbers. The *Gold Coast Youth Magazine* appeared once in 1912 in Cape Coast. *Young Man's Adviser, Eastern Star & Akwapim Chronicle, Voice of the People* and the *Gold Coast*

Independence all existed before. *Literary & Social Guide, Voice of Africa, Gold Coast Pioneer, Gold Coast Times and Sunlight* were not left out from the list of newspapers (Ibid).

The *Gold Coast Catholic Voice* was a monthly paper set up by the Catholic Mission from 1926 to 1927. As its name implies, it was purely established for missionary activities. The *Gold Coast Spectator, Gold Coast Truth, Gold Coast Daily Telegraph, Gold Coast Guardian* and the *Gold Coast Daily News* were all established within this period to carry out various roles in that nationalization drive as numerous newspapers that existed at the time. It is instructive to note that these were the press that existed from 1822 to 1930 in the Gold Coast. Many of these newspapers played major roles in the struggle for political independence as they kept on hammering on the excesses of the colonial administration.

Anyidoho (2016) indicates that economic factors motivated the setting up of professionalism in the media, explaining that the first printing press was brought into the Gold Coast in 1822 by Charles McCarthy, followed by Missionaries who also brought printing equipment into the country. Aside printing presses, funding, personnel and printing materials also constituted economic aspects of the newspaper business. For economic viability, the *West African Herald* had part of its funding through advertisement. James Mensah Sarbah and other merchants advertised in the paper while other English-speaking newspapers equally received sponsorships. These commercial sponsorships often led to political undertones in the newspaper business. For instance the *West African Times* and the *Ghana Statesman* were established in 1931 and 1948 respectively by J.B. Dankwah for commercial and political reasons.

The press at the time had unique characteristics. Notable among the characteristic of the press at the time is that the colonial press, particularly that of British West Africa, were largely owned by influential and highly educated Africans who had returned from overseas and played an important watchdog role in exposing the excesses of the colonial administration. For Asante (1996), the whole notion of media development and use in Sub-Saharan Africa was basically premised on a largely liberal Western value-system that favoured a free and lively press. This might have accounted for the numerous newspapers that existed in the Gold Coast at the time.

Secondly, the press at the time was identified with the oral discourse style of communication in identifying with their readers in raising public awareness on the excesses of the colonial administration, and in this way making a significant contribution in setting the agenda in the struggle for nationhood. It was the press that profoundly ignited the struggle for independence by

consistently hammering on the excesses of the colonial masters. This consistency enabled the citizens of the Gold Coast to mobilise the little resources and energies they had towards one golden dream of freeing themselves from the shackles of colonialism.

Ansah (1980), states that the press in colonial Ghana was employed mainly to criticize the oppressiveness, injustice and other evils of the colonial system and to agitate and mobilize the people for independence movement. He notes that the press in pre-independent Ghana "was an advocacy press for whose running needed commitment to the nationalist cause rather than professional skills in journalism" Ansah (1980:2). As examples, persons such as J. B. Danquah (a notable lawyer-politician), Nnamdi Azikiwe (a leading Nigerian nationalist who edited a newspaper in the Gold Coast in the mid-1930s) and Kwame Nkrumah, were all practicing journalism without any professional training on the job. Most of those practicing journalism at the time were professionals in law, medicine and not professional journalists. They took advantage of the then prevailing political and economic environment to practice journalism even though without professional and ethical appreciation of the job.

The Gold Coast newspapers demanded that citizens be given political rights, improved living standards, and self-governance. The political agenda of Gold Coast journalism became nationalistic and attracted zealous youths, and women, and reached out beyond the circle of elites, urging rural leaders and the urban poor with a more accessible language to demand for freedom. The colonial media did not spare the colonial master from fiery oppositional outcry. Their tacit use of strong language against the colonial masters was an indication of a nation prepared to shoulder its political and economic aspirations. In 1948, Nkrumah started *The Accra Evening News,* a publication stating the views of the Convention People's Party (CPP). Largely written by party officials, this newspaper was incessant on the popular demand for "Self-government Now" while launching angry attacks against the colonial government. It is remarkable to note that the media particularly newspapers played a key role in Nkrumah's radical political activism.

Cecil King, a British newspaper magnate of the London Daily Mirror Group, established *The Daily Graphic* in 1950. This newspaper maintained a policy of political neutrality, emphasizing objective reporting by local African reporters. With its Western origin, The *Graphic* sought to position itself as the most professional newspaper in the Gold Coast at the time. This newspaper survived several turmoil in the political history of Ghana and currently remains one of the leading state-owned

newspapers in the country. At present, it has a number of other newspapers under its operations with several offices and correspondents spread across the country.

After gaining independence from British rule in 1957, Nkrumah became prime minister and subsequently president of Ghana in 1960 when a new constitution established the nation as a Republic. At independence, four newspapers were circulating in Ghana; within a few years, Nkrumah dominated these papers for his personal political interest. Being a socialist, Nkrumah crafted an African form of socialism and saw the media as an instrument of state authority. He attempted to use newspapers as propaganda tools to build national unity and popular support for the ambitious development projects of the new government as Ghana was then a new independent state. Nkrumah knew of the significant role newspapers played in the fight for independence and so made the media a strategic part of his governance.

Boafo (1988), indicates that journalism did not acquire the status of a profession in the Gold Coast until the early 1950s and the need for, and the importance of formal journalism training were recognized only after the country had achieved its political independence in March, 1957. In view of that, the Ghana Institute of Journalism was established in 1959 as the premier institution for the training of cadres of African journalists to play an active role in the emancipation of the continent. As a premier institution for the training of journalists, it attracted students across the Sub-Sahara African region who took interest in journalism as a profession. The GIJ was therefore a novelty institution which served the media needs of many countries across Africa.

Broadcasting however started a century later after the establishment of newspapers. Radio broadcasting began in Gold Coast in 1935. The technology was still young globally at the time it was introduced in the country. Radio Zoy which was established by the Colonial Government was the first radio station to start broadcasting in Ghana. Programming was generally developed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and then re-broadcast in Ghana on radio Zoy (Whaite, 2005). Radio Zoy later became the Gold Coast Broadcasting Services in 1954 and then Ghana Broadcasting Cooperation (GBC) after independence. GBC is still the state's broadcaster with several radio outlets across the country.

2.9:1 Post-Independence Media of Ghana

The media of Ghana continued to have influence even after the country's independence. The Guinea Press Limited was established in 1957 by the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) as the mouthpiece of the party. The Guinea Press (Publishers of *Ghanaian Times* and *Weekly Spectator*)

was absorbed as a state property and named the New Times Corporation by the National Liberation Council. The turn of events after independence did not favour the press in Ghana as the first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah took steps to prevent opposition press against his regime. Aside the *Accra Evening News* that was established by Kwame Nkrumah, the *Daily Graphic* and its subsidiaries were acquired by the state in 1963 so that they could propagate the agenda of the new independent state. Journalism was developed into a recognised profession by 1950 but the status was not fully felt when post-independence factors hampered the growth of the profession in the country (Ansah, 1993, Anyindoho, 2016).

Kwame Nkrumah in 1961 allegedly introduced series of measures including authoritarian directives against the *Ashanti Pioneer* of Kumasi, thus directing the paper's editor to submit its copy to his minister of information before printing. This was a form of state censorship. The *Ashanti Pioneer,* founded in 1939 by John and Nancy Tsiboe, remained defiant in the 1950s and early 1960s, and became a vibrant regional opposition to Nkrumah. After repeatedly subjecting the paper to censorship, Nkrumah eventually shut it down in 1962. The editor of the *Pioneer* was allegedly detained for seven months while the city editor spent four and half years in detention in Fort Ussher Prison for criticisms against the CCP government, led by Nkrumah (Boafo, 1988, Asante, 1996)

Television was established in Ghana in 1965 by the government in collaboration with Sanyo of Japan. Sanyo had then wished to promote television in Ghana to support its own television assembling plant in Tema. It is significant to note that from the introduction of radio in the Gold Coast in 1935, and television in 1965, broadcasting remained a state monopoly. The airwaves were fully liberalized in 1996, giving opportunity for the establishment of several radio and television stations. Whereas the various subsequent regimes – colonial, independent, military, and civilian, differed much in their use of the media, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) always served a strong political and educational purpose. Throughout the history of GBC, development of the broadcast infrastructure and programming policies were closely tied to state ideology, be it colonial, anti-colonial, or Pan Africanist revolutionary.

In 1966, Nkrumah was overthrown by a military coup led by the National Liberation Council (NLC). The new political leadership of the country took a more liberal approach towards the news media. This is in contrast to state domination of the media under Nkrumah. It released independent journalists from prison, closing down the more blatant instruments of state propaganda, and lifting

forms of censorship and bans on foreign journalists. These steps gave a breathing space for the media to operate freely. In the second republic which began in 1969, most media outlets were owned by the state and therefore were obliged to change their editorial positions overnight, extolling the virtues of Nkrumah and African socialism one day, then lambasting the violence and corruption of his regime the next. While the Chairman of the NLC publicly encouraged "constructive" criticism and the free flow of information, the main newspapers continued to experience indirect forms of state patronage and influence.

When the country was returned to civilian rule in 1969. Kofi Abrefa Busia, the prime minister of the Second Republic encouraged freedom of the press which resulted in the proliferation of the private press during the period of his administration from 1969 to 1972. Scholarship on the approach of this regime towards the media is scanty. Despite the little that is known about its media systems, it is acknowledged that attempts were made by the regime to make the media independent and free to operate without unnecessary restrictions or control by the government.

The third Republic which begun in 1979, was equally liberal to press freedom to the extent that its constitution devoted three articles to the independence of the media and the establishment of the Press Commission. It is remarkable to note that this regime was the first to have established an institution solely for the protection of the rights of the media. Given the fact that the 1979 Constitution devoted space for the media and even set up a commission for it, there is good reason to believe the regime respected press freedom. Because of the short period of this administration, much of what the media did and how the government handled the media is very sketchy except to say the government had good intentions for the media. Although, democratic and Pan-Africanist, the government of Hilla Limann was overthrown in another coup in 1981, bringing to an abrupt end his political leadership.

The country ushered in the fourth Republic in January, 1992 with a new constitution. This constitution which is still the main legal document governing the country remains the most significant landmark in the history of the media. This is because the 1992 Constitution devotes a significant part (a full chapter) to the professional practice and independence of the media as well as providing an institution for the development and promotion of professional standards of journalism in Ghana. The National Media Commission; taking after the Press Commission in 1979 Constitution, was established by the 1992 Constitution to undertake the herculean task of setting

up professional standards in the practice of journalism. Among its other functions is to insulate the state media from governmental control.

The spirit of the fourth Republican Constitution, coupled with civil society/public agitation made continued state monopoly over the airwaves untenable in Ghana. The School of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana, for example, played significant role for private participation in broadcasting as it organised a number of workshops on the "privatization of radio and television" to stimulate public discussion (Karikari, 1994). In addition to such awareness creating initiatives, the call for deregulation was dramatically expressed when a pirated FM station called 'Radio Eye' began broadcasting to parts of Accra without recourse to the broadcasting licensing authorities.

Owusu (2012) states that Radio Eye was raided and shutdown after a few weeks on air and criminal charges preferred against its owners. The station's defiant action forced the government to address the central question of broadcast deregulation. This eventually led to the deregulation of broadcasting in Ghana in 1995, a process put in motion earlier by the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution. Prior to the liberalisation of the airwaves, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation enjoyed monopoly in broadcasting in the country since the first Republic though some broadcasting signals were received from foreign networks. Signals of international broadcasting networks such as the BBC, and VOA, could be received in parts of the country prior to the liberalisation of the airwaves. The media of Ghana did not fare well under the military regimes. All the periods of military rule in Ghana have had bad records for press freedom, free expression and respect for democratic principles. This is no secret because military governments are known for their authoritarian rule and violations of people's rights. Beginning from the first coup in 1966, to the last coup in 1981, the military juntas have resulted in human rights abuses. In all the military regimes experienced in Ghana, the constitutions were set aside and in their place were military decrees which paid little respect to press freedom and media development.

The media of Ghana have been growing steadily over the periods. The National Communication Authority of Ghana put the total number of radio stations in the country at 575, out of which 428 are operational across the country (NCA, 2020). This comprises public, community, commercial and campus operational radio stations. Also, 102 television (tv) stations are on air out of a total of 146 authorised analogue, digital and satellite tv stations. The number of newspapers is estimated to be over 100 and several news portals and blogs operate in a country with a population of 30.8

million. A recent data indicates that a total of 707 FM broadcasting stations have been licensed but 513 are operational as at the third quarter of 2022. Similarly, 155 television stations have been authorised with 113 on air as at third quarter, 2022 (NCA, 2022). These constitute the media of Ghana in all the 16 administrative regions of the country.

2.10 The Political Economy of the Media, 4IR and Fake News

Related literature on fake news, the political economy of the media and the fourth industrial revolution are analysed in a form of integrated literature. Borden and Abbott (2008) indicate that familiarity with literature in a discipline enable researchers to determine existing gaps, theoretical controversies and methodologies for conducting and investigating new studies. This therefore justifies the need to review literature on the link between fake news, the political economy of the media in Ghana and the fourth industrial revolution. Upon a painstaking exercise to review literature on fake news, the political economy of the media of Ghana and the fourth industrial revolution, it was realized that there is paucity of related studies in Ghana. To obtain adequate and appropriate literature significant enough for this study, similar available literature around Africa and the globe is used alongside the few available studies found in Ghana.

From the European context, Carr, Sanchez and Daros (2019) investigated citizens' engagement in the contemporary era of fake news and questioned whether the phenomenon is a hegemonic distraction or a control by social media. They argued that social media has gained prominence in the contemporary social, economic and political context of the globe, creating opportunities for everyone to engage, interact and communicate across board. These communications come in the form of text, images/videos, podcasts and a blend of innovations which includes fake news disseminated without discrimination through social media platforms and accessible to all. Politicians and political parties knowing the power these platforms wield, have taken advantage of them to influence the public through all forms of democratic communication strategies to woo supporters. Using Spain, relative to fake news, the study investigated misinformation and disinformation in relation to immigration issues and discovered that fake news has a strong influence in information disseminated on immigration issues in Spain.

The study adopted a qualitative exploratory approach to analyse news stories from selected internet-based organisations including the BBC, *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and selected

popular fact-checkers. A total of 2412 verified news stories relating to the immigration context in the United States and Europe were analysed using content analysis as the instrument.

Carr et al. (2020) found that the interplay of the internet and technology has made the mainstream media lose its monopoly of information in coexistence with other bodies such as the state, elites and the bourgeois. Fake news is therefore not only questioning the professionalism of journalism and the legitimacy of the mainstream media but about who controls and dominates over information as a necessary ingredient in a democratic environment. This confluence of fake news-democracy complicates and saturates the ecosystem in which digital technology and algorithms reposition the availability of news. Political and economic interests are at the center stage of the phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation where networks of actors direct the opinions, beliefs and perceptions of citizens. Fake news, it was discovered from the study, could indisputably encourage or discourage decision making and political participation in democratic states.

Carr et al. (2020) claimed that toxic narratives against immigration created xenophobic politicking, populism and vilification of the 'other' in Spain. Consequently, in the quest for electoral advantage, advanced sophistications and fake news were used as the springboard to reduce immigration challenges in Spain. To effectively deal with fake news menace, the researchers suggested the need for inter-sectorial strategies involving state and non-state actors to support and combat fake news and disinformation. As a longstanding phenomenon in the globe, critical literacy education is needed to deal with the dubious deceptions, betrayals and duping of citizens through fake news. They also expressed dismay over the non-existence of a complete handbook or unfettered checklist designed for fake news. That notwithstanding, the researchers believe enhanced citizen participation in the democratic process should grapple with the hegemonic forces that interweave themselves in democratic governance.

In a similar European context, Vosoughi, Roy and Aral (2018) investigated the spread of truthful and false news online. The study aimed at verifying genuine and false news stories on Twitter from 2006 to 2017 in a deferential diffusion, where human and robotic assistance was applied to the study. In all, 126,000 stories tweeted 4.5 million times by three million people who were sampled for the research. The news items were classified into true and false stories based on information from six fact-checking organisations. This was done by passing the title, body, and verdict whether true, false or mixed of each of the stories reported on websites, and then matched them against those on Twitter.

Findings indicate that politics constituted the largest category of the data followed by urban legends, business, terrorism, science, entertainment and, natural disasters at the bottom. It revealed that falsehood spreads and diffuses faster, farther and more widely in all categories of information. Falsehood also tends to reach more people than the truth which implies that falsehood is usually re-tweeted by many people than the re-tweets of truth. To understand the velocity at which falsehood travels faster and farther than truthful information, individual characteristics of users on twitter was analysed.

Vosoughi et al. (2018) found that users who spread false news had less followers, followed fewer people and were less active on twitter. The study also revealed that those users were not significantly verified and had been on twitter for a short period. To understand why fake news traveled faster than true news, novelty was adduced as the possible reason why false news was re-tweeted a number of times. This is because of the need to claim certain social status of those users as they try to communicate their new found status to the world which is that, they have access to unique information. People who belong to social groups are according to the study, quick to share any new information they come across without making efforts to verify the truth or otherwise of the information they are sharing. This is a common means of spreading fake news.

Vosoughi et al. (2018) called for further studies to unravel the behavioural explanations to the differences in the diffusion of false and true information particularly on the identification of human judgments. They affirmed that false news can redirect efforts at interventions in natural disasters and allocation of resources in aid of victims and can even misinform elections. The current ad-hoc analysis of fake news and disinformation research in the view of the researchers, cannot resolve the problem. The researchers suggested the need for more research to be done on a large and systematic scale to fully understand the phenomenon and find solutions to it. They also recommended misinformation containment policies to focus more on behavioural interventions rather than curtailing bots because human behaviour contributes more to the spread than automated robots do.

Chadwick, Vaccari and O'Loughlin (2018) studied tabloid and social media to understand whether there is affinity with news produced and shared on tabloid newspapers and social media in the United Kingdom. The study used a media resources perspective to integrate four data sets constructed during the 2017 UK elections campaign. Chadwick et al. (2018) indicate that publication and dissemination of tabloid news on social media is a predictor for misinformation

and disinformation behaviour. This is mostly done to exploit through a syndicated process for financial gains. It is also not only for financial rewards but could also be purely to fabricate news to destroy the principles underlining liberal democracy. The involvement of tabloids in circulating such fake news in the UK is raising concerns among critics that the media is losing its time tested values of accuracy, and objectivity which aided in shaping the political life of citizens. Chadwick et al. (2018) mention *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* as tabloids which strongly advocated and campaigned for Brexit and at a point misrepresented certain facts. These misrepresentations were shared countless times on social media. This is an indication that newspapers are fast adapting to digital content but as to whether such contributes to fake news remains to be seen.

Chadwick et al. (2018) found that a larger proportion of respondents admitted sharing contents they deemed problematic and that contributes what they termed 'democratically dysfunctional disinformation'. The study observed a correlation between people who shared tabloid news on social media and their likelihood to promote disinformation and misinformation. Such people are more likely to engage in democratic dysfunctional behaviour of sharing any sources on social media to promote fake news. Chadwick et al. (2018) indicate that tabloid newspapers affect civic life negatively through social media because they provide fertile resources for misinformation and disinformation to take place. The study also found that users who are politically like-minded are more likely to promote and share disinformation without being challenged because of the hemophilic network such people share. This overtime, could decrease people's awareness to pay extra care for credible news in favour of fake news or fabricated news content which could undermine civic culture.

Chadwick et al. (2018:4271) state "At the systematic level, tabloid newspaper logics are now integrating with social media logics and enabling people to spread misinformation and disinformation". This situation of sharing tabloid content on social media could lead to the sharing of messages in the cycle of social media users to promote fake news. They recommended future studies in this area to focus on how the hybrid of older and newer media could promote the production and dissemination of fake news in different contexts. This might digress into the debate that social media these days sets agenda for the mainstream media in the form of fake news. Therefore fake news that started on social media could actually become a breaking story on mainstream media if care is not taken.

Domenico, Sit, Ishizaka and Nunan (2021) reviewed fake news, social media and marketing literature in a systematic and thematic research stressing that social media has become a brand for marketing activities such as services and product development. The side effects of fake news to brand marketing however could be severe including the fact that it could create doubts over prior knowledge and create disbelief about a product or service. It could tarnish the corporate identity and reputation of companies and consequently create financial difficulties for firms. Domenico et al. (2021) indicate that fake news dissemination starts when creators develop fake profiles on social media and use such identities to spread fake news or falsehood online. This fake news which is uploaded online is then shared and re-shared by other users through social behavioural processes influenced by the online community members. A more disturbing sharing of fake news on social media is promoted by both human and non-humans such as robots or algorithms that mimic human behaviour and perform diverse roles in a sophisticated and smart manner. Domenico et al. (2021) explained further that social bots are designed and programmed to spread fake news in the early stages of a fake story and target users to increase the rate of the spread.

Domenico et al. (2021) found that humans equally engage in the spread of fake news knowingly or unknowingly. Those who spread the fake news intentionally either do so for political or ideological reasons while others maliciously spread fake news for monetary gains. They indicate that other users share fake news in order to gain acceptance among their online friends while others do so to reinforce group comradeship. This solidarity with group members is based on the principle that people create and share fake news based on prior beliefs. All these Domenico et al. (2021) aver, affect brand marketing negatively. This is done to change consumers' mind against a firm and cited Pepsi, McDonald and Coca Cola as companies that have suffered from such smear campaigning through fake news. Fake news will therefore affect firm products and consumers' knowledge and attitude leading to reputational damage and boycotts. Domenico et al. (2021) conclude that fake news does not only affect consumers and firms but the society in general and urged firms to invest in strategies that would lead to positive outcomes for their firms.

The African context also has a number of fake news studies conducted with varied outcomes. Mutugi, Nyamboga and Matu (2020) investigated the challenges Kenyan television journalists face in spotting fake news. The relativists-interpretative, constructionists' ontology and epistemology philosophical paradigm approach was adopted for the study where 16 respondents were purposively sampled for the study. The qualitative multiple case study was employed for the study

with a target population comprising mainly editors and journalists in Kenya. In-depth interviews, observation and document reviews were the data collection instruments used.

Findings suggest that editors and journalists in Kenyan television face myriad of challenges in spotting fake news. In the list of the challenges were; loss of viewers to competitor TV stations, lack of authoritative contacts to confirm authenticity of news and sources who gave fake news for personal, business and economic benefits. Other challenges were the ability of fake news to camouflage real news, speed of fake news, and unclear definition of fake news, live reporting, uncooperative sources, inexperienced correspondents and interns and social media all of which posed as challenges for journalists in Kenya in spotting fake news.

Matu et al. (2020) further found in their study that the public reason beyond facts when seeking for information to satisfy their thirst for news hence they zap from one station to another seeking for breaking news. The journalists were also faced with the challenge of authentic sources to contact or speak to during incidents stressing that most of the sources relied upon by journalists for news have ulterior motives and past reputation of disinformation. This is compounded by sources who give fake news for personal, business and economic benefits. This is because some individuals have personal, political and economic reasons before granting information to journalists. These individual interests affect the information provided thus resulting in fake news. Then again, there is the challenge of fake news having close resemblance with real news. This camouflages real news making it difficult for editors to detect fake news.

The study recommends the need for media institutions to invest in expert training for journalists to spot fake news. It recommends further that engaging the services of data experts and fake news specialists to train interns and employee journalists on the typologies, styles, propagation and use of fake news is the best immediate measure that can be taken to reduce fake news. Other recommendations include education and training of audiences, sources, reporters and editors on fake news to minimize the difficulties journalists face in spotting fake news. Aside these, the study recommends a technologically based approach to overcome the difficulty in spotting fake news by citizen journalists.

Mutsvuairo and Bebawi (2019) studied the curriculum of journalism training institutions in the Middle East and Africa to understand whether the journalism curriculum in these countries taught topics on fake news. The comparative study examined undergraduate journalism and media programmes curriculums from four Anglophone African countries, namely; Zimbabwe, South

Africa, Kenya and Uganda and four Middle East countries which were; Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt. The main objective of the study was to understand how these countries' universities were teaching 'fake news' as a topic in journalism since these countries have long been studying journalism education to raise professional journalists to provide the information needs of their respective countries.

The study is premised on the sustained debate over whether the teaching of journalism and media programmes in Africa should be Eurocentric or Afrocentric. This is premised on scholars' divergent views that geographical context should define journalism practice rather than culture. Others are also of the view that Pan-Africanism and Western ideologies should be the underlining influence in a journalism and media curriculum. In the unending debate, some scholars are in favour of integrating global journalism into the local curriculum. Mutsvuairo and Bebawi (2019) see journalism education that hinges on Eurocentric approaches as problematic for Africa and the Middle East because the sort of journalism learnt and practiced does not adequately address the developmental challenges of these areas. Journalism schools as they suggest, must rather focus on indigenous press and culture.

Mutsvuiaro and Bebawi (2019) found in their study that journalism education in the Arab region is largely government controlled although there were some mushrooming private universities offering courses in journalism and media studies. This makes those schools, in the view of the researchers, to fail in producing critical journalists who will hold the governments in the Arab regions accountable. The goal of Arab journalism schools is to prepare journalism students to promote the state's accomplishments. Accountability journalism and combating fake news seems to have been incorporated into journalism training institutions alongside investigative journalism courses. The study identified that most of the lecturers teaching journalism in the Middle East were academics who have not worked as journalists and this, the study concludes, affects the practical training abilities of the trainers.

The study, also found that none of the universities offer a stand-alone course on 'fake news'. Rather, most of the universities have integrated fake news into other modules making learners not to benefit fully from teaching content on fake news. In the view of the researchers, there is the need for fake news modules to be taught fully to highlight the journalistic impediments it is causing these regions. They indicated that journalism educators need to work in collaboration with legal

scholars in areas such as copyright and regulation of digital environment to help deal with the complexities brought about by fake news.

Mutsvuairo and Bebawi (2019) suggest that journalism education in Africa and the Middle East schools should promote research-led teaching that stimulates a regulatory framework aimed at eradicating fake news. The fact that most of the universities use English as the medium of instruction across Africa is problematic. Again, the study identified over reliance on foreign journalism educators in the Middle East as worrying because it breeds colonial hegemonic agenda in Africa and the Middle East educational system. These Eurocentric ideas have influenced and blurred the thinking that fake news should be looked at from Russia's social media based supremacy of disinformation.

"In the Middle East and Africa, conspiracy theories, rumours and gossip dominate the fake news ecosystem" (Ibid, 151). This makes the researchers to recommend the need for indigenous pedagogical development that deals with fake news in Africa and the Middle East context. They further suggest the need for African and the Middle East countries to focus on regulatory mechanisms aimed at eradicating fake news in the social and contemporary media. They contend that fake news creates credibility challenges for mainstream media. This challenge demands collaborative efforts including research on workable policies for redress. Aside that, studies on fake news have largely focused on social media, elections and on the ability of journalists to spot fake news.

Writing on fake news in South Africa, Wasserman (2020) indicates that debates over the subject should focus more on the fabricated form of information in any form of media whether social or mainstream media. For a better understanding of the disinformation, misinformation and fake news discourse, discussions should be understood in a particular context of production and consumption. The paper therefore made an attempt to locate fake news in South African media that illustrates how journalistic discourse of fake news operates in such a young democratic country. Using content analysis as the main research instrument, the researcher explored fake Twitter accounts and spoof websites as a demonstration of journalistic paradigm in a transitional society.

On this score, Wasserman (2020) sees fake news in the African context as a complex and imprecise concept which comes in different forms such as a causation directed at mainstream media organisations to paid Twitter accounts, spoof websites and satirical pieces which make analysis of the term cumbersome. Fake news in South Africa in the view of the researcher could be broadly

categorized into political attacks on social media and spoof websites providing satirical and fabricated news stories and clickbaits. Fake news in South Africa though comes in different guises and forms; it also comes with high politicisation. As a highly politicised concept, it has a direct effect on journalism and democracy largely.

It comprises truth telling, informed decision making and participation in the public sphere. In its political form, fake news sponsored political Twitter accounts re-echoes and amplify the campaign of "white monopoly capital" or satirical stories that make fun of people in leadership positions and this condenses the already charged political context in South Africa. This also brings to question the broader relationship between journalism and the audience, especially the distant nature of mainstream media from the reality of the marginalized. Fake news sites in South Africa have used satirical pieces to critique and hold the powerful in society to account. The sites have also pointed out the failures of the mainstream media and set the moral standards for journalism to be responsive to societal needs (Wasserman, 2020).

Wasserman (2020) concludes by stating that though fake news has been presented as harmful to journalism and the South African democratic government, it provides an opportunity for the mainstream media to re-assert and re-affirm its dominance and professional paradigm of news production and dissemination. This can best be done through a process of introspection that could redefine the role of the mainstream media in a technologically transforming industry instead of attempting to orchestrate and ostracise fake news in South Africa. The rise of fake news is posing critical challenges not only to mainstream media to carry out their professional responsibilities to society but has enlightened citizens to demand more from mainstream media to resonate with the experiences and realities of the poor and the marginalized. This direction is more preferred than a mere rejection and shunning of fake news.

In another study, Chiumbu and Radebe (2020) argued for decolonising the critical political economy of the media, stating that funding plays crucial roles in what stories get published in the media and those silenced on ideological and power structural grounds. The paper calls for rethinking about decolonising of the political economy of the global South because the Marxist approach to the understanding of the media-state relations in Africa contains inherent limitations. Chiumbu and Radebe argue that the Marxist approach to the critical political economy of the media critiques the bourgeois ideology of capitalist modernity solely on Eurocentric positionality without the reality of coloniality which affects African countries.

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Building on existing research to back their arguments, Chiumbu and Radebe (2020) call for rethinking the political economy for the African continent to reflect the peculiar needs and cultures of Africa stressing that the global hegemonic model of power continues to shape asymmetrical power relations in the global North and global South to the detriment of the global South. This form of deliberate policy aimed at the continued domination of Africa must be halted. The scars of slavery, colonial rule and exploitation of African resources are still fresh in the memories of the people of the continent hence the need for Africans to find solutions to their problems through intellectual deliberations on the political economy. It is only through such discourses will the continent rise again.

Chiumbu and Radebe (2020) posit that Marx's materialistic conception of historical progress cannot be used to measure Africa's path to development as it mirrors only one unilateral path to development without specific reference to Africa's culture and history. Marxism focuses on Eurocentrism with colonialism receiving little attention saying that "we maintain that Marx's ideas on race, class and empire have not imprinted on the political economy scholarship" (Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020:8). They suggest that the Marxist critical economic approach is not to be abandoned in seeking a totally new approach towards the political economy of the media in Africa but rather proposed that the adoption of an integration of decolonial theories to accommodate more nuanced perspectives of critical political economy is better.

Media ownership is located in relation to power and that of African media is linked to the global media through commercialisation, liberalisation, privatisation and internationalisation which are all linked to the global political economy. This has liberalised most African media, both print and broadcast, which is dictated by capitalist ideologies. These media systems cannot be devoid of colonial dynamics with ties to global capital. "In South Africa, while ownership of print media has moved to black-owned companies, the shareholders are located in big multinational companies ….print media has remained entwined within a global capitalists structure that privileges racialised capital" (Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020:10). As a result, they suggest the need for the African media practitioner to refrain from using Western media concepts and practices as yardstick in measuring their standards. They should rather rethink and adopt an indigenous framework for journalism for Africa geared towards the needs of the continent. The postcolonial societies such as Africa must integrate the decolonisation approach in journalism practice, values and ethics (Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020).

Dahlberg (2015) in his positioning paper on the digital media and the political economy of social media, he argues that there is an empowerment divide associated with social media platform ownership because these platforms are owned and dominated by a handful of for-profit corporations. Buttressing his case, Dahlberg (2015) indicates that *LinkedIn, Twitter, Wikipeadia* (non-profit) and *YouTube* are owned by *Google*. The ownership structure covers their physical infrastructures such as server farms and intellectual property such as data analysis and processing systems, data, platform software and user profiles. Aside these, Facebook which is another platform owner is in this category of empowerment divide as people no longer use web browsers. Rather, connectivity to internet is made through mobile phones to connect to a text-based *Facebook* interface and those on smartphones are already hooked on Facebook once they start using their devices yet these same group of people most of who are in the Global South may not even have an email address but have Facebook pages. This phenomenon is making Facebook synonymous to the internet to some people. The platforms in turn take advantage to economically and surreptitiously exploit the user.

This form of ownership empowerment translates to ownership divide which leads to control divides through platform rules and codes which give explicit control over platforms usage to owners of the platforms instead of users. Platform owners can modify, censor content and application however they do so without the consent of the user. Dahlberg (2015) indicates that platforms also carry out surveillance on users. These platforms are in the habit of tracking and following users around the web and covertly collecting data from other Internet users for the purposes of raising advertising revenue. This surveillance information could be handed to the government when demanded from the platforms. This form of selling users profiles to advertisers is an economic and political capital that results in the exploitation of the user. These platforms also stratify visibility inequalities between users leading to deepening of inequality of users. Dahlberg (2015) suggests the need for intensive digital divide research to examine the political and economic context on how social and cultural contexts shape digital technologies that feed these inequalities among users. More interesting to this paper is the need to understand the ownership structure of the media of Ghana and what the media use their corporate ownerships of their organisations for. Mare, Mabweazara and Moyo (2020) present a special position paper on fake news and cyber-propaganda in Sub-Saharan Africa where they advocated for the re-centering of the research agenda of fake news to explore the intricacies that are aimed at bridging the intellectual divide

between the Global North and Global South. The study was to fill the yawning gap on how fake news and cyber-propaganda are produced in different political, ideological and demographical contexts. They noted that most studies in this area tend to be one-dimensional along a Western perspective that glosses over global experiences. It argued that Western-centric conception should not be seen as universally applicable but the need to frame alternatives to dismantle the intellectual imbalances between Africa and the West. The broader socio-political and cultural factors must also be understood distinctively.

Mare et al. (2020) maintained that fake news must not be looked at from the European context as a universal phenomenon which demands a common solution globally stressing that it must be seen differently in the case of Africa where there are peculiar challenges which provide fertile grounds for the production and consumption of fake news. The need to have a sober reflection on the phenomenon of fake news using the African lenses is necessary because of the contextual differences that will help in shaping the recurring challenges of fake news. In the case of the Global North, the rise of populist politics, digital capitalism, transformation of the public sphere and structural weakness of liberal and mainstream media are known causes of the rise of fake news but little is known of the drivers of the phenomenon in the Sub-Sahara Africa.

Mare et al. (2020) are of the view that social phenomena must be understood against the backdrop of local contexts as well as the wider context which will enable critical assessment. This assessment will not also exclude the impact of digital technology to the ongoing discourse surrounding fake news. The paper views the phenomenon as not just one but multiple experiences that must be brought to bear to fully understand fake news and cyber propaganda. This heterogeneity principle must be applied across the globe in a critical manner to "de-Westernise" or "decolonize" media and communication research. The paper further suggests that such a broad study must not only look at the contextual variations but critically answer the notion of fake news from the traditional ethical challenges facing journalism in Africa; what constitutes the political economy of fake news and cyber propaganda in Africa, what motivates the production of fake news, who are behind the production, their digital competences and the dissemination mechanisms. These questions they contend, must not be reserved for only the digital media but must be applicable to the mainstream media as well.

Nounkeu (2020) investigated Facebook and fake news on the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon using mixed multi-method approach where content analysis, ethnography and participant

observation were used to study straight news stories of a citizen journalist. This fake news or the spread of falsehood on social media is increasing and is becoming common in Sub-Sahara Africa particularly in Cameroon. It must be noted that the Anglophone crisis has created conflicts in that country since 2016, specifically in the South-west and the North-west regions. In all, 133 straight news stories were analysed in the study based on their credibility, variability and other journalistic standards.

The findings revealed that 79 of the stories analysed did not have sources as it is the case in journalism practice. This is problematic to ethical journalism news processes where news stories must have sources otherwise such stories become incredible and suffer transparency problems. Another 33 of the stories analysed out of the 133, were provided by sources without disclosing their identities. Others were said to be anonymous, a characteristic Nounkeu (2020) indicates could be likened to propaganda. Nounkeu (2020) believed the practice of using anonymous sources by both conventional media and social media could be a conduit to fuel rumours and dubious content. The study also found that 93 of the stories did not indicate when and where the incident in the stories occurred. This raises verifiability doubts over the stories analysed.

Nounkeu (2020) concludes that the stories analysed, lacked the basic elements of reliability and verifiability associated with a professional journalistic piece. This confirms the belief that propagation of fake news is backed by financial or political interests. What makes citizen journalism lack authenticity according to Nounkeu is the absence of gatekeeping processes that ensure that news stories meet certain minimum ethical acceptance before publication. All traditional news stories pass through this stage where the input and output stages create the enabling environment for verification and cross-checking but that of the social media paves way for all manner of junk information to be disseminated. This leads to publication of fake news either intentionally or accidentally. The affordability and accessibility nature of social media in the view of Nounkeu (2020) makes them prone to fake news and disinformation.

In the Ghanaian context, Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019) in their article, "Journalism in the era of mobile technology: the changing pattern of news production and the thriving culture of fake news in Pakistan and Ghana", investigate how the practice of journalism in Pakistan and Ghana have changed the face of new technologies resulting in the cell phone becoming a basic tool used by journalists in producing their news stories. They contend that the changing patterns of news production in what can be termed 'mobile journalism' is making the work of journalism easier and

faster which in the end gives rise to the proliferation of fake news, lack of accuracy and truthfulness in the stories journalists produce.

The qualitative approach employed by Jamil and Appiah-Adjei's study was anchored on the media convergence and the social responsibility theory of the press. With interviews as the main instrument of data collection, 15 journalists from each of the two countries participated in the study with findings suggesting that the advent of new technologies has resulted in the rise of mobile journalism in both countries which has reformed the newsrooms where journalists operate. This new order has resulted in a new culture of easy exchange of information and communication between audiences and other journalists within the same environment. They attribute the transformations in journalism to developments in information and communication infrastructure in Pakistan and Ghana stressing that 3G and 4G technologies have been introduced to foster the use of smartphones for news gathering and reporting in both countries.

Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019) contend that the use of mobile devices in journalism has made the process of news production faster and less costly as news could be produced in no time in contemporary times noting that events far away could be watched vie the internet and processed into news without necessarily being present physically. Although the transformation has been laudable, the study expressed great concern about a growing culture of fake news in both countries which they assert has the potential of eroding the gains of technological transformation in journalism. They indicate that the use of mobile devices in taking photos and videos for news production has maximized the unauthenticity of incidents and news contents. The study recommends verification processes and gate keeping procedures in checking fake news in order to reduce its occurrences, as the incidence appears to be proliferating. It concludes by calling on the respective governments of the two countries to institute stringent measures to tackle the challenges brought by fake news.

Sanny and Selormey (2020) published an Afrobarometer report commissioned by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) entitled, "Double-edged sword? Ghanaians see pros, cons of social media, want access but not fake news" which revealed that Ghana is experiencing its share of fake news reports about COVID-19 which has created and is creating a series of misunderstandings, confusions intended to undermine efforts at educating the public about the pandemic. The report which surveyed 2,400 Ghanaian adults show that 22 percent of the people were dependent on social media for their news consumption and 19 percent on the internet which

demonstrates a steady increase in the use of digital sources for news and information. This is a great rise from the two percent of internet users recorded in 2008 by the Afrobarometer report.

The number of Ghanaians depending on social media and the internet as sources of news is increasing faster, although they trust these sources less than the traditional media sources such as television, radio and newspapers. This is irrespective of the obvious positive effects of social media and its negative repercussion for society in general. The study also points out that, a greater number of Ghanaians are against any restrictions to the access of social media and the internet. Almost the same number equally want government to fight the spread of false information, hate speech and undesirable content in the media. "One-third (32%) of Ghanaians support government regulation of access to the internet and social media, but close to half of the study (48%) prefer unrestricted access" (Sanny & Selormey, 2020).

Sanny and Selormey (2020) found in their study that the level of educational attainment correlates with the use of social media and access to the internet stressing that the use of digital media increases sharply with their educational level and socio-economic status. The study explained further that the usage of digital media also has gender and age dimensions. Young adults were identified to prefer digital sources of news more than the elderly population do. Also, men and rural-urban residents prefer digital media more than women and rural residents do. These nonetheless, only four in 10 Ghanaians do not trust information from digital media as against 55% who believe news from private and public media is trustworthy.

When it comes to who spreads false news, a larger percentage of Ghanaians (78%) blame politicians and political parties for spreading fake news. This is closely followed by government officials and journalists, social media users, activists and interest groups who scored 69%, 63% and 57% respectively. Sanny and Selormey (2020) also found that 48% of Ghanaians think unrestricted access to the internet and social media helps in making people more informed and active citizens who engage freely in public discourse as part of their democratic rights as citizens. The study concludes that government should be able to fight the spread of fake news and disinformation without necessarily restricting access to digital media. It recommends for the government, media and civil society to join forces in intensive public education to detect, fact-check and fight the spread of fake news and disinformation in the public sphere.

Shardow and Asare (2016) examine the independence of journalists in relation to the media ownership structures in Ghana. The study was underpinned by the qualitative method and the

social responsibility theory of the press relation. It focused on newspapers using a multiple case study design where content analysis, in-depth interviews and document review were used. The *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* (state-owned) and the *Daily Guide* and *Enquirer* (privately-owned) were selected for the study to ascertain the watchdog roles of the press vis-à-vis their ownership structure. The study is also undertaken on the basis of the constitutional responsibility bestowed on the media by the 1992 constitution of Ghana where the media is tasked in Article 162 (5) to hold the government accountable to the people of Ghana. This implies a watchdog role has been assigned to the media.

Shardow and Asare (2016) found in their study that the country's media had one of the best regulatory regimes in place to ensure the media is able to discharge its duties without any interferences from government. The study found that the owners of the private newspapers studied were closely linked to political power in the country. While the *Daily Guide* owners are closely linked to the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the *Enquirer* is linked or affiliated to the National Democratic Congress (NDC). It must be noted that the NPP and the NDC are the major political parties that have ruled this country interchangeably since 1992. The framers of the constitution also established the National Media Commission (NMC) to serve as the referee of the media to ensure journalists do not compromise on their roles. Shardow and Asare (2016) found that the watchdog role of the private newspapers were less critical of the government they affiliate with while the state press is mild in their reports on government especially when scandals are involved. The study indicates that the state press was less critical of government and that journalists working in these newspapers acted as if they lacked professional independence in the discharge of their duties.

Shardow and Asare (2016) found in their study that the political alignment of the print media and to some extent the state media affects their watchdog roles and made them somehow dependent on their owners in the discharge of their duties because they toe the line of their owners and write stories based on the preferences of the media owner. The state media too subtly play to the dictates of their favourite political parties through a set of cultural understandings in the newsroom. Financial viability was also found to have affected the media's watchdog role. Poor circulation, cost of printing, lack of advertisement were economic hindrances to the media's performances. Shardow and Asare (2016) called for measures to deal with those tangible and intangible factors that impacted negatively on the watchdog role of the media. The NMC was also urged to be

proactive to ensure journalists and editors are really independent to discharge their duties as prescribed by the constitution of Ghana.

On the fourth industrial revolution related study, Fuchs (2018) focused his lenses on Germany and its industrialising efforts in the 4.0 technologies and described the 4IR as the digital germane ideology stressing that 4.0 concept propagates on the fusing of Internet of Things, big data, social media, cloud computing, sensors, artificial intelligence and robotics to the creation and distribution of physical goods. "Industry 4.0 means that a good is fully automatically produced, delivered, used, repaired, recycled without human intervention through the networking of different technologies over the internet" (Fuchs, 2018:281). Fuchs claims that 4IR is a major concern for Germany because while the USA's and the UK's manufacturing value-additions are decreasing to 12.3% and 9.8% in 2015 respectively, Germany in contrast remained at 25%. Another reason for Germany's quest for 4.0 is that it has a lesser financial and manufacturing-based economy and cannot compete favourably in the internet economy. The country's desire to lead the capitalist economies in digitized networks and manufacturing are all cogent factors to focus its attention on 4IR.

Fuchs (2018) is however skeptical about the 4.0 and his reasons are simple. The fourth industrial revolution's complex relationship of de-industrialisation and re-industrialisation is not positive in the inherent structural challenges of the capitalist world. While acknowledging automation and dehumanization in sectors of manufacturing, he indicates that the capitalist's quest to make profit will reduce humans to a controllable cog which will create consequences on unemployment. Human loss of the control in the means of production. This will limit labour's automation and decision power to robots without dissent to make wage claims such as increases, welfare conditions and strikes and will therefore limit working class struggles. "Digital automation faces in capitalism an antagonism between profit interests and human interests" (Fuchs, 2018:284). He is of the view that robots, algorithms and other digital technologies should not completely replace human labour in the interest of the capitalist class otherwise several challenges are bound. Some of the challenges relate to privacy issues, data protection and surveillance especially when goods are exchanged through the internet since technology systems are not faultless.

Other concerns raised against 4IR is that when the physical products become networked to the internet, threats of espionage, hacking, cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism become the new security hazards the globe will encounter. Fuchs (2018) cautioned that the risk of technology in capitalism

should not be downplayed since computerisation in the past has raised fixed capital costs and impacted profit rates badly in many countries. The present moments of digital capitalism are the new German ideology which is influenced by the real life-process characterised today by precarious labour, social insecurity and inequality between the rich and the rest of the population saying that "capitalism is the struggle between capital and humanity" (Fuchs, 2018:287). Much as capitalist's interest is concerned, one would be interested in understanding the capitalist's orientation and gains associated with the production and distribution of fake news and in particular the capitalists who own and control the economic power of the media in Ghana. It is also of interest to this study to investigate the risk associated in technological capitalism in Ghana given that the country is still fragile in technological know-how as it could expose it easily to hackers and cyber-crime should 4IR be introduced without much cautioned.

Ayentimi and Burgess (2019) studied the relevance of the fourth industrial revolution for sub-Saharan Africa in view of the valuable opportunities the new era presents to the global community. The study which relied mainly on secondary data indicates that 4IR is comprehensive and all-embracing in tackling challenges facing the globe using smart technologies as against previous revolutions which were underpinned by mass production, transportation, rapid electricity utilization and communication technology usage. The 4IR is characterised by physical, digital and biological worlds fused together with the ultimate goal of transforming humanity. However, Ayentimi and Burgess think 4IR will pose difficulties for some sectors such as production, consumption and employment. It is also predicted to affect geo-political and socio-economic change in developed and developing economies. It is not surprising that fake news is posing a challenge in the media, information, governance and democratic space as the 4IR waves on.

Ayentimi and Burgess (2019) indicate that despite the seeming challenges posed by the 4IR to the world, sub-Sahara Africa and the continent in particular appear to have positive indicators such as the most populous and youthful demographics, endowment of natural resources as drivers of development. They advanced arguments that the 4IR holds prospects for all industries including those in the sub-region such that production and productivity will be up-scaled to rejuvenate economic restructuring. This enables the informal sector to leap-frog its industrialisation drive in exporting digital services in intra-regional and re-industrialisation of the continent. This cannot be achieved without specific policy directions to manage technological changes occasioned by the 4IR. What is imperative is the policy direction towards revolutionizing how news is gathered and

distributed in this age. Will the sub-region's media industry be automated to replace robotic journalism, and what are the implications for human journalists?

Ayentimi and Burgess (2019) recommend the need for African countries and the sub-region in particular to adopt proactive-deliberative strategies and reactive policies in response to technology and innovation to address key issues such as poor internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure gaps to ensure internet-access-for-all initiative policy. The need to develop and shape education to hunt for talents is critical in this direction. The sub-region should focus more on newer energy generation and storage, application of robust infrastructural technology to improve societal structures that will rejuvenate growth in all industries.

From the varied reviews articulated, the principal method used by most of the studies reviewed revealed that the qualitative method and content analysis were the dominant research paradigms employed. Fake news and the political economy of the media is a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood from one generic perspective such as the use of a qualitative approach. The mixed method approach being employed by this current study is highly recommended for an elaborate analysis of this phenomenon. The use of the mixed method will enable triangulation of data and ensure the validity of the findings from this study. The use of the mixed method is complemented by the critical philosophical paradigm which will assist in investigating the issues holistically and integrate quantitative and qualitative data broadly.

Another deficiency in the reviewed literature is the over reliance on secondary data which does not give a clear picture about the complex subject of fake news and political economy of the media particularly in the African context where the subject is not comprehensively studied. The use of primary data or a combination of secondary and primary data as this study attempts to do is preferred. This is because of the multi-dimensional approach which will offer better insights to the phenomenon of fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana.

The descriptive method of analysis is chiefly employed in the reviews analysed but the inferential analysis is also used because of its strengths in a study such as this current one. In order to generalize findings, inferential analysis offers generalisation from quantified data but is incapable of explaining motives behind the numbers and behaviour. The descriptive on the other hand, elucidates the motives behind the numbers or phenomenon but lacks generalisation qualities. To address the pitfalls, triangulation is adopted as in the case of this study where the descriptive and

inferential analysis is applied to understand the motives behind the numbers and also to generalize the findings.

A major lacuna identified from the literature is the non-availability of studies on the political economy of the media on fake news in the Ghanaian context. The paucity of studies on the fourth industrial revolution in the Ghanaian context is also clear from the literature reviewed. Although little is known about the political economy of the media and fake news in the global North, literature on the subject in Africa is either non-existent or unknown. Regrettably, none of the literature reviewed touched on the political economy of the media or political economy of fake news in Ghana. This study explores the subject in perspective from the critical realism worldviews using the mixed method approach.

The review of studies on fake news in this section also indicates that most authors considered the political utility of fake news without specific contextualization. The studies failed to point out the disparities of fake news experienced in the Global North and the Global South. This necessitates the need to explore the phenomenon of fake news in a specific context of Ghana. This is much so because of the non-existence of an elaborate study in this geographic environment. This study is not only bringing new dynamics to the study of the subject but is also adding to the existing literature on fake news and the political economy of the media especially in this era of post-truth coupled with advanced technological development and usage across diverse industries and contexts.

In conclusion, the mixed method research which is being used by this study appears to be the best approach in the research traditions. It contains the weaknesses and strengths of the qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, researchers are able to gather elaborate data about a phenomenon and subject such data to rigorous analysis inductively and deductively.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORISING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEDIA

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The critical political economy of the media (CPEM) which forms the theoretical basis for this study will help us understand the phenomenon of fake news and the synergy with which fake news is disseminated in the public sphere in Ghana. The political and economic players that influence the agenda of the media particularly on the manufacture, production and distribution of fake news is highlighted in this chapter. The public sphere as a theory is also treated as it forms part of the theories underpinning this study.

3.1 Critical Political Economy of the Media (CPEM)

Political economy of the media is a dynamic structural relationship of the economic and media industries and the ideological content of the media (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). Specifically, political economy provides the basis and settings for media operation and shape by cultural, economic and power positions (Ogenga, 2010). Political economy of the media is a model that explains and interrogates the intellectual underpinnings of the political, economic and social relationship of the media and government in a given society. Murdock (2015:733) extrapolates that "political economy set out to understand how capitalism worked and assess its consequences for the organisation of social and political life". As an intellectual project emerging in the eighteenth century, political economy of the media sought to replace the metaphysical and religious narrative of the world with rationality, and man-made models of change as benchmarks. With capitalism as its chief proponent, the theory emerged after the upheavals in France and America, where monarchical and autocratic governance was systematically replaced with democratic governance making citizens unreservedly participate in decisions bordering on their social and political affairs. In this process, enlightenment emancipated citizens from ignorance, fear, exploitation and thus encouraging rationality, and equalitarianism that positioned political economy as an ideal tool for critics to measure the successes and failures of capitalism.

Murdock and Golding (2016) assert that the political economy of the media sees the mass media as an industrial commercial entity that produces and distributes commodities. The central idea of the political economy of the media has to do with the organisation and funding of media institutions which has implication on the stories that are covered and those that do not see the light of the day or censored to satisfy some interests. Political economy of the media is aimed at identifying the power struggles, the ideological orientations, operations and ownership of the media in a given society. The political economy of the media which is–neo-Marxist in orientation, is not a new concept. The theory emerged alongside the development of the mass media in the 20th century. With the growth of the internet and digital media, this development has expanded the frontiers of public relations and advertising and accompanied by consumer culture in what is termed "cultural capitalism". Although the media is in a digital era, Wasko believes CPE remains the same philosophy because society has not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it.

Two dominant approaches exist in the political economy of the media. The first approach focus on "the European cultural industries approach" which place emphasis on power and media concentration while the second focuses on how "cultural forms are produced, distributed, interpreted and contested" (Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020:05). The cultural product of political economy of the media is a broad-based approach focusing on meaning in texts (Mosco, 2014). This meaning is elaborated to include all forms of social communication. The cultural product of political economy is unbounded and thus "analyses of race, gender, sexuality, and disability" (Hardy, 2014:16). This could account for several meanings assigned to fake news where Donald Trump found it easier to describe journalists who present oppositional viewpoints as 'fake news' because he "deployed fake news as a collective noun to deride news stories and outlets he does not like" (Hirst, 2017:83). The political economy of the media is a prelude to the critical economy of the media though recent scholarship on political economy and critical economy of the media is blurring (Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020; Hardy, 2014; Mosco, 2014).

Hardy (2014:06) defined critical political economy of communication (CPEM) as "approaches that place emphasis on the unequal distribution of power and are critical of arrangements whereby such inequalities are sustained and reproduced". Critical political economy of communication has its roots in the Frankfurt School's work of 1930s and 1940s where the critical theory of the media and mass communication was developed. The critical political economy of communication is a realist approach that interrogates problems relating to political and economic organisation of

communication resources. Its approach to the media examines how political and economic dynamics of media industries affect the production and distribution of meanings for people to connect, relate and understand the world they live in. "Political economists focus on ownership, finance and support mechanisms (such as advertising), and on how the policies and actions of governments and other organisations influence and affect media behaviour and content" (Hardy, 2014:09). This dimension extends to issues of media production, the content of the messages which are meant for intended audience are subjected to critical analysis in the CPEM approach to media studies. It raises concern about the ownership structure of the media and the influence such ownership has on the content of media production.

McQuail and Deuze (2020:125) defined political economy theory as a "socially critical approach that focuses primarily on the relation between the economic structure and dynamics of media industries and the ideological content of the media". Critical political economy of the media is also described as an approach where the media is seen as a marketing conglomerate for selling transnational commercial commodities (Wasko, 2014). This implies that the media and the economic and political systems work together in a common relationship where inter-dependence is expected. McQuail and Deuze see an unhealthy relationship in a situation where the media accumulated more wealth than expected. In such a situation, the media's tendency to, or temptation of growing vested interests is high. As the media's interest grows economically and politically, its independence and critical role in society will reduce thereby failing to uplift the marginalised voices in society. McQuail and Deuze (2020) indicate that the political economy of the media's approach focuses on an economic activity that leads to the media commodity. They described the primary media commodity in the political economy to be the 'audience' as the main product to be sold to advertisers. The adoption of CPEM would enable this researcher understand the relationship between power, ownership and the unequal economic relationships underlining the media of Ghana.

Murdock (2015) advanced arguments that the press and public communication offered diversity in a new democratic system of governance. Mirroring the media of Ghana using the capitalist principle, this study will be able to decipher whether the media is serving the interests of business moguls or it represents the public's interest as its functions purport to say. The press was a pivotal tool used in disseminating and providing information for citizens to understand societal problems better (Ibid). Secondly, competing policies and alternative ideas were tested in the press. In the

mid-nineteenth century which saw much intellectual discourse on CPEM, communication systems played significant roles in capitalism including helping firms to tract and coordinate their diverse business activities. Communication systems, according to Murdock, were utilitarian in matching supply and demand of goods through advertising. The press additionally offered a free market for the trading of ideas where the best alternative idea triumphed.

The work of Karl Marx greatly influenced the political economy approach in various forms. Scholars such as Wasko, (2014), Fuchs, (2018), and Murdock, (2014) in contemporary times, continue to present variants of Marx's inspired version of the critical political economy of the media where class struggle is the basis of the analysis. They argue variously that there is a direct link between the economic structures, ownership of media and the production content. The political economy of the media approach always sees the legitimacy in their stance on class struggles by looking at the concentration of media in the hands of a few capitalists or entrepreneurs who do not only control the capital flows in media organisations but the content as well. In the 21st century, proponents of the theory have maintained that the concentration of power is more on ideas than on material structures (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). This argument is relevant in the present study where this researcher attempts to understand the context of the media of Ghana in relation to the production of fake news.

Borrowing ideas from Karl Marx and Engels, Murdork (2015) argues that the control of economic resources by the capitalist class also gave them advantage to control and regulate the production and distribution of ideas to manipulate public culture to their advantage through what is termed "press barons". The new concentrated press owners now owned chains of media organisations funded hugely through advertising, defeating the purpose of the ideal public communication in servicing democratic states. The fear is that the new media owners are too powerful to the extent that they could use the media to promote their selfish interests. Since advertising is the main revenue source for the press, it could open the media to editorial pressures and deny marginalised groups in society a voice and rather amplify that of a minority bourgeois. This is crucial for the critical political economy of the media, which advocates that dissenting voices must also be heard. In the work of Chiumbu and Radebe (2020), they touted the path of the political economy of the media of Africa as a Marxist perspective, but advocated the need for the decolonising of the political economy in the African context. They urged media scholars to focus on developing

indigenous formats for the study of the political economy of the media and journalism in general instead of the often Eurocentric approach.

For media to be able to survive in such a commercial enterprise, it must have a guaranteed products/programmes and audience in accordance to a market-relevant profile. In today's media, the "pay-per" go and the subscription model is the most sustained revenue in the media economic system. This is because of the declining levels of advertising revenue. As the power dynamics continue to affect the political economy of the media. Globally, the "Media has shifted towards the global reach and power of internet platforms, as well as the rise of corporate ventures that integrate or combine information, telecommunications and technology services" (McQuail & Deuze, 2020:126). The media in Ghana is not an island in the digital experience where readership is declining for newspapers and the need to raise revenue through adverts is critical. This accounts for the increase in fake news publications in some jurisdictions (Chadwick et al., 2018). This study explores the factors influencing fake news dissemination in this context.

Critical political economy of communication basically concerns itself with the sustainable production of public culture in a free and equitable manner rather than in an exploitative and destructive manner. It is also centred on the diversity of information produced to engage participatory citizenry debates on the basis of equal opportunities and tolerance devoid of social exclusion. Relating this argument to media production in Ghana, it appears the media ecology is highly privatised with even distribution of information and commodities to the citizenry. News production follows laid down ethical procedures through the gatekeeping function process as indicated by Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019). This said, the political economy of communication must provide the enabling platform for diversity of information, analysis and debate by citizens in a democratic state.

Murdock and Golding (2016) argue that any major analysis in recent times must revolve around digital capitalism, communicative capitalism and cognitive capitalism. This is because there is a shift of what constitutes the political economy of communication in recent times. Wasko (2014) sees recent discourse on political economy as a revival of media studies and that media and communication must be seen as commercial entities that produce commodities for profit making in capitalist economies. The media's essential values have been reduced to profit making instead of focusing on addressing public needs such as problems confronting the masses where the need to amplify their voices is becoming muted. This is intensified beyond the mainstream media to

include converged businesses such as the digital media and the internet. For a complete analysis of the political economy of communication, Wasko (2014) suggests the need to understand the power relationships between the state and the media especially in understanding the state's role in allocating communication resources, regulations and supporting corporate entities and the state's use of communication resources.

Wasko (2018) further sees the critical political economy of communication as a significant field of importance in recent debates about communication economics. This, she indicates, is as a result of emergence of technology where CPEM is a critical part of the economic, social and cultural developments and has in contemporary times received enormous research and publications dedicated to CPEM. Such publications have focussed on theories and historical evolutions and themes in relation to the concept. Although there are variations in the CPEM, Wasko (2018:02) says "CPEM at least attempt to decentre the media and emphasise the capital, class, contradiction, conflict and oppositional struggles". This approach of CPEM reflects Marxist roots although the political economy of communication can trace its origins to diverse influences. This implies that CPEM just represents an aspect of studying media industries, communication and information fields and is equally valuable in studying other approaches.

Despite the invaluable contributions of CPEM approach to media and communication studies and scholarship in general, it is not without criticisms. Critiques are of the view that CPEM lacks empirical rigour in research and defines concepts narrowly. Others are of the opinion that CPEM is being too deterministic and focuses so much on the economic and production side of the communication process and also losses sight of texts, audiences and consumption of media and communication components. Additionally, critiques have the misconception that the political economy of communication focuses only on the ownership and control questions of the media. These criticisms have however been rejected by Wasko (2018:04) who argues that "political economic concept offer insightful and critically important insights by which to view media, which is still dominated by commercial enterprises and capitalist principles that need to be understood through critical and un-idealised analysis".

The critical political economy of the media (CPEM) as applied to this study holds itself to the capitalist economic exploitative ideology. CPEM has some components constituting a holistic theory. These include (1) critical political economy of media, (2) ideal communication and accessibility, (3) capitalist market system, (4) media ownership pattern and (5) content

diversification. Exploring the critical component of the theory, Golding and Murdock (2016) indicate that it enables a broader analysis of the power dynamics of the media in given geopolitical area. The critical political economy defines the ideal communication pattern and ownership of the media in relation to diversity. This theoretical perspective, is relevant to this study because it helps us in understanding the media ownership structure of Ghana, and the economic and political foundation of the media in this state. This study focuses on fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana in the era of the fourth industrial revolution. The media of Ghana is a product of the political and economic circumstance of the country hence the need to explore the concepts holistically.

It is worthy to note that the critical attributes of CPEM in a capitalist system is grounded in Marxism where media and communication are fused with the structure of inequality in classed societies. In this system, the economic structure of the media is heavily controlled by the market forces of the capitalist market which includes big corporations, politicians and media moguls resulting in the decline of diversity presentation and discussions in the public sphere. The Marxist perspective of the critical political economy of the media is applicable to the Ghanaian media context. This is because of the systemic inequality of access to the media by all citizens of Ghana. This silences the voices of majority of citizens as it defeats the context diversity principle of CPEM.

In a Geopoll (2017) analysis of media ownership in Ghana, it was revealed that media ownership in the country is highly affiliated politically. This comes in the form of covert and overt political links or state ownership. This influences the content of the publications they produce or stories they write since content could be slanted to favour political and ideological interests instead of the public's interest. This is why some citizens were concerned when the NPP-led government in 2018 shut down some radio stations perceived to be opposed to the ideology of their party. As a ruling government, the NPP was accused by critics for using state power to close down radio stations perceived to be ideologically different from their perspective. This could be likened to state control of alternative voices in the political sphere, which is contrary to the ideal media system of a democratic country.

Hirst (2017) asserts that recent debates over fake news has rekindled interest in the critical political economy of the media because, in this epoch, the paradigm of news production is unclear. "Only a critical political economy approach can adequately deal with the assertion that capitalism relies

on mass ignorance for its survival" (Hirst, 2017:91). On this score, the media in Ghana has direct and indirect relationships and affiliations with political and partisan groups and individuals. Most media in Ghana are either owned by political personas, or have vested interests and concentration of power in political personas and ideologies (Geopoll, 2017). There is no wonder that the political interest rather than the public interest will override the content of the public sphere of the media in Ghana. The Geopoll report which also named the faces behind most of the print, TV, radio and online media organisations in Ghana raised concerns about the objectivity and diversity of media content. This could possibly explain why contagious fabrications and propaganda news stories appear in some media outlets in the country with impunity. It would be unthinkable if such stories are published to satisfy their pay masters. Since the contents are distorted, such news stories can simply be described as disinformation or fake news which tend to sway the thinking of the masses towards the direction of the propagandist.

Along this line of thinking, McQuail and Deuze (2020) aver that the political economy theory has grown in relevance in recent times, and they cite a number of reasons. One of those reasons is the concentration of media across the globe which is pushing media power into the hands of a few individuals including mergers of electronic hardware and software. Secondly, the global information economy is growing and converging telecommunication and broadcasting services. The third factor is the decline in public sector control of mass media and telecommunication because of deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation of the mass media. The fourth reason for the increasing relevance of CPEM is the diminishing nature of information inequality in the digital divide where communication facilities have advanced, creating wider gaps in the information rich and information poor segments of the population. All these factors have in diverse ways made political economic theory proposition widen in application and scope in the era of the fourth industry revolution (McQuail & Deuze, 2020).

Deploying CPEM for this study will enable this researcher understand the historical power dynamics of the mass media of Ghana, the politics in relation to the ownership and operational structures of the media as a capital and ideological commodity despite expectations for it to be a public trust for the people of Ghana. CPEM will also enable this researcher understand the social, political and economic players that control, regulate and fund the media and how that translates into serving certain interests rather than serving as a voice and empowerment instrument of the marginalised in a democratic society. Understanding these systemic intricacies will ultimately give

meaning to the economic and political capital of fake news production and dissemination in the public sphere of Ghana in relation to the digital divide of the population of this country.

3.2 Contextualising the Ghanaian political economy of the media

Where the media in Ghana begun is necessary in giving us a better understanding of the general political economy of the media in Ghana. As earlier pointed out, Ghana traces the foundation of its media to 1822 when the first newspaper, *The Gold Coast Gazette* was established by Sir Charles McCarthy in the Gold Coast (Ansah, 1993, Anyindoho, 2016). Since then, the country's media after a series of political upheavals, have transitioned into a liberal democratic press protected by the 1992 Constitution which guarantees enormous press freedom and independence of the media from governmental control. The media in Ghana broadly consist of both mainstream and social media but significantly deregulated in a space where many print and electronic stations exist and operate either privately or as state-owned. The existence of multiple media institutions operating in a democratic space has created opportunities for advertisers to easily market their products and services through the media. This capitalist commercialisation of the media is the bone of contention of the critical political economy of the media (McQuail & Deuze, 2020) and that the media cannot survive without advertisement as a source of revenue. Some scholars see the commercialisation of the media as a disservice to the universal interest of the citizenry as the media is perceived as a public service institution.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), both civil society organisations working for freedom of the press and the promotion of the independence of the media have acknowledged the cardinal role of the media in dissemination of facts and reliable information for public debate as ingredients in shaping public opinion in society. Such a task, in their considered opinion, demanded an independent and pluralistic media that could offer constructive criticisms in safeguarding the democratic process. The RSF and MFWA carried out a media ownership monitoring study in Ghana in 2017 and discovered that there was lack of transparency in the ownership structure of the media in Ghana which amounted to conflict of interest cases where some media owners were identified as key political figures in the country. This form of politicisation of media ownership gives birth to another thorny issue of weak regulatory laws of the media thus posing fundamental threats to press freedom.

RSF and MFWA (2017) also found that financial sustainability is one of the biggest challenges of the media industry, the lack of which results in newspapers exiting the market shortly after they appear in the newsstands. The print media relied on two streams of revenue, advertising and sale of newspapers, but with dwindling sales, advertising revenue becomes the major source of economic survival. The study indicates that the largest source of advertising revenue comes from the state but it is unevenly distributed. The largest share of the advertising revenue goes to the state's largest newspaper, the *Daily Graphic*. The remaining is distributed among newspapers affiliated to political parties such as the *Daily Guide* if the New Patriotic Party (NPP) is in power and the *Enquirer* newspaper if the National Democratic Congress (NDC) becomes the ruling government. The study further indicates that advertising revenue on radio and television goes mainly to stations with large audience shares in the market excluding the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the state's broadcaster which enjoys state funding. This uneven control of resources and power in the hands of political and economic players could pose serious challenges to the content of the news in these media organisations funded by or affiliated to political parties.

On regulations, the RSF and MFWA (2017) identified the 1992 Constitution of Ghana as the strongest foundation for media freedom and independence in the country but observed a high concentration of media ownerships in the country as worrying. It also noted that the regulatory regime for media operation did not safeguard against cross media ownership and monopolies which had the tendency to influence media content. The study additionally, states that records regarding companies' registration were opaque or not transparent contrary to the Company's (Amendment) Bill of 2016 where all companies were required to provide details of their ownership to the Registrar General's Department before commencement of business. Though the National Media Commission was identified as one of the regulatory bodies of the media in charge of content while the National Communication Authority was mentioned as a technical institution responsible for issuing broadcasting license, they both do not function optimally because of bottlenecks. Regulatory issues are critical to the political economy of the media as it could impair the functions of the media in a given state. This study explores further how regulatory systems affect fake news production and dissemination in Ghana.

It is logical to argue from the critical political economy perspective that the role of the media of Ghana has not changed throughout the country's history. Right from the inception of the media

during colonial rule, it has played the role of a mouthpiece of governments, and at independence, it was used as a propaganda tool by the first Republic as indicated earlier. In the 1992 Constitution, article 162 (5) expects the media to hold the government accountable to the people of Ghana. Its ownership structure equally favours the political class to the extent that the state and politicians with power or links to governments are the major owners and shareholders of most of the media organisations operating in the country (RSF & MFWA, 2017). These scenarios contradict Golding and Murdock's (2016) description of the ideal position and role of the media in a democratic state.

3.3 Media ownership and regulation context in Ghana

One cardinal provision that cements the ownership and regulation of the Ghanaian media is the chapter twelve of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. In article 162 (3), it is explicit that the media ownership structure is expected to be liberal without restrictions in acquiring and owning a media of mass communication. The article states that "There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information". To acquire any print medium in Ghana simply requires the interested party to register the newspaper with the National Media Commission (NMC), a constitutional body which is also responsible for the professional development of the media in Ghana. The law precludes acquisition of license for ownership and practice of print media since the media is expected to be a public trust and serve the interest of the people of Ghana whether private or public. It is also based on the notion that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that must be respected without restrictions.

Ironically, the broadcasting space has a different story. Since independence, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation has held the monopoly of broadcasting in Ghana. This started in 1935, when the first radio (ZOY) started broadcasting in the country in a relay broadcasting from the British Broadcasting Service (now BBC). The monopoly of broadcasting by the state continued even after the country gained independence in 1957. Even after the first, second and third republics, the country's broadcasting space was still under state monopoly although attempts were made as early as the 1960s to allow private participation in broadcasting but failed to materialize at the time due to political and regulatory issues (Owusu, 2012, Anyidoho, 2016). Prior to the liberation of

the airwaves, calls for inclusion of private broadcasters went unheeded. Government upon government after independence failed to make the broadcasting space liberal to enable private persons to participate. Karikari (1993) at the time, advocated strongly for the liberation of the broadcasting space in Ghana after the fourth republic was birthed. The 1992 Constitution which came into being as the Fourth Republican Constitution contained adequate liberal principles including free expression, hence Karikari's demands for the monopoly of broadcasting to be broken. This he argued would give plurality of voices and opinions on matters that bother on the national and people's interest as a democratic society. Many other media scholars and civil society organisations continued the demand for private inclusion in the broadcasting space since the new constitution gave birth to a liberal media system.

Owusu (2012) indicates that private broadcasting or independent broadcasting did not start early in the democratic process of Ghana unlike the independent press which has been part of the country's colonial struggles. He adds that events leading to the liberalisation was not without controversy. In 1994, Dr. Charles Wereko-Brobby, a political activist made the first attempt at opening a private radio station. He started Radio Eye as a pirated broadcasting station in Greater Accra but the then Government through security operatives, stormed the facility, seized equipment of the station and pressed criminal charges against the owner. As efforts were mounting for broadcasting space to be liberalised, in 1995, Radio Universe, Joy FM, Radio Gold, Groove, Vibe, Sunshine (now Choice) and TV3 were issued with licenses to operate as private commercial radio and television stations respectively. This is where the monopoly of the state broadcaster, GBC was broken. This notwithstanding, the proliferation in the media of mass communication was not fully operational until after the 2000 elections of Ghana (Owusu, 2012).

To ensure the protection of the airwaves and frequency allocations, a technical institution- National Communication Authority (NCA) was established in 1996 by Act 524 and amended as Act 769 of 2008, to regulate allocation of frequencies. This act empowers the NCA to license and regulate communication and related services in Ghana. Among the functions that the NCA is to undertake for the broadcasting media is to establish and monitor the implementation of national communication standards and issuing of licenses for the authorization of broadcasting spectrum. Aside that, the authority was charged to be fair in promoting competition among holders and

operators of communication networks. This goes to include resolving any interferences with the frequencies authorised through frequent monitoring of activities of the licensees.

In streamlining the media of mass communication, the National Media Commission (NMC) in the year 2000, developed a national media policy document to be implemented for all media including public relations, advertising and the film industry. Christened the 'National Media Policy', the policy was to serve as a benchmark for the NMC to measure its performance as it was tasked to take all appropriate measures to ensure the promotion and maintenance of the highest journalistic standards in the media of mass communication in Ghana. The policy provided general guidelines to build, free, dynamic and responsible media for the print, electronic, film, wire service, advertising and public relations practices in the country. The policy put the print and electronic broadcasting media into three broad categories; public, commercial and community, and regarded all media as a public trust whose role was to ensure the public interest was the overriding force behind their existence.

While the national media policy took into consideration the historical and political antecedents of the country into consideration in drafting the policy, it did not lose sight of introducing a free market economy principle in the media by urging it to be competitive. This competiveness would require the media to design programmes tailored to meet market demands instead of public interest. This appears to be conflicting in some respect. The policy in one breath is preaching for a social service principle from the media and in another angle, attempting to be introducing a capitalist principle at the same time where it expects the private media to fund itself through commercial advertising. This is where proponents of CPEM come in handy to interrogate the ideological stand so as to understand who the players of these enterprises are. Proponents of CPEM also intend to understand how the media is use for, that is political, economic or ideological propagation are some of the queries. It is on the basis of this and many issues that this study interrogates the ideological, economic and political influences of fake news in Ghana.

The framers of the NMC's policy also provided the ownership criteria of the media in Ghana. In general, national interest must dominate all forms of media in the country and that in promoting diversity of ownership, the registration process must be transparent and in public record. Public media was given a special mandate to provide information and education to the people of Ghana

and its ownership is expected to be preoccupied by the state as the highest shareholder. The private commercial media is expected to have 51 percent of its shareholders in the hands of indigenous Ghanaians though foreign ownership is encouraged. The structure of the ownership must be spread in order to discourage monopoly such that the interest of the public would be properly served. In all, the policy expects harmonization of all legislation in line with the constitutional instruments that would promote freedom and independence of the media at all times. Using the lenses of the CPEM, it is critical for this study that the capitalist exploitative tendencies were pre-empted by the framers of the policy and its consequences will be empirically examined in the wake of fake news in the social and mainstream media of Ghana.

Many scholars (Owusu, 2012, Karikari, 1993, Anyidoho, 2016 and Shardow & Asare, 2016) have all acknowledged the enormous legal and regulatory regimes developed to protect and enhance freedom and independence of the media in Ghana. Among some of these legal instruments are the liberalisation of the broadcasting space, the guaranteeing of the independence of journalists and editors of the mass media, insulating the state media from governmental control, the repeal of the criminal libel law and most recently the passage of the freedom of information bill into law. Aside these, the setting up of the National Media Commission to enhance the professional conduct and performances of the media and the National Communication Authority for technical regulation of the broadcasting space have all been lauded as some of the systems put in place to promote independence and extend freedom of expression. Critical among all these is to understand where fake news feeds into the regulatory regimes and the performances of the media especially at a time when profit motives seem a priority more than public interest. As to whether these regulations and policies are adequate to regulate publication of fake news in Ghana is yet to be seen. In an attempt to provide interrogate these issues further, this study will also examine the regulatory policies of the media in relation to fake news.

3.4 Fake News as Political and Economic Capital

Using Facebook and Google as the basis, Azhar (2017) argues that these tech giants sell promotional media commodities in the digital space. This space remains relatively understudied in Ghana as long as capitalist production predominates the physical and the virtual worlds. Hirst (2017) observes that in the digital space, click-baits were common features of fake news. These

online portals dwell on the sensational and provocative headlines to attract readers most of who only read the headlines without reading the details of the story and then share it on social media. This becomes a revenue generating stream for advertisers who rely on the sensational and clickbaits to promote their commodities online. Ahiabenu, Ofosu-Peasah and Sam, (2018) identified several false and fabricated stories in the mainstream and social media in Ghana. Some of these stories were sensational and related to the deaths of prominent figures in the country. Others were just plain propaganda to score political goals. This is achieved through capitalism's reliance on mass ignorance in the manufacture of fake news which is imminent in recent dispensations.

It is a critical political communication approach that can normalise the ignorance of citizens through the manufacture of consent (Hirst, 2017). The concerted education and awareness of the masses of the corrosive effects of fake news would encourage marginalised citizens to cure themselves of the deepening disease. As explained earlier, the political economy of the media is not just to make us understand the business players in the media industry but to provide insight into the critical influence of the media content especially in relations to news production and distribution as well as advertisers who fund and sponsor the survival of media businesses and operations. It is understandable that fake news is produced or manufactured for various reasons. Some produce fake news because of its commercial value-clicks while others are highly political to achieve propaganda effect. Whichever form it comes, it mostly involves deliberate deception of the consuming audience. This falsehood, according to Hirst (2017) although manufactured, can easily slip through the eyes of professional journalists who are ethical but simply lazy and poorly resourced to detect or are intellectually poor to challenge authorities who make unsubstantiated claims.

Fake news is greatly contributing to loss of advertising revenue for the mainstream media because of the use of high tech strategies where tech platforms are now receiving advertising revenues which used to go to traditional news publishers and newspapers. The attention eyeballs or access to the public's mind as modus operandi of tech giants is identified as a capitalist tactic of amassing wealth through digital media. According to Morgan, (2018) though most Internet companies are not regulated as media companies, they exploit free expression to rake in huge profits to the detriment of the democratic space. They mostly achieve this diabolic agenda through robots and artificial intelligence where they place adverts based on users behavioural conducts on the internet.

Visentin, Pizzi and Pichierri (2019) identified advertisement of big brands in automated platforms as one major reason fake news is continuing to enjoy patronage, stressing that the trend will proliferate as the Internet continues to replace the traditional sources of news such as radio, television and newspapers. Fake news also presents negative consequences for brand marketing because it influences brand trust, brand attitude and behavioural attitudes towards a brand and other consequences such as purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth referrals. This implies that consumers' perception about a brand are negatively affected by fake news dissemination regardless of the source of the information. This indicates that fake news has significant implication for marketing and companies' reputation which makes it imperative for companies to understand the appearance of fake news or misleading content close to their brands since it has the likelihood of affecting brand attitude and behaviour (Visentin et al., 2019)

Mare et al. (2019) found that political propaganda usage among some African countries is very common and has the tendency of influencing voters. Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter were seen as major social media platforms commonly used by political propagandists to disseminate fake news which contributed in marring elections in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. This practice is exacerbated by the poor information literate populace, who just share any information without authenticating whether the information shared is true or not. This development is relevant to the political climate of Ghana which completed its last elections in 2020. It is not clear how fake news influenced the choice of candidates in the 2020 general elections of Ghana though there was a sizable number of fake news publications prior to the 2020 elections and after the elections.

 Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) observe that fake news has a high influence on politics and on voters comparable to one television commercial ad. This implies that the production and dissemination of fake news has a positive outcome for politicians who could utilize it to their advantage but its negative implications are dire. This in their view makes politicians and poof or quake websites take advantage of the gullibility of the masses to produce fake news knowing very well they stand to gain from its dissemination. This is accentuated by the increasing decline of trust for the mainstream media where Gallup research suggests the public is losing confidence and trust in accurate and fair news reportage. This declining trust and confidence in the mainstream media could be the reason for fake news gaining grounds in the public sphere. As to whether fake news has reduced the confidence of the citizenry towards the Ghanaian media, is what findings of this study will provide answers to.

The political economy of the media as a theoretical foundation for this study, aptly provides the bases to explore largely the social, economic and political powers that control the media in its bit to serve society. The theory enhances analysis of the legislation and legal systems that favour or undermine the media's roles, as well as the funding and ownership structure of the media and how all these feed into the production of fake news in Ghana. This theory also enables this researcher to examine the economic, political and psychological motives associated with the production and dissemination of fake news in the public sphere of Ghana.

3.5 The Public Sphere

The Public sphere is significantly associated with the German scholar, Jurgen Habermas who coined the term in his book, "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society", published in 1962 in German and translated into English in 1989. The theory has since become very influential in various academic disciplines. The central theme of the public sphere is premised on a democratic space for the general citizenry to deliberate and discuss government policies and programmes in an opinion formation that will influence transformation of policies. Willems (2012) indicates that the theory referred to the new space or sphere for the exchange or communication of ideas or deliberation of public issues without constraints. The theory is traced to the feudal system in Europe which was replaced by capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Church and the State had in the feudal system constrained public debate and controlled information dissemination and ideas to the citizenry. As time evolved, the absolute power of the state and the church were broken as a result of capitalism which brought a new space for private people to come together, engage and discuss matters of common interest.

Willems (2012) explains the concept of the public sphere in an elaborate manner by indicating that public interest dominates individual interest and as such people put aside their individual parochial interests to focus on public interest in deliberations which are sustained by theatres, coffee shops, newspapers, journals and debating societies. For a true democracy to exist and function, Habermas argued that there must be public debate to arrive at a consensus where enlightened ideas would be generated. Informed decisions are not only generated at such a space but shapes public opinion for the public interest. The media, a special institution in the public sphere is the conduit for the deliberation and discussions of ideas and arriving at a consensus. The media therefore is an

important institution that enables public discourse to take place in helping citizens make informed political decisions and choices.

The Public sphere as a normative concept in true democratic states, is creating difficulties for civil participation thus blurred by advertising communication where private interest instead of the universal interest of the public is being served. This form of sponsored communication in the view of Habermas, is a capitalist feature which is threatening rational deliberation in public sphere as it existed in the eighteenth centuries. Willems (2012) believes that the public sphere is on the demise because public communication is currently being influenced by political and commercially sponsored communication where public broadcasting is giving way to commercial broadcasting and tabloidization. In the mist of all these, it is rational to question the fundamental influence of fake news in public communication especially politically sponsored communication where propaganda and skewed communication as well as rented press serve the interests of the pay masters to the disadvantage of the public interest. It is equally rational to think that fake news is adding another meal to the communication menu where minority groups hide behind fake news to contribute to the whole democratization process in the public sphere. This study explores further to understand the fundamental contributions if any of fake news in the political economy of the media of Ghana.

Johannessen and Flak (2016) see public sphere as a platform, an open space or domain for the expression of public opinion in a given social life. It can also be an open space where individuals or citizens constructively debate, interact and share ideas over public policy and programmes. In this case, public sphere becomes a layer that mediates between the government and the citizen in arriving at the utmost decision for public interest. As a result of the interactive exchanges between citizens, civil society and the state, it ensures maintenance of social balance and stability. The "public" in the public sphere refers to the inclusive individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by any transaction in the process. The public sphere is the central point for deliberation of ideas, discussion of topical issues of public interest. This sphere is presumed to be free and accessible to all category of citizens to participate in open communication and deliberation of issues affecting their lives and the lives of society generally.

Johannessen and Flak (2016) argued that the advancement in modern technology has even opened up more opportunities for the utilization of e-participation in governance, public participation in

governance and decision making in national and transnational debates. This could easily be achieved with the availability of social media that aids and facilitates citizens' participation in public deliberation. This implies that the role of social media in democratic participation has not been fully examined though social media is seen as an opportunity to redesign responsibility and roles of stakeholders (Johannessen & Flak, 2016). It is against this that the need to understand stakeholders' roles and influence in the democratic process is making the concept of the public sphere more necessary in understanding fake news dissemination in the public sphere of Ghana. The concept of public sphere relates closely to the political economy and that explains their interrelationships in this study.

Public sphere commonly refers to the public or forum where public opinion can be formed based on matters discussed generally without coercion (Habermas, 1997 as cited in Adut, 2012). Public sphere can be traced to 18th century where salons were used to serve as forums for public discourse by citizens on matters of public interest. "The dominant approach identifies the public sphere as the site where citizenship is exercised" (Adut, 2012:240). This approach envisages the public in the public sphere to be a community that is acting within itself by actors who are egalitarian in an interactive conversation or participation. Adut (2012) notices that there are some impediments on what actually constitutes public sphere in situations where publically accessible sphere is a constraint to physical access criteria and other restrictions, stressing that public sphere must be seen as a generic term that can denote virtual or real spaces that can obtain visibility or audibility. In his view, the dominant approach of public sphere in contemporary era is disservice to society and must be replaced with semiotic public sphere which would aid in analysing ideal public sphere for egalitarian participation to be achieved.

Chambers (2020) explained public sphere as a wild, and unstructured multiform of communication involving civil society and the state. In such a setting, the form of communication necessarily includes social media as a vital component of the sphere especially in contemporary societies where people's daily lives are dependent on social media. It is the source of information in the world which flows from a deliberative and disruptive venue. In a broad public sphere where communication broadens and widens, communication becomes asymmetrical from one major source where majority of people become consumers of information. This is despite the participatory feature of social media where the audience can also be producers of messages. In this

deliberative process where partisan polarisation is common, disinformation and publication of falsehood cannot be ruled out. This necessitates examination of fake news in the public sphere of Ghana as this study attempts to do.

The public sphere performs a significant function of articulating problems, claims and interests in an ideal system. The articulation of views and opinions is important vehicle in real democratic systems. This ensures that solutions are arrived at through opinions that are sought from a free space in which the contest of ideas is obtained unimpeded. The space in a democratic public sphere filters itself to confront and purge itself through public scrutiny to form what is referred to as public opinion. Chambers (2020) believes the perfection of the democratic system is affected through distorting information that derails its processes. One of such distorted information that disrupts the democratic public sphere is fake news. How certain fake news disrupts and affect the political economy of the media of Ghana is yet to be unraveled in this study. Even before that is uncovered, studies suggest a number of ways fake news is influencing and thwarting truth deliberation.

Chambers (2020) enumerated three ways in which fake news undermines opinion formation. One of the ways in which communication flow is undermined by fake news is through manipulation with the intention to reverse communication flow from the periphery to the center using elitist agenda. Secondly; this makes citizens to infuse falsehood into their thoughts and consequently undermine the credentials of the general opinion. Finally, because people are aware of the existence of fake news and falsehood in the public sphere, public opinion is distrusted making them lose confidence in the democratic process. Some scholars however hold a contrary view that fake news is not after all injurious to the public interest but rather a form of democratic participation in the public sphere by minority groups who are denied access to the mainstream media by the powerful political actors.

Fenton (2018) states that Haberma's public sphere is critical in the analysis of digital communication, media and democratic political participation because it directly links media practices and usage to democracy. In the internet era exemplified by recent developments, scholars are wondering whether digital and online media could be regarded as a functioning public sphere for debates that generate deliberative discourse in a rational manner. The assumption of a better media in the public sphere is that it promotes a functioning deliverables for liberal democracy. This arrangement can best be complemented by a political framework which is not rotten but a

vibrant and strong political framework which makes democracy work. Ghana's democracy can best work in a political system that believes in a strong media and public sphere where ideas are respected instead of personalities.

Fenton (2018) is of the conviction that public sphere is premised on liberal democracy where the presumption is that voters will be fully accounted to, through the publicity and deliberation on the public sphere using social and mainstream media. These deliberations which are expected to be rational, will then form the consensus for policy makers to make decisions based on the opinions formed. "Existing democracy often falls far short of this ideal with societies characterised more by political disaffection than a citizenry satisfied that they understand all of the issues they are voting on" (Fenton, 2018:29). Democracy in contemporary times is serving a privileged few as was the characteristics in the pre-democratic times. This is where Fenton is pessimistic about the public sphere as a critical theory that would emancipate humans in the constraints of liberal democratic systems.

In his cynicism, Fenton (2018) indicates that liberal democracy hinges on political economic institutions and other structures developed to articulate media technologies which leads to varied forms of intellectual media productions. These interrelationships must be understood collectively instead of selectively because economic austerity leads to poverty and consequently inequality in liberal democratic systems. Putting ones hope on the internet as a democratic savior obscures the numerous ways through which liberal democracy is difficult to dismiss digital systems that perpetuate inequality in society. If the internet is left to be the only determinant for public sphere, large sections of society will be cut off particularly in developing countries where access to internet is a major challenge. Fenton (2018) thinks public sphere of liberal democratic system has failed and that there is need for new theoretical insights to address the current predicaments stressing that the interests of the elites now prevail over the masses as is happening in France, US and the UK where established democratic systems are failing society. This probably explains the weaknesses of bourgeois public sphere such as its failure in serving the interests of minority groups in society especially the working class and women. Public sphere also suppresses the marginalised and promotes the interest of the elites as emotions dominate public discourse instead of rationality (Asomah, 2020).

In the case of the public sphere of Ghana, it is unclear who controls the public sphere though the scarcity of literature including the 1992 constitution of Ghana, claims the public sphere of the country is democratic enough to entertain all views including the views of the marginalised and the voiceless in society. To understand clearly the state of the public sphere of Ghana, this study explores how the government of Ghana's regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production through the public sphere. Are they existing legislations that promote or impede free flow of communication or there is naturally uneven playing field for all actors. The exploration of this study will give a clearer picture of the phenomenon in the Ghanaian context.

In the structural transformation of the public sphere of Habermas, he focused on the changes in the 17th and the 18th centuries coffeehouses where people met to debate the literary, political and economic issues of the day. The coffeehouses, described as public sphere, provided even structures for people to freely participate in public discussions without status or barriers limiting their involvement. Steward and Hartmann (2020) emphasise that in the 21st century technological world however, public sphere is now mediated professionally from podiums, panel discussions and round tables as well as the media and thus making public sphere a commodity or business instead of the market serving as a mediating force. This form of mediation is likely to diminish public engagements in public discourse. They argue that the public sphere can no longer be seen by one singular relationship but a new set of networks and institutional actors with unique logics rather than what pertains in Habermas' mid-twentieth centuries. Steward and Hartmann (2020) identify three changes in the public spheres and mention new media technology, proliferation of social movements and the rise of think-tanks dedicated to the management of the public as influencing contemporary public sphere.

Steward and Hartmann (2020) are of the view that the internet and social media have had remarkable influence and brought structural changes to the public sphere because of the rise of network individualism where horizontal relationships are created and facilitated by technology. This form of network opens doors for multiple publics to have access to distributed content such as in the case of mass messaging, sharing and reproduction of content using social media platforms. This horizontal relationship are reshaping the vertical relationships that are already established and known to have facilitated the public sphere through institutions such as media, governments and educational systems.

Technologically facilitated access to public sphere is faced with challenges such as the digital divide which is creating a new form of stratification in society since not all citizens can afford and participate in public discourse evenly. Again, knowledge and technical competence is affecting access to the new public sphere tailored by individuals to satisfy their social homophily and partisan interests. This is done to avoid conflicts (Steward & Hartmann, 2020). They explain further that technological companies widen the inequality in access to the public sphere through algorithmic filtering. This changes what people see and how conversations occur on technology platforms such as Google, Facebook and Twitter.

Steward and Hartmann (2020) see technology to have influenced how social movements are organised across many different publics. From the Occupy Wall Street to the Arab Spring and the Black Lives Matter, the structural transformation of the public sphere is experiencing a new trend of social movement mobilizations along unique social, environmental and economic lines and this they contend requires new theories. The emerging social movements relate to the public through special activism using neoliberal logic that shapes their new members' transition to leadership positions with defined responsibilities. The bottom up approach adopted by social movements makes it attractive to citizens who willingly donate towards the course of the social movement. The success of this social movement is contingent on how civic groups interact in the public sphere for mutual benefit.

Structural transformation of the public sphere is also changed by new institutions and elite hybridity in cultural industry where corporations draw support from social philanthropic projects in the interest of economic security, albeit short-term. Politically, polarization is contributing significantly to divisive climate society making elites from diverse political groupings disinterested to corporate. This form of bipartisan engagements in civil infrastructure are not likely to occur because of the polarisation. This is where think-tanks are emerging globally with the devotion to influence public policy from the mainstream to the periphery in political thoughts. These elite think-tanks who are sometimes referred to as 'the third sector' are superseding accountability to their constituents marked by cultural consumption. "The public sphere is no longer solely market mediation; it is now dependent on the sociological context of a range of overlapping institutional fields and elite practices and sociological theorizing" (Steward & Hartmann, 2020:180).

3.6 Media, democracy and the public sphere in Ghana

The media is a cardinal partner in any democratic experiment and Ghana's fledgling democracy would not have been this enviable without the sharp lenses of the media. The media is the only arena comparable to the salons, as in Paris and coffeehouses, as in Germany-elucidated in Habermas' public sphere. Writing on democracy, public sphere, power elites and political corruption in the private media in Ghana, Asomah (2020) ascribed to democratic freedoms as pre-requisite for efficient execution of the herculean task given to the media to communicate and inform citizens of government policies and programmes, stressing that an independent and freer media is critical in the watchdog functions of the media such that politicians and public servants could be held accountable for their actions and inactions. The prevailing constitutional and legal framework gives credence to the tacit arguments that the media in Ghana has adequate freedoms to operate without much control. Indeed, on the surface value, one cannot agree more than the generally held view that the media in Ghana cannot be controlled nor its contents censored; however, it takes more than mere window dressing to have real independent and efficient press that delivers and holds duty bearers accountable.

To buttress the credence of the freedom and independence of the media in Ghana, Reporters Without Borders (2020) ranked Ghana's media 30th in the global press freedom rankings, citing its media pluralism and independence as enshrined in its 1992 constitution as major reasons. Such a positive ranking paints a glowing picture of all-too-good media environment in this country but this feat is though yet to be empirically tested on certain parameters. One of such parameters is whether the public sphere where the ordinary citizen is expected to meet, interact and negotiate on diverse issues in Ghana is actually free from any encumbered controls such as the ownership of the media concentrated in the hands of elite doctrines that mainly serve the interest of the bourgeois class in society. Even before such empirical test is done, the country was in 2022, ranked 60th in the global freedom rankings. In the current milieu where a third of the country's media is owned by the state or by businessmen linked to the government (Reporters Without Boarders, 2020), the situation can be worrying. The public sphere must not be sacrificed on a predetermined media ownership structure that seems to be in control of media production and content. The independence and professionalism of journalists must be paramount in the public sphere.

As is expected, the country's ratings in the freedom of the world report also gives positive remarks about Ghana describing it as a free democratic country where periodic elections through multi-

party democracy have become the culture. The country's strong record in upholding civil liberties is acknowledged with the view of ensuring transparency and accountable governance (Freedom House, 2020). Despite this, the report was blunt that Ghana had a weak judicial independence system while political corruption presents a bigger challenge for government's performances. These unfavorable description of the country's democratic system throws more challenge to the public sphere where citizens are expected to engage each other in meaningful intercourse to produce laudable ideas and suggestions to enhance the structural weaknesses. This study explores the complexities inherent in the systemic sphere of Ghana by dissecting fake news production as a political economic commodity.

Asomah (2020) identifies excessive partisanship in the media of Ghana as a disincentive in fighting corruption. This makes the democratic public sphere to lack the objectivity and neutrality expected of a space meant for civic discourse. This partisanship has not only affected the way and manner journalists report on stories but how they lean on political parties and interests. This gives reason to doubt the stories they write and publish. Allegations are rift that journalists especially those in private practice support political parties for monetary gains and juicy political appointments hence making the public sphere desecrated. "To a large extent, the private media in Ghana is divided between two main political lines: pro-government and pro-opposition. The main political parties often involved in using their media to make allegations and counter-allegations are the New Patriotic Party (NPP), now the ruling party, and the National Democratic Congress (NDC)" (Asomah, 2020:229). This appears alien to Habermas' (1989) structural transformation of the public sphere where he argued for the need to have a free space for deliberating and articulating dominant issues of the people in a public discourse aimed at influencing government's policies and programmes for the collective interest of all citizens.

Shardow and Asare (2016) see political alignment of the media as problematic. The print media and to some extent the state media's watchdog roles are compromised when they are made to be dependent on their owners in the discharge of their duties. Such media are not only mucking the public sphere but are towing the lines of their owners and writing stories based on the preferences of the media owner. The state media too subtly play to the dictates of their favourite political parties through a set of cultural understandings in the newsroom. Financial viability was also found to have affected the media's watchdog role and that makes the sphere pupate of the bourgeois class. This is exacerbated by poor capital for operation of the press as poor circulation, cost of

printing, and lack of advertisement affect their sustenance and hinder the media's performance. Shardow and Asare (2016) call for measures to deal with those tangible and intangible factors that impact negatively on the public sphere and the watchdog role of the media to enable dissenting opinions to be freely exercised without restrictions.

Writing on the crisis of public communication, Blumler (2018) says digitisation, social media and the internet have in combined efforts radically changed and transformed the face of communication globally making the media ostensibly not able to serve its purpose in society. Blumer (2018) identified media-centricity, change over time and Anglo-American analytic bias as issues tenable in the crisis of communication. On media-centricity, he argues that political and economic factors are more responsible for the crisis than the communication system itself which feeds into political party breakdowns due to the ideological preferences of individuals. The fundamental transformation taking place in the communication era could also have roots from the social inequalities in relation to access to mainstream and social media camouflaging the crisis at hand. On Anglo-American bias, Blumer indicates that the centralization of public sphere in the constrained territories of the US and Britain may no longer be a disqualification since the creation of global publics is made easier by technology.

In this new order of things, Blumer sees citizens as no longer monitoring the news and public discourse only to get updates about which politician and political interests they should support but that citizens effectively participate in the public sphere and deem it right to be heard. This new form of citizen participation and engagement in public policy and discourse comes in different forms which are more consistent with democratic norms. These forms of participation are aided by the internet and social media and sometimes characterised by information wars and bombardments resulting in crisis of incivility where the winner-takes-all approach becomes the order of our democracy. Blumler (2018) expresses skepticism over the near-Machiavellian tactic of deploying consultants for strategic political campaign communication as losing appeal to the citizenship model. This implies that "the internet can strengthen democracy and citizens' involvement in it" (Blumer, 2018:90) and that the political class must engage citizens often. This is because representative democracy implies a fuller involvement of citizens with a degree of trust that can translate a peaceful policy for democratic governance.

Schlesinger (2020) indicates that the public sphere is central to discussions on political communication as it shapes competing political ideologies. The current discussions on the theory

relates to its transition from mass media to the internet and digital media. The present stage of the public sphere is described as 'post-public sphere' as a number of unusual and unstable happenings are likely to influence the shape of the public sphere. The post public sphere does not seem to give a clear direction because of the changes in political communication, media and economics, all brought about as a results of the digital world where mediated communication is transforming the practice of public communication and journalism in particular.

Schlesinger (2020) says the post public sphere is mutable given the fact that, in crisis situations such as the COVID-19, mainstream media and public service media is a source of solidarity in educating and disputing conspiracy theories and misinformation bundied about. In the complex happenings, the public sphere is disrupted in volatility of communication ecology creating a new order of citizen-media-political arrangements.

This is exacerbated by economic difficulties, hostilities and general social problems facing democratic capitalist countries. Analysts are gazing their lenses to a new form of liberal democracy minus a public sphere since it obscures basic economic and social inequalities (Fenton, 2018, Schlesinger, 2020). In the structural changes, there are remarkable happenings to public sphere and in this case, Fenton recommends a new theory capable of addressing the current democratic communication meltdown but Schlesinger (2020) maintains that structural changes have always affected the public sphere resulting in reformulations and that "at any given moment, political, economic and technological conditions define its scope. In short, the post public sphere is part of a developmental history" (Schlesinger, 2020:1554).

Schlesinger (2020) suggests tougher measures such as streamlining regulatory regimes for the internet and digital communication ecosystem to ensure that the cultural content generates works of competence. Although such attempts to regulate the content of digital forms of communication may be based on individual national interests, there is a growing international agenda to find solutions to the unruliness of the internet space. In the UK for instance, work on a regulatory agenda presently focusing on "fake news, exposure to harmful or illegal content, anti-competitive behaviour, misleading political advertising, the uses of consumer data, expression of violence and terrorism, online indecency and interference by foreign governments in the domestic electoral process" (Schlesinger, 2020:1558). This drastic measure is being pursued despite the concern that regulation could potentially censor communication. The move is strategic but not without implications for the post public sphere in the future. It is the considered view of this researcher

that similar measures be taken in dealing with the upsurge in fake news publications in the political economy of Ghana.

The public sphere elucidates the space through which the citizenry of Ghana interact, debate, discuss and contribute to the participatory democratic environment of the media. The public sphere will enable this researcher understand the political and economic dynamics that favour or undermines the exercise of free expression in the media space. It provides this study the bases to explore the enabling possibilities, and limitations associated with citizens' contribution to the governance and policy decisions of themselves. More critical to this researcher is, how fake news and technological upsurge favours or undermines the media's public sphere in Ghana. The combined efforts of the critical political economy of the media and public sphere being used as the theoretical foundation of this study, will complement analysis of data and interpretation of findings in this study. This will be achieved through synergising literature and data inductively and deductively for comprehensive understanding.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods and procedures used in this study. Research methodology can be described as a technique or strategy used in investigating or studying a phenomenon. To investigate a complex phenomenon just as this study attempts to do, a strategic approach needs to be used. Such a design is described by Walliman (2016) as a framework that enables researchers to collect and analyse data. In this study, both secondary and primary data were collected from various sources using acceptable ethical procedures. This chapter which discusses methods used in gathering data for this study, consists of the design of the study, data collection procedures and analysis. This study adopts a mixed-method design rooted in the critical philosophical foundation or paradigm. Using ontology of existing methodological procedures, the epistemology of fake news and political economy of the media of Ghana was studied. This was done in cognizance of the fourth industrial revolution as a variable tool that has the tendency to aid the dissemination of fake news in the media industry.

4.1 Research Approach

The approach of this study is a mixed-method approach. Creswell (2014) defines a mixed-method as a method of research that combines or integrates qualitative and quantitative research methods and data in a research study. This approach is also referred to as integrating, synthesis, multimethod, mixed methodology and qualitative and quantitative methods. Open-ended questions were used to collect the qualitative data while for the quantitative data, a questionnaire with close-ended questions was used. The essence of this approach is to compensate for the weaknesses of each form of method. Again, this ensured that the data collected aid and complement each other. Bryman (2012) indicates that the mixed method research approach has been an increasing research strategy since the 1980s. The approach is chiefly used to compensate for the weakness of either the qualitative or the quantitative approaches thus making it appealing to many researchers as one of the best approaches.

Creswell (2014) points out that in blending the data of a mixed method research, it provides a stronger and a more nuanced understanding of the problem or question more than either the qualitative or the quantitative data standing alone. The mixed method research according to Creswell (2014) grew out of diverse fields such as evaluation, education, management, sociology and health sciences. Since its inception in the 1980s, it has gone through the formative, philosophical debates, procedural development and the reflective stages. The strength of a mixed method research lies in its sophisticated and complex approach used in investigating a phenomenon. This makes the approach appealing to researchers because it gives a complete understanding of research problems and questions, which makes it possible to compare different perspectives.

The mixed method thrives on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative designs and uses deductive and inductive processes in acquiring knowledge through an integrative enquiry. Leavy (2017) points out that the approach is appropriate in a research that is intended to describe, explain and evaluate a phenomenon and is "particularly useful for studying complex problems or issues" (Leavy, 2017:164). Doyle, Brady and Byrne (2009) describe mixed method research as an approach whose interest lies in the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data in an integrative manner. Mixed method in this instance bridges the gap that exists in quantitative and qualitative positions. Mixed method research comes with a number of advantages; one of such advantages is that it affords triangulation of methods which produces higher validity. This provides completeness and a comprehensive picture of the issue or phenomenon under study. "Mixed method studies can use one research approach (i.e., qualitative or quantitative) to explain the data generated from a study using the other research approaches. This is particularly useful when unanticipated or unusual findings emerge" (Doyle et al. 2009:179)

Describing mixed method research as 'multi-strategy research', Bryman (2012) stressed the need for mixing the quantitative and the qualitative process in a mutually illuminating manner rather than using the two approaches in tandem. Walliman (2016) indicates that the use of a mixed method approach will enable researchers to address different research questions; thus, a quantitative method could be used to find out the extent of a problem while a qualitative approach is appropriate for examining the nature of the problem. This gives this researcher the opportunity to understand the nature of fake news and political economy of the media in Ghana through the qualitative method at the same time providing the opportunity to understand the extent at which

fake news is an issue in the political economy of the media of Ghana especially in the current upsurge in the use of fourth industrial technologies in news and other media productions.

4.2 The Research Design

The design is an explorative sequential mixed method. Creswell (2014) indicates that in explorative sequential research, the researcher first begins by exploring with qualitative data and analysis and then uses the findings in the second phase where quantitative data will be collected. The second database builds on the results of the initial database to enable generalisation. The use of exploratory sequential approach enabled this researcher develop better measurements using specific samples from the population of the study (journalists) through a qualitative phase. The qualitative phase in this instance includes intensive interviews with five (5) editors from different media institutions in Ghana. These interviews were separately conducted and on different occasions. The findings of the first phase were used to formulate a questionnaire for the quantitative phase and findings were generalised to the population of study. Gibson (2017) identified a number of mixed method approaches including qualitative analysis of experience followed by quantitative, structural analysis supplemented with qualitative, quantitative modeling with qualitative, content analysis with quantitative and qualitative and case comparison of both qualitative and quantitative. Any form of mixed method approach adopts one of the listed criteria in studying the phenomenon.

Of all the mixed method approaches, Gibson (2017) identified the exploratory sequential approach as one of the most used where the use of qualitative experience is supplemented with the quantitative. Such an approach gives researchers the opportunity to use their interpretations in the qualitative data to strengthen the confidence of the quantitative analysis. Significantly, the mixed method approach to research is arguably the best approach as Gibson (2017) points out that mixed method gives room for elaboration of a phenomenon by researchers more than they would have done using only one approach to the phenomenon. This gives confidence to the findings which also makes it possible to do generalisation due to the high validity that will be achieved as a result of triangulation of methods and approaches.

Neuman (2014:39), defines exploratory study as "research whose primary purpose is to examine a little understood issue or phenomenon and to develop preliminary ideas about it and move

towards refined research questions". Fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana is an unexploited topic. Exploration studies are done for some purposes. Babbie (2005) states that exploratory study is done for satisfying curiosity, test feasibility for a more detailed study that will develop strategies for a later study. This study will serve as the basis for further studies to be conducted on the political economy of the Ghanaian media especially in relation to ownership of the media, the active players and influencers of media content as well as its interrelationship with fake news production and dissemination in the public sphere.

4.3 Research Paradigm/Philosophy

Philosophical foundation or research paradigm is the bedrock of every academic research. It provides the exposition, the worldview underpinning any meticulous research by delineating and interpreting meanings, relationship, framework and overview about a research enterprise. Neuman (2014) defines philosophical foundation of research as the broad alternative framework within which all research is conducted. The philosophical foundations are assumptions and principles such as ontology - the fundamental nature of reality and epistemology - how we know the world around us or what makes a claim true. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) describe research paradigm as a concept that provides an extensive philosophical foundation for a research study which can either be used distinctively or in combination with others in a research. Research paradigm has been used interchangeably with 'world view' stressing that attempts to choose the most appropriate research paradigm for a mixed research study has been a long standing issue in academic research.

Post-positivism, constructivism, participatory and pragmatism are broad worldviews, often associated with mixed research studies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These traditions differ in their ontology and epistemology to research. While post-positivism is closely related to the quantitative research approach, constructivism is related to the qualitative research approach where meaning and understandings are generated from detailed study of subjects and their subjective views. The participatory and pragmatism worldviews relate well with the mixed method research where the use of multiple methods of data are common.

Neuman (2014) identifies three broad paradigms in social science research. The three wide-ranging philosophical approaches that come to mind in social science research are the positivist social science, interpretive social science and critical social science approaches which implicitly guides

the conduct of research. Positivism takes its root from the 'pure sciences' and is mostly associated with the quantitative research designs. Among the common research methods used in this approach include; experiments, surveys, and statistics which are used in studying phenomena with emphasis on determination of cause and effect. It is value-laden science with objectivity as a key feature. Walliman (2016) thinks positivism is based on realism which attempts to understand the world in its reality stressing that science is a continuous process, building on existing knowledge.

According to Neuman (2014), interpretive social science concerns itself with a systematic analysis of social meaning through the direct observation of people and objects in their natural environment in order to arrive at an understanding and interpretation of how to create and maintain the social world. It is related to hermeneutics. Interpretive social science orients itself to social construction of reality where people construct their reality out of interactions and beliefs. It studies meaningful social action in contexts where subjective meanings could be derived out of subjects studied. Interpretive worldview adopts voluntarism that suggests that people could make conscious choices as subjective beings. Interpretive social science is commonly used in exploratory studies. Walliman (2016) offers further explanation on the interpretative philosophical doctrine which elucidates the point that the world is a creation of our minds. For that reason, we can experience the world better through our perceptions, beliefs and observations. This philosophical perspective, orients itself to social construction of reality where people construct their reality out of interactions and beliefs. Interpretative philosophical perspective adopts voluntarism and gives people a conscious choice as individuals with independent views (Neuman, 2014 and Walliman, 2016). The interpretative worldviews which is usually used for exploratory studies makes it possible for social actions to be studied in context where subjective meanings could be derived.

The Critical Social Science (CSS) tradition which is also referred to as dialectical materialism, class analysis, critical realism and critical structuralism, is the focal paradigm for this study. Neuman (2014) postulates that the critical social science generally sees social research as beyond the surface of illusions to uncover the structures in the material world to help people change their conditions and build a better world for themselves. CSS aims at conducting research to critique in order to transform society. It concerns itself with power relations and uncovering the "underlining sources of social control, power relations and inequality. By uncovering conditions, CSS empowers people especially those in society who are less powerful and marginalised" Neuman

(2014:110). CSS can be traced to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Theodor Adorno and other earlier scholars such as Jurgen Habermas.

Creswell (2014) uses the term 'transformative worldview' to describe the critical paradigm stressing that "it includes groups of researchers who are critical theorists; participatory action researchers; Marxist; feminists; racial and ethnic minorities; persons with disabilities; indigenous and postcolonial people; and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-sexual, and queer communities" (Creswell, 2014:9). This group of researchers feel that the constructivist stance did not address issues of marginality, social injustice and discrimination hence their advocacy to address oppression. This can be done using intertwined politics and political change agenda to confront social justice and oppression of minority groups and ideologies. The outcome of the transformative or critical philosophical research is intended to transform the lives of the participants, which is made possible by empowering people, reducing inequality, suppression and oppression.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) acknowledge the thrust of the critical theory as coming from a social justice perspective that seeks to transform the political, social and economic conditions which tend to suppress and marginalise the less privilege in society. The critical theory comes in with the assumption that there exists an unequal power relationship in society created by the powerful class in society who dominate and control everything to the disadvantage of the less privileged. Kivunja and Kuyini describe the critical paradigm as a transformative paradigm that hopes to change situations for better. It does so by respecting cultural norms aimed at empowerment and the removal of oppression, leading to social transformation. The critical paradigm adopts neo-Marxist, cultural studies, feminist theories, queer theory, critical discourse analysis, critical ethnography and action research as research projects and methodologies often conducted under this tradition. This is achieved through instruments such as open-ended interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended questionnaire and observations (Scotland, 2012).

Scotland (2012) posits that critical paradigm is historical materialism in orientation where reality is shaped by political, social, cultural, ethnic and gender values. This socially constructed reality is under constant internal influence where communication (political economy of the media) and language are used to empower or weaken the power struggles in society. Knowledge in critical tradition is socially constructed but power from society influences it to the direction of positioning

power of society. That is why this current study is interested in understanding the power brokers particularly the political economy of the Ghanaian media using a mixed triangulated method. Issues such as the ownership of the media, political and economic players within the Ghanaian media and dissemination of fake news and the legal regulatory regime that permits or controls it are all variables of interest, best addressed through the transformative worldview or the critical paradigm.

The critical paradigm is influenced by factors such as culture, race, gender, politics and location. While calling for consideration for the less privileged and the marginalised, the normative stand of the paradigm tradition should be consistent democratically to ensure its ideals materialise. Critical tradition interrogates values, and exposes hegemonic social situations to emancipate the powerless and the less privileged in society to bring about change. In its process of influencing change, the critical paradigm proscribes conscientisation of people to be aware of their disempowered situations (Scotland, 2012).

This study adopts the critical paradigm tradition as the main worldview or philosophical paradigm to understand the power relations that exist in the political economy of the media in Ghana with the aim of influencing change in the media systems of the country (Neuman, 2014, Scotland, and Creswell, 2014). This will enable the researcher to explore the economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana and how government's regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production. Hoddy (2018) indicates that critical realism is becoming an important scientific philosophical paradigm for the discovery of new knowledge. This is because of its recent incursion into empirical social science for practical advocacy in the civil society movement and then for transformation. Critical realism believes that "the world is real in the sense of existing independently of our perceptions and beliefs, and that our understanding of it is socially constructed" (Hoddy, 2018:03).

Zachariadis, Scott and Barret (2013) indicate that critical realism is a pluralistic methodological paradigm that incorporates a number of quantitative and qualitative methods of study. The basis for the multiplicity applicability of this paradigm is that, social phenomena are defined in context. Barret et al. (2013) stress that critical realism is largely associated with Bhaskar and it is seen as a middle ground for empiricism and positivism on one hand and anti-naturalism and interpretivism on the other. In such a nuanced process of knowledge discovery, a number of philosophical and

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worldviews are brought together thus making critical realism quite attractive and suitable for this study as it can greatly contribute in uncovering knowledge through the qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand how fake news is disseminated in the public sphere of Ghana.

The ontological perspective of critical realism is very strong in that it supports reality as independent of people's knowledge and perception. Knowledge generation in critical realism is therefore a human creation depending on specific context and processes involved in such production of ideas (Barret et al., 2013). The epistemological relativism of critical realism makes knowledge acquired infallible but that nonetheless, not all knowledge is infallible. "Critical realism consents that some researchers may have more valid explanations or theories that approximate the intransitive domain with more probabilistic accuracy than others" (Barret et al., 2013:857).

4.4 Research methods

Kothari and Garg (2014) describe research methods to include all those techniques used in conducting research. They can also be the procedures used in performing or studying a research problem. This comes in the form of methods used in collecting data, statistical techniques and those methods used in evaluating the accuracy of the results or findings. In-depth interviews and a structured questionnaire were therefore research methods employed for this study. The in-depth interviews were applied to the qualitative data while the survey used the quantitative data collection procedure in administering questionnaires to respondents. Yin (2014) argued that "intensive interviews" forms a significant part of research methods because they provide a pool of data needed for social science works. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) indicate that survey is a flexible and useful means of data collection that can either be in person, by telephone, mail, or self-administered. For this study, questionnaires were sent to respondents to self-administer.

Bryman (2012) states that triangulation is achieved through the usage of varied research methods such as the use of in-depth interviews and a survey means of data collection. It also means the use of both qualitative and quantitative research designs in a study in a planned or unplanned manner. Triangulation strengthens the internal and external validity of a study and this complements this current study where the finding from the first phase of the study was converged and corroborated with the quantitative findings in the second phase. In effect, the qualitative data was collected and

analysed and outcome was used to develop survey questionnaire to collect the quantitative data, after which both findings were presented (Gibson, 2017).

4.4.1 In-depth Interview

The first phase of the data collection as per the sequential mixed method was qualitative where detailed data was gathered from respondents through in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were held with five news editors separately from five media organisations. These editors were drawn from the *Daily Graphic, Daily Guide, Ghana News Agency, JoyFm*, and *TV3* to constitute the sample for the qualitative phase of the research. The in-depth interview is a long conversation with a respondent with the intent of eliciting information. The in-depth interview is an intensive interview with fewer questions asked but detailed information obtained (Kumekpor, 2002). This enabled this researcher to gather in-depth data on fake news and political economy of the media of Ghana. The interviews were organised separately with each respondent being allotted not less than 45 minutes to respond to questions from a prepared question guide. Because of this, the in-depth interviews were semi-structured to give flexibility to both the researcher and respondents. All covid-19 protocols were observed while collecting data for this study. Bryman (2012) explains semi-structured interview as a form of research that permits the researcher to use predetermined questions or question guide and gives leeway for the interviewee to respond. All the interviews were tape recorded alongside notes taking. The recorded interviews were transcribed later. Through an inductive process, themes and codes were generated and determined, and based on this a questionnaire was formulated for the second phase of the data collection process and analysis. Kothari and Garg (2014) state that depth interviews are techniques designed to uncover the motives and feelings of respondents especially on personality dynamics and motivations. This demands a great deal of skills from the researcher. It must also be noted that depth interviews require adequate time as it is time consuming.

4.4.2 Research Questionnaire

The second phase of the data collection process in this study was done by means of a quantitative process. A questionnaire consisting of about 30 questions was administered to 230 journalists in the city of Accra, the capital of Ghana for them to respond to various questions. These questions were developed out of the findings of the qualitative study. The themes and codes that were generated from the findings of the first phase of the study, were used to form the second phase. As

indicated by Creswell (2014:276) in the exploratory sequential mixed method, "a researcher can analyse the qualitative data to develop new variables, to identify the types of scales that might exist in current instruments or to form categories of information that will explore further in the quantitative phase". The sample of 230 was randomly selected out of the population of journalists working in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. In order to increase return rate, the questionnaires were administered to the respondents, thus yielding higher responds rate. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) stress the need for the use of self-administered questionnaire using simple and straightforward language to avoid ambiguity. Pretesting the questionnaire was done to ensure the research instrument is adequately designed. Findings from this study can therefore be generalised because of the good psychometric properties such as validity and reliability.

4.5 Data collection technique

Data for this study was collected in two phases. In-depth interviews and structured questionnaires were used as data collection instruments for the first and second phases respectively. The intensive interview technique was used to collect data from news editors of five media organisations, both the print and electronic. These are; *Daily Graphic, Daily Guide, Ghana News Agency, JoyFm*, and *TV3*. Another set of the structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 230 journalists in the second phase. While the study adopted purposive sampling for the qualitative phase, the quantitative phase used simple random sampling. All covid-19 protocols were observed while collecting data for this study. In situations where respondents could not be accessible due to covid-19 restrictions, zoom conferencing and telephone interviews were used in few occasions. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Two broad processes were used in the data collection stage. These are the qualitative data where in-depth interviews were collected and the quantitative data where a survey consisting of 30 questionnaires were used for the second phase. The in-depth interview involves an intensive conversation with fewer questions but detailed information obtained from respondents (Kumekpor, 2002). Such conversations were held with five news editors from five media organisations in Ghana. These editors are from the *Daily Graphic, Daily Guide, Ghana News Agency, JoyFm,* and *TV3* who constituted the sample for the qualitative part of the research.

4.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher first used a pilot study and double-blind technique and then later used the procedure to gather the data. The pilot study was to pre-test the questionnaire before the actual administration to ensure the main resource was smooth. The in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to integrate the qualitative and quantitative data in a triangulated manner. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) argue that, for a measure to be reliable, it must be pre-tested to demonstrate its consistency. The data collection instruments used for the study were pretested to ensure all challenges associated with the instruments were eliminated. Aside this, the first phase of the study which is qualitative in nature, complements the development of the survey instrument in the second phase. This enables the convergence and corroboration of data, and ensures consistency and truthfulness of the study.

 Bryman (2012:47) define validity as "the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research". It is an important ingredient of a research work without which doubts can be cast at the outcome of a research work. Reliability is another important psychometric element in research that must not be lost out. Reliability concerns itself with the consistency of a measure or whether the results of a study could be repeated. While validity and reliability are very crucial in every research environment, internal validity is more associated with quantitative studies where the study specify causal relationships or connection. External validity relates more with a qualitative study than it does for a quantitative study. Validity and reliability are essential to this study that is why rigorous steps such as pretesting the instrument and breaking the study into two phases using qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted. Rigour for the qualitative data was enhanced through credibility, vividness and transferability (Leavy, 2017). Credibility is about the trustworthiness of the qualitative data while transferability is to ensure the study's findings are useful to other contexts other than the research settings. The credibility and trustworthiness of this study can therefore be assured.

A total sample size of 235 for both qualitative and quantitative is an accurate representation of active journalists working in Ghana as captured by the Ghana Journalists Association (umbrella body of journalists in Ghana) which put the total number of its members in good standing in 2021, at 675. Another factor that holds high the validity and reliability of this study relates to the use of

triangulation of in-depth interviews and survey to collect data which contributes highly to the realisation of the validity and reliability of this study.

4.7 The population and sampling methods

The population for this study is the entire population of journalists in Ghana. The population of a study is the universe or units in which the sample is selected (Bryman, 2012). However, it is highly impossible to reach out to every single individual in this population of study hence the use of a sample. This population is found in a mixed-setting of all media organizations in Ghana. While the total social media platforms and web portals in Ghana are uncountable, the National Communication Authority (NCA, 2020) of Ghana puts the total number of radio stations at 575. About 428 of these are operational across the country. This comprises public, community, commercial, and campus operational radio stations. Also, 102 television (tv) stations are on air out of a total of 146 authorised analogue, digital, and satellite tv stations. The number of newspapers is estimated to be over 100 newspapers and several news portals and blogs in the country. These constitute the population settings for this study as indicated by Babbie (2013:115) that "the population for a study is that group about whom we want to draw conclusions". The media of Ghana is imperative for this study as it gives holistic view of the media institution in Ghana. As a study that sought to understand how fake news is disseminated in the political economy of the media in Ghana, it is critical to take a look at the media in perspective.

In all, the media of Ghana can be classified into state-owned or public entities and privately owned media organisations which operate for profit. The state-owned media are owned and financed by the Government of Ghana. The state media includes newspapers, television stations and a wireless service. The private media sector of Ghana is saturated with radio and television stations dotted across the country. This also consist of numerous newspapers and online portals all serving important roles in the democratic culture of the country.

The media of Ghana which began operation from the colonial era of 1822, has undergone a number of phases in its transition to the current democratic state. At colonial period, the media emerged to serve the colonial masters and their interest as well as few literate native population. Anyidoho (2016) classified the media of Ghana sociologically into three phases, the first was the era where the media involved only amateur newspaper productions without any professional markers for news production. The second phase also was amateur in nature but commercial in orientation that

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critique the colonial government and its administration. A third phase of the Ghanaian media is the state of professionalism where commercial and modern technology and infrastructure is used in media production. The current stage which is within the third phase, the Ghanaian media is vibrant media consisting of electronic, print, and digital media organisations operating in diverse ways to give voice to the people, educate, inform, entertain, and influence policy positively for good governance.

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the five media organisations for the in-depth interviews while simple random was used to sample 230 journalists for the survey. Neuman (2014) underscores the need to use purposive sampling to get unique cases that are informative as well. Purposive sampling that enabled this researcher to identify knowledgeable and information-rich subjects for the study. Similarly the use of a simple random sample for the survey ensured the samples selected accurately represents the population of study. Simple random sampling as a probability procedure, allows each unit of the population equal chance of being included in the study. Bryman (2012) indicates that using simple random sample as a probability procedure, inferences can be made from the sample to the population. Walliman (2016:111) also states that simple random sampling is "used when the population is uniform or has common characteristics in all cases". The population of this study fits in well to this definition because it is a uniform sample with a common characteristic. They are all engaged in news gathering, production, processing and dissemination.

A total sample size of 235 was used for both qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:102) state that there is no approximate sample size for data collection stressing that "Certain sample sizes are suggested for various statistical procedures, but no single sample-size formula or method is available for every research method or statistical procedure". A number of factors influence a choice of sample size including the type of project and its purpose, time and resource constraints. The choice of 230 sample size for the quantitative data and five (5) respondents for the qualitative therefore falls within these reasons since the project uses two means of data collection which is also constraint by time and financial resources. The researcher is also dealing with a sample whose population is smaller in the country.

In order to eliminate misunderstandings and increase return rate, the questionnaires were administered to respondents throughout the process. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) stress the need

for the use of self-administered questionnaire using simple and straightforward language to avoid ambiguity. The researcher also observed certain factors in the process of administering the questionnaire, all of which have positive impact on the outcome of this study.

4.7.1 Target population

The population for this study is the entire population of journalists in Ghana. The population of a study is the universe or units in which the sample is selected (Bryman, 2012). However, it is highly impossible to reach out to every single individual in this population for the study hence a sample was statistically sampled for the qualitative and quantitative phases of this study. The target population for the qualitative study is the news editors of five (5) media organisations and the 230 journalists of Ghana. These news editors of the five media organisations (*Daily Graphic, Daily Guide, Ghana News Agency, JoyFm,* and *TV3*) were purposively sampled for the study because of their worth of expertise in the subject of this study. Another set of 230 sample of journalists in the Greater Accra of Ghana were reached through a simple random sample. "A target population is the specific collection of elements we will study" (Neuman, 2014: 252).

4.7.2 Unit of analysis

In social science research, the unit of analysis generally is the people. "Social researchers typically choose individual people as their unit of analysis" (Babbie, 2005:96). The social groups and individuals are regarded as unit of analysis. The concept could be slippery in the words of Babbie (2013) stressing that in nomothetic research where more people and things are involved, it becomes quite difficult to identify the unit of analysis. The units that were analysed in this research are the editors from five (5) selected media organisations and a sample of 230 journalists in Ghana who participated in this study. Kumekpor (2002:52) defined unit of analysis as the "actual empirical units, objects, occurrences which must be observed or measured to study a particular phenomenon".

Neuman (2014:67) is of the view that a single research could have more than one unit of analysis saying that "the social world comprises many units, such as individual people, groups, organisations, movements, institutions, countries and so forth", consequently researchers can tailor their theoretical ideas or concepts to apply to one or more of these units of analysis. For the clarity of concepts, our units of analysis must be defined. We therefore need to understand who a

journalist is. A journalist is defined as an individual engaged in a vocation of informing, educating and entertaining the public through a medium of communication.

News editors are senior ranked persons in the profession of journalism. They occupy a strategic stage of the gatekeeping process of the news processing before the final product comes out for public consumption. Editors are very crucial in decision making regarding what news gets published and what news is silenced or censored. Their knowledge of and role in the dissemination of fake news is very paramount in making informed decisions on the subject. Researching on fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana would have been incomplete without seeking the opinions of journalists who probably come across series of misinformation and disinformation in their daily duties. This could lead to wrongful labelling by people without media literacy to accuse journalists of peddling misinformation and disinformation. Their responses and views on fake news and the political economy of the media enabled this researcher gather adequate data on the subject for analysis.

4.7.3 Population characteristics

Ghana has a vibrant media consisting of electronic, print, and digital media organisations operating in diverse ways to give voice to the people, educate, inform, entertain, and influence policy change for good governance. The media consists of both mainstream and social media but significantly deregulated in a space where many print and electronic stations exist and operate either privately or as state-owned. The existence of multiple media institutions operating in a democratic space has created competition through innovations where there is a fusion of new technologies with contemporary media in a common space. In the democratic space in which the media of Ghana operates, both professionally trained journalists and citizen journalists ply their trade side by side either as professional journalists, citizen journalists or bloggers.

The media of Ghana can be classified in terms of historical, political and sociological periods. This can be seen from the colonial period, post-independence and a period of modern professionalism. Anyidoho (2016) looked at the media of Ghana from the sociological perspective and classified it into three phases. The first phase which began from 1822, was the era where the media evolved with only amateur newspaper productions without any professional markers for news production. The first phase had the involvement of the colonial government in the media production and the involvement of few natives and missionary groups. The second phase stretched from 1931 to 1945

which began with the *West African Times*. Also the second phase was equally amateur in nature but commercial in orientation that critiqued the colonial government and its administration.

The third phase of the Ghanaian media's history, according to Anyidoho's categorisation saw a lot more professionalism where commercial and modern technology and infrastructure is used in media production. This stage began in 1947 with the establishment of the *Evening News* (1947) and the *Telegraph* in 1949. The period also saw the establishment of the *Daily Graphic* in 1950 and the *Sunday Mirror* in 1953, both by Cecil King, a British businessman. The Conventions Peoples Party (CPP) established the Guinea Press, publishers of *Ghanaian Times* (1958) and the *Weekly Spectator* (1963) in an attempt to control professional journalism.

To beef up professional training in communication and journalism, the Ghana Institute of Journalism and the School of Communication were established in 1959 and 1972 respectively to train professional journalists to take up positions in the mainstream media. The successive government of Kofi Abrefa Busia of 1969 to 1972 encouraged professionalism. The remaining civilian governments in the third and fourth Republics of Ghana gave room for professionalism and proliferation of the media. In simple terms, the Ghanaian media is vibrant consisting of electronic, print, and digital media organisations operating in diverse ways to give voice to the people, educate, inform, entertain, and influence policy in diversity of opinions to enhance good governance.

As journalists, their daily activities is determined by what is happening anew in society generally. Their routine is to gather data, process it into useful information that is significant and affects our lives. In a bit to simplify the characteristics of mass communication of which journalism is a part, Dominick (2014) indicates that the media is a complex system that produces news through a multiple gatekeeping processes. It needs great deal of money and resources to operate in a highly competitive environment. The media also stands to make profit although public service broadcasting could be an exception to this profit making business. Given the characteristics of the media, fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana is being analysed in view of these lenses that the media is a complex institution that can only be understood through researches such as this study.

4.7.4 Ethical issues

Ethical clearance was sought from the University's Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa and approved before data collection. This was to ensure full compliance with all laid down ethical procedures relating to social science studies. Additionally, all respondents to this study were assured of informed consent and anonymity. Leavy (2017) states that informed consent is about the researcher explaining the risks and benefits of participating in a research project. Participation in the study is of a voluntary nature. Participants' identities have also remained anonymous which implies their identities are not revealed in the study. They were informed of the essence of the research and willingly participated. Prior to field entry, established protocols were used in accessing the site of study and in reaching out to participants and this ensured a positive turnout rate. This conforms to the suggestion of Marshall and Rossman (2011) that researchers must anticipate issues of negotiating entry, reciprocity, and adherence to ethical principles.

4.8 Data analysis and interpretation

Data was analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics for the quantitative and qualitative data. Inferential procedure in research is the generation of data to enable researchers to infer characteristics of a population of study while descriptive study measures "accurate description of a situation or of an association between variables…this minimises bias and maximises the reliability of the evidence collected" (Kothari & Garg, 2014:33). The use of a quantitative data collection procedure therefore enables inference of this study to be extrapolated to the general population of the Ghanaian journalists while the qualitative procedure gives further description of the phenomenon of fake news and political economy of the media without biases.

Data from the survey was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 26) and descriptive statistics (percentages). The final quantitative data was presented in tables, graphs, and other illustrations where necessary. The in-depth interviews were analysed inductively where texts were carefully studied and coded in categories and themes as suggested by Creswell (2014) that qualitative data can be analysed and presented through themes and narrative form. The analysis was subjected to the purpose of the study and the methodology used. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) stipulate that the findings of every researcher must answer two basic questions: (1) are the results internally and externally valid? and (2) are the results accurate?

In the analysis and interpretation process, findings were inductively and deductively synergised with the critical political economy of the media and the public sphere conceptual frameworks as well as available literature. The CPEM conceptually explains the power dynamics of media ownership, uses and influence in the political and economic sense. Murdock (2015:733) simplifies the concept that "political economy sets out to understand how capitalism worked and access its consequences for the organisation of social and political life". As an intellectual project emerging in the eighteenth century, political economy of the media sought to replace the metaphysical and religious narrative of the world with rationality, man-made models of change as benchmarks. Willems (2012) indicates that public sphere refers to the new space or sphere for the exchange of communication and debates on public issues without constraints through the media. In the public sphere, public interest dominates individual interests and as such people put aside their individual parochial interests to focus on public interest in deliberations which are sustained by theatres, coffee shops, newspapers, journals and debating societies.

These conceptual topics, made it possible for condensing of the volume of data that were collected through the qualitative and the quantitative processes. The nuances of the findings gave meaning to the exploratory sequential mixed method, where the qualitative data analysis precedes the quantitative data analysis. Creswell (2014) suggests the need to analyse the databases separately and use the qualitative data to develop the quantitative measure. The need to make comparison in the case is not necessary as Creswell (2014:277) put it but rather, the "intent of the strategy is to determine if the qualitative themes can be generalised to a larger sample".

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

5.0 Introduction

The findings and analysis of the qualitative data are presented in this chapter. This subdivision of the thesis looks at the publication of fake news in Ghana from the perspective of news editors of five media organisations in Ghana. Constituting the first phase of the data collection process, in-depth interviews were the key instrument used to glean data from news editors of the *Daily Graphic, Daily Guide, Ghana News Agency, JoyFm, and TV3* as respondents for the qualitative part of this research. The analysis is subdivided into various sections along the objectives of the study and synthesised into the literature and theories of the study. To avoid direct identification of the respondents in accordance with ethical guidelines, all respondents have been anonymised and their names and the media organisations they represent replaced with alphabets "A" "B" "C" "D" "E" in conformity with ethical procedure. In the next sections, key findings of this thesis are presented.

5.1 Fake news is variedly defined

The findings of this study indicate that fake news as a concept, has varied meanings and definitions. Although a number of definitions of the concept has been presented in this literature, respondents equally defined the concept based on their understanding of the phenomenon, which suggests that fake news is a complicated concept with different meanings. Respondent "A" defined fake news as "news that is not proven until otherwise we have facts to back it. Fake news to me is something that is not truthful but maybe spread by some people for an intention nobody knows". This definition has a combination of the element of misinformation and disinformation, both of which are widely considered to be part of fake news. The definition is also similar to one offered by Lazer et al. (2018) who defined fake news as fabricated information that mimics news media content but lacks news media's editorial norms and processes for accurate and credible ethos of information dissemination. Fake news is created for different purposes and comes in forms such as satire,

parody, and advertising clickbait, as a political propaganda and content manipulator or fabricator (Okon, Musa & Oyesomi, 2021) depending on the purpose of the creator(s).

For respondent "D", fake news "is any false information that is circulated on social media and causes fear and panic among people". This gives the understanding that fake news connotes propaganda, a piece of information projected to achieve specific ideals or objectives. As a form of propaganda, it is usually calculated and targeted at political opponents either to destroy their character or policy or to divert attention from government policy. This is affirmed by Barclay (2018), who states that fake news is a form of propaganda intentionally created to achieve either political, organisational or commercial purposes. The extension of this meaning of low facticity of fake news is given by (McGonagle, 2017, Posetti & Matthews, 2018, Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019) which buttresses the point that fake news is widely understood as any information which is either fabricated, concocted, twisted or maliciously created to misinform, mislead and wrongly influence people.

Respondent "E" defined fake news as "Fake news is any information or broadcast content on social or mainstream media that is not factual" and this buttresses the earlier descriptions of fake news as any publication that lacks facts and authenticity and truthfulness. Fake news is believed to have three life cycles. The disinformation message is first created by a person or group of persons with specific intent. At the publication stage, the fake news is released into the system and this is mostly done through social media platforms. These platforms are linked to the creators who equally have friends and other followers on social media. The propagation stage is where social media users can either share the fake news, like it, or do nothing at all to it; or where it can be detected at this stage and stopped from being spread to other users or to the mainstream media (Jarrahi & Safari, 2022).

5.2 RQ1: What are the economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana?

Respondents were unequivocal that fake news is produced with several motives in mind. Some of these motives could be economic, political, social or sometimes intended to destroy competitors. These identified themes are highlighted further to mean that the main motives are mostly known to the producers of the fake news.

5.2.1 Economic motives of fake news

Respondent "C" indicates that fake news is produced by people who are interested in peddling falsehood to make money. The driving force therefore is material motivation. "We live in an era where what is trending is what people want to read or hear and so people produce fake news in order to trend so they can make some money". This implies that fake news is intentionally created just as to attract traffic on their websites and other social media outlets and to achieve that, headlines are usually sensationalised to elicit audience readership or clicks. A number of scholars confirm the economic motives of fake news (Dahlberg, 2015, Morgan, 2018, Bakir & McStay, 2018, Croteau & Hyones, 2019, Wasserman, 2020, Okon, et al. 2021). They are of the view that there is extensive economic capital from fake news. The economic capital of fake news must be seen from different perspectives. The tangible gains in material terms and the intangible aspect in the form of ideological selling and advertising. Bakir and McStay (2018) link this economic commodity of fake news dissemination on Facebook to 2010 when it introduced Edgerank as algorithm newsfeed. This newsfeed tracks what users engage in on the platform such as what they like, comment, share, view and click. The proliferation of fake news is meant for political and economic purposes in the digital ecology. Digital media is now gaining hugely from advertising revenue with Facebook, Google, Yahoo and Twitter all profiting through integration of news into their offerings. As these platforms thrive for immediacy in news delivery, they favour fake news proliferation in the public sphere as a common practice (Bakir & McStay, 2018).

As a result of the digital environment, some individuals have taken advantage of social media to make economic living out of the digital behavioural advertising. This group profits from fake news through clickbaits ((Bakir & McStay, 2018, Wasserman, 2020). This is done by creating a web content to attract online advertising revenue relying on sensational headlines and eye-catching pictures to get click-through, shares, comments and likes. The more people read on their websites, the more money they make from advertisers.

> Some people have some news outlets maybe a website or portals and other ways of using social media to achieve their agenda. So they come out with it, post it to other social media outlets and once it keeps on going round, there are people who are very gullible, they don't have time to do checks and balances to check whether it is fake or genuine and the more it spreads, the more it attracts other people and people who don't check facts at the end of

the day tend to believe whatever they read because at the end of the day it is going round and maybe people are not questioning it. (Respondent B).

These sensationalists achieve this at the expense of truth and accuracy. A typical example of how individuals make money from fake news is the use of fake news websites by undergraduate computer science teenagers in Vele, Macedonia in 2016. The pro-Trump websites they created, generated several fake news stories which attracted large audience and in return, they gained substantially in a form of money to put them in a financial footing (Bakir and McStay, 2018, Croteau & Hyones, 2019). Similar other profit-making fake news websites also proliferate in health and well-being sites, sites to praise celebrities and sites promising blockbuster movies which indicates a widespread practice of the economic motives of fake news.

Mills et al. (2019) indicate that each of the over 100 websites created at Veles, Macedonia leading to the 2016 US elections made as much as $2,500 revenue daily from ads. This was achieved with the primary driver being advertising revenue (Mills et al. 2019). This is based on the logic that fake websites can be created by individuals and use Google Ads in a form of programmatic advertisement to encourage chasing of traffic using intermediaries. Aside raking profit through adverts, another strategy used by fake news websites is to seed their content on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to attract traffic back to their sites using sensational stories to ensure visibility. This practice as indicated by respondents, is common among fake news creators in Ghana who use sensational and fabricated headlines to attract traffic.

The economic gains derived from the dissemination of fake news fits into Fuchs (2018) argument that there is capitalist intent in the production and dissemination of fake news. This fits into the description of respondent "E" who says, "So they may tell you a certain rice imported from Vietnam contains rubber or is made of plastics etcetera or a certain drug has metal pins in them just because of economic purposes". If people rely on fake news to not only remain afloat in the digital space but to boost their profit margins or make money, then there is obviously a capitalist orientation and gains associated with the production and distribution of fake news and in particular the capitalists who own and control the economic power of the media in Ghana. This can well be grounded in the political economy theory of the media. McQuail and Deuze's (2020) perspective of political economy is that of a critical communication approach that focuses primarily on the relationship between the economic structures and the dynamics of media industries as well as the ideological content of the media. This implies that the media, and the economic and political

systems work together in a common relationship where inter-dependence is expected. In such a situation, the media's tendency or temptation to grow vested interests is high. As the media's interest grows economically over public service, its independence and critical role in society will reduce thereby making them fail to uplift the marginalised voices in society. McQuail and Deuze (2020) submit that the political economy of the media's approach focuses on an economic activity that leads to the media commodity and indeed fake news has commoditised media messages making the media struggling to remain relevant in society.

5.2.2 Political motives of fake news

Fake news and politics are closely related. Political communication has remained a significant part of politics and in contemporary global politics, the use of diverse strategies such as social and mainstream media campaigns is a critical component of the strategies. What is also becoming a part of this enterprise is the use of slant, fabricated and fake messages to woo voters. Posetti and Matthews (2018) indicate that fake news has always been a part of politics and cited the use of political fakes in the case of Antony and Cleopatra in Roman times where Octavian spread negative information to destroy Antony as a clear case of propaganda which can be referred to as fake news. In relation to this, respondent "A" indicates that "there are always political motives. Sometimes political opponents of the government will always as much as possible try to produce fake news that will fit into their political campaigns". In various democracies across the world, fake news is being used significantly as a political cog. Yerlikaya (2020) elaborates that fake news was hugely used to project Donald Trump over his contenders in the 2016 US elections. Many scholars have even argued that Trump would not have won that election but for fake news. "Today, social media tools, which have important effects in shaping political processes, have become widely used for disinformation and propaganda" (Yerlikaya, 2020:184). This implies that creators of these manipulations use strategies that manipulate the minds of voters towards the direction of the manipulators. Respondent "E" states,

> I think even going way back into the 2016 elections, we had perceived that the current government signed into or outsourced a PR agency that used either algorithms or certain set of information from the local players in the political landscape, from the 2016 to 2020 to make people believe certain invectives, innuendoes and certain descriptions of key individuals in the then opposition political parties for the targeted voter population to believe it and so I believed it's been used widely particularly if you look at the tagging of

the main opposition leader as incompetent, it was consistently used and it was a trending slogan in social media and then into mainstream media and became a well publicised phrase or adjective for the description of the opposition leader or the performance of his government at the time which was also replicated in the 2020 elections.

Croteau and Hoynes (2019) also affirm the power of fake news in politics and the larger effect on democracy. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) observe that fake news has a high influence on politics and on voters comparable to one television commercial ad. This implies that the production and dissemination of fake news has a positive outcome for politicians who could utilise it for their advantage.

Respondent "C" raised concerns about the ownership structure of media organisations in Ghana and that some of the media owners influence fake news publication. He states,

> Some of these media outlets are owned by politicians who may want to do their bidding. They channel stories that may hurt their political opponents in order to gain advantage over them. There are media outlets like that used to champion political advantage. The *Daily Guide* and the *Enquirer* are guilty of that and other papers affiliated to the National Democratic Congress. Both the NDC and the NPP have media affiliated to them and these media houses are often used to spread fake news.

Some media institutions in Ghana are much polarised because of their political and ideological stands. Their ownership structures have often come up for questioning by media lovers and some civil society organisations. They are either owned by or are affiliated to bigwigs of the NDC or the NPP- the two major political parties in Ghana. As political tools, these affiliated media institutions are used to sometimes peddle falsehood and disinformation in order to discredit their opponents. These arguments are in sync with political economy theory advanced by (Wasko, 2014, Murdock, 2016, Fuchs, 2018,). In contemporary times, the variants of Marx's inspired version of the critical political economy of the media where class struggle is the basis of the analysis, indicates that there is a direct link between the economic structures, ownership of media and the production content. The political economy of the media approach always sees the legitimacy in their stand on class struggles by looking at the concentration of media in the hands of a small capitalist class, or entrepreneurs who do not only control the capital flows in media organisations but the content as well.

The proliferation of fake news in mainstream media has a correlation with media ownership. On this score, the media in Ghana has direct and indirect relationships and affiliations with political and partisan groups and individuals. Most media in Ghana are either owned by or have vested interest and concentration of power in political personas and ideologies (Geopoll, 2017). There is no wonder that the political interest rather than the public interest would override the content of the public sphere of the media in Ghana. The Geopoll report which also named the faces behind most of the print, TV, radio and online media organisations in Ghana raised concerns about the objectivity and diversity of media content. This explains why some people can manufacture false content to either destroy or tarnish the image of their rivals in politics.

5.2.3 Fake news is manufactured to destroy competitors

An interesting finding from this study indicates that fake news is used to fight competition either in business, politics or social life. People tend to use negative propaganda and fake news to destroy, ridicule and tarnish the operation or personality of their opponents. Respondent "B" says, "If we want to prove ethnic superiority over others, our festivals…..I may want to undermine other opponents in social status by producing some fake news to say my culture is richer than other people's culture. So, all these are done even in chieftaincy". This new development is related to brand marketing where fake news can either be used to promote or destroy brands. The side effects of fake news to brand marketing however could be severe including the fact that it could create doubts over prior knowledge and create disbelief about a product or service. It could tarnish the corporate identity and reputation of companies and consequently financial difficulties for firms. This is based on the principle that people create and share fake news based on prior beliefs (Domenico et al., 2021) which affects brand marketing negatively. This is done to change consumers' mind against a firm as was the case of Pepsi, McDonald and Coca Cola companies that suffered in the past from smear campaigning through fake news. Fake news will therefore affect firms' products and consumers' knowledge and attitude leading to reputational damage and boycotts. Fake news does not only affect consumers and firms but the society in general. Firms must therefore invest in strategies that will lead to positive outcomes for their firms (Morgan, 2018, Domenico et al. 2021).

Visentin et al. (2019) identified advertisement of big brands in automated platforms as one major reason fake news is continuing to enjoy patronage, stressing that the trend will proliferate as the

Internet continues to replace the traditional sources of news such as radio, television and newspapers. Fake news, they postulate, also presents negative consequences for brand marketing because it influences brand trust, brand attitude and behavioural attitudes towards a brand and other consequences such as purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth referrals. These reasons make it possible for competitors to indulge in fake news in order to destroy other brands and in the process, promote their brands.

In the instance of politics, fake news is used to destroy political opponents in order to beat competition. Examples of such negative competition abound in African politics. Respondent "C" remarks,

> We saw how fake news was used in the 2020 general election of this country where the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Parties used fake news to undo each other in the heat of the election campaigns. The flagbearer of the NDC was projected as a womanizer while the NPP candidate was projected as a corrupt leader who receives bribes for favours.

On the African continent, Kenya's 2017 elections readily come to mind on how fake news can be used to fuel negative competition. In the 2017 elections in Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga were the contending parties. Maweu (2019) indicates that the main contenders used explicit propaganda, fueled with hate speech and fake news against each other and this was extended to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp as well as print and broadcast media which were highly used to propagate fake news by the Raila's and Kenyatta's camps. This was in an attempt to sway public opinion for votes. In one instance, a photoshopped video of the BBC Africa and CNN emerged close to the 2017 elections creating the impression that Uhuru Kenyatta was in the lead. The videos were subsequently identified as fake and were not originated from the two organisations. Again, there was also a 90-s video circulated to depict Raila Odinga as a violent and tribal bigot who would plunge Kenya into war once he becomes president of that country. Although internet technologies have given democratic participation to minority groups to break the monopoly of traditional media, it is equally affecting election integrity negatively (Maweu, 2019, Yerlikaya, 2020).

5.2.4 Fake news interferes with scientific facts

Scientific discovery is usually held in high esteem and seen by academics and non-academics as critical in planning and implementation of local and global policies. As fake news permeates all sectors, the scientific community is not left out. Respondent "A" opined that "fake news contributed to the virus hesitancy cases in Ghana. A number of fake news was indiscriminately thrown about when new vaccines were discovered. Each manufacturer tried to undermine the other's vaccines". Indeed if there was a time in history that fake news has affected the world, then it could be at the peak of the Covid-19. This makes Sanny and Selormey's (2020) Afrobarometer report very relevant to this study. They revealed that Ghana experienced its share of fake news reports about COVID-19 which has created and is creating a series of misunderstandings, and confusion intended to undermine efforts at educating the public about the pandemic.

From conspiracy theories to disinformation and misinformation about the virus, fake news was all over the globe confusing people about the facts of the disease. When the WHO announced the vaccination and the need for people to vaccinate, another round of conspiracy theories emerged to create doubts in the minds of people. While some scientists condemned specific vaccines, others promoted the other. Some scientists specifically condemned some vaccines in order to promote theirs and when fact checking was done, it became obvious that most of the information disseminated turned out to be false.

"So in Ghana during the peak of Covid-19, media houses, both traditional and social media published fake news stories including conspiracy theories. The traditional media carried most of these fake news stories which appeared in social media until we had authorities come to refute these things", respondent "D", indicates. Schlesinger (2020) appears right when he indicates that the post public sphere is mutable given the fact that, in crisis situations such as the COVID-19, mainstream media and public service media are a source of solidarity in educating and disputing conspiracy theories but ironically, the public sphere was used to disseminate misinformation that ended up confusing a large populace. In the complex happenings, the public sphere is disrupted in a volatility of communication ecology creating a new order of citizen-media-political arrangements. This is exacerbated by economic difficulties, hostilities and generally creating social problems facing democratic capitalist countries. Analysts are turning their lenses on a new form

of liberal democracy minus a public sphere since it obscures basic economic and social inequalities (Fenton, 2018, Schlesinger, 2020).

In the structural changes, there are remarkable changes to public sphere and in this case, Fenton recommends a new theory capable of addressing the current democratic communication meltdown but Schlesinger (2020) maintains that structural changes have always affected the public sphere resulting in reformulations, and that "at any given moment, political, economic and technological conditions define its scope. In short, the post public sphere is part of a developmental history" (Schlesinger, 2020:1554). Public sphere must therefore be sanitised to disseminate useful and educative messages to citizens.

Some studies have confirmed the sporadic rate at which fake news was released to confuse and mislead people in Ghana. One such study is by Ayoung, Baada and Bugre (2022) who found that the country was seriously hit with Covid-19 and election related fake news causing devastating effects more than the disease itself (Ayoung, et al. 2022). "And I will still go and use covid-19 as an example because it is during this period that we recorded a number of incidents and that was when fake news became actually very common in Ghana. So there were so many stories out there and journalists, most of them were not doing their fact checking", respondent "D" indicated. This makes the fight against fake news a daunting task given the plethora of digital information technologies used in its production and dissemination. "Fake news is even more dangerous for academic institutions since it can compromise and reduce the integrity of scholarly work if care is not taken", (Ayoung, et al. 2022:04).

5.3 RQ2: How are the 4th industrial revolution technologies aiding the production and dissemination of fake news and its economic ramifications in Ghana?

The study found that technology played significant roles in the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana to the extent that anyone with a mobile phone and an internet connectivity can produce and indiscriminately distribute any fake news for mass consumption. This singular act of people producing and disseminating anything similar to a piece of journalism is creating credibility challenges for journalists. Themes emerging from this specific research question include; technology drives fake news, social media must be censored, fake news affecting credibility of journalism and mainstream media also propagates fake news.

5.3.1 Technology drives fake news

Respondent "B" says, "The new media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Tiktok, YouTube are responsible for the spread of fake news in Ghana". Other respondents also expressed similar views which indicates an unanimous view that social media indeed lead in the spread of fake news. They further claimed that some fake news is not spread by humans but is engineered by technologies such as robots with the aid of artificial intelligence. Reasons given for this state of affairs is not strange. Social media is largely unregulated and gives room for everyone with access to a smart phone and the internet to easily produce and disseminate any form of information without restrictions. Once this message is let loose, it receives unlimited access and multiple shares within a twinkle of an eye. Social media is a common feature of the 21st century media. Social media is simply any social network service such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, among others that provide people the opportunity to socially interact from person-to-person on the Internet (Lule, 2014, Dominick, 2014). These platforms allow unprecedented volume of personal and informal communication in real time from anywhere in the world. This allows users to always be in touch with friends all over the world and keep conversations as casual as possible. News on social media can be instantaneously delivered making news organisations to harness bloggers as sources of real-time news. This form of crowdsourcing does not give much depth to the news thus throwing a bigger challenge to the traditional sources of news. Social media presents an incommodious task for users to participate in activities online, converse or comment on someone's post, create and share post on sites of individual choice, collaborate in creating content with other members and link up with friends and those with similar interest. In this process, any fake news that gets through, flies like bush fire.

Respondent "A" indicates that technology is at the core of fake news dissemination saying, "I do know that technology plays a key role especially using artificial intelligence, using coding forms part of a broader context of using artificial intelligence in undertaking this fake news". This scenario is akin to scholars' view of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) otherwise known as industry 4.0. This era, also refers to the "smart factory" or a virtual copy of the physical and decentralised worlds where decisions can be made by technology instead of humans (Morrar, Arman and Mousa, 2017). It can also be described as a situation where the physical systems relate and communicate with one another in relations with humans in real-time and enabled by artificial intelligence. There is a growing debate about the global impact of industry 4.0 because of the

digital revolution, smart knowledge and systems and the Internet of things that are overwhelming the entire universe. Virtually every field is experiencing new changes in terms of technological changes and other transformations, a characteristic most scholars admit is extraordinary in the evolution of human society.

As to whether this state of affairs should be allowed to simmer or be integrated with human specialists such as journalists, respondent "E" indicates that "traditional media channels are mostly managed by very experienced editors and journalists who will not let anything go without verifying the source and the authenticity of such information". This is the case because of the rigorous gate keeping processes in the mainstream media making it difficult to use such channels for disseminating fake news. Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019) contend that the use of mobile devices in journalism has made the process of news production faster and less costly as news could be produced in no time in contemporary times noting that events far away could be watched via the internet and processed into news without the journalist being necessarily present physically. They also affirmed that the use of mobile devices in taking photos and videos for news production has maximised the unauthenticity of incidents and news content leading to fake news dissemination.

Arguing from the political economic perspective Fuchs, (2018) is of the view that robots, algorithms and other digital technologies should not completely replace human labour in the interest of the capitalist class otherwise several challenges are bound. Some of the challenges relate to privacy issues, data protection and surveillance especially when goods are exchanged with network of internet since technology systems are not faultless. Other concerns raised against 4IR is that when the physical products become networked to the internet, threats of espionage, hacking, cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism become the new security hazards the globe will encounter. Fuchs (2018) cautioned that the risk of technology in capitalism should not be downplayed since computerisation in the past has raised fixed capital costs and impacted profit rates badly in many countries.

Ayentimi and Burgess (2019) posit that 4IR will pose difficulties for some sectors such as production, consumption and employment. It is also predicted to affect geo-political and socio-economic changes in developed and developing economies. It is no surprising that fake news is posing a challenge in the media, information, governance and democratic space as the 4IR wave on. While acknowledging the great contribution and diversity of technology in news production,

Dalgali and Crowston (2018) maintain that such technologies should not be the only determining instrument in news production because of ethical concerns. Algorithms journalism could deal with huge data and process it faster for news to be spread quicker. These are positive indicators for the 4IR technologies but "violations of transparency, verification, privacy, bias" (Dalgali & Crowston, 2018:05) are major ethical concerns that cannot be easily resolved by the use of algorithms. Further worrying about the use of algorithms and 4IR in journalism is the concern about who should be held responsible over a news item that goes bad. It must be noted that most of these stories produced by robots, lack bylines therefore who to hold responsible becomes quite cumbersome. Since robotics and artificial intelligence journalism is a new development in the journalism profession, their usage must be relooked at to reduce fake news dissemination.

Other varied views expressed by respondents suggest that although social media coupled with technology is a faster means to spread fake news, the platforms could also be used to clamp down on the dissemination of fake news in society. They argued that in the past when such technologies were non-existent, people gave a lot of stories through face-to-face verbal interactions but now technology makes us to easily communicate and converge in a virtual community to have similar interactions. However, this community is now polluted to the extent that almost everyone is grappling with its challenge in a form of fake news. They argued further that the same technology which brought this disinformation should be used to identify fake news and flag it immediately it is detected. This will prevent fake news from being shared and multiplied in society.

5.3.2 Social media must be censored/regulated

There were other respondents who think freedom of expression has significantly contributed to the spark of fake news. They were of the view that the democratic public sphere which permits everyone to freely express him/herself is creating confusion in what is described as echo-chambers. "Those days in an authoritarian government, censorship was one of the major tools used by governments to ensure that no fake news was allowed", respondent "B" retorted. A number of people are of the view that free speech and to some extent free expression on social media should be censored. In other words, argument for regulation of social media is becoming a common and simplistic solution towards mitigating fake news in society especially in some neighbouring countries where new legislations have already taken place. In Ghana, our legal system though does not have elaborate laws to deal with fake news publications generally; it is still punishable under

various laws. For instance, the Electronic Communication Act of 2008 (Act 775), section 76 makes fake news publications punishable. It states that "A person who by means of electronic communication service, knowingly sends a communication which is false or misleading and likely to prejudice the efficiency of life saving service or to endanger the safety of any person,…commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of not more than thirty six thousand Ghana cedis or to a term of imprisonment of not more than five years or both". Aside this, there also exist other obnoxious and archaic laws such as "causing fear and panic" often used to threaten dissenting opinions and critical voice and journalists in the country.

The respondents are of the opinion that because Ghana does not have strict laws censoring speech, it is empowering some social media users to use such platforms as major channels to disseminate fake news. They described the absence of a law to regulate and control social media as counterproductive as such a law will curb fake news dissemination (Morgan, 2018, Yerlikaya, 2020). This assertion is however contrary to the position of McGonagle (2017), who holds the view that fake news aids participation in public debate by citizens in a democratic state. It must be noted that mainstream media should not be the only means through which individuals and minority groups are able to participate and engage in public debates. As this engagement continue, divergent ideas are brought onboard leading to opinion formation. Chambers (2020) avers that democracy is not entirely about truth tracking but features such as deliberative or discursive perspectives where open debate, critical public sphere, an independent, active and accessible free press complements the process. This pragmatic view of truth-tracking (testing of truth claims) in a democracy makes it impossible to rule out the potential role of fake news in a democratic society. Fake news is therefore a necessary evil for the promotion of divergent views in the public sphere and of course the public sphere of Ghana.

Johannessen and Flak (2016) see public sphere as a platform, an open space or domain for the expression of public opinion in a given social life. It can also be an open space where individuals or citizens constructively debate, interact and share ideas over public policy and programmes. In this case, public sphere becomes a layer that mediates between the government and the citizen in arriving at the utmost decision for public interest. As a result of the interactive exchanges between citizens, civil society and the state, it ensures maintenance of social balance and stability. The question as to whether social media as a public sphere should be censored demands a multi-million

responses. One of such great response is that of Fenton (2018), who thinks public sphere of liberal democratic societies have failed and that there is need for new theoretical insights to address the current predicaments, stressing that the interest of the elite now prevails over that of the masses as it is happening in France, US and the UK. These are classic democratic countries with established liberal democratic systems yet are in favour of censoring social media because these technologies have rather caused troubles and widen the inequality in access to the public sphere through algorithmic filtering (Steward & Hartmann, 2020).

5.3.3 Fake news affecting credibility of journalism

Fake news is infecting journalism with a cancerous tumor to the extent that respondents felt the value of the profession may become irrelevant in the very near future. Respondent "A" says "we have confused our audiences and listeners and as it stands now people do not know which is fake news and which is genuine news". The stark reality is that journalism and journalists' credibility have grossly been affected ever since fake news dominated the public sphere. The effect is so great to the extent that it is delegitimising journalism as the fourth estate (Vu and Saldaña, 2021) and as a result, some journalists have started developing new strategies of redeeming trust and credibility from audiences in the wake of the destructive effects of fake news. The focus of journalists has shifted from being accountable to being more transparent with the news. Revealing the process in which news is produced, created, gathered and disseminated is very imperative in making the audience believe and trust the authenticity of the news. Journalists are encouraged to use both disclosure and participatory transparency in dealing with fake news. This implies providing adequate news production and involving the audience in news production respectively (Vu and Saldaña, 2021).

The level of trust in the media is declining because people capitalise on the free expression in democratic societies to disseminate fake news and propaganda deliberately to sow doubts in people's mind. For instance the analysis of the effects of misinformation in American democracy in recent times proves a damning effect of fake news. Scholars argued that traditional journalism was marginalised in the US during the Trump administration leading to series of spin operations on social media full of misinformation claiming Pope Francis had endorsed Trump. This has led scholars to begin asking whether democracy could survive the wave of distortions in the information relay (Morgan, 2018, Croteau & Hoynes, 2019).

Franklin (2014) posits that journalism is increasingly facing threats in the era of the digital media causing many media organisations to fold up while others are finding innovative means of survival. These risks are increasing as fake news continues to strive for space in the social and mainstream media and in the process, creating poor quality and low adherence to ethical standards in journalism. This is made worse in situations where some traditional media (mainstream media) due to non-adherence to professional standards or weak journalism, end up producing similar misinformation content as would have been done by fake news generators. These errors, mostly arise as a result of poor research, sloppy verifications and partisan bias on the part of journalists and media houses (UNESCO, 2018). Nounkeu (2020) avers that most news stories on social media lack the basic elements of reliability and verifiability associated with journalistic pieces. This goes to further confirm the belief that propagation of fake news is backed by financial or political interests.

Even though credible media organisations are doing a lot in curbing fake news as indicated by respondent "D", who states that "in my media house, you won't find us publishing fake news because when you do that particularly when it is affecting a company, an individual or an organisation and if there is a law suit, you will be affected". A number of people believe citizen journalism plays a part in the spread of fake news. Nah and Yamamoto (2020) emphasise that citizens are not only consumers of news nor regarded only as audience of news but can also be considered as producers of content for which reason their role in shaping society is cardinal. The participation of citizens in journalism is multidimensional as it includes participating in a discussion in the media to writing and submitting blogs, videos and news stories. Domenico et al. (2020) indicate that fake news dissemination starts when creators develop fake profiles on social media and use such identities to spread fake news or falsehood online. This fake news which is uploaded online is then shared and re-shared by other users through social behavioural processes influenced by the online community members.

5.3.4 Mainstream media also propagate fake news

With the aid of technology, social media is leading the inter-media agenda setting process in a form of fake news. Fake news is not only a feature of social media but it sometimes slips through mainstream media and in some instances, it is propagated to achieve mischievous purposes by the producers. Respondent "E" indicates that,

So in Ghana during the epidemic period, that was when it was really at its peak. Media houses, both traditional and social media. The traditional media carried most of these fake news stories in the social media until we had authorities come to refute these things. So a lot of media organisations are doing diligent work to ensure that whatever they publish out there is without any scheming to malign anybody, any company or organisation but there are others as I told you because of their personal interest, their personal benefits they turn to gain, they will go ahead to spread it come what may and that is why sometimes a lot of them are taken to the court to justify what they have put out there.

The findings of Matu et al. (2020) in Kenya confirms the devastating influence of fake news on editors and journalists in Kenyan television. This is creating a number of challenges including the loss of viewers to competitor TV stations, lack of authoritative contacts to confirm authenticity of news and sources who gave fake news for personal, business and economic benefits. Other challenges were the ability of fake news to camouflage real news, and speed of fake news making it difficult to control. These, Matu et al. attribute to live reporting, uncooperative sources, inexperienced correspondents and interns and social media all of which posed as challenges for journalists in Kenya. Wasserman (2020) believes fake news in the African context, is a complex and imprecise concept which comes in different forms such as a causation directed at mainstream media organisations to paid Twitter accounts, spoof websites and satirical pieces which make analysis of the term cumbersome.

Chadwick et al. (2018) indicate that tabloid newspapers affect civic life negatively through social media in the United Kingdom because they provide fertile resources for misinformation and disinformation to take place. They indicate that users who are politically like-minded are more likely to promote and share disinformation without being challenged because of the hemophilic network such people share. This, overtime, could decrease people's awareness to pay extra care for credible news in favour of fake news or fabricated news content which could undermine civic culture. They state that "At the systematic level, tabloid newspaper logics are now integrating with social media logics and enabling people to spread misinformation and disinformation" (Chadwick et al. 2018:4271). This situation of sharing tabloid content on social media could lead to the sharing of messages in the cycle of social media users to promote fake news.

When respondents were pushed to mentioned names of popular news media guilty of fake news production and circulation, they were hesitant and rather stated,

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Yes, I don't have any organisation in mind as we talk now but somebody put out a story for example if I'm mentioned in a story or in a news item and somebody wants to get the facts, the basic thing to do in journalism ethically, they need to contact me to get my side of the story, that is very basic. You contact whoever is affected and then whoever is alleging if you have the name and the contacts, it is incumbent on whoever is going to publish that story to ensure they get in touch with that person to find out whether he got true facts or evidence as he is claiming, if you are a media house and you are not able to go through these basic things, then I think you are getting it wrong if you go ahead without cross-checking.

The credibility challenges on mainstream media are so high that even well-established media organisations such as the CNN and Fox News are labeled as peddlers of fake news. Linden, Panagopoulos and Roozenbeek (2020) found in a study that there is an ideological asymmetry of fake news stressing that 75 percent of conservatives think CNN is fake news while 59 percent of liberals on the other hand suggest Fox News is fake news. This finding further strengthens the widely held evidence that conservative thinkers are more likely than liberals to label mainstream media as reporting fake news. This simply means that conservatives trust the media less compared to liberals and this suggests that although there may be trust issues with news produced from mainstream media, people generally have different levels of trust and credibility in mainstream media. Tsfati et al. (2020) posit that mainstream media's coverage of fake news events makes the public to perceive the mainstream media as tools for propagating fake news. This is so because mainstream media is sometimes compelled to cover fake news stories because they carry enormous news value and again, ideological tendencies cannot also be ruled out of the equation why contents of mainstream media is perceived to be fake news thereby destroying its credibility.

The rule of the thump in ensuring credibility and maintaining trust as suggested by respondents is for the mainstream media to be accountable for whatever they publish stressing that if a media outfit for example decides to publish a story, they should be more ethically right and do more attributions and cross-checking to reduce incidents of doubts and of fake news.

5.4 RQ3. How are government regulatory policies impeding or promoting fake news production in Ghana?

It appears the Government of Ghana is concerned about the proliferation of fake news in the mainstream and social media and attempts are being made to curb the phenomenon, though none of the respondents could remember any specific policy being implemented to curb fake news dissemination. A number of the respondents confirmed either participating in training workshops or confirmed being aware of such trainings aimed at curbing fake news menace. They indicated that the government through the Ministry of National Security has organised a series of workshops for organisations and individuals in the media fraternity to learn about how to control fake news. Some of these training sessions were mostly in the capital of Accra, and focused on the ability of journalists and news editors to detect falsehood and fake news. There is also a moral philosophical belief among some journalists in the country that peddling falsehood is not only ethically wrong but against their spiritual teachings, "Thou shall not lie". Aside these general views, some themes emerged from this research question and are discussed below.

5.4.1 Arrest, detentions and gagging media in Ghana

There was public uproar and civil society spearheaded campaigns to stop government from intimidating and harassing journalists in Ghana over some publications the government described as fake news. Although respondent "B" retorted that, "There are laws on fake news, but I am yet to abreast myself with the laws regulating fake news, there may be laws but I can't remember any". Between 2020 and April, 2022, a number of journalists have been arrested in relation to publication of fake news. These arrests, detention and prosecution of the journalists and other citizens over the publication and dissemination of fake news have dominated public discourse for some time now. This is generating renewed thinking among liberal thinkers who wonder whether the country is in reverse gear on freedom of expression after the law criminalizing speech was repealed in 2001. A few of these incidents readily come to mind. In November 2021, Nhyiraba Paa Kwesi Simpson, a journalist with a Takoradi-based Connect FM was arrested in connection with publication of fake news. Again, Kwabena Bobbie Ansah, a journalist with an Accra-based Power FM was also arrested in February, 2022 for publication of false information. Other citizens arrested for similar offences include Mensah Thompson, a civil activist and Kwame Baffoe, a politician who were also arrested in February, 2022 for publication of false information (Myjoyonline, 2022). All these

arrests, detentions and prosecutions were in relation to the country's Electronic Communications Act (Act 775, section 76, of 2008) and the criminal offences act of 1960.

These arrests, detentions prosecution of some of these citizens are generating serious debate over the universal law on the freedom of expression. A number of civil rights organisations and individuals have condemned such acts which they describe as reintroduction of criminalization of speech. They are of the view that those happenings were a draw-back to the successes chalked in press freedom in the country stressing that the criminal libel laws were repealed two decades ago and that it is retrogressive to reintroduce such obnoxious laws. One of such persons who is against the criminalization of speech is a communication scholar, Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo, who believes the security agencies must not be involved in such cases and caution journalists to be mindful of their professional conduct arguing that such conducts are irresponsible journalism and outright false publications (Myjoyonline, 2022).

Despite these arrests and detentions, article 21(a) of the 1992 Constitution is explicit on fundamental human rights of citizens. It states that all persons shall have "freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media". This implies that the freedom to speak in Ghana has been extended to include people's right to freely express themselves in the media of mass communication and these rights can only be restricted on the guise of national security or at emergencies but none of these applied to the aforementioned situations. These developments are contributing to the drawback of the country's press freedom ratings. A report by Reporters Without Borders (RFS, 2022) indicates that Ghana maintained its 30th position in 2020 and 2021 but 60th in 2022 world press freedom index. These positions are among the worst performance of the country in almost a decade now. Freedom House has equally expressed misgivings about the country's freedom report in recent years. These are indications that the country's respect for fundamental human rights and the rights of citizens to freely express themselves is being violated gradually.

5.4.2 Legislating social media amounts to obstructing free expression

A number of people are advocating for legislation to regulate social media in Ghana in order to curb the spate of fake news in the country. The government through its spokesperson, the Minister of Information, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah in October, 2018, equally announced government's long term plans of legislating social media to curtail the production and dissemination of fake news in

Ghana just as some countries, including Kenya, have done. The minister was obviously responding to the surge in fake news publications in the country, but since that pronouncement, little has been done by way of legislating social media. In this regard, respondent "E" remarked,

> I am afraid that we will abuse the law if we enact laws to control fake news. Politicians will abuse it because those laws are going to be enacted by the same politicians and they will abuse it. Mostly when they are in opposition, its better, but when they are in government they are the same people who fight the media and they can use the same law to muffle people from expressing themselves.

Respondents however suggested the need for government's interventions in the area of training courses and programmes on fake news and facilities for fact checking since many of the media organisations lack the resources to undertake it themselves. These training programmes and facilities will give journalists better knowledge on the detection and curbing of fake news effects in the country instead of instituting laws which may infringe on people's rights. The common understanding among the respondents is that, they were all against publication of fake news and will welcome any measure geared towards discouraging people from spreading falsehood and fake news in the system, but legislation should be the last resort.

Fake news legislation is not a new phenomenon in the global community. The United Kingdom, one of the buoyant democracies in the world, published the Online Harms White Paper as a regulatory measure dealing with a range of issues including hosting, sharing and online harms such as disinformation (Theil, 2019). In France, the government in December 2018, passed a law, no. 2018-1202 to 'fight against the manipulation of information'. This law was passed under controversial circumstances given that France already has a range of laws to deal with civil and criminal offences on false information (Theil, 2019, Smith, 2019). The Germany's Network Enforcement Act (the NetzDG) which came into force in January, 2018 also required network providers to remove content that contravenes certain portions of the Criminal Code within a defined period after receipt of complaints (Smith, 2019). These are but a few European countries instituting legislation in an attempt to curtail fake news, misinformation and disinformation in their countries.

Similar developments are taking place in Africa. From 2016 to 2020, notable countries that have enacted and enforced punitive laws on fake news include; Benin, Burkina Faso, Code d'Ivoire,

Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Ugunda. Despite these countries enacting laws prohibiting fake news, the phenomenon of fake news still persists. The South African law on fake news became necessary during the pandemic. During the peak of the Covid-19, the South African government introduced a law making the spread of fake news a prosecutable offence but analysts have already described most of these laws as dead-on-arrival, as they have failed to curb the rate of misinformation in these countries. Most of these are legal regulations (Garbe, Selvik & Lamaire, 2021) which turn to suppress press freedom and the need to focus on content regulation is key.

Ghana therefore needs to learn from the experiences of these countries that have already introduced various laws criminalising online offences and publication of false information since many of these countries have failed to achieve the intended objectives. Among the negative effects of introducing such laws is that, free speech is likely to be stifled in regimes of regulating online communication, the regulator is likely to be overburdened and the authorities may resort to vague standards and selective application of the law with concomitant effect on the rule of law (Theil, 2019). In a country where the rule of law and constitutional due process are respected, legislating and criminalising speech should be the last option but if all attempts fail to curb the situation, legislation should be carefully considered. This could be done in cognisance of human rights protocols and international conventions and treaties signed onto by the country.

5.4.3 Regulations must focus on tech giants

The respondents also made suggestions for the telecommunication companies and other network providers to be surcharged or fined if they allowed their platforms to be used to disseminate fake news. The logic of this proposition is that people who propagate fake news, including some journalists could make counterclaims of infringing on their fundamental rights of free expression if arrested for publishing false information. This appears to be in line with the Germany's Network Enforcement Act (the NetzDG), which is a law strictly applicable to network providers who allow their platforms to be used for fake news. As a result of that law, Facebook and Twitter have deleted or blocked some users who used their platforms to spread unacceptable content including disinformation. These providers are required to remove content that contravenes certain portions of the Criminal Code within a defined period after receipt of complaints, otherwise they face sanctions in the form of charges (Smith, 2019). Similar regulatory regimes could be introduced in

Ghana to fine these tech giants who allow their platforms to be used for dissemination of fake news.

Tech companies have great influence and exert power on the public sphere in contemporary times in what is referred to as 'functional sovereignty that must be contested in the ethical, political and legal structures (Creech, 2020). These tech giants exemplified by Facebook, Twitter and Google must be the major focus in relations to regulations on fake news since respondents attributed most of the fake news to be coming from these institutions. It is no wonder that Nigeria government in June 2021, banned Twitter services for about seven months after the Nigerian government accused it of siding with a secessionist group. This singular action demonstrates that tech companies could be made to face the law should they act against the interest of countries, but that can only be achieved if countries insist on the right thing. Arguments for regulation of social media is becoming common, but such appears simplistic solution towards mitigating fake news. Respondents think this argument should rather focus on tech companies since our legal system already has certain laws to deal with fake news publications. For instance, the Electronic Communication Act of 2008 (Act 775), section 76 makes fake news publications punishable.

Whittaker (2019) is of the view that much has changed in the news production and distribution system in the Western media since cable and satellite broadcasting was introduced. In recent years, social media is taking over the primary role of the news influencer while advertising is disrupted by big techs. Technology clearly changes behaviour (Whittaker, 2019:165). Pavlik (2016) on the other hand postulates that algorithm, artificial intelligence (AI) and big data are converging to generate a new digital newsroom with the potential of replacing human journalists. This is meant as a cost cutting measure. It is equally suggestive that they should be a combination of the new technologies with human journalists for efficient news gathering, production and distribution. Respondents blamed proliferation of fake news on algorithm and automated journalism and are seeking for solutions through regulation of network providers' content.

Respondents believe tech companies are given too much room to operate without much restriction or regulation, a situation they claim is contributing to the hikes in fake news on these platforms. They suggest series of negotiations and consultations could be done between government and the tech companies aimed at resolving the dissemination of fake news and other related online offences and at the end, put in place permanent regulations to seal the process. Garbe, Selvik and Lemaire

(2021) contributing to the subject, indicated that a lot of traction on social media platforms has lifted political and social discourse to moderate these platforms particularly in the Global South. As content and legal regulation remain major means of moderating the platforms (Garbe et al. 2021) most countries are adopting a state-centric approach that puts a strain on press freedom and therefore to redirect efforts at content regulation led by the state is crucial for African countries.

5.4.4 Education on fake news should be prioritised

Educating the general population and journalists to decipher fake news from credible and authentic information is the best approach suggested by some of the respondents. Respondent "A" states that "They should educate them to take steps to decipher the truth from the fake ones by ensuring that they don't repost or share whatever they get immediately they receive it to make sure they cross-check and ensure that whatever they are sharing will promote national cohesion and development". This is the position of some scholars (Mare et al. 2019, Mutsvuairo and Bebawi, 2019, Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020) who think in doing so, it reduces the tendency of sharing and re-sharing fake and potential fake news messages.

Mare et al. (2019) found that political propaganda usage among some African countries is very common and had the tendency of influencing voters. Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter were seen as major social media platforms commonly used by political propagandists to disseminate fake news which contributed in marring elections in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. This practice is exacerbated by the poor information literate populace, who just share any information without authenticating whether the information shared is true or not. The literate population in Ghana is 79 percent (Statista, 2022) which makes it possible for the average citizen to be able to detect any false information if given the needed education on the identification of fake news. This education could be led by the media to ensure that the average citizen can easily identify fake news and publicly denounce it to frustrate the intended purpose of the publication. Once its potency begins to be affected, it will be unproductive to produce and disseminate it.

Mutsvuairo and Bebawi (2019) found in a study that none of the journalism schools in Africa had curricula in fake news and that journalism education in Africa and Middle East schools should promote research-led teaching that stimulates a regulatory framework aimed at eradicating fake news. It is also imperative to note that media ownership is located in relation to power, and that of the African media is linked to the global media through commercialization, liberalisation,

privatisation and internationalisation which are all linked to the global political economy. This has liberalised most African media (both print and broadcast media) dictated by capitalist ideologies. These media systems cannot be devoid of colonial dynamics with ties to global capital. "In South Africa, while ownership of print media has moved to black-owned companies, the shareholders are located in big multinational companies ….print media has remained entwined within a global capitalists structure that privileges racialised capital" (Chiumbu and Radebe, 2020:10). Such a theoretical implication must be taken into consideration in journalism education to hinge on the African context instead of focusing on Eurocentric approaches. Journalism schools as they suggest, must rather focus on indigenous press and culture (Mutsvuairo and Bebawi, 2019). The 'gonggong' which is a local channel of communication in most Ghanaian rural communities is strictly obeyed by rural inhabitants because they know it carries serious messages which must be obeyed by all. It is even believed to be the voice of 'God' because the voice of our ancestors is the voice of 'God'. As to what makes people to change and take advantage of public communication and spell falsehood in the media can only be explained on the breakage of the traditional value system and grapping fast the western-centric worldviews. Simply put, fake news cannot thrive on African worldviews as it maybe tabooed.

5.5 RQ4. How do media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication?

In journalism, there are series of processes that information goes through before the final product comes out as news for the audience to read, watch or listen to as a news. This process is simply referred to as gatekeeping process and in this "professional journalists highlight some stories more than others through more prominent placement" (Croteau & Hyones, 2019:440) and through this, journalists decide which stories to publish or disseminate.

5.5.1 Rigorous gatekeeping process required in journalism

Some of the respondents indicated there were very tedious and rigorous gatekeeping processes in their media houses to ensure that every single story passes through several hands before finally being published. As a result, fake news hardly gets published in these well established and credible media houses. Respondent "B" elaborates on the long chain processes of gatekeeping,

> Of course at a media outlet like the *Daily Graphic* where I work, journalists generate stories
> and when they do, they send the stories to the news editor. He checks, edits and verifies

the sources of the story and later we meet at the editorial conference where the news editor reads out the stories and if there are questions to be answered, we ask those questions and if the story is not deemed credible, we don't consider it at all. We ask the reporter to go back and answer those questions and if the reporter is unable to do that, we spike the story. It won't even see the light of day but if a story is credible enough that meets our satisfaction, after editorial conference, the story is given to the sub-desk who will also go through it and then check all the facts; if there are inaccuracies in the story, we call the reporter to verify; if he is not able to answer the questions, then we don't use the story at all. If he is able to fill the gaps, then the story moves from our hands and goes to the proof-reading department where they check the grammar and all that. From there, it comes back to the sub-desk; we give it to the design people, who design the pages; the pages come back to the sub-desk and we make sure the pages contain exactly what is in the story and then from there it goes to the night desk. The night desk will also do their checks, cross the t's and dot the i's before the story is published. So it's very difficult for a story to pass through if it is not credible.

This implies self-regulation is the normative practice in the media as indicated by the respondent. To ensure professional standards, media organisations either abide by the GJA's code of conduct or comply with in-house ethical procedures used as self-regulatory mechanisms (Okon, et al., 2021) in maintaining and regulating ethically acceptable journalistic work in print, broadcast and online media. "Responsible journalism in Ghana would require accountability and the willingness of information producers to build and sustain trust and confidence in the citizenry" (Okon, et al., 2021) in the absence of specific policy or regulations on fake news, self-regulation is the obvious option for journalists in Ghana to tie the tide of the raging fire of fake news consuming mainstream and social media alike. Despite the non-existence of a clearly defined law or policy regulating fake news, the country recently passed the right to information and the cyber security laws, both of which failed to consider misleading, distorted and fabricated information disseminated in the public sphere as a major issue in the digital era.

5.5.2 Media must adhere to ethics

Ethical principles are the cornerstone of good journalism, and to be able to achieve ethically performing journalism, the media must adhere to an established code of conduct by professional

journalists. This is deemed to be one of the surest ways of fighting fake news and respondents agree that all journalists should adhere to the Ghana Journalists Association's (GJA) code of conduct or any other ethical standard in journalism. These ethical principles require journalists to use approved means in obtaining truthful, unbiased and accurate information from sources. "Journalism strives on truth, accurate and unbiased news that is gathered through painstaking investigation", respondent "B" states that journalists should report the truth at all times given the fact that the public has the right to be informed with accurate, balanced and comprehensive information, a view that is in conformity with article 2-6 of the revised code of GJA's ethics which states among others. This is only achieved through adequate enquiries, verification and cross-checking of information. McQuail and Deuze (2020) agree that media ethics should be seen as principles of good conduct for practitioners who should reflect society in the media.

These are but normal ethical procedures in the news media. A number of issues are usually considered while the story changes hands as the gatekeeping process follows the chain. News stories that go through professional hands must be accurate, balanced, objective and factual without reflecting the writer's biases. Every single fact must be cross-checked and double checked to eliminate unsubstantiated allegations and inaccurate facts (Dominick, 2014). These are best practices, which, respondent believes, when adhered to by journalists and media organisations, the war against fake news in the mainstream media would have been won. This is where content regulation is pertinent (Garbe et al. 2021) to this discussion as it will compel technology companies and platforms to be held responsible if social media is misused in a form of abusive content and fake news as being done in other countries.

Though freedom of expression exists as a constitutional right, respondents demand that those who want to express themselves in the mainstream media should do so with facts. "I understand free expression as the ability to come and speak your mind with facts and evidence, ability to speak with facts and figures to back whatever you are saying and not to use falsehood in speaking your mind", respondent "C" remarked and stressed that when people present false claims, they fail to address the issues. The best thing they suggest is for people to come to the press with facts and not allegations without supporting evidence, not falsehood and in particular news makers must also check their facts in order not to misinform and mislead the public since when facts are distorted by news makers, it is likely to be conveyed to the audience. The relevance of responsible

journalism (Mcquail & Deuze, 2019, Okon, et al. 2021) would be better felt if journalists carried out their roles ethically devoid of fake news.

Fact Check Ghana (2022) indicates that a media literate population is a better weapon that will arm citizens to analyse, assess and evaluate information to critically respond to disinformation content. This correlates with respondents' recommendation that citizens have a greater role at debunking fake news whether on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp or any of the social media platforms should be policed by citizens by cross-checking and verifying information. People should not be in too much of a hurry to share with other people without cross-checking. There is the need for the state to find a common ground or use a combined approach to balance the situation where statutory regulation, self-regulation, technological applications and literacy awareness are combined in dealing with the menace of fake news in Ghana (Okon, et al. 2022) in view of the democratic ideologies of the country.

Artificial intelligence has been suggested as one of the means through which fake news could be fought. Stroud (2019) proffers pragmatic ethical theory as a complement to the process. In pragmatic theory, it means the psychological reactions of citizens on these community platforms must be questioning "who judges what fake news is, and what sort of habits form or inform such judgments?" Emphasis must be placed on platforms and their role at exercising responsibility over hateful and harmful speeches on the platforms and maximise autonomy. "The pragmatist ethicist will insist that the factor of the habitual patterns of reaction and judgment in regard to moral matters-serve as a theoretical guide to instantiate falliblism and openness" (Stroud, 2019:11) and this must be combined with digital literacy education through critical inquiry.

5.5.3 Need for Fact-checkers

Most of the journalists indicated that their media organisations do not have sophisticated facilities to enable them do scientific verification of information prior to publication. Most of them rely on the gate keeping processes that exist in their media houses to authenticate stories prior to publication. However, there exist a credible fact-checking organisation in Ghana known as Fact-Check, Ghana, established by the Media Foundation for West Africa. Fact-Check Ghana is a technology driven model with a team made up of experienced journalists and researchers dedicated to countering fake news and misinformation in public discourse by politicians and public figures.

It is part of a civil society movement aimed at projecting objective and responsible public sphere for decent discourse.

The need for media organisations to set up independent professional fact-checking teams as part of their media or affiliated to their media organisations or rely on fact-checkers to debunk fake news is very critical in curbing fake news (Saldaña and Vu, 2021). This is quite clear with the increasing number of fact-checking organisations growing by the day in the global community to a staggering 188 and more still being set up to debunk fake news. Some of these fact checking organisations are set-up by not-for-profit organisations while others are either set-up by governments or by media organisations. With the decreasing financial fortune in the media industry caused partly by fake news and the digital space, it may appear to be an unprofitable venture for a single media organisation to establish a fact-checking unit in the country, but teams of media or the GJA could raise resources to provide professional fact-checking services for the media in the country generally.

Respondent "E" suggested the need for less resourced media houses to be given periodic training in order to identify and flag fake news since most of the media outlets lack the needed resources to carry out such training.

Fake news can easily be detected and identified (Jarrahi and Safari, 2022). Its authenticity can be checked by looking at the evidence presented in the news story. It serves the public interest if the fake news is detected early at the propagation stage before it is spread to a larger group of people. The life cycle of fake news begins at the creation stage to the publication stage and then propagation stage where the falsification will either thrive or go extinct. At the creation stage, one or more authors come together to produce the content for specific reasons. At the publication stage, fake news is injected or disseminated into the public mostly through social media and linked to the users and followers who see it as they are friends to the user. Then propagation point is where users can either share the fake news, like it or do nothing at all to it. This is the stage fake news spreads but it can also be stopped when detected at an early stage and that means the life cycle has been curtailed (Jarrahi & Safari, 2022). This can best be achieved through education on the subject.

Respondents indicate that with a little bit of scientific investigation and much media literacy training, media organisations and individuals who continue to engage in fake news will be fish out and those that may fall foul of the law should be made to face the full rigours of the law. "The

training we had to take journalists through on fake news and after that training, we realized that media houses were now being cautious as to what they carry out in their media houses or the media space. So fake news was reduced to the barest minimum", respondent "D" stated this in response to the significance of media literacy training as plausible solution to fake news. Adjin-Tettey (2022) submit that media literacy training to spot fake news is very imperative in detecting and debunking fake news but such a solution should be complemented by refresher training and retraining to aid long term recall and productivity.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the quantitative data of this thesis. This part of the thesis analyses the questionnaire administered to some journalists in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The respondents were a mix of journalists across different media, randomly sampled in accordance with the methodological procedure spelt out in chapter four (4) of this thesis. This forms the second phase of the study as required by the sequential exploratory mixed method. They responded to a range of open-ended and closed-ended questions relating to fake news and political economy of the media. The results and findings are presented in a form of statistical tables and graphs in the subsequent paragraphs.

This research aimed to better understand the role false news plays in the political economy of Ghana's media landscape. The study sought to explore the economic and political motives for the production of fake news as it relates to the public sphere of Ghana. The research also demonstrated how technologies invented in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era contributes to the circulation of false information in Ghana. Additionally, the study analysed the effects of regulatory laws on the creation of false news in Ghana. At last, the research also looked at the procedures used by the media to verify news items before they are published.

6.1 Background Analysis of Respondents

For the quantitative responses, the research detailed the profile of the participants looking at their sex, age, academic degrees acquired and years of experience in journalism. Table 6.1, presents the summary of the responders' profile analysis.

According to Table 6.1, males accounted for 48.70% (n=112) of the respondents while females made up 47.80% (n=110). However, 3.50% (n=8) of those surveyed would rather not reveal their sexual orientation. From the figures, more men were willing to take part in the survey than women, the proportion of male respondents was somewhat greater than that of female respondents.

The age distribution of the respondents is shown in Table 6.1, where we see that almost half (48.70%) are under the age of 30. Next, between 31 and 40-year-olds made up 39.10% (n=90) of the total population sampled. In addition, there were respondents between the ages of 41 and 50 (n=18, 7.8 percent), 51 and 60 (n=4, 1.70 percent), and 61 and older (n=6, 2.60 percent). The distribution of respondents is reflective of the age structure of the current Ghanaian population and further indicates that journalism in Ghana is mostly practiced by the youthful segment of the population. The different levels of experience by age were seen as beneficial to this study, so a wide range of ages was included and this brings diversity in responses to the research questions.

Table 6.1: Profile Analysis of Respondents

Source: (Field Data, 2022)

In terms of the level of education, 61.70 percent (n=142) constituting the majority were bachelor's degree certificate holders, 21.70 percent (n=20) were master's degree holders. In addition, 12.20 percent (n=28) of the respondents were Diploma Certificate holders. Clearly, the respondents have

Profile	Level	No. Respondents	Percent
Sex	Male	112	48.70%
	Female	110	47.80%
	Do not want to share	8	3.50%
Age	18-30 years	112	48.70%
	31-40 years	90	39.10%
	41-50 years	18	7.80%
	51-60 years	4	1.70%
	Above 61 years	6	2.60%
Education Qualification Attained	Diploma	28	12.20%
	Honours degree	8	3.50%
	Bachelor's Degree	142	61.70%
	Master's Degree	50	21.70%
	PhD	2	0.90%
Years of experience in journalism	1-5 years	120	52.20%
	6-10 years	46	20.00%
	11-15 years	36	15.70%
	16-20 years	12	5.20%
	Above 20 years	16	7.00%

obtained some level of knowledge making it simpler for them to learn and appreciate the subject matter and their participation in the research was valuable.

The survey also detailed the background of the respondents based on their experience in Journalism and evaluated in terms of years as shown in Table 6.1. The majority representing 52.2 percent (n=60) have between 1 and 5 years' experience in journalism while 20 percent (n=46) of the respondents have between 6 and 10 years of experience. Next, 5.2 percent (n=12) and 7.0

percent (n=16) have between 16 and 20 years and more than 20 years respectively. However, 15.7 percent (n=36) have 11 to 15 years' experience in Journalism. Therefore, it is apparent that the respondents have at least a year's experience when it comes to journalism which is useful to this research. The researcher concludes that various experience levels of the respondents produce divergent viewpoints on the subject matter as they would have come across issues of fake news in their years of practice.

6.2 Economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana

Figure 6.1 is a summary of the responses on the causes of false news in Ghana. More than half of the respondents felt that the production and dissemination of false news are driven by economic and political motivations while 15.7% were unsure whether or not persons working in media create false news for economic and political motives. However, 6.7% of respondents said they did not think economic or political motivations were behind the spread of false news in Ghana.

Figure 6.1: Economic and political factors are responsible for fake news publication in Ghana
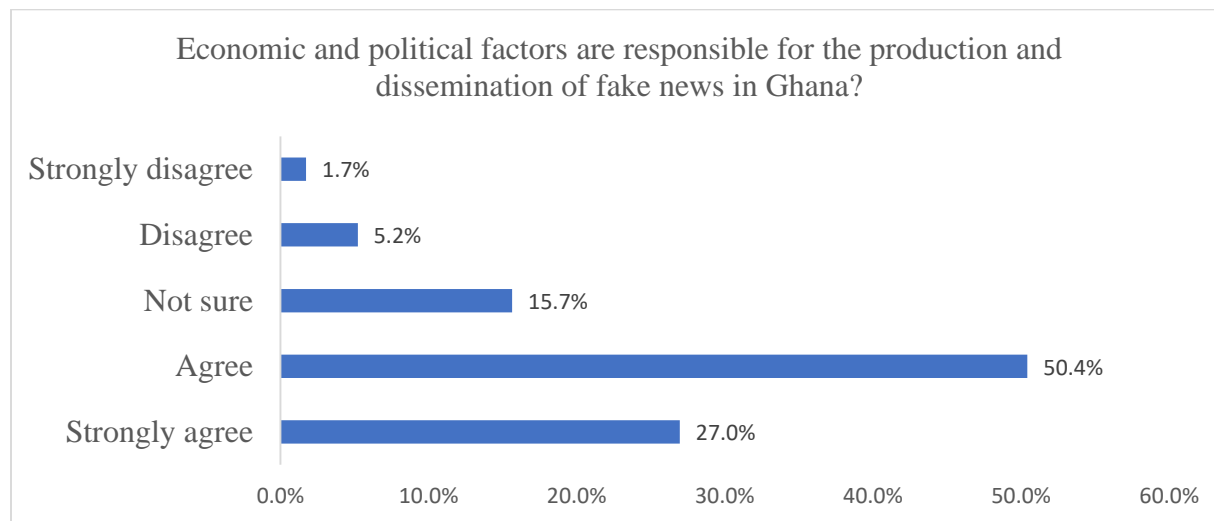
Source: (Field Data, 2022)

As to whether or not any of the respondents had contributed to the spread of disinformation, only 3% (n=8) of respondents admitted that they have produced an article or feature while being aware of its inaccuracy, whereas 97% (n=222) said they have never done so. This implies that some

journalists although fewer, intentionally, publish fake news either for parochial interest or to achieve political and economic gains.

Figure 6.2: Ever written a story/feature knowing it is inaccurate
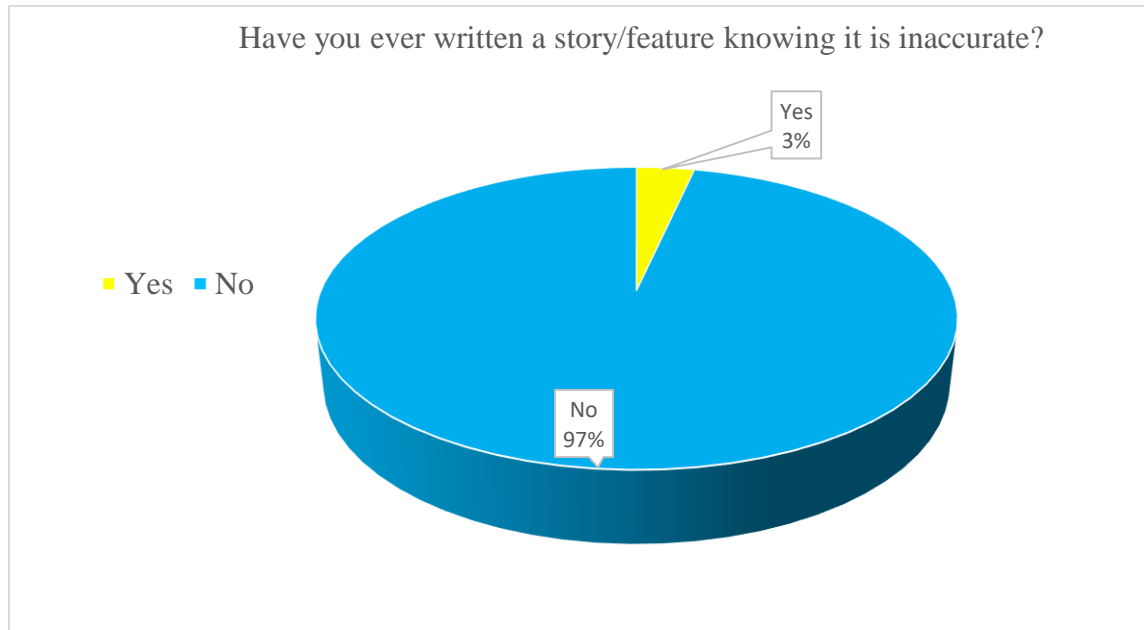
Source: (Field Data, 2022)

According to the survey, 3% of respondents have produced a story or feature knowing it is erroneous due to their inability to complete sufficient cross-checking of facts before publishing. This could also be a form of sloppy journalism or unprofessionalism. According to the results shown in Table 6.2, only 27.83 percent of respondents (n=64) cited being the first to publish as a factor in the reporting of false news, while 72.17 percent of respondents (n=166) disagreed. Also, 63.48 percent (n=146) blamed propaganda or politics for the prevalence of false news stories in the media, while only 36.52 percent (n=84) disagreed. While 53.91% (n=124) of respondents do not think financial incentives play a role in the proliferation of false news, 46.09% (n=106) of respondents think it does. The survey found that 51.3% (n=118) of the respondents blamed unprofessionalism among journalists for the prevalence of false news articles, while 48.7% (n=112) disagreed. The analysis as contained in the data in Table 6.2, shows that majority of news writers, 70.43 percent (n=162) do not believe that trends have a role in the spread of false news in the media, whereas just a third of the respondents (n=68) hold this view.

Table 6.2 Motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana

Statement	Responses	No. Respondents	Percent (%)
If yes, state the reasons for the inaccurate	Not Applicable	222	96.52
	Lack of Accurate Research	8	3.48
First to Publish as a reason accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not first to publish	166	72.17
	Yes, First to Publish	64	27.83
Propaganda/Political as reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not Propaganda/Political	84	36.52
	Yes, Propaganda/Political	146	63.48
Economic benefits as reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not for economic benefits	124	53.91
	Yes, For Economic benefit	106	46.09
Unprofessionalism as reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not unprofessionalism	112	48.7
	Yes, Unprofessionalism	118	51.3
To trend as reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not to trend	162	70.43
	To trend	68	29.57

Source: (Field Data, 2022)

The respondents believed that false information or news stories should not be published on purpose by any news outlet or news service. They indicate that false news is a depravity against mankind, which is propagated through the mainstream and virtual media or social media. Fake news, they indicate, is a complete rejection of all that journalism and the press stands for. Journalism thrives on truth, accuracy and adherence to professional ethical performance and is therefore regrettable that this cancer of fake news would have to dent journalism badly. The respondents believe that

the sponsors, investors, and owners of the media have their own socio-cultural, political, and economic interests at heart, which is why they fund and publish false news. According to the survey, there is a widespread belief among media professionals that some phony stories are published for the sake of personal benefits rather than for economic or political reasons. When people seem to be more important than they really are, they sometimes resort to publishing false news. Publish a narrative with fabricated information to boost ratings and attract readers to media websites, all for the sake of advertisers. Also, the research concludes that hostile government and civic actors have been involved in the production and dissemination of false news, especially around election time. However, there are some who consider the publication of false information as a lucrative business opportunity. Perhaps another contributor is the lack of oversight on the internet. There is no strict monitoring of the internet and policies are non-existent to protect it in Ghana. When the internet was opened to the public in the 1990s, its primary function was to facilitate the dissemination and collection of data for public good. Some individuals now find it more challenging to discover reliable sources of information online because of the proliferation of false news. Over the last several years, the influence of false news has grown exponentially. These fake news websites typically resemble reputable media outlets to fool their readers into thinking they are receiving accurate information.

6.3 How 4th industrial revolution technologies aid the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana

The purpose of this section is to determine the contribution of the 4th industrial revolution technologies to the creation and distribution of false news in Ghana. To that end, the survey participants were first asked about their usage of social media for news. In Figure 6.3, it can be seen that 94% (216) of respondents rely on social media for their news. This means that nine out of every 10 journalists surveyed, get their news from social media. This is an indication of the big role technology plays in the work of journalism.

Figure 6.3: social media as source for news updates

Do you use social media as a source for news updates? (%)

	Yes	No
■ Do you use social media as source for news updates?	93.91	6.09
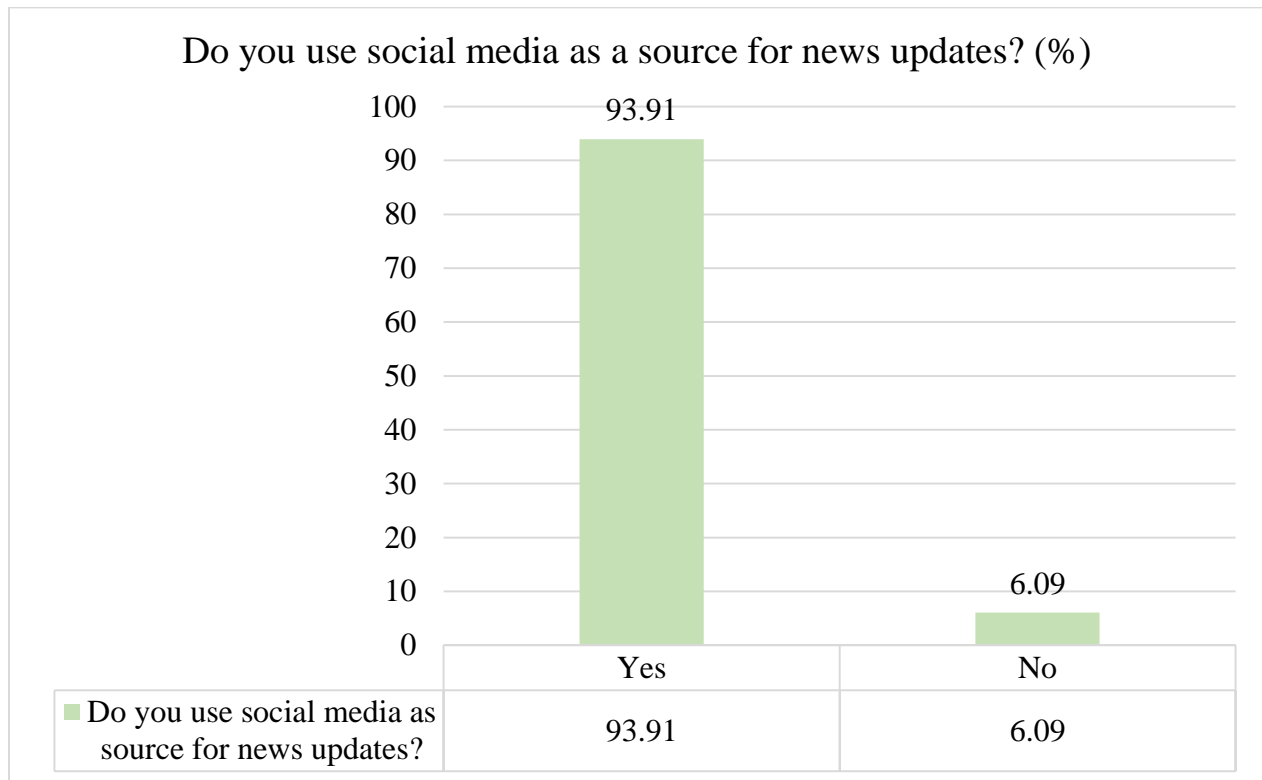
Source: (Field Data, 2022)

Figure 6.4 displays the channels where the survey respondents get their news. Respondents have mostly utilised Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to stay abreast of breaking news, as seen in the figure. This could be case that these social media platforms are easily available in this part of the world.

Figure 6.4: Social media platforms used for news updates

If yes, which of these social media platforms do you use for news updates? (%)

Platform	%
Instagram	0.87
Whatsapp and Twiiter	2.61
Facebook and Google+	2.61
Twitter and Instagram	2.61
WhatsApp	2.61
Facebook and Instagram	5.22
Not Applicable	6.96
Google+	7.83
Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Google+	9.57
Twitter	11.3
Facebook	13.04
Facebook and Whatsapp	16.52
All the of them	18.26
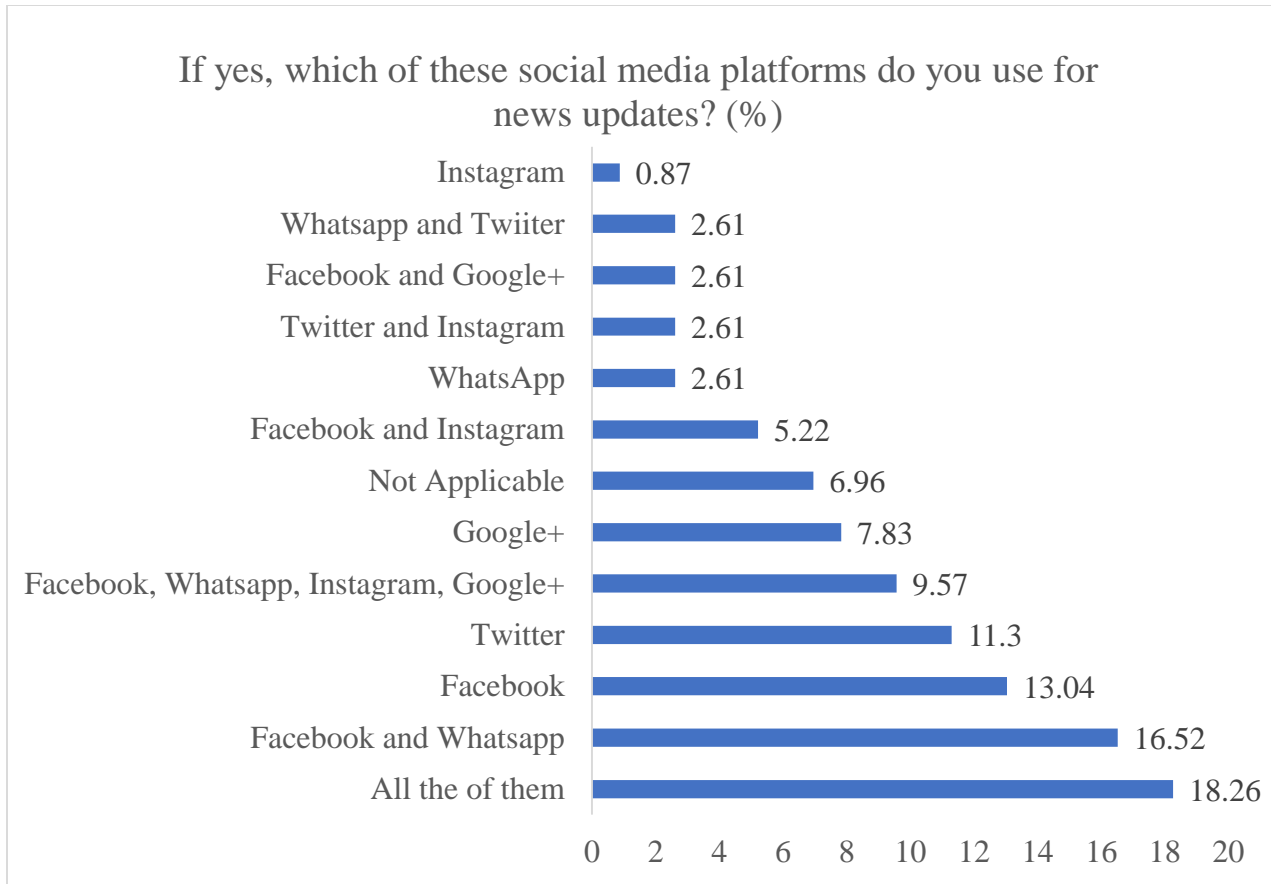
Source: (Field Data, 2022)

In addition, participants were asked if they agree with the following statements: the rise of artificial intelligence, robotics, and other technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution facilitates the spread of false news. Figure 6.5 is a summary of the responses showing that 36.52% of respondents strongly agreed and 33.18% agreed that new technologies like robotics, artificial intelligence, and other 4IR technology contribute in the propagation of false news. 26.96% of respondents were unsure, and 4% did not think that emerging technologies like robotics, AI, and other fourth industrial revolution technologies will aid in the spread of false news.

Figure 6.5: New technologies as means for dissemination of fake news

The advent of new technologies such as robots, artificial intelligence and other fourth industrial revolution technology aids dissemination of fake news?

1.74 1.74
26.96
36.52
33.04

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
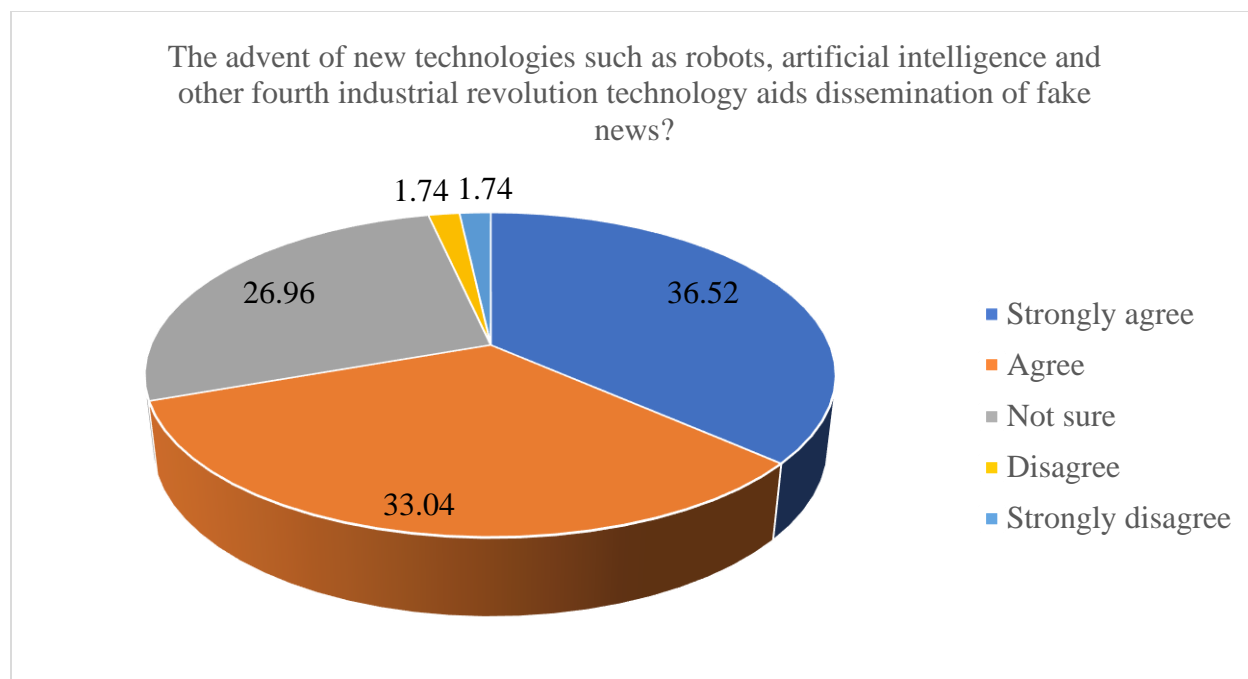
Source: (Field Data, 2022)

Table 6.3: The role of technology in promoting fake news publications

Statements		Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Digital technology is the reason for the increasing spread of fake news	No. Respondents	66	130	22	12	0
	Percent (%)	28.7	56.52	9.57	5.22	0
Social media is the reason for high rate of fake news in the country	No. Respondents	74	120	30	6	0
	Percent (%)	32.17	52.17	13.04	2.61	0
Technology cannot be blamed for the spread of fake news	No. Respondents	18	54	46	96	18
	Percent (%)	7.83	22.61	20	41.74	7.83
Social media plays a minimal role in the dissemination of fake news	No. Respondents	10	24	44	98	54

169

	Percent (%)	4.35	10.43	19.13	42.61	23.48
Robots or artificial intelligence is used to spread fake news	No. Respondents	10	54	116	36	12
	Percent (%)	4.42	23.01	51.33	15.93	5.31

Source: (Field Data, 2022)

In light of the results in Table 6.3 and Figure 6.5, the researcher is of the view that the advent of AI, robots, and other technologies connected with the Fourth Industrial Revolution aids in the dissemination of disinformation, misinformation and fake news. This is due to the widespread misuse of such technologies throughout Africa, Ghana included, for nefarious ends. As a society, we have always placed trust in journalists and the media in particular to operate with integrity while covering the news. But the internet and new technologies have made it easier for the production and distribution of news with little editorial supervision or control. These days, many people get their news from the internet, and it may be difficult to know which stories to believe especially in the case where many believe any news story emanates from journalists. False news or hoax stories have increased, in part because of the sheer volume of available information and because of the widespread ignorance of how the internet really works. Through the usage of social media, these stories may reach a far wider audience.

6.4 How government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana.

This research set out to determine whether or not governmental regulations in Ghana helped or hindered the dissemination of disinformation. The results of the analysis are summarised in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: How government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana

Statement	Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The laws of Ghana make provisions to regulate the production and dissemination of fake news.	No. Respondents	42	88	56	32	12
	Percent (%)	18.26	38.26	24.35	13.91	5.22
The provisions of fake news laws in Ghana are enforced by the government of Ghana.	No. Respondents	10	66	80	50	24
	Percent (%)	4.35	28.7	34.78	21.74	10.43
News stories produced by journalists in Ghana are factual and truthful.	No. Respondents	12	126	54	34	4
	Percent (%)	5.22	54.78	23.48	14.78	1.74

Source: (Field Data, 2022)

Table 6.4 shows that, of those polled, 56.52 percent (n=130) agreed with the assertion that Ghanaian law has mechanisms to restrict the creation and transmission of false news. Furthermore, the majority of respondents who were asked were either unsure or disagreed that the government of Ghana enforces provisions of fake news regulations. According to Table 6.4, their consensus was that despite the existence of legal frameworks, they are not being effectively implemented. Conversely, 60% of those polled (n=138) indicated they believe news reports generated by journalists in Ghana to be accurate and honest. The researcher posits that mass media; online media, social media, blogs, and websites must be self-regulating through institutional and professional bodies. Professional groups in the media industry throughout the globe must work together more closely to combat disinformation online by investigating claims of fake news, prohibiting the publishing of such stories, and devising penalties for news outlets that violate self-regulatory guidelines. Where self-control fails, governmental regulations may be much more severe, thus this method is preferable but must be carefully done in order not to infringe on people's rights. As a result, organisations representing journalists should draft self-regulatory mechanisms, guidelines, legislation, punishments, and any other sanctions against false news dissemination as deterrent in maintaining sanity in the profession. Hate speech, false news, election result hacking, and Internet misuse are all issues that have been brought to the attention of lawmakers as a consequence of growing public concern over fake news. It is for this reason that governments everywhere should pass laws prohibiting hate speech, and policies to deal with false news publication. Legislations or policies should be enacted to check abuses of individuals responsible for spreading disinformation in cyberspace via websites, blogs, and other means but such should be done with a human face and in consultation with stakeholders.

6.5 How media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication

The purpose of this research was to learn from the perspectives of media outlets how they verify news articles prior to publication. The findings of the analysis, based on the responses received, are shown in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: How media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication

Statement	Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
News processing follow gate keeping steps, from the reporter to the editor before publishing	No. Respondents	84	106	26	6	8
	Percent (%)	36.52	46.09	11.3	2.61	3.48
News follows a chain of command from reporter to sub-editor and then to the editor	No. Respondents	82	108	28	8	4
	Percent (%)	35.65	46.96	12.17	3.48	1.74
There is a system in place to fact-check fake news stories	No. Respondents	46	96	72	10	6
	Percent (%)	20	41.74	31.3	4.35	2.61
There is no means to immediately fact-check fake news stories	No. Respondents	14	40	72	96	8
	Percent (%)	6.09	17.39	31.3	41.74	3.48
There is a fact-checker but the process is cumbersome to use and so it is not used	No. Respondents	18	56	78	68	10
	Percent (%)	7.83	24.35	33.91	29.57	4.35

Source: (Field Data, 2022)

From the findings shown on Table 6.5, the vast majority of respondents (n=190) believe that the news goes through a series of gatekeeping stages before being published, and this begins with the reporter and ends with the editor. The results also showed that 83% of respondents felt that there is a clear line of authority in news organisations, beginning with the reporter and ending with the editor. The study's results also affirm the existence of methods and suitable tools to rapidly fact-check tales of suspected fake news. In addition, some respondents disputed the idea that there existed a fact-checker in their media houses but others who acknowledged fact-checkers in their media organisations indicate the process is difficult to use, hence it is not being employed. According to the data collected for this research, most media organisations manage the content they release by instituting various in-house gatekeeping editorial procedures prior to publication. These include passing articles up the editorial chain from the reporter to the sub-editor and finally the editor. Moreover, even if the procedures required in fact-checking false news items might be hard, there are methods to do so instantly through editorial processes. This is an indication that when ethical principles are religiously complied with, the excesses of fake news in the mainstream media will be reduced drastically.

6.6.0 Discussion of quantitative findings

This section provides the last part of the study's primary purpose, which explores the influence of fake news on Ghana's media context. This section analysed the quantitative findings on fake news and political economy of the media in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution technology. The study also examined how various laws and regulations in Ghana have contributed to the proliferation of disinformation. Finally, the chapter examines the steps the media take to confirm stories before they are disseminated. This section further focuses on providing a concise review of the most important facts, along with a few general conclusions and suggestions.

6.6.1 Economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana

In sum, respondents are of the view that fake news in Ghana is driven by political and economic motives. This is indicated by more than half of the respondents who felt that the production and dissemination of false news are driven by economic and political motivations while 15.7% were unsure whether or not persons working in the media create false news for economic and political motives. This finding confirms available literature as Kshetri and Voas (2017) indicate that fake news has political, economic and social benefits. They argue that over 200 websites promoted

Russian propaganda in the 2016 US presidential elections. This attracted over 15 million views from the US alone and over 213 million others on Facebook. All these go to buttress the fact that fake news creators conceal political and economic motives in disseminating falsehood.

Some of the respondents (3%) admit publishing fake news thus contributing to the rate of the spread of disinformation in the public sphere. This figure though less compared to the majority (97%) who indicate they have never produced an article or feature while aware of its inaccuracy. This implies that some journalists although fewer, intentionally, publish fake news either for parochial interest or to achieve political and economic gains. Hirst (2018) explores this in the political economy of fake news to indicate that the media create fake news for commercial purposes. This profitable reason comes in the form of clicks, views, likes and the shares which are all dialectically related to the economic and political motives. The form of symbiotic relationship existing in the political, economic and media systems in Ghana could equally promote the likelihood of the media churning fake news. This relates to Akpojivi (2018) argument that the media, political and economic systems in Ghana are bed-fellows where it sometimes become impossible to insulate the media from political, and economic pressures. Given this scenario, it is not impossible for the media to publish fake news for economic and political gains.

6.6.2 How 4th industrial revolution technologies aid the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana

From the analysis, respondents were unequivocal that the availability of the 4th industrial revolution technologies contribute to the creation and distribution of false news in Ghana. To that end, the survey participants were first asked about their usage of social media for news and 94% of the respondents confirmed relying on social media for their news. This means that nine out of every 10 journalists surveyed, get their news source from social media. This is an indication of the big role technology plays in the work of journalism. They further indicate they mostly utilise Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to stay abreast of breaking news. This relates to a recent Pew Research Center (2022) report which found that most journalists rely on social media to connect to their sources. The study equally found social media as an important tool aiding journalists in promoting news stories.

Respondents also indicate the rise of artificial intelligence, robotics, and other technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution facilitates the spread of false news. The responses

show that 36.52% of respondents strongly agreed and 33.18% agreed that new technologies like robotics, artificial intelligence, and other 4IR technology contribute in the propagation of false news. A similar study (Flore, 2019) is consistent that artificial intelligence and bots proliferate fake news through polarized websites and social networks. "Fake news disseminated on the internet are a matter of great concern to countries…via social media, the internet, mobile phones, or artificial intelligence in the form of bots" (Flores, 2019: 198).

As a society, we have always placed trust in journalists and the media in particular to operate with responsibility while covering the news. But the internet and new technologies have made it easier for the production and distribution of news with little editorial supervision or control. In the absence of checks and balances through gatekeeping, fake news and inaccurate reports are likely to slip through (Flores, 2019; DeFleur and DeFleur, 2022). These days, many people get their news from the internet, and it may be difficult to know which stories to believe especially in the case where many believe any news story emanates from journalists. False news or hoax stories have increased, in part because of the sheer volume of available information and because of the widespread ignorance of how the internet really works. Through the usage of social media, these stories may reach a far wider audience (Flores, 2019). Additionally, social media has though widened access and participation in the public sphere, it has also "accentuated the information disorder and undermined the major pillar on which communication is built" (Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2021:430).

6.6.3 How government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana.

A good number of respondents (56.52%) agreed with the assertion that Ghanaian laws have mechanisms to restrict the creation and transmission of false news. Furthermore, majority of the respondents were either unsure or disagreed that the government of Ghana enforces provisions of fake news regulations. There is a consensus that despite the existence of legal frameworks on fake news, thus Electronic Communication Act of 2008 (Act 775) makes fake news publication criminal however, the Act is being ineffectively implemented. Then again, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and other international treaties signed onto by Ghana makes free speech an inalienable right (Akpojivi, 2018). With these legal frameworks and treaties in place, it may be quite difficult

to implement legislations relating to fake news since others will interpret such a move as criminalising speech and a reversal of freedom of expression.

The respondents posit that mass media; online media, social media, blogs, and websites must be self-regulating through institutional and professional bodies. Though a good call, attempts to regulate social media across the globe has often been met with strong opposition from freedom fighters such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders. Another school of thought is of the view that instead of enacting new legislations against publication of fake news, existing legislation should be enforced while effective education to empower people to identify and flag fake news is pursued (Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2021).

6.6.4 How media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication

The findings also indicate that a vast majority of respondents believe news stories go through a series of gatekeeping stages before being published, and this begins with the reporter and ends with the editor. The results also show that 83% of respondents felt that there is a clear line of authority in news organisations, beginning with the reporter and ending with the editor. The study's results also affirm the existence of editorial process suitable to rapidly fact-check tales of suspected fake news. According to DeFleur and DeFleur (2022), gatekeeping is a significant process in journalism where news stories and articles are examined and then selecting the relevant and ethically acceptable stories for the audience and that the selected stories must reflect accurately of the event and happenings of the day to the public.

Despite these laid down gatekeeping processes, some respondents indicate that there is no fact-checker in their media houses but others who acknowledged fact-checkers in their media organisations indicate the process is difficult to use, hence it is not being employed. The Pew Research Center (2022) equally found in its study that some US journalists do not use fact-checkers. This could lead to sloppy journalism (UNESCO, 2018) which accounts for most of the fake news stories emanating from mainstream media. In the case of social media where everyone can self-publish (Dominick, 2014; Lule, 2014), it is difficult to expect gatekeeping process to eliminate fake news. Adherence to professional conduct in mainstream media and empowering citizens through education on fake news is the best alternative in curtailing distrust in the media.

The analysis of the quantitative data also indicate that, most media organisations manage the content they publish by instituting various in-house gatekeeping editorial procedures prior to publication. These include passing articles up the editorial chain from the reporter to the sub-editor and finally, to the editor. Moreover, even if the procedures required in fact-checking fake news is non-existent, there are professional procedures to do so through editorial processes. This is an indication that when ethical principles are religiously complied with, the excesses of fake news in the mainstream media will be reduced drastically (Flores, 2019; DeFleur and DeFleur, 2022).

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

7.0 Introduction

The major purpose of this thesis is to explore the political and economic implications of fake news on the media Ghana. The study also analysed the economic, political and other peculiarities relating to the ceaseless dissemination of propagandistic contents in the news media and other social platforms as well as its influence on journalism. On the whole, the study contributes a milestone in the literature of fake news and political economy of the media, and in particular, setting the basis for further empirical studies on the economic and political ramification of fake news. Using the critical philosophical paradigm as the basis, the study argues that fake news presents great opportunity for minority groups to, not only contribute in the public's sphere, but also to benefit profitably from the digital space as a democratic sphere created by digital evolution.

The study was guided by four broad research questions which include; 1. What are the economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana? 2. How are the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies aiding the production and dissemination of fake news and its economic ramifications in Ghana? 3. How are government regulatory policies impeding or promoting fake news production in Ghana? and 4. How do media outlets authenticate news stories prior to publication? Aside these, the study was also premised on the assumption that economic and political reasons are responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

The study was guided by the political economy of the media and by extension, critical political economy of the media and the public sphere. Political economy of the media as espoused by Hardy (2014) focuses on the ownership, financial and support mechanisms in the media such as advertising, and on how the policies, programmes and actions of governments and other organisations influence and affect media behaviour and content. These include the extent to which media production and, content of the messages are influenced with concomitant propaganda, half-truths and complete fabrication and disinformation to sway public views and opinions. As a critical political economy concept, it turns the media as a tool in marketing conglomerate where selling transnational commercial commodities is a commonplace (Wasko, 2014). With the growth of the internet and digital media, this development makes the dissemination of fake news easier for the intended

purposes. Public sphere, as applied in this study, extrapolates that the digital space or sphere for the exchange or communication of ideas or deliberation of public issues should be unimpeded (Willems, 2012). Fake news, however, appears to influence public discourse hence plaguing efficient public discourse in its democratic trajectory.

The research questions are addressed in the phase one and two of the study; however, the fifth chapter provides the findings based on the qualitative aspect of the study. Chapter six provides responses to the second phase of the study which comprises quantitative analysis of the findings. This chapter presents summaries of key findings of the study, establishes gaps, limitations, and provides suggestions for further studies while making some recommendations for future research.

7.1 Summary of key findings

Key findings of the study based on the qualitative and the quantitative analyses are highlighted in this section. The findings suggest a significant agreeability that fake news is produced with political, economic and other hidden motives. This confirms the hypothesis that economic and political reasons are responsible for the dissemination of fake news in the public sphere of Ghana. Other findings indicate that some people also publish fake news for the fun of it while others intend to destroy competitors in business or in politics.

7.2.1 Fake News Driven by Economic and Political Factors

The study found that fake news is driven by economic and political motives and peddled by people to gain material advantage. We live in an era where what is trending is what people want to read or hear and so people produce fake news in order to trend, so that they can make some money for survival. To such people, fake news is intentionally created to attract traffic on websites through clickbaits. A strategy used to gain economic advantage is sensational headlines to elicit audience readership or clicks. A number of scholars confirmed the economic motives of fake news (Dahlberg, 2015, Morgan, 2018, Bakir & McStay, 2018, Croteau & Hyones, 2019, Wasserman, 2020, Okon, et al. 2021). They are of the view that there is extensive economic capital of fake news and this must be seen from different perspectives. The tangible gains of fake news are in material terms and the intangible aspects are in the form of ideological selling and advertising. This economic utility of fake news is actualised by the fourth industrial revolution technologies such as artificial intelligence and other digital media platforms on social media. The proliferation of fake news is meant for political and economic purposes in the digital ecology.

Digital media is grappling with the lacuna in the mainstream media by conserving digital contents in the form of commodities as advertisement in virtually every space. Almost all the social media platforms, especially Facebook, YouTube, Google, Yahoo, Twitter and among others, are all profiting through the integration of news into their offerings. As these platforms thrive for immediacy in news delivery, they favour fake news proliferation in the public sphere as a common practice (Bakir & McStay, 2018). This is done by creating a web content to attract online advertising revenue relying on eye-catching pictures to get click-through, shares, comments and likes. The more people read news items on these websites, the more money the producers make from advertisers. This practice as indicated by respondents, is common among fake news creators in Ghana who use sensational and fabricated headlines to attract traffic. The economic gains derived from the dissemination of fake news fits into Fuchs' (2018) argument that there is capitalist intent in the production and dissemination of fake news. The challenge for journalism is that these sensationalists achieve this at the expense of truth and accuracy which are held high in ethical journalism.

This upsurge of fake news in the public sphere is common in the political arena where the use of lies and concocted propaganda contributes to winning votes. Fake news and politics are closely related. Political communication has remained a significant part of politics and in contemporary global politics, the use of diverse strategies such as social and mainstream media campaigns are critical components of the strategies. What is also becoming a part of this enterprise is the use of slant, fabricated and fake messages to woo voters. This can well be grounded in the political economy theory of the media. The perspective of McQuail and Deuze (2020) on political economy is that of a critical communication approach that focuses primarily on the relationship between the economic structures and the dynamics of media industries as well as the ideological content of the media. This implies that the media, the economic and political systems work together in a common relationship where inter-dependence is expected. In such a situation, the media's tendency or temptation of growing vested interests and manipulating content to meet ideological, political and economic interest cannot be overruled. As the media's interest grow economically and politically over public service, its independence and critical role in society would reduce thereby failing to uplift the marginalised voices in society. McQuail and Deuze (2020) submit that the political economy of the media's approach focuses on political and economic activity that lead to the media commodity and indeed fake news has commoditised the media. From the critical philosophical perspective, the media is to serve the interest of the less privileged in society but this critical role is being hampered by false news disseminated in the public sphere.

The use of social media tools has significant effects in shaping the political processes in disseminating fake news content using strategies to manipulate the minds of voters (Yerlikaya, 2020). Another finding of the study again indicates that political parties in Ghana do contract public relations agencies for strategic communication with the intent of swaying voter's decisions. This strategy was used in the 2016 and the 2020 elections where significant part of Public Relations (PR) activities were outsourced to an agency. This foreign agency in question, used either algorithms or some set of information from the local players in the political landscape, to make people believe certain invectives, innuendoes and certain descriptions of key individuals in the then opposition political parties as "incompetent". This was done strategically and consistently to appear as if it was a reality and it became a slogan on social media and then set an agenda in the mainstream media.

Additionally, the study discovered that the media ownership pattern in Ghana is politically skewed which has the likelihood of influencing media content as well as fake news dissemination. It was discovered that some of these media outlets are owned by politicians who might use those mediums to do their bidding. They channel stories that may hurt their political opponents in order to gain advantage over them in these political instruments called 'media'. There are media outlets like that used to champion political advantage. The *Daily Guide*, *Radio Gold, The Searchlight* and *The Enquirer* are but a few of the politically affiliated media houses identified by respondents. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) have media organisations affiliated to them and these media houses are often used to disseminate propaganda messages including fake news. This has resulted in the polarisation of some media institutions. As political tools, these affiliated media institutions are used to sometimes peddle falsehood and disinformation in order to discredit their opponents. These arguments are in sync with political economy theory advanced by (Wasko, 2014, Murdock, 2016, Fuchs, 2018). In contemporary times, the variants of Marx's inspired version of the critical political economy of the media where class struggle is the basis of the analysis, indicates that there is a direct link between the economic structures, ownership of media and the production content. The political economy of the media approach always sees the legitimacy in their stands on class struggles by looking at the concentration of media in the hands of a few capitalist class or entrepreneurs who do not only control the capital flows in media organisations but the content as well.

7.2.2 Industry 4.0 Technologies Influence Fake News Dissemination

The fourth industrial revolution technologies (Industry 4.0) are noted for leading the drive for fake news publication in Ghana. The fourth industrial revolution (4IR), also refers to the "smart factory" or a virtual copy of the physical and decentralised worlds where decisions can be made by technology instead of humans (Morrar, Arman and Mousa, 2017). It can also be described as a situation where the physical systems relate and communicate with one another and in relations with humans in real-time and enabled by artificial intelligence. Examples of such fourth industrial revolution technologies include the use of artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, algorithms and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, among others. These technologies have been identified as tools mostly used by fake news creators for the spread of fake news. Incidentally, some fake news is not spread by humans but engineered by technologies such as robots with the aid of artificial intelligence. It is imperative to note that social media is largely unregulated and gives room for everyone with access to smart phone and the internet to easily produce and disseminate any form of information without restrictions. Currently, there are no restrictions on social media in Ghana; such producers easily disseminate their content in the public sphere and sometimes receive unlimited access and multiple shares instantaneously. Social media presents an incommodious task for users to participate in activities online, converse or comment on someone's post, create and share posts on sites of individual choice, collaborate in creating content with other members and link up with friends and those with similar interests. In this process, any fake news that gets through, flies like bush fire. This simply means that, technology is at the core of fake news dissemination, especially the use of coding which forms part of a broader context of using artificial intelligence.

There is a growing debate about the global impact of industry 4.0 because of the digital revolution, smart knowledge and systems and the Internet of things that is overwhelming the entire universe. Virtually, every field is experiencing new changes in terms of technological changes and other transformations, a characteristic most scholars admit is extraordinary in the evolution of human society. It is against this that some scholars are of the conviction that journalism should integrate technology and robotics in the profession. A contrary view has it that traditional media channels are mostly managed by very experienced editors and journalists who will not let anything go without verifying the source and the authenticity of such information. This is in the case of the rigorous gate keeping processes in the mainstream media making it difficult to use such channels for disseminating fake news. Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2019) contend that the use of mobile devices in journalism has

made the process of news production faster and less costly as news could be produced in no time in contemporary times; noting that events far away could be watched via the internet and processed into news without necessarily being present physically. They also affirmed that the use of mobile devices in taking photos and videos for news production has maximised the unauthenticity of incidents and news contents leading to fake news dissemination. Aside these, Fuchs (2018) is of the view that robots, algorithms and other digital technologies should not completely replace human labour in the interest of the capitalist's class otherwise several challenges will abound. Some of the challenges relate to privacy issues, data protection and surveillance especially when goods are exchanged with network of internet since technological systems are not faultless. Other concerns raised against 4IR is that when the physical products become networked to the internet, threats of espionage, hacking, cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism become the new security hazards the globe would encounter. It is also predicted to affect geo-political and socio-economic change in developed and developing economies (Ayentimi & Burgess, 2019). Other concerns over the use of 4IR in journalism is who should be held responsible for a news item that goes bad. It must be noted that most of these stories produced by robots lack bylines; therefore, who to be held responsible becomes quite cumbersome. Since robotics and artificial journalism are new developments in the journalism profession, their usage must be revisited to reduce fake news dissemination.

7.2.3 Media Gagging Common in Absence of Strict Regulations

It appears the Government of Ghana is concerned about the proliferation of fake news in the mainstream and social media and attempts are being made to curb the phenomenon though none of the respondents could remember any specific policy being implemented to curb fake news dissemination. Arrests, detentions and gagging the media were identified as common practices meted out to journalists under the cover of deterring fake news dissemination. This necessitates public uproar and results in civil society spearheading campaigns to stop government from intimidating and harassing journalists in Ghana over some publications the government describes as fake news. Between 2020 and April, 2022, a number of journalists have been arrested in relation to publication of fake news. These arrests, detentions and prosecution of journalists and other citizens over the publication and dissemination of fake news have dominated public discourse. One person has been jailed. This is generating new thinking among liberal thinkers who wonder whether the country is in a reversed gear on freedom of expression after criminalisation of speech was repealed since 2001. All these arrests, detentions and prosecutions were in relations to the country's Electronic

Communications Act (Act 775, section 76, of 2008) and the Criminal Offences Act of 1960. Reporters Without Borders (RFS, 2022) report indicates that Ghana maintained its 30th position in 2020 and 2021 and retrogressed to 60th position in the press index report in 2022. These positions are among the worst performance of the country in almost two decades. These are indications that the country's respect for fundamental human rights and the rights of citizens to freely express themselves is being violated with reckless abandon.

The need to legislate on social media in Ghana dominated findings with the reason that it could curb the spread of fake news in the country. This appears to be among the long term plans of the government, as earlier announced in October, 2018 by the Minister of Information, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah in a public ceremony. However, some respondents expressed the fear that enacting laws to curb fake news could not solve the problem because it would be abused. Respondents suggested the need for government's interventions in the area of training courses and programmes on fake news and facilities for fact checking since some of the media organisations lack the resources to undertake it themselves. These training and facilities would give journalists better knowledge on the early detection and subsequent curbing the fake news menace. Fake news legislation is not a new phenomenon in the global community. The United Kingdom, one of the buoyant democracies in the world, published the Online Harms White Paper as a regulatory measure dealing with range of issues including hosting, sharing and online harms such as disinformation (Theil, 2019). In France, the government in December 2018, passed a law no. 2018-1202 to 'fight against the manipulation of information'. The German's Network Enforcement Act (the NetzDG) which came into force in January, 2018 also required network providers to remove contents that contravene certain portions of the Criminal Code within a defined period after receipt of complaints (Smith, 2019). From 2016 to 2020, notable countries that have enacted and enforced punitive laws on fake news include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Code d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. Therefore, Ghana needs to learn from the experiences of these countries that have already introduced various laws criminalising online offences and publication of false information since many of these countries have failed to achieve the intended objectives.

The respondents also made suggestions that the telecommunication companies and other network providers should be surcharged or fined if they allowed their platforms to be used to disseminate fake news. The logic of this proposition is that people who propagate fake news including some journalists could make counterclaim of infringing on their fundamental rights of free expression if

arrested for publishing false information. This appears to be in line with the German's Network Enforcement Act (the NetzDG), which is a law strictly applicable to network providers who allowed their platforms to be used for fake news. As a results of that law, Facebook and Twitter have deleted or blocked some users who used their platforms to spread unacceptable contents including disinformation. These providers are required to remove contents that contravene certain portions of the Criminal Code within a defined period after receipt of complaints otherwise, they face sanctions in the form of charges (Smith, 2019). Similar regulatory regimes could be introduced in Ghana to fine these tech giants who allowed their platforms to be used for dissemination of fake news.

Another significant proposal was for tech companies to be regulated against dissemination of fake news. This is due to their unravelling influence on the public sphere in contemporary times (Creech, 2020). These tech giants exemplified by Facebook, Twitter and Google must be the major focus in relations to regulations on fake news since respondents attributed most of the fake news to be coming from these telecommunication companies. Arguments for regulation of social media are becoming common and simplistic solution towards mitigating fake news; respondents think the focus should rather be on tech companies since our legal system already has certain laws to deal with fake news publications. Tech companies should be regulated because of their enormous influences have on society. Technology clearly changes behaviour (Whittaker, 2019:165). Pavlik, (2016) on the other hand postulates that algorithm, artificial intelligence (AI) and big data are converging to generate a new digital influence on society. Respondents blamed proliferation of fake news on algorithm and automated journalism and are seeking solution through regulation of network providers' content.

7.3 Conclusion

Based on the primary results, a number of inferences can be made from the quantitative and the qualitative findings and analyses. First, economic and political incentives motivate the creation and distribution of fake news thus confirming the hypothesis that: economic and political reasons are responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana. This finding also corroborates the findings from literature that indicate economic motives as well as politics are the combined factors driving most fake news dissemination in the public sphere. Secondly, the presence of the fourth industrial revolution technologies aids the production and distribution of fabricated contents on social and mainstream media. The widespread abuse of such technologies across the

world, including Ghana, facilitates the manufacturing and transmission of false news via AI, robotics, social media and other technologies of the 4th industrial revolution.

Thirdly, it has been discovered that government regulatory mechanisms including some laws relating to false publications do exist and that some measures to limit the dissemination of fake news are periodically enforced through arrest and detentions. However, such strategies of dealing with fake news tend to infringe on people's right to free expression. There are seemingly legal regimes in place to deal with fake news dissemination, but these laws appear to be in conflict with the fundamental rights of free expression and therefore enforcing such laws could infringe on people's rights. Nonetheless, policies could be framed towards dealing with fake news dissemination in the country. Last but not least, enforcing ethical journalism is the best way to deal with fake news in the mainstream media and therefore continuous training and retraining of journalists would help in checking ethical abuses that end up being spread as fake news. Most media outlets control the material they publish via many layers of editorial review. Articles are sent from the reporter to the sub-editor and then to the editor as part of these processes. Furthermore, there are techniques to rapidly fact-check bogus news articles using fact-checks or AI; despite these, not every media institution or journalist utilises those processes.

7.4 Recommendations for policy

A number of recommendations are suggested in this study for the government and policy makers to brainstorm and consider incorporating towards reducing and eliminating the dissemination of fake news and propaganda contents in the mainstream and on social media. It is recommended that there should be efforts to bridge the policy gap on fake news dissemination. There is a policy gap in Ghana that is badly needed to give direction to what should and should not be done to curb or reduce fake news dissemination. In the absence of such a policy and implemented to the letter, government, media and other stakeholders would continue to adopt ad-hoc measures and lip services in addressing the social, communication and technological canker be-devilling the state in particular and the global community as a whole. Even though some respondents recommend legislation as the best option, as communication scholar and a journalist, the researcher does not support enactment of laws to deal with people who circulate fake news. What is needed is a holistic national policy that encapsulates all issues through broader stakeholder consultation and finally move towards implementing such a policy. This is the best way out, otherwise the country could be consumed not by bullets but fake news and propaganda messages.

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Secondly, the study also recommends strengthening the capacity of the National Media Commission (NMC) to fully carry out training sessions, sensitisation and education of journalists on detection and flagging fake news. This could be significant in dealing with the challenges of fake news. It is imperative to indicate that a lot of journalists, especially those at the countryside, do not understand anything about fake news and as such, can easily pass out fake news as news stories to their audiences. This form of misinformation was very common during the peak of Covid-19 Pandemic in Ghana. If this scenario is not checked, it could culminate in disastrous consequences for the country should there be an outbreak of any communicable disease. Per the constitutional mandate, the NMC is mandated "to take all appropriate measures to ensure the establishment and maintenance of the highest journalistic standards in the mass media…" (1992 Constitution of Ghana). The NMC's role is even more pronounced in situations where people, with passion for journalism, ply the trade without formal training or knowledge of the ethical guidelines. Such persons need to be trained both on the job and on the ethical principles of journalism; otherwise, they are endangered species in journalism and society at large. Should this be implemented, it will go a long way to help fight the canker of fake news since such individuals are already practising anyway and since they cannot decipher ethically accepted news, propaganda or fake news will persist. This is most worrying as such people can be perpetual purveyor belts of fake news.

Aside the role the NMC should be cushioned to undertake, the National Communication Authority (NCA) also has a significant role to play in preventing suspected fake news stories or information from reaching the larger population. The NCA performs several functions to ensure efficient communication on audio and audio-visual as well as in the cyber space. As a corporate body responsible for several forms of communications and a regulator in the communication industry, it is clothed with the powers to, "establish and monitor the implementation of national communications standards and ensure compliance accordingly" (NCA Act, 2008). Technically, NCA could liaise with the telecommunication companies and internet providers to ensure strict compliance of communication protocols to curb fake news dissemination on the internet. If nothing at all, the NCA can collaborate with the NMC in various ways to sanitise the public sphere.

Media owners and media organisations should periodically carry out in-house refresher training courses for journalists and interns working for them. Such capacity building activities reshapes and keep the journalists abreast on new knowledge and trends in the industry for efficient service delivery. If not, the same old hands will continue to produce the same content without relevance to

society. There is the need for media institutions to invest in expert training of journalists, engage the services of data experts and fake news specialist to train interns and employee journalists to spot fake news, know typologies, styles, propagation and use of fake news. These are the best immediate measures that can be taken to reduce fake news propagation.

The study further recommends that technology and artificial intelligence be used to track, identify and eliminate fake news from the public sphere. Although the spread of fake news is largely blamed on technology, especially the industry 4.0 technologies such as; artificial intelligence and robotics, same technologies can be used to identify fake news at the initial stage, eliminate them before they are spread to the masses. Fortunately for Ghana, Google, in 2019, established its Artificial Intelligence (AI) laboratory in Accra. Although its original aim was not to fight fake news, it can be used in fighting fake news if the government goes into a partnership with Google to programme and deploy AI in fighting fake news. In line with this, the government could partner Facebook to provide public education towards fighting fake news. Google can equally partner government in a more purposive manner in deploying AI and robotics in detecting and 'nib in the bud' any fake news information early before it gets spread to the masses. This is a high possibility that must be explored for the interest of citizens who seek accurate and reliable information for their daily lives.

Additionally, fact-checkers are important elements in the fight against fake news, propaganda, fabricated and disinformation content. In some parts of the world, the use of fact-checking system and other expertise in fighting fake news abound. Unfortunately, in Ghana, such fact-checkers are not common making the fight against fake news a herculean task. The known fact-checker in Ghana, 'Fact-Check Ghana' is a private entity, established by the Media Foundation for West Africa. Its role in providing accurate and factual information is imperative in the fight against fake news especially during the 2020 elections and the peak of Covid-19 Pandemic. With only one credible fact-checking facility in a country with over 500 radio stations, portals and several newspapers, is highly inadequate; hence the need for more fact-checking centres to be established either solely by the government or media institutions or in partnership with other organisations.

The seventh recommendation goes to media training institutions. Media training institutions in Ghana should incorporate course contents on fake news in their curricula to ensure that journalists are fully aware of fake news and how to reduce the temptation of rebroadcasting or disseminating fake news content in the media space. In a study conducted by Mutsvuairo and Bebawi (2019), it was discovered that there is no stand-alone course on fake news in any of the institutions studied in

Africa. They found that, fake news is incorporated into investigative journalism courses in some of the curricula of journalism training institutions in the Middle East and Africa. The comparative study examined undergraduate journalism and media programme curriculums from four Anglophone African countries namely; Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda and four Middle East countries; Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt. The revelation that fake news might not have been properly taught on the continent, calls for worry for countries such as Ghana, because the journalism training institutions might be facing the same challenge of not training student journalists on fake news detection. This calls for journalism training institutions in the country to develop stand-alone courses on fake news to ensure adequate training of professional journalists.

7.5 Delimitation and Recommendations for Further Studies

Fake news is an important subject on the global scene in recent years and research on the topic has widen from journalism and communication to encompass health, education, economics and other disciplines. As a developing nation with resource constraints, resources allocated for scientific research is meagre therefore, leaving many important areas such as fake news issues, not well attended to. There is the need for more empirical studies to understand fully the seeming challenges posed by the 4IR to the world, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular and the continent as a whole. As a continent with positive indicators such as most populous and youthful demographics, endowed with natural resources as drivers of development, it is imperative for scientific research to lead the path of growth in the next century. Although arguments have been advanced about the potential role of the 4IR for all industries, including those in the sub-region, such that production and productivity would be up-scaled to rejuvenate economic restructuring (Ayentimi & Burgess, 2019), research needs to unpack these lofty ideas. As a continent thirsty for growth, it is imperative to integrate research with policy especially in the area of fake news research where existing literature is highly inadequate to inform policy direction.

Fake news could be disseminated both on social media and mainstream but technology, especially the internet, must be available to enable this materialise. Sadly, the digital divide is widening between the Global North and the Global South; limiting technological access to some parts of the continent. How fake news spread in those areas and also in countries with average internet penetration is a matter of worry. There is the need to fully understand how internet plays a part in the dissemination of fake news among various segments of the population. We also need to understand the social demographics of fake news in Ghana and its effects on policy credibility. Aside these, there is the

need for African countries and the Sub-Region in particular, to adopt proactive and deliberative strategies and reactive policies in response to technology and innovation research in tackling their peculiar issues such as poor internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure gaps to ensure internet access for all initiative policy is fully implemented for the benefit of citizens.

From the varied reviews articulated, the principal method used by most of the studies reviewed, reveals that the qualitative method and content analysis were the dominant research approaches employed for fake news research. Fake news and the political economy of the media are complex phenomena that cannot be fully understood from one generic perspective such as the use of a qualitative approach. The mixed method approach employed by this study is highly recommended for an elaborate analysis of this phenomenon. However, the sample for this study was limited to the Greater Accra Region and did not cover the whole country due to resource constraints. A wider population and samples, perhaps, a sample that could cover the entire country is recommended in future studies. The use of the exploratory sequential mixed method was used for this study and enabled triangulation of data and ensured validity of the findings. Nonetheless, the use of the explanatory sequential mixed method could also be employed to replicate this study in future research.

Another limitation which can be addressed in future research is in the area of the real contribution of the media to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country and how that affects the overall economy of Ghana. Though one cannot underscore the significance of the media in varied aspects of development as it provides information, education, entertainment and a catalyst for development, it is imperative to understand its overall performance in economic terms despite growing number of radio stations springing up each year. For instance, how profitable is it to establish a media business in Ghana and how does it impact on the economy. These lingering questions that also relate to the political economy of the media must be understood through research. Again, it is also important to understand the economy of the media from the Audience perspective as Hardy (2014) indicates that conventionally, media economy consists of production, content and audience. Production and content issues have been tackled in this study in relations to fake news production and its influence on media content; however, a lot needs to be understood about the audience. We need to understand how audience are commodified and also examine how "advertising serves as a system of subsidy that privileges media serving audiences valued by advertisers" (Hardy, 2014:13). This needs to be understood from the context of the news media which is attracting advertisers' attention thereby depriving the mainstream media of advertiser's profits. These approaches will offer multi-

dimensional perspectives which will present better insights to the phenomenon of fake news and the political economy of the media of Ghana.

Besides these research recommendations, it is instructive to know that the mixed method research which was used for this study appears to be the best approach in the research traditions. It makes up for the weaknesses and strengths of the qualitative and quantitative methods. As a results, researchers are able to gather elaborate data about a phenomenon and subject such data to rigorous analysis inductively and deductively. This notwithstanding, the experimental approach which could establish the causes and effects of fake news is hiatus in this respect. This researcher therefore recommends experimental approach in future studies of this kind.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Ethical approval

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

28 March 2022

Dear Mr Paul Achonga Kabah Kwode

| NHREC Registration # : |
| Rec-240816-052 |
| CREC Reference # : |
| 11753234-CREC-CHS_2022 |

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 28 March 2022
to 28 March 2027

Researcher(s): Name: Mr Paul Achonga Kabah Kwode
          Contact details: 11753234@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr NL Selekane
          Contact details: 0124292146

Title: Fake News and Political Economy of the Media in Ghana: The era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Purpose: PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for five years.

The *low risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:
1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the

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confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.

7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date **(28 March 2027)**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **11753234_CREC_CHS_2022** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature:

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP

Prof K. Masemola
Exécutive Dean : CHS
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 2298

Appendix 2: Informed Consent form

UNISA | university of south africa

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview/questionnaire.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname…………………………………………………………(please print)

Participant Signature………………………………………….…Date…………………

Researcher's Name & Surname………………………………………………………(please print)

Researcher's signature……………………………………………Date…………………

Appendix 3: Approval letter from Ghana Journalists Association

GHANA JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION

Founded: August 15th 1949

NATIONAL OFFICERS

PRESIDENT
Affail Monney

VICE-PRESIDENT
Linda Asante-Agyei (Mrs)

GENERAL SECRETARY
Edmund Kofi Yeboah

ORGANISING SECRETARY
Albert Kwabena Dwumfour

TREASURER
Audrey Dekelu (Mrs)

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
Mary Mensah

April 22, 2022

Paul Achonga Kabah Kwode

University of South Africa

Dear Sir,

RE: Request for Permission to Conduct Research with Members of the Ghana Journalists Association.

Fake News and Political Economy of the Media in Ghana: The Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

I write to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated February 18, 2022 requesting for permission to conduct an academic research titled: "Fake News and Political Economy of the Media in Ghana: The Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution," as part of your Doctor of Philosophy in Communication programme at the University of South Africa.

The Ghana Journalists Association willingly grants you the permission to conduct the interviews to enable you gather the information needed for your research and wishes you well.

Please do not hesitate to come back should you be in need of any further assistance.

Yours Sincerely

Linda Asante Agyei

Appendix 4: Question Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

<u>UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA</u>

PHD IN COMMUNICATION

The schedule is designed to solicit responses from a semi-structured interview with selected journalists from the Daily Graphic, Ghana News Agency, JoyFM, TV3 and Daily Guide media houses, all of Ghana. The purpose of the study is to explore fake news and the political economy of the media in Ghana.

The discussions will focus on how the fourth industrial revolution is aiding the production and dissemination of fake news in the public sphere of Ghana. Responses from the in-depth interviews will help the researcher understand how fake news spreads, the editorial fact-checking processes in place to check fake news and how the political economy play a role in the dissemination of fake news in the country. The interview will cover a number of questions including the following;

1. What is your understanding of fake news?
2. How are fake news produced and published, and in which medium?
3. What are the political reasons people publish fake news?
4. What are the economic benefits for publishing fake news?
5. What is your view about the economic benefits for/of fake news?
6. In which way do fake news affect the practice of journalism in Ghana?
7. How do new technologies play a role or aid the production and publication of fake news?
8. Which are the common 4th industrial revolution technologies aiding the production and dissemination of fake news?
9. Are there specific reasons for using these technologies?
10. If any, could you explain the gatekeeping processes in media organisations in Ghana?
11. Do media organisations use fact-checkers in detecting fake news?
12. Which are the common media outlets (mainstream and social) that publish fake news and why?
13. What has government done to address the issue of fake news?
14. Are there laws regulating fake news dissemination in Ghana?
15. Are there any policy interventions aimed at addressing fake news?
16. How realistic can these policies address the spread of fake news?
17. How will enactment of laws be democratic since citizens have the right to freedom of expression?
18. What do you think can be done to reduce fake news propagation?

Appendix 5: Research Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR JOURNALISTS

Dear respondent,

The researcher is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Communication Science, University of South Africa, city of Tshwane. The questionnaire seeks to understand the dissemination of fake news in the political economy of Ghana. To achieve the objectives of the study, your utmost cooperation and honest responses to these questions is very important. All information provided in this questionnaire would be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and will **ONLY** beused for academic purposes. You are therefore **NOT** expected to provide your name on this questionnaire. The researcher appreciates your response in advance. Thank you.

SECTION A. GENERAL INFORMATION (Please tick the appropriate response)

1. Sex: Male (   ) Female (   ) Do not want to share (   )

2. Age: 18-30 years (   ) 31-40 years (   ) 41-50 years (   ) 51-60 years (   ) Above 61 years ( )

3.   Education Qualification Attained: Certificate ( ) Diploma (   ) Honours degree (   )Bachelor's Degree (   ) Master's Degree (   ) PhD (
)

4.   Years of experience in journalism: 1 – 5 years (   ) 6-10 years (   ) 11-15 years (   ) 16-20 (   ) Above 20 years (   )

This section relates to the economic and political motives of fake news publication

Tick (√) the appropriate response for each of the questions below.

1. Economic and political factors are responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana?

Strongly agree (   ) Agree (   ) Not sure (   ) Disagree (   ) Strongly disagree (   )

2. Have you ever written a story/feature knowing it is inaccurate?

Yes (   )   No (   )

3. If yes, state the reasons for the inaccurate …………………………………………………………

………

………

4. State reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting

a.……

b.……

c.……

d.……

e.……

The following questions relates to the use of the 4th industrial revolution technologies (*i.e., the use of facebook, whatsapp, twitter, google tools, robotics, artificial intelligence e.t.c*)

5. Do you use social media as source for news updates?

Yes (   )   No (   )

6. If yes, which of these social media platforms do you use for news updates?

Facebook (   ) WhatsApp (   )   Twitter (   ) Instagram (   )   Google+ (   )

   Other, specify (   )

7. The advent of new technologies such as robots, artificial intelligence and other fourth industrial revolution technology aids dissemination of fake news?

Strongly agree (   ) Agree (   ) Not sure (   ) Disagree (   ) Strongly disagree (   )

8. The laws of Ghana make provisions to regulate the production and dissemination of fake news.

Strongly agree (   ) Agree (   ) Not sure (   ) Disagree (   ) Strongly disagree (   )

9. The provisions of fake news laws in Ghana are enforced by the government of Ghana.

Strongly agree (   ) Agree (   ) Not sure (   ) Disagree (   ) Strongly disagree (   )

10. News stories produced by journalists in Ghana are factual and truthful.

Strongly agree (   ) Agree (   ) Not sure (   ) Disagree (   ) Strongly disagree (   )

11. Outline factors used by your media house to ensure accuracy of news stories.

a…………………………………………………………………………………………

b…………………………………………………………………………………………..

c…………………………………………………………………………………………..
d………………………………………………………………………………………….

e…………………………………………………………………………………………

f…………………………………………………………………………………………

g………………………………………………………………………………………….

The below questions relate to the gatekeeping and fact-checking process in journalism

12. Social media news sources are trustworthy to me and are reliable for mainstream media.

Strongly agree (   ) Agree (   ) Not sure (   ) Disagree (   ) Strongly disagree (   )

13. How do you know whether the news sourced from social media is factual, accurate or reliable?

a…………………………………………………………………………………………

b………………………………………………………………………………………………………

c………………………………………………………………………………………………………

d………………………………………………………………………………………………………

14. Tick (√) any of the statements you agree with in the following;

Whatever is published by social media is true (   )

I believe if it's not true, it will not be published (   )

I assess the publisher and writer of a news story before reading (   )

I am always skeptical about every news story so I double check the source (   )

I immediately publish social media stories so that I can be the first to break the news faster than other media houses ( )

Other (Specify) ……………………………………………………………………………….

1. Which of the following channels of media are prone to fake news? Radio (   ) TV (   )

   Newspapers (   )   Websites/Internet (   )   Social media (   )

   2. Which of the following types of media easily publish fake news in Ghana?
   Mainstream/traditional (   ) Social media (   )

   3. News stories produced by the media in Ghana are properly edited and are therefore authentic for public consumption?

   Strongly agree (   ) Agree (   ) Not sure (   ) Disagree (   ) Strongly disagree (   )

   4. Outline the factors responsible for your answer in question 16.

   a………………………………………………………………………………………………

   b…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

   c…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

d…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

e…………………………………………………………………………………………………

f……………………………………………………………………………………………………

g……………………………………………………………………………………………………

5. All news stories go through editorial gatekeeping processes?

Strongly agree (　) Agree (　)　Not sure (　) Disagree (　) Strongly disagree (　)

1. Explain your answer provided in question 18.

a………………………………………………………………………………………………

b………………………………………………………………………………………………

c………………………………………………………………………………………………

d………………………………………………………………………………………………

e………………………………………………………………………………………………

f………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. *Tick (√) the appropriate box for each statement as it applies to the economic and political reasons for publishing fake news.*

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
21.1 Fake news is produced because of economic reasons					
21.2 Fake news production is a source of economic livelihood for some people in Ghana					

Statement					
21.3 Fake news is produced to attract traffic to websites of the producers					
21.4 Political reasons are responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news					
21.5 Fake news is used by the government to divert attention when faced with media backlash					

Statement					
21.6 Political parties produce fake news to gain political advantage					
21.7 Fake news is a propaganda tool used by politicians to achieve their goals					

3. *Tick (√) the appropriate box for each statement as it applies to the use of technology in producing fake news.*

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
22.1 Digital technology is the reason for the increasing spread of fake news					
22.2 Social media is the reason for high rate of fake news in the country					
22.3 Technology cannot be blamed for the spread of fake news					
22.4 Social media plays a minimal role in the dissemination of fake news					
22.5 Robots or artificial intelligence are used to spread fake news					

4. Tick (√) the appropriate box for each statement as it applies to the gatekeeping functions of the media.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly agree
23.1 News stories/features are written and edited by reporters					

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly agree
23.2 News processing follow gate keeping steps, from the reporter to the editor before publishing					
23.3 News follow a chain of command from reporter to sub-editor and then to the editor					
23.4 There is a system in place to fact-check fake news stories					
23.5 There is no means to immediately fact-check fake news stories					
23.6 There is a fact-checker but the process is cumbersome to use and so it is not used					

Thank You for Participating

Appendix 6: COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

This study is being undertaken in a period where Covid-19 restrictions have been eased in Ghanathus enabling face to face interactions albeit the wearing of mask. In order to reduce the risk of infection of Covid-19 between the researcher and the research participants, the following measureswould be adopted during data collection stage;

Researcher would abide by all national regulations, guidelines and protocols of Covid-19 throughout the data collection process.

The researcher would ensure that the risks to the participants and researchers are justified by the potential benefits to the participants, society and the scientific community.

Wearing of mask by the researcher at all data collection points.

Researcher would carry "COVID-19 researcher toolkit" when interacting with others. Thisshould include:

a. Researcher's own mask (might even need several if spending the whole day and havingto touch your mask or remove it in between data collection with participants).
b. A shade for the researcher and the participant might be essential when observation offacial expressions during research is essential.
c. Masks for participants who might need it or who are not on mask.
d. Thermometer.
e. Alcohol based hand sanitiser.
f. Sanitiser for surfaces, e.g. chairs, table.
g. A4 size plastic bag to put informed consent documents or paper questionnaires in (thiswill be left in the plastic bag for a minimum of three days).
h. Availability of basic materials on COVID-19 (proper use of masks, proper hand washing, grounds for social distancing, reason for cough etiquette) to distribute to participants.
i. Box of tissues where necessary.
j. Bag for disposal of used masks and tissue