Digital Inclusion in Ghana

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Introduction

This report analyses the digital rights in the digital space and how these rights increase digital inclusiveness and narrow the digital divide in Ghana. The key thematic areas highlight the best ways to improve the inclusiveness of people digitally while the challenges and available opportunities are the restrictions people encounter online and factors that help narrow or bridge the digital divide, respectively. The interventions in response to new media are increasing interactions, knowledge acquisition and, more broadly, the ways of living and working.[1] Technology is expanding the boundaries of social circles, sharing of information and relating to people with different backgrounds worldwide.[2] People already rely on the various social media sites embedded in their daily lives for news, updates on events, entertainment, connect with family and friends, share, receive, and comment.[3] However, the drawback is how people can recognise their right to interact and express themselves online freely without restrictions.[4]

[1] Dentzel, Z. (2014.). How the internet has changed Everyday Life. OpenMind. https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/internet-changed-everyday-life/

[2] Learning, L. (n.d.). Introduction to sociology. Lumen. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-introductiontosociology/chapter/media-globalization/

[3] Simplilearn (2021). Positive and negative impacts of social media: Here are the advantages and disadvantages. Simplilearn.com. https://www.simplilearn.com/real-impact-social-media-article

[4] Owusu-Darko, K. A. (2021). Internet access as a fundamental human right in the digitalization of economy. Thebftonline. https://thebftonline.com/2021/06/23/internet-access-as-a-fundamental-human-right-in-the-digitalization-of-economy/.

[5] Preston, L. (2021). What is Digital Media? Digital Marketing Services | Digital Logic ™.https://www.digitallogic.co/blog/what-is-digital-media/#:~:text=Digital%20media%20is%20any%20form,social%20media%2C%20and%20online%20advertising.

Definitions of Concepts

Digital Media

Digital media is any form of media that can be created, viewed, modified, and distributed via electronic devices.[5] Essentially, digital media has made it easier for individuals, organisations, or entities to share, access, and alter information easily.[6] People now use social media to express their views, receive information, share updates, and even connect with prospective target audiences for their businesses.[7]

Digital Rights

Subsequently, as people continue to use, engage, and access information online, certain laws need to be adapted to protect and safeguard the fundamental human rights of "Netizens" and that is Digital citizens.[8] Equally, the African Commission on Human and People Rights (ACHPR) and United Nations (UN) have affirmed and entrenched that the rights of people online must be protected just as offline.[9] This implies that people should have the freedom to express, interact, access, and relate online without restrictions and exclusions.[10] Digital rights, which are closely intertwined with freedom of expression and privacy are becoming increasingly important.[11] This implies that digital rights allow individuals, entities and organisations to use, access, create, publish and express freely on digital media.[12] Yet, the marginalised and minority groups in the Ghanaian society is a matter of concern as the issue of legalising the LGBTQIA+ community is still opposed and members belonging to this community are having their rights infringed upon offline and online.[13]

Digital Inclusion and Digital Divide

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[6] Preston, L. (2021). What is Digital Media? Digital Marketing Services | Digital Logic ™. https://www.digitallogic.co/blog/what-is-digital-media/#:~:text=Digital%20media%20is%20any%20form,social%20media%2C%20and%20online%20advertising.

[7] Learning, L. (2021). Introduction to business. Lumen. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wmintrobusiness/chapter/reading-digital-marketing-social-media

[8] Learning, L. (2021.). Introduction to business. Lumen. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wmintrobusiness/chapter/reading-digital-marketing-social-media

[9] PLC, A. M. B. F. T. (1986). African Commission on human and peoples' rights. African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Legalinstruments. Retrieved January 27, 2023, from https://www.achpr.org/legalinstruments/detail?id=49

[10] Iberdrola. (2021). Digital rights, essential in the internet age. Iberdrola. https://www.iberdrola.com/innovation/what-are-digital-rights

[11] Iberdrola. (2021). Digital rights, essential in the internet age. Iberdrola. https://www.iberdrola.com/innovation/what-are-digital-rights

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Digital Inclusion and Digital Divide

Digital inclusion is the state in which all individuals, entities, organisations, and even minorities in society have access to engage online.[14] This includes access to high-speed internet, access to digital skills training, use of digital devices that meet the user's needs, technical assistance, apps, content, and software that are intended to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.[15] Individuals must have the same rights in digital spaces as it is in the real world even though there are issues of access, communicative rights and liberty online due to the digital divide[16] and that has caused a resurgence of interest in digital inclusion.[17]

Also, it is regarded as a lack of access prevents individuals from playing active roles in society[18] and just as West puts it, the gap between people who can easily use and access technology and those who cannot is termed as a digital divide.[19] The differences in how people use the internet,[20] who displays the kind of internet skills and how these differences in access, usage, and skills affect people from different backgrounds, specifically in Ghana.[21]

[11] Iberdrola. (2021). Digital rights, essential in the internet age. Iberdrola. https://www.iberdrola.com/innovation/what-are-digital-rights

[12] Iberdrola. (2021). Digital rights, essential in the internet age. Iberdrola. https://www.iberdrola.com/innovation/what-are-digital-rights

[13] Human Rights Watch. (2021). Ghana: LGBT activists face hardships after detention. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/20/ghana-lgbt-activists-face-hardships-after-detention

[14] Tesfaye, T., Scorse, Y., & Smith, L. (2022, August 29). Definitions. National Digital Inclusion Alliance. https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions

[15] Tesfaye, T., Scorse, Y., & Smith, L. (2022, August 29). Definitions. National Digital Inclusion Alliance. https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions

[16] Rogers, E. M. (2001). The digital divide. Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 7(4), 96–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/135485650100700406

[17] Micklethwaite, A. (2018). Onwards! why the movement for digital inclusion has never been more important. Digital Literacy Unpacked, 191–202. https://doi.org/10.29085/9781783301997.016

[18] The United Nations. (2016). Identifying social inclusion and exclusion. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf

[19] Goggin, G. (2018). "Afterword: Why digital inclusion now?" - ses.library.usyd.edu.au. https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/handle/2123/17784/GogginAfterwordWhyDigitalInclusionNow%3F.pdf?sequence=2

[20] Hargittai, E. (2002). View of second-level digital divide: Dif erences in people's online skills: First Monday. View of Second-Level Digital Divide: Differences in People's Online Skills | First Monday. https://firstmonday.org/article/view/942/864

[21] (www.dw.com), D. W. (2018). Despite Ghana's commitment to internet expansion, problems persist: DW: 29.11.2018. DW.COM. https://www.dw.com/en/despite-ghanas-commitment-to-internet-expansion-problems-persist/a-46508524

Digital Rights Legislation Framework in Ghana

In Ghana, the 1992 Constitution reiterates its supremacy as a fundamental value of the state and establishes in Chapter 5, clause 21(1) that all persons shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media.[22] Therefore, the other media includes digital media, which aids digital citizens to interact online hence the need to protect privacy and ensure responsible digital citizenship by being ethical, respectful, sceptical, and recognising rights while using digital media.[23] The provision above provides citizens with the liberty to exercise freedom of speech and express themselves freely offline and online.[24] These provisions have, however, been violated on many occasions. For instance, in May 2021, two journalists faced arbitrary arrest and torture while filming government vehicles parked at the National security service car park that was allegedly purchased at inflated prices and shared it with a colleague journalist who was also arrested later.[25]

Similarly, the Data Protection Act, 2012 (Act 843) sets out the rules and principles to govern the collection of personal data, use, disclosure and keeping of personal data.[26] The recognition of the right to privacy concerning the processing of personal data and other information in Ghana led to the passage of Act 843 and further guarantees the right to privacy as enshrined under the 1992 Constitution.[27] On the contrary, there are situations where actions conducted by some persons, entities, organisations, and even Government institutions are deemed as an infringement on the rights of people under this Act.[28] For example, the National Communication Authority (NCA) and some Telecommunications Companies like Vodafone, MTN and AirtelTiGo have been sued over the ongoing SIM re-registration exercise for the collection of personal information of subscribers (fingerprints, iris or facial pattern records, and other biometric data) as it is deemed as a violation of the fundamental human rights and freedom of the people at large.[29]

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[22] constituteproject.org. (2022). With Amendments through Ghana's Constitution. Comparative Constitution Project. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.pdf

[23] Raisingchildren.net.au. Digital Citizenship: Teens being Responsible Online. https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/entertainment-technology/digital-life/digital-citizenship (2021)

[24] Constituteproject.org. (2022). With Amendments through Ghana's Constitution. Comparative Constitution Project. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.pdf

25 Nyabor, J. (2021). Ghana: Arbitrary arrests & Torture of Journalists,

how free is the Press? https://www.theafricareport.com/91219/ghana-arbitrary-arrests-torture-of-journalists-how-free-is-the-press/

[26] The Data Protection Act, 2012 (Act 843). https://www.dataprotection.org.gh/data-protection/data-protection-acts-2012

[27] The Data Protection Act, 2012 (Act 843). https://www.dataprotection.org.gh/data-protection/data-protection-acts-2012

[28] News Ghana. Lawyer sues NCA, Telcos over SIM re-registration https://newsghana.com.gh/lawyer-sues-nca-telcos-over-sim-re-registration/ (2021)

Also, there is the Cybersecurity Act of 2020 which protects the critical information infrastructure of the country, regulates cybersecurity activities, provisions for child protection online and development of Ghana's cybersecurity ecosystem.[30] In this internet-driven world, cybersecurity incidents and breaches have become a problem even though measures are being taken to prevent hackers and identity thieves from accessing information from individuals, entities or organisations (victims).[31] In Ghana, the reliance on the internet by individuals, organisations and government institutions is increasing, and that has led to an increase in cyber espionage, fraud, cyber theft and other cyber-attacks that cause harm to electronic transactions and data privacy online hence the need to increase cyber security to protect the rights of individuals within the national digital ecosystem.[32] In 2020, the National Information Technology Agency (NITA) under the Ministry of Communications and Digitalization in Ghana affirmed how cybersecurity incidents had affected critical sectors of the country and caused disruptions in the delivery of essential services by these sectors. The sectors include Energy, Banking and Finance and Telecommunications. If cybersecurity issues are left unchecked, it can affect the security and economy of the country in the near future.[33]

Equally, there is the Right to Information (RTI) bill passed in 2019 by the government of Ghana to fulfil the functional democracy as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution. Article 21(f) guarantees every individual the right to access information from government institutions and other agencies.[34] The RTI bill promotes inclusiveness as it supports individual rights to access information published or not published and also holds the government accountable.[35] A Commission was established in 2020 to seek the smooth implementation of the RTI Bill as entrenched in the Act. As part of the duties of the Commission, there has been a call recently to all public institutions to submit reports on all implemented provisions of the RTI Act to the Commission, and this is subjected to Section 77 of the Law, which requires public institutions to submit written reports to the Commission within 60 days after December 31 on how their various institutions have implemented the law throughout the previous year. The purpose of this is to know the number of requests granted for access to information and also to get to know rejected requests by the various public institutions.[36]

[29]News Ghana. Lawyer sues NCA, Telcos over SIM re-registration https://newsghana.com.gh/lawyer-sues-nca-telcos-over-sim-re-registration/ (2021)

[30] Ministry of Communications and Digitalization. Cybersecurity Act passed to Promote & Regulate Cybersecurity Activities. https://www.moc.gov.gh/cybersecurity-act-passed-promote-regulate-cybersecurity-activities#:~:text=Parliament%20has%20passed%20the%20landmark,and%20develops%20Ghana's%20cybersecurity%20ecosystem. (2020)

[31] Morrissey, D. Cyberbullying and Cybersecurity: How are they connected? https://cybersecurity.att.com/blogs/security-essentials/cyberbullying-and-cybersecurity-how-are-they-connected (2019)

[32] Ministry of Communications and Digitalization. Cybersecurity Act passed to Promote & Regulate Cybersecurity Activities. https://www.moc.gov.gh/cybersecurity-act-passed-promote-regulate-cybersecurity-activities (2020)

[33] Ministry of Communications and Digitalization. Cybersecurity Act passed to Promote & Regulate Cybersecurity Activities. https://www.moc.gov.gh/cybersecurity-act-passed-promote-regulate-cybersecurity-activities (2020)

[34] Ghana Right to Information Act, 2019 (Act 989). http://www.africanplatform.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Ghana-RTI-Act-__1_.pdf

[35] The Right to Information. Ghana's Journey. https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/download/1570075247RTI%20GHANAs%20JOURNEY%20(1992%20-%202019).pdf

[36] Adu-Gyamerah, E. Submit RTI implementation plan by March 2022-Commisssion directs Public Institution. https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-submit-rti-implementation-plan-by-march-2022-Commission-direct s-public-institutions.html (2021)

Subsequently, there are several Acts having various regulations and guidelines which are recognized under the 1992 Constitution of Ghana that regulates online activities in terms of rights and privacy of digital citizens thus the National Communications Authority act, 2008 (769), the Electronic Communications Act, 2008 (775), the Electronic Transaction Act, 2008 (772), the National Information Technology Agency Act, 2008 (771), and the Communications Service Tax Act, 2008 (Act 754).[37]

Despite these legal provisions to protect the rights, privacy, and other engagements online and offline, people still have challenges with digital participation in terms of electronic transactions fraud, misinformation, tariffs, hate speech, criminal defamation, and other cyber-attacks.[38]

In Ghana, the country's Parliament unanimously voted to change the Criminal libel and Seditious laws, which were repealed in July 2007 under the Amendment Bill (Act 2001).[39] Yet, actions like arrest and detainment of journalists who criticise the government must be permitted by law as per Section 208 of the Criminal and Offences Act 1960, Act 29, and Electronic Communications Act (Act775), section 76.[40] Many private media journalists have been arrested based on these Acts. For instance, in July 2019, a reporter from MordernGhanaonline.com and his deputy editor were arrested. They were alleged to have published false news against the Minister of National Security, Albert Kan Dapaah. Another instance is the arrest and detainment of a Daily WhatsUp News editor for allegedly publishing false news.[41] Concerning these arrests, press media advocates such as the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) opposed the actions against these journalists and demanded their immediate release.[42] Furthermore, there has been an argument that the law is being abused by security agencies, especially the Ghana Police Service.[43] The prevalent is that, in cases where public figures or those connected to power feel a particular news portal or publication is defaming them, the proper course of action is to file a civil lawsuit rather than using the police to arrest and detain reporters.[44]

Moving on, Adadevoh emphasised in a recent report, cyber financial fraud is

[37] National Communication Authority. Regulatory Framework: Legislation. https://www.nca.org.gh/regulatory-framework/legislations/

[38] DW Akademie. Digital is Transforming Society in Ghana. https://www.dw.com/en/digital-is-transforming-society-in-ghana/a-46486052 (2018)

[39] Darko, S. A. (2022). Ghana's Law on Publication of false news is vague and easily analysed [web log]. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaat-lse/2022/02/25/ghana-law-publication-of-fake-news-vague-easily-abused-free-speech/.

[40] Darko, S. A. (2022). Ghana's Law on Publication of false news is vague and easily analysed [web log]. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaat-lse/2022/02/25/ghana-law-publication-of-fake-news-vague-easily-abused-free-speech/.

[41] MFWA. (2022). The two laws surviving the repealed criminal libel law in Ghana. Media Foundation For West Africa. https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/the-two-laws-surviving-the-repealed-criminal-libel-law-in-ghana/#:~:text=On%20July%2

027%202001%2C%20Ghana,criminal%20libel%20and%20seditious%20laws.

[42] MFWA. (2022). The two laws surviving the repealed criminal libel law in Ghana. Media Foundation For West Africa. https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/the-two-laws-surviving-the-repealed-criminal-libel-law-in-ghana/#:~:text=On%20July%2027%202001%2C%20Ghana,criminal%20libel%20and%20seditious%20laws.

[43] MFWA. (2022). The two laws surviving the repealed criminal libel law in Ghana. Media Foundation For West Africa. https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/the-two-laws-surviving-the-repealed-criminal-libel-law-in-ghana/#:~:text=On%20July%2027%202001%2C%20Ghana,criminal%20libel%20and%20seditious%20laws.

[44] Darko, S. A. (2022). Ghana's Law on Publication of false news is vague and easily analysed [web log]. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaat-lse/2022/02/25/ghana-law-publication-of-fake-news-vague-easily-abused-free-speech/.

prevalent across all cyber platforms in the country, including bank and e-commerce, and this should be seen as a national security threat that requires a definite solution[3] In this quest, telecommunication companies in Ghana have come up with measures to help battle electronic money transactions like the introduction of acceptable identification (ID) cards for money withdrawals.[45] However, such an approach hinders the transaction of individuals and restricts all persons not having a required ID card on them at a particular time use of the services of mobile money.[46] There have been several concerns raised. What if a person travels or leaves his or her ID card at home and cannot access it immediately? How does this procedure even safeguard money in people's accounts from fraudsters? In emergencies, what does one do to withdraw money from one's wallet without a valid ID card?[47] Even though these measures are there to help subscribers use electronic transactions with little or no fear of falling into any fraud schemes, some customers do not understand why these fraudsters are not being apprehended and prosecuted.[48] Yet, while these measures are still in progress, there should be legal bindings to help prosecute perpetrators of such fraud acts.

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45 Senyo, P., K. Ghana's new Mobile Money rule could derail financial inclusion but there are answers. https://theconversation.com/ghanas-new-mobile-money-rule-could-derail-financial-inclusion-but-there-are-answers-158770 (2021)

46 Ghana Business News.Mobile Money service: Customers want more security measures against Fraudsters. https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2021/07/27/mobile-money-service-customers-want-more-security-measuresagainst-fraudsters/ (2021)

47 Ghana Business News.Mobile Money service: Customers want more security measures against Fraudsters. https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2021/07/27/mobile-money-service-customers-want-more-security-measures-against-fraudsters/ (2021)

48 Ghana Business News.Mobile Money service: Customers want more security measures against Fraudsters. https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2021/07/27/mobile-money-service-customers-want-more-security-measures-against-fraudsters/ (2021)

Access status in Ghana

Focusing on who is using the internet and who is not in Ghana, the government and telecommunication companies are on set to improve access to the internet, even though there is a setback of uneven coverage and high costs.[49] Ghana was one of the first African countries to deregulate the telecommunications market[50], and since 2005, the country's technology ecosystem is fast growing.[51] In 2018, Ghana had close to 19 million unique mobile subscribers, which is equivalent to 67% of the population,[52] there has been a 7.5% increase between 2019 and 2020.[53] Social media users in Ghana increased by 12% between April 2019 and January 2020.[54] In Ghana, the average cost per gigabyte (GB) of mobile internet usage was $0.66 in 2021. While 1GB of mobile data in the nation may be purchased for as low as 0.17 dollars, it could also be purchased for as much as $3.47.[55]

There has been significant growth, and that has made Ghana's internet penetration rate the highest in West Africa and above Sub-Saharan Africa with an average of 44.8%.[56] However, the digital participation in Ghana has been a challenge to society in terms of poor infrastructure, access to capital, women and other marginalised groups, cybercrime, misinformation, hate speech,[57] and affordability.[58]

[49]DW Akademie. Despite Ghana's commitment to Internet expansion, Problems persist. https://www.dw.com/en/despite-ghanas-commitment-to-internet-expansion-problems-persist/a-46508524 (2018)

[50] GSAM. Country Overview: Ghana Driving mobile-enabled digital transformation. https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Ghana-Country-Overview.pdf

[51] DW Akademie. Digital is Transforming Society in Ghana. https://www.dw.com/en/digital-is-transforming-society-in-ghana/a-46486052 (2018)

[52] DW Akademie. Despite Ghana's commitment to Internet expansion, Problems persist. https://www.dw.com/en/despite-ghanas-commitment-to-internet-expansion-problems-persist/a-46508524 (2018)

[53] Dataportal 'Digital 2020: Ghana. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-ghana

[54]Dataportal 'Digital 2020: Ghana. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-ghana

[55] Sasu, D. D. (2021, November 9). Ghana: Price for Mobile Data 2021. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1274872/price-for-mobile-data-in-ghana/

[56] Dataportal 'Digital 2020: Ghana. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-ghana

[57] DW Akademie. Digital is Transforming Society in Ghana. https://www.dw.com/en/digital-is-transforming-society-in-ghana/a-46486052 (2018)

[58] DW Akademie. Digital backlash threatens media freedom in Ghana. https://www.dw.com/en/digital-backlash-threatens-media-freedom-in-ghana/a-46602904 (2018)

Increasing Digital inclusion and closing the divide

Gendered dimensions in access

The gender gap in internet access exists where hundreds of millions of women and girls are missing out on opportunities to use the internet to learn new skills, start online businesses, undertake e-transactions, and other online activities.[59] The digital gender divide in addition to infrastructure, lack of digital skills and affordability, has been one major barrier to meaningful participation in a digital society[60] Thus some people are advantaged in terms of access and the use of technology to others.[61] However, being a digital citizenship to some extent, is having equal access to, and skills in using digital technologies as (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2008) reposed.[62] Again, the digital divide goes beyond the number of men and women

using the internet or have access. The digital gender divide comes into play differently for women across the globe and they face their own unique barrier from digital participation, digital skills, education gaps, affordability, income inequalities, and others.[63]

According to one study in 2019, 3.7 billion people are unconnected and the majority are women and girls.[64] The study further states that, the proportion of women using the internet globally is around 48% compared to men, which is 55%.[65] This means the gender gap in internet use globally stands at 12.5%.[66] Another study in 2021 shows there has been an increase in the number of people using the internet globally as it stands at 4.9 billion, and with that, 62% of men are using the internet compared to wom-

59 International Telecommunication Union. Bridging the Gender Divide. Overview. https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/bridging-the-gender-divide.aspx (2021)

60 International Telecommunication Union. Bridging the Gender Divide. Challenges and Solutions. https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/bridging-the-gender-divide.aspx (2021)

61 International Telecommunication Union. Bridging the Gender Divide. Challenges and Solutions. https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/bridging-the-gender-divide.aspx (2021)

62 Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. J., and McNeal, R. S. Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation. Cambridge: MIT Press (2008) https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1044&context=library_staff

63 International Telecommunication Union. Bridging the Gender Divide. Challenges and Solutions. https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/bridging-the-gender-divide.aspx (2021)

64 International Telecommunications Union. Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2021 https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx (2021)

65 International Telecommunications Union. Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2021 https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx (2021)

66 International Telecommunications Union. Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2021 https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx (2021)

en 57%.[67] Even though there has been an increase in digital inclusion and digital gender is being narrowed globally, women continuously remain digitally marginalised in developing countries.[68]

In Ghana, despite the ever-increasing relevance of digital participation and access, 30.3% of the entire population has internet access. The men are 31.2% and women 29.4%, with a 9% gap[69]. However, in terms of meaningful connectivity, the overall %age is 12.5%, of which men have 13.4% and women 11.9%, with a gap of 14.9%.[70] There is still a challenge of digital divide among women in urban areas who benefit from the use of the internet compared to those in the rural areas.71 A study showed that this is due to poor service and availability in rural areas and the high cost of data. Again, there is a divide in digital skills training in the urban areas as well as rural areas or even regional bases in Ghana. For instance, the Ministry of Communications and Digitalization, as part of its duties of enhancing and promoting female digital skills, have embarked on several projects to attain that. These projects are set to change the status quo, which makes women and girls hold up behind without participating in the digital space. In one of the projects, sixty thousand females to benefit from Cyber Security Training were chosen from three regions in Ghana. In a

country with 16 regions, if only three regions are selected to have such training, then there is a divide among the females in the other regions.[72]

The Level of Society

Society has received a lot of impact from new technology, and it plays an essential role in society today. Technology has enhanced communication, learning, and how people interact day-in and day out, and has made it possible for people to access and engage online.[73] Again, technology has introduced electronic commerce and made it a new way of doing business, making business transactions easy and faster at the same time building a good customer relationship online.[74]

Subsequently, in Ghana, the introduction of new technology has made a great impact on the economic, social, health, education and communication in the country. The internet has been a significant change as it has given people urban-rural areas in terms of internet access. In some parts of rural areas, the residents used to rely on traditional media for information, but since the introduction of the internet, people now have access to social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube, where they can join live sessions of television and radio stations for information, post comments, and have a feel of the programs.[75] This

[67] International Telecommunications Union. Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2021 https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx (2021)

[68] World Wide Web Foundation. Women's Rights Online: Closing the Digital Gender Gap for a more Equal World. http://webfoundation.org/docs/2020/10/Womens-Rights-Online-Report-1.pdf (2020)

[69] World Wide Web Foundation. Women's Rights Online: Closing the Digital Gender Gap for a more Equal World. http://webfoundation.org/docs/2020/10/Womens-Rights-Online-Report-1.pdf (2020)

[70] World Wide Web Foundation. Women's Rights Online: Closing the Digital Gender Gap for a more Equal World. http://webfoundation.org/docs/2020/10/Womens-Rights-Online-Report-1.pdf (2020)

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has narrowed down the digital divide and improved inclusiveness in rural areas.

Furthermore, organisations are trying to help bridge the digital divide regarding gender, marginalised groups and served and under-served communities in the country. They provide Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres in various district capitals by supplying computers and the internet to anyone who wants to learn or improve their digital skills. Also, some private organisations collaborate with government institutions such as Ministries and universities to train women in ICT skills such as Artificial intelligence and Cybersecurity. These are innovative ways to bridge the digital gender divide in the country.[76]

Marginalised groups such as disabled persons and minority groups are developing new ways to engage and access digitally in society. A recent study showed that the internet is helping to enlighten and educate people on certain traditional customs that infringed on the rights of people through digital media, in turn breaking barriers and promoting a positive impact in society.[77] Further, the internet is making waves for dialogue among the people in the country, giving social groups like the LGBTQIA+ community and women

a voice in society.[78] Again, advocacy groups have adopted ways to advocate issues surrounding young people and women through social media. Now parents, teachers, politicians, and society as a whole have found out that issues confronting humanity cannot be ignored anymore, thus compelling leaders to find solutions for them.[79]

Politics and Governance

Another field that digital media and the use of the internet have impacted is Politics and Governance in the country. In Ghana, most media organisations are privately owned, and many of these outlets belong to politicians, therefore primarily imposing what they want the people to hear as news, especially during election periods. However, the introduction of social media has made it possible for citizens to interact with politicians through their social media handles.[80] That is, through social media tools like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, politicians can facilitate political engagements and campaigns with electorates. Some Civil Society Groups (CSGs) also use social media to educate and advocate on political issues, such as the #iRegistered campaign that sought to encourage Ghanaians to register for the 2016 limited registration exercise.[81]

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80 Penplus Bytes. Social media and Political campaigning in Ghana. https://www.penplusbytes.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SOCIAL-MEDIA-AND-POLITICAL-CAMPAIGNING-IN-GHANA.pdf (2017)

81 Penplus Bytes. Social media and Political campaigning in Ghana. https://www.penplusbytes.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SOCIAL-MEDIA-AND-POLITICAL-CAMPAIGNING-IN-GHANA.pdf (2017)

Given Governance, the government and other institutions in Ghana have leveraged the internet and social media to bring their services to the convenience of the citizens thus government's implementation of e-government focuses on facilitating the effective delivery of government services to the citizens and ultimately providing efficient government-wide electronic means of sharing information and knowledge.[82] Ghana has experienced a phenomenal increase in ICT penetration in every aspect of the economy, of which governance is a part.[83] The government's determination to make the e-government possible has made several portals like electronic payments (epay), electronic services (e-services), all under E-services, Government e-Commerce portal infrastructure which is developed to provide a platform for online submission application services via e-forms, e-Payments for post and delivery services, and others.[84]

Education

The internet has made it possible for students to engage online through social networking, access information, and research.[85] Some researchers have affirmed how the influence of new media and social media platforms in today's era of connected learning has become a strong controlling factor in the educational system globally.[86] In Ghana, where 30.3% have access to the internet,[87] ICT services have the potential to enhance the quality and accessibility of education.88 The use of digital tools like smartphones, laptops, tablets and other materials that facilitate the use of the internet enhances students to work faster, research, assignments, and other school projects students engage in.[89]

The Ministry of Education in Ghana has established a variety of school programs to ensure students acquire high-quality education through the Ghana Education Service (GES), which is a public agency under the ministry. One of the initiatives by the GES is to make ICT a compulsory subject at the Technical and Vocational Education Division (TVED), where they provide training in software development and internet proficiency. The introduction of digitalised learning in Ghana has enhanced the learning opportunities for students and teachers as the use of educational technology such as Smartboards, E-readers, Board projectors, and others support interactive learning activities.[90] Also, in April 2021, the Ghana Library Authority and the Scholastic Incorporation launched a browser-based program, the Scholastic Literacy Pro to help assess students' reading abilities and comprehension.[91] These are all mea-

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sures the government takes to promote digital inclusion among students in the country.

The state of Journalism

Journalism has moved from the traditional way of transmitting information due to the introduction of digital media and the internet.[92] Technology has, one way or another, exerted a fundamental influence on the functional duties of a journalist, although print media and broadcast media are still relevant in the dissemination of news.[93] In Ghana, New media and internet use is rapidly rising, and it's been implemented with relatively liberal policies causing an increase in content creation, publishing, digital distribution, and consumption via digital tools such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and the likes.[94] A recent study has shown that digitalisation has increased audience interaction online when it comes to social, economic, political, or governmental issues.[95]

Social media has now paved the way for people to engage in blogging and citizen journalism, of which now the sites earned these bloggers revenue through digital advertisement.[96] Although social media has created room for fake news, disinformation and malinformation, media houses are investing in various training for people to be handling their social media platforms and engage with their audience online because social media is now seen as what is relevant.[97] For journalists, the pace at which the digital transformation is taking place makes it necessary for some to catch up as online news providers are making a sudden occurrence of increase. Most topical or breaking news is first disseminated online for the audience to read, comment and share. For this, there is the need to learn digital skills and maintain an online presence at all times.[98]

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94 Fosu, I. Exploring the potential of wireless technologies to accelerate universal Internet access in Ghana. Telecommunications Policy. 35 (6):494–504. doi:10.1016/j.telpol.2011.04.001/ https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0308596111000565?via%3Dihub (2011)

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Conclusion

Despite the rapid growth in Ghana in terms of access and enhancing digital rights and privacy, the country still faces gaps of access in the rural areas as most people in such remote areas cannot afford the high cost involved in purchasing a digital tool like a smartphone or using the internet. Where there is affordability, the connection rate is low. Again, in terms of digitalisation, the high rate of taxation is preventing people from utilising such services due to the e-levy tax introduced on all mobile money transactions, which the government needs to address and find solutions to make the citizens continue using the mobile money transaction.

Again, as much as the government is improving the involvement of women in digital skills training, there is a clear divide between the urban, rural and even regional areas, as not all women can acquire such training. There are rising questions concerning bloggers and citizen journalists as they should be counted as journalists and afford the same

rights and protection regarding freedom of expression. The state should provide regulatory measures to help curb hate speech, defamatory statements, and cyber-bully from anonymous or even identifiable accounts on the various social media channels.

Again, Ghanaians, especially public officials, must be ready to release information to people when it comes to accessing the right to information, as not all government institutions have an RTI official to help release the information requested. Marginalised Groups, especially the LGBTQ community, should be able to express themselves freely without restrictions. In all, people have the right to express themselves freely offline and online. Online activities must be regulated as offline activities to help individuals engage and express themselves without restrictions. Defined laws should govern fake news, and defaulters should be sued under civil laws rather than arrested and detained.

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