



# RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: VULGARISM AND VIOLATIONS BY SOCIAL MEDIA USERS DURING THE 2016 AND 2020 ELECTIONS IN GHANA.

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# Rights to Freedom of Expression: Vulgarism and violations by social media users during the 2016 and 2020 Elections in Ghana

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Furthering digital rights in Sub-Saharan Africa is a significant call of many civil society organisations and advocacy groups. The region, over the years, has witnessed several governments attempt to regularise the digital space according to its whims and caprices. Mainly during elections in African countries, the governments invent different strategies to regulate and control the internet against calls of many digital rights advocates. Actions ranging from internet disruptions, online surveillance and undue content moderation<sup>1</sup> just to mention a few. Although Ghana has not witnessed any action of blatant internet shutdowns, there have been instances of the government trying to control what happens on the internet. Civil society groups have persistently been on guard to ensure a free internet without excessive government control in Ghana. Studies have digested the issues of internet regulation in Ghana, but this paper will, however, take a different turn and look at how individuals and social media users can ensure a safe and responsible digital space that will not warrant government interference. The paper will digest the issue of social media vulgarism and individual violation of freedom of expression and draw a line of responsibility for the two parties involved, the government and social media users.

abusiveness and inappropriateness on social media<sup>2</sup>. Vulgar language is as an overly lowered language with disgusting and obscene lexicalisation, which is generally banned from any form of civilised discourse<sup>3</sup>. Vulgarity is the use of curses and swear words<sup>4</sup>. In this paper, vulgarity relates to using offensive and derogatory words in online conversation. To understand the extent of vulgarity on social media, the author employed qualitative content analysis of some purposively selected comments of social media users during the 2016 and 2020 general elections in Ghana. An open-ended survey was also used to assess individual awareness of the legal implications of social media vulgarity, and an expert interview with a legal practitioner was conducted to understand the stance of the law on social media vulgarism. The first section of the paper explores internet penetration and regulation in Ghana. It also explores the use of social media in Ghana's elections, looking at how political parties, the electoral commission, the media, and civil society groups use the platforms and the reactions from the public. The second part presents the data collected from the content analysis, survey, and interview for discussions and findings.

Vulgarity is often associated with

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1 Marchant, E. and Stremlau, N., 2020. Internet Shutdowns in Africa| The Changing Landscape of Internet Shutdowns in Africa—Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, p.8.

2 Salim Sazed, 2021. Identifying vulgarity in Bengali social media textual content. *Computer Science*. p.13, Doi: 10.7717/peer-cs.665

3 Elizabeth Eder, Ulrike Krieg-Holz, Udo Hahn, 2019. At the lower end of language—exploring a vulgar and obscene side of German. In: *Proceedings of the Third Workshop on Abusive Language Online*. pp. 128-119.

4 Isabel Cachola, Eric Holgate, Daniel Preotiuc-Pietro, Junyi Jessy Li, 2018. Expressing vulgar: the socio-dynamics of vulgarity and its effects on sentiments analysis in social media. In: *Proceedings of the 27th International Conference on Computational Linguistics*. pp. 2938-2927.

# INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, Chapter 12 of the 1992 Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Individuals have the inalienable right to say what they want, how they want it, and where they want it. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states that everyone has the freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Along with its corollaries of freedom of information and press freedom, freedom of expression is an enabler of all other rights<sup>5</sup>. Principle 10 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights also elaborates on freedom of expression to include the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas either orally, in writing or in print. Digital media presents a large platform for the enjoyment and realization of the right to freedom of expression and all other basic human rights.

“The internet has changed how we communicate, work and play. It has affected how we live and learn, participate and protest”<sup>6</sup>. Freedom of expression on the internet has changed the face of communication and given meaning to other civil rights. Since the advent of the internet and social media in Ghana, interaction among people has turned a new face. Social media

networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube have increased individual participation in national discourse and paved the way for better democratic governance.

In Ghana, most people use social media to air their grievances on national issues. Others use it to call the government's attention to a pressing concern in their locality. Content creators and social media influencers use their platforms to entertain their audiences to make a living. Organisations and businesses see the new media as a platform to advertise their products and services. The government equally resorts to these platforms to communicate its policies to the citizenry. Various studies have shown that people use social media for other purposes: to connect and communicate with people they meet online<sup>7</sup>, to share photos<sup>8</sup>, to look at what others are doing<sup>9</sup>, and to find information<sup>10</sup>. The new media is widely patronised across the globe due to its penetrative ability. What begs to question is how well people use these platforms to avoid overstepping their freedom of expression.

Social media, however, is becoming an unsafe place. Vulgarity is fast-growing on digital platforms. The research found that the rate of swear word usage in English on Twitter is **1.15%** compared to **0.5 %-0.7%** of its usage in daily conversation<sup>11</sup>. Individuals are responsible when expressing their views and opinions on digital platforms. This responsibility must be balanced with the right to enjoy freedom of expression. Cyberbullying, hate speech, offensive words,

5 Freedom of expression: A fundamental human right underpinning all civil liberties. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/70years/freedom-of-expression>

6 Wolfgang Benedek, Mathias C Kettmann, 2013. Freedom of expression and the internet. *Council of Europe Publishing*. p. 13, available at <http://book.coe.int>

7 Ammar Oozeer, 2014. Internet and social network: freedom of expression in the digital age. *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*. Vol. 40, pp. 360-341. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050718.2014.909129>.

8 As seen above

9 As seen above

10 As seen above

11 Foster, William, Seymour Goodman, Eric Osiakwan, and Adam Bernstein, 2004. Global diffusion of the internet IV: The internet in Ghana. *Communication of the Association for Information Systems*. Vol.13, pp. 654-81.



and disinformation are being peddled on various social media platforms, which affect others and make social media a precarious place. Digital media should not be a resort to these irresponsible acts. Whilst we advocate for free online media devoid of any government bureaucracy and control, individuals and, therefore, social media users must exercise responsibility in the kind of content they put out online in order not to hurt others.

## INTERNET PENETRATION AND DIGITAL MEDIA REGULATION IN GHANA

Ghana was one of the earliest African countries to access the Internet in 1994<sup>12</sup>. Since then, the country has recorded relative growth in mobile connections moving from fixed-line access to the mobile broadband network. The country now operates with a 4G network connectivity which allows for fast internet connection. Although rural areas suffer poor Internet connection, the country has made relative progress with Internet connectivity. Globally, there were **4.66** billion social media users, with active users of **4.20** billion representing **53.6%** of the global population as of January 2021. Ghana has a rapidly growing digital space with **15.70** million internet users and **8.20** million active social media users as of January 2021<sup>13</sup> of which **92.3%** access social media platforms through mobile devices. Mobile connectivity in Ghana as of January 2021 stood at **41.69** million mobile connections representing **132.8%** of the total population<sup>14</sup>. These statistics indicate that many more people are using the internet than before. However, there are still issues of the digital divide, as studies have shown that women are significantly underrepresented on social media platforms<sup>15</sup>. The high cost of data and poor internet connectivity in rural areas further worsen the issue of the digital divide in Ghana.

For instance, a digital insight in Ghana by DataReportal, an online media research think-tank, revealed that the percentage of

messenger's Ad audience that Facebook report is **67.1%** males as compared to **32.9%** females as of January 2021. Also, the percentage of the Ad audience that Instagram reported was **59.4%** males to **40.6%** females at the end of January 2021. Notwithstanding the digital divide issues, Ghana is making impressive strides in internet penetration.



Fig 1 below: Facebook potential advert audience

Visit: [www.datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-ghana](https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-ghana)

Internet regulation in Ghana is under the auspices of the Ministry of Communication and Digitalization and the National Communication Authority. Other Acts under the 1992 constitution, such as the Electronic Communication Act of 2008 (ACT 775), the Criminal Offences Act of 1960 (ACT 29), the Cyber Security Act of 2020 (1083), and the Data Protection Act, 2012 (843) all contain provisions that can be used to regulate internet users and prosecute offenders. The Data Protection Act 2012 (ACT 843) establishes the Data Protection Authority, which is mandated to protect the privacy of individual and personal data by regulating the processing of personal information. The Cyber Security Act 2020 (ACT 1083) stipulates under section (3) subsection (D) that the Cyber Security Authority shall promote the development of cybersecurity in the country to ensure a secure and resilient digital ecosystem. Any violation by social media users or content creators can be prosecuted under any of the acts mentioned above, depending on the nature of the offence.

12 Wenbo Wang, Lu Chen, Krishnaprasam Thirunarayan, Amit P Sheth, 2014. Cursing in English on Twitter. In: Proceedings of the 17th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperatives Work & Social Computing. New York: ACM. pp. 425-415.

13 Digital 2021: Ghana. Available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-ghana>.

14 As seen above in 13

15 As seen above

## ELECTIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN GHANA

Elections are a key component of a democratic state and are held periodically depending on the tenure of office to elect representatives to manage the affairs of a country. According to the constitution of Ghana,<sup>16</sup> elections are regarded as a procedural instrument by which political authority and legitimation are formally granted to elected representatives. Although elections do not define a nation as practising absolute democracy, it's treated with utmost significance in Ghana.

Ghana pride itself as the beacon of democracy in Africa and the world at large hence having successful elections is one prerogative of the government. The nation since its return to constitutionalism in 1992, has organised eight successful elections, including three changes of government. The internet has played a significant role in the success stories of these elections. The 2012 and 2016 elections in Ghana were fiercely contested on social media<sup>17</sup>. Political parties have embraced social media campaign strategies in addition to their usual rallies and house-to-house campaigns. Social media played a vital role in the 2012 presidential elections in Ghana, with supporters of the two leading parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), continuously engaging in political campaigning on Facebook and Twitter even when official campaign activities have ended<sup>18</sup>. Social media has gained predominance in politics because of social networking sites (Facebook) and microblogging services (Twitter) are thought to have the propensity to positively induce

political participation<sup>19</sup>. In the 2012 presidential campaign, Barack Obama and Romney spent a substantial amount of money on social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Pinterest, intending to reach prospective voters<sup>20</sup>. These voters, they added, comprehensively involve themselves in these social media platforms by posting, commenting, and video-sharing.

In the round-up to the 2016 presidential elections in Ghana, the presidential aspirant of the two leading parties devised various tactics to get their message to the populace. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and its candidate John Dramani Mahama used multiple hashtags, including **#JmToaso**, **#TransformingGhana**, **#ChangingLives**<sup>21</sup> among others, on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, whilst the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and its leader Nana Akufo Addo employed hashtags such as **#VoteForChange**, **#ToAbaPa**<sup>22</sup> and among others. These measures received a great reception on social media platforms. In the 2020 elections, social media campaigns among political parties intensified due to the covid-19 pandemic, which limited public gatherings and rallies. The NPP developed what they called Virtual Rallies on specific days to spread their messages through hashtags on social media. They also invented Party Colours Day, where their party members and sympathisers flooded social media with the party's colours. The increasing use of social media for political campaigns indicates the importance of digital space during elections.

The traditional media in Ghana also use their social media platforms for information sharing

16 Tina Freyburg & Lisa Garbe (2018), Blocking the bottleneck: Internet shutdown and ownership at elections times in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Communication*, 3916-3896, 1932-8036/20180005.

17 Wilberforce S. Dzisah, 2018. Social media and elections in Ghana: Enhancing Democratic Participation. *African Journalism Studies*. Vol. 39(1). pp. 47-27, Doi: 10.1080/23743670.2018.1452774

18 News Ghana, 2016. How well do Ghanaian media utilize social media platforms? A look at how well Ghanaian Media Houses are using social media. available at <https://www.newsghana.com.gh/how-well-do-ghanaian-media-utilize-social-media-platforms/>.

19 Stefan Stieglitz and Linh Dang-Xuan, 2012. "Political communication and influence through microblogging – An empirical analysis of sentiment in Twitter messages and Retweet behavior". In: *Proceedings of the 45<sup>th</sup> Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)*. pp. 3500-509. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS>

20 Deen Freelon and David Karff (2015) Of big birds and bayonets: hybrid Twitter interactivity in the 2020 presidential debates. *Information and Communication Society*. Vol. 18(4), pp. 406-390, Doi: 10.1080/1369118x.2014.952659.

21 <https://twitter.com/JDMahama/status/644943171722547200?t=z0sLr5gFI4O3Iid50rpjsQ&s=19>

22 <https://twitter.com/NAkufoAddo/status/805304395864952832?t=-IFiWXMbWR9kd70twSHU0g&s=19>

and education. Their role in elections cannot be underestimated. The media's most important public-interest functions in the context of democratic life, perhaps, are not only to report on political issues generally but also during elections campaigns when the electorates decide who will represent in government to provide a platform for discussion, representation, and debate<sup>23</sup>. Media convergence has allowed broadcast and print media to move online and give their audience the necessary information. This new form of journalism and media practice has increased citizens' participation in issues influencing their election choice.

The Electoral Commission of Ghana has also embraced the new wind of social media for information sharing and educating Ghanaians on various programs and exercises it intends to undertake. For instance, in the build-up to the 2020 elections, the Electoral Commission opened an online platform that allowed prospective registers to fill out forms online and further complete their registration at designated points<sup>24</sup>. It also has social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube where it posts all information on elections and electoral processes. It uses these platforms to run campaigns on exercises it embarks on. The commission, in the lead to the 2020 elections, developed an initiative called **Let the Citizens Know**, where it occasionally organises press conference and disseminate flyers with important messages to the citizens using the hashtag **#LetTheCitizensKnow**<sup>25</sup>. On election day itself, the election governing body takes to social media to address some concerns and bring the citizens up to speed on the electoral process. After the elections, all declared results are published on their social media platform. Civil society organisations also use social media platforms for their activism and mobilisation. For instance, months before the 2020 general election in Ghana, an online advocacy

group emerged on Twitter with the hashtag **#FixTheCountry**, which took centre stage in all discussions on Ghana Twitter leading to the election. The group, although they did not have any known office for their operations, was able to mobilise the youth to accept and got many people to call for good governance messages and pressure the government. They were able to mobilise through Twitter and demonstrated on the street of Accra to press home their demands.

The new media provides a viable platform for political participation and discussions. However, what we must caution against is the attempt by some fringe elements within the civil society groups and other voluntary groups to use the new media platforms to trade insults<sup>26</sup>. Social media can be a platform where people use abusive and vulgar language when discussing. Tolerance on social media is far fading out, and considerable efforts must be taken to reverse the trend. In an environment whereby there is less tolerance of alternative views, the essence of social media engineering and political discourse could become dubious and undemocratic and ultimately lead to a "dumbing down" of media and political efficacy<sup>27</sup>.

Ghana has, over the years, built a reputation as one of the most media-friendly countries not just in Africa but the world. The country's media have enjoyed one of the most relatively liberal and free media in the last decade in Africa. According to **World Press Freedom Index**, Ghana has risen steadily from 67th place in 2002 to 23rd in 2018 on the world press freedom ranking and went down to 30th in 2020. The constitutional guarantee of press freedom and freedom of expression, accompanied by data protection and privacy laws, are being threatened by digital backlash and vulgarism on social media.

In 2017, an Afrobarometer report showed that popular support for media freedom drastically

23 Bernd-Peter Lange and David Ward, 2004. The media and elections: A handbook and comparative study. *Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers*.

24 <http://ec.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/VOTER-REGISTRATION-FORM-1.pdf>

25 <https://youtu.be/6vsBin7inFk>

26 As seen above in 16

27 Sally Young, Saskia Bourne, Stephanie Younane (2007). Contemporary political communication: Audiences, politicians, and the Media in international research *Sociology*. Vol.1 (1): pp.59-41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00023.x>

declined to 36%, with many citizens calling for the government to impose tougher regulations on the media, especially the new media. The report bemoans that, journalists and citizens alike called for stricter regulations on social media platforms. The increase in the use of abusive and offensive language is a worrying trend that must be resolved amicably to ensure a safe digital space without infringing on people's rights to free speech.

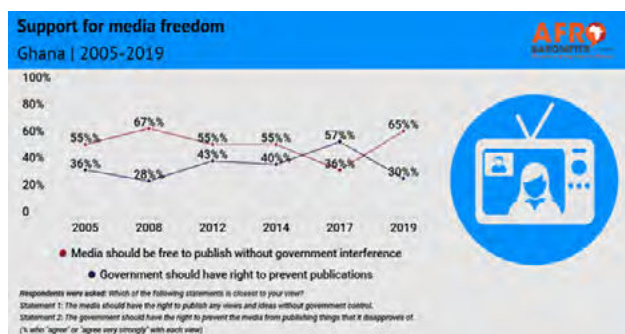


Fig 2. Afrobarometer report on popular support for media freedom in Ghana

Visit: [www.afrobarometer.org/countries/ghana-1](http://www.afrobarometer.org/countries/ghana-1)

In the 2016 and 2020 elections in Ghana, social media posts on Nana Akuffo Addo and John Dramani Mahama generated an average of eight thousand comments a day. The media and other important political people generated many comments on their social media posts. A content analysis of twenty-five (25) comments, each selected purposively across four social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, during the 2016 and 2020 elections in Ghana are represented in the chart below. The analysis examined whether the selected comments contained one of the following: Insults and hate speech (IN&HS); false accusations and character assassination (FA&CH); inciting war & violence (W&V); Derogative comments against a tribe or ethnic group (T&E).

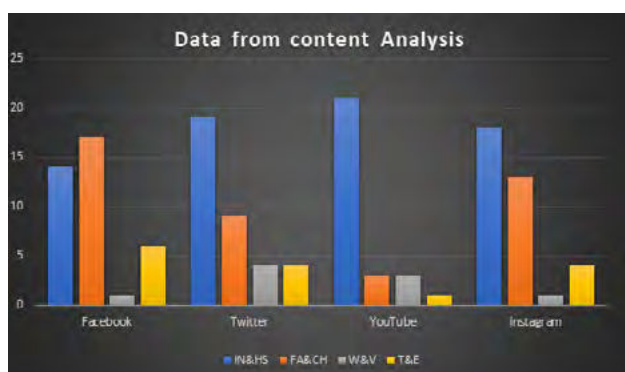


Fig 3. Data of content analysis on social media comments in the 2016 and 2020 Elections in Ghana

The study also employed a semi-structured survey to assess awareness of the legal implication of social media vulgarism. This allowed for open-ended responses from the participants for more in-depth information. A total of 45 participants willingly responded to a five-question survey. An expert interview was also conducted with a legal practitioner to understand the stance of Ghana's constitution on social media vulgarism and individual violation of the right to free speech.

On the first question of the survey, **44** of the respondents representing **97.8%**, alluded that they are aware of vulgarism on digital media. Twelve of the participants, however, believe that vulgarism is a normal thing to do, and they see nothing wrong with it, citing that social media is a different world and that people have the right to freedom of expression to say what they deem fit. To them, it is what makes social media a lively and fun place. However, the **33** others who defied the normality of vulgarism on social media pointed out that it can lead to mental and emotional trauma, and it is against societal norms hence it should not be entertained.

On whether participants were aware of the legal implications of vulgarism, only **12** indicated that one could be prosecuted if found guilty. The immediate difference in the responses to the second and third questions indicates that people, although clear of the absurdity of vulgarism, lack knowledge of the legal implications that make them continue to engage in the act or other factors that influence them to use vulgar words when commenting on social media. The political intensity and competitiveness can push people to go on an insulting spree on social media. Even in the traditional media, vulgarism is on the rise in Ghana as many journalists and politicians have adopted the style of insulting and offensive attacks in airing their views on national issues. There seems to be a gradual normalisation of vulgarism on both the traditional and new media platforms in Ghana.

What is more striking is that journalists and politicians who engage in these skimble-skamble acts are the most followed and liked. The environment has become too conducive for such people. The government, in the attempt



to regulate this waywardness, may impose tougher regulations which may end up violating the fundamental human rights of many people. On the question where respondents were asked to state any provision in the constitution that deals with social media vulgarism and offensive commentary, only three participants cited the Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038), and another cited the Electronic Communication Act, 2008 (Act 775). This is in agreement with what the interviewed participant stated.

*“Now, the most relevant law that will be applicable is the Act of 2020 (Act 1038) and then the Electronic Communication Act of 2008 (Act 775). Section 76 of the Electronic Communication Act criminalises sending communication which is false and misleading and likely to prejudice the efficiency of life-saving service or to endanger the safety of any person”.*

He added that section 208 of the Criminal Offensive Act of Ghana or the Criminal Code and section 1 (c) of the State Secret Act, 1962 (Act 101) also criminalise such. On the last survey question, participants were asked if they had participated in any program or taken courses in school that addressed the issue of responsible use of digital space and media literacy. Eight respondents were revealed to have either participated in a program on media literacy or taken a course on media literacy. They also indicated the media and digital literacy programs and courses enlightened them on the need for responsible use of the media, and they have become cautious about what they post on social media.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data presented in **Fig 3**. Shows a high level of insults and hate speech in political commentary on social media. YouTube recorded the highest level of insults and hate speech, with 21 of the reviewed comments containing swear and abusive words. This can be seen across all the various social media platforms in Ghana. Some individuals, due to political reasons, engage in very abusive and demeaning conversations that in face-to-face conversations, they would not. They hide behind their phones and computers without knowing the legal consequences of committing these acts. Some people feel like social media is a different world, and hence they are free to engage in any manner of conversation the way they deem fit. That perception is unfounded and delusional. Studies have shown that cyberbullying and attacks on social media have emotional and mental trauma on persons on the receiving end of the act.

The data also indicates that false accusations and character assassination comments in political discourse on social media follow insults and hate speech. Character assassination is a hateful discourse that is designed to damage the status of a person. It is closely related to false accusations as both can be defamatory. Facebook recorded the highest of such incidence, with 17 comments targeted at discrediting the reputation of the related persons. Most of the comments make wild accusations and speculations that are unfounded, which can lead to the legal prosecution of the commenters.

**R1**, in his response on whether a person can be prosecuted on this trajectory, indicated that

*“It is actionable, and people feel it is a phenomenon that is being created, so they want to take on offenders”.*

There is a growing concern that people get away too many times with defaming unsubstantiated comments on social media. Hence, many more victims of these unscrupulous acts are now willing to take on offenders. In 2017, Hackman Owusu Agyemang, a former Board Chairman of Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), won a libel suit against Michael Dokosi, Managing Editor of the Daily Post Newspaper, Giraffe Publications, and Haruna Mahama, a pro-NDC activist for a post on Haruna’s Facebook page alleging Mr Hackman recorded a video of an in-house meeting with the former President J. A Kufour.. The Facebook post was further published in the Daily Post newspaper, and Mr Hackman won ₵800,000 defamation suit<sup>28</sup>. Defamation is a serious crime and can cost one a lot of money for just a single post on social media. Many people are unaware of the implications of their actions on social media and are caught, as victims.

The data also revealed some comments inciting violence and tribal and ethnic discrimination. The incidence of tribal and ethnic discrimination cut across all four social media platforms recording minimal occurrence with the highest on Facebook of 5 cases. Violent comments also showed minimal effects, with the highest on Twitter. These are not just isolated cases but consistent behaviours on social media platforms.

The awareness level of the legal implications of social media vulgarism is at a very low point. Only **26.7%** of the surveyed participants alluded to knowing the legal implications of vulgarity on social media. Many of those who engage in vulgarity on social media believe they have the inalienable freedom of expression. So they can say whatever they like and deem fit, which is right, but that should not include offending other parties. The empowerment provided by the internet can at times, be abused and lead

28 Hackman wins GH 800,000 libel case. Available at <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Hackman-wins-800-000-libel-case-562924>

individuals to issues of communication that cause harm to others. In the UK, for small individuals, this has proven to be a problem sometimes met with criminal charges<sup>29</sup>. **R1** nonetheless disagrees with cases of criminalising online speech regarded as offensive.

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29 Dominic McGoldrick, 2013. The limits of freedom of expression on Facebook and social networking sites: A UK perspective. *Human Rights Law Review*. Vol. 13(1), pp. 151-125, Doi: 10.1093/hrlr/ngt005.

# CONCLUSION

Vulgarity on the digital platforms in Ghana is hopping alarmingly and could affect the good of the new media for effective discussions and political participation. While the government and regulatory bodies of the media must be cautious not to implement stringent measures that will infringe on people's digital rights, individuals hold a great responsibility of ensuring that their content and posts online will be less offensive and not derogatory to make the space a safe place for all. The lack of awareness of the legal implications, the perception of social media existing in a "different world", and the low media literacy skills in the country account largely for vulgarity on Ghana's social media platform. These three underlying issues must be addressed amicably to prevent further exacerbation of digital rights violations.

The surest way to tackle these issues without worsening digital rights in the country is to intensify public education on the responsible use of digital platforms. Bodies such as the National Media Commission (NMC), the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), and the traditional media can embark on a national campaign to sensitise people on the effective and responsible use of social media. social media campaigns can also be initiated to address the issue

of vulgarity and cyberbullying on digital platforms. Civil society organisations and digital rights advocacy groups can also channel the efforts not only to be on the neck of the government but also to educate the very people they are defending on the need for responsible use of social media.

The teaching of media literacy should be extended to primary and high school education. Media literacy competencies are addressed more often in high school than in college<sup>30</sup>. Developing media literacy education at all levels of education and implementing the teaching and learning of these skills properly will ensure that young ones who visit social media use it responsibly, and the issues of vulgarity and cyber bullying will be reduced significantly. Also, media literacy in higher education should be intensified and incorporated well to produce graduates that are media literate and may not engage in vulgarity. Implementing media literacy curricula in post-secondary higher education is still in its infancy stage<sup>31</sup>. The perception that social media is a different world is fast becoming the excuse of those who engage in vulgarity for their irresponsible behaviour. The digital space is only an extension of the natural world, and people must treat others in the space as they would in face-to-face conversation.

30 Hans Schmidt, 2012. Media literacy education at the university level. *The Journal of Effective Teaching*. Vol. 12, pp. 77-64.

31 James A. Brown, 1991. Television critical viewing skills education: Major media literacy project in the United States and selected countries. p. 392. Available at <http://doi.org/10.4324/9780203052457>.



