

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

NEWS SHARING BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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**A dissertation in the Department of Strategic Communication,
School of Communication and Media Studies,
submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Business Communication)
in the University of Education, Winneba.**

November, 2021

DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

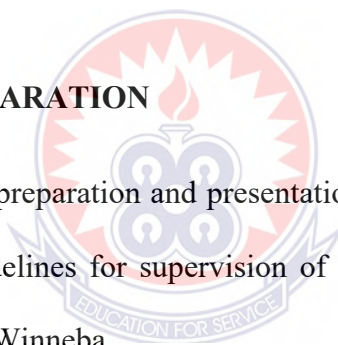
I, **Harriet Greene**, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotation and references contained in publishing works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

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



NAME OF SUPERVISOR: **CHRISTIANA HAMMOND PhD**

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DATE:.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family and friends for their continuous love and support.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people contributed to the success of this thesis who deserve my appreciation. For without them, this work would not have been successful. Firstly, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Christiana Hammond and Miss Elizabeth Owusu Asiamah for their constructive criticism and helping to improve this project. I can only say, God bless you all.

Secondly, I would like to express my appreciation to Prof. Andy Ofori-Birikorang, Mr. Kwesi Aggrey, Dr. Pascal Kpodo, Mr. Emmanuel Dogbey, Dr. Mavis Amo-Mensah, Dr. Albert Wornyo, Dr. Gifty Appiah-Adjei, Mr. Asare Okae-Anti, Mr. Rainbow Sackey, Miss Belinda Osei Mensah and Mr. Viscount Buer for their academic and social support during my stay in graduate school. I really cherish the immense contributions of these personalities in shaping my academic life.

I wish to also acknowledge the astounding support of my dear husband, Mr Nathaniel Ayiku for his unwavering support throughout the pursuit of this degree. I am forever grateful to God for giving me such a wonderful husband.

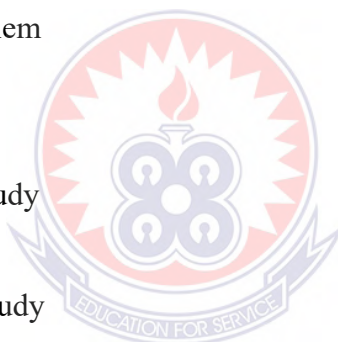
Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the support of friends like Mr. Nyamekye Nkrumah, Angela, Mavis, Priscilla and Margaret. Another gratitude goes to my mother-in-law, Madam Martha Essel for taking care of my children and for holding the fort in my absence. My immense gratitude goes to my kind brother-in-law, Mr. Samuel Ofori Danquah and his family, for their support especially in offering me their home during the period of my study. To my parents Mr. Alfred Greene and Madam Mary Hayford, my siblings Alfred, Godfred and Abigail, and my lovely children Ama, Ohemaa and Fiifi, I can only say thank you. I would like to express my profound gratitude for your outstanding support and encouragement.

How can I leave out the student of the School of Communication and Media Studies, especially the Department of Media Studies who contributed to the successful completion of this thesis? I say thank you for the outstanding support. To all my COMSSA 13 UEW family, I say let us keep soaring until we meet at the top.



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ABBREVIATIONS

Global Systems for Mobile Communication Association – GSMA

Subscriber Identification Module – SIM

University of Education, Winneba – UEW

United States - US

World Health Organisation – WHO

Chief Executive Officer – CEO

Frequently Asked Questions - FAQs

Massachusetts Institute of Technology – MIT

End-to-End Encryption - E2EE

Social Networking Sites – SNSs

Uses and Gratifications - U&G

Instant Messaging – IM

British Broadcasting Corporation - BBC



ABSTRACT

The reception of news and information is diverse and has been evolving. There has been a rapid alteration in the news environment and news consumption practices. The society is moving from the conventional news cycle which is controlled by journalism professionals to a more composite information cycle that integrates ordinary people within its processes. Social media has been increasingly used to gather and share news stories from mainstream news websites. Studies have found young people who are tech savvy, especially, students to be particularly interested in exploring the media options that come along with technology. In order for the traditional news media to understand how to better appeal to young people, studies have recommended that, attention must be given to how young people value and use news in different ways. While research on online news sharing abounds, most of the research to date has not focused on the attitudes and behaviour of users of social media. This study, therefore, investigates the case of news sharing practices on Facebook and WhatsApp of students of University of Education, Winneba (UEW). It investigates the types of news stories students of UEW share on social media; examines their motivations for sharing news stories and explores how students evaluate the credibility of the news stories they share. Employing the Uses and Gratifications (UG) and the Epistemology of Testimony theories, the study through interviews and focus group discussions analysed data from purposively selected students from the School of Communication and Media Studies of UEW. The findings indicated that, the participants particularly share entertainment/celebrity, politics, crime, sports and local/campus news. The analysed data further revealed that, entertainment and socialisation are the most dominant motivations of participants for sharing news on social media. The study concludes that, news stories shared on Facebook and WhatsApp are predominantly 'soft' news due to their virality and the participants aim to relax, release tension and interact with others. Also, the study concludes that participants employ heuristics like assessing the source of news stories, confirming from other independent sources, relying on reasoning and presentation when analysing the credibility of news stories as they prefer verification techniques that require the least time and mental effort. An interesting finding of the study is the discovery of the flaming news type which is now popular with young people in Ghana.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

People's perceptions of news and information are rapidly changing. The news environment and news consuming habits are constantly shifting nowadays. Society is rapidly transitioning from the traditional news cycle, which is dominated by journalists, to a more dynamic information cycle, which includes regular people (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018). In 2011, scholars from the American Pew Research Center concluded that “if searching for news was the most important development of the last decade, sharing news may be among the most important of the next” (Olmstead et al., 2011, p. 10). The orthodox news media organisations still churn out most of the news ingested currently, including that, which flows through social media and aggregators (Domingo et al., 2015). This shift from traditional to social media has brought new facets into the relationship between people and news. For instance, 28% of internet users have embraced participative media platforms to read news content, while 37% have experience in sharing news stories through social media sites (Facebook company information, 2018). The social media empowers users to not only gain access to news stories but also to partake in their production and dissemination. In such platforms, news stories can be diffused and debated by people globally within minutes (Thompson et al., 2019). In the recent unrest in Nigeria for instance, news, photos and videos of the protest spread rapidly across social media networks such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter with #EndSarsNow, instantly attracting attention around the globe. This attests to Chadwick and Vaccari's (2019) assertion that, social media environments motivate the voicing of legitimate but undervalued perspectives

and the airing of grievances that are not addressed by existing communicative structures.

More than a decade ago, Web 2.0 was described from various perspectives by different authors (Alexander, 2006; O'Reilly, 2007; Siemens, 2008; Zimmer, 2010) among others. The concept of Web 2.0 refers to the social use of the Web which permits people to join forces, to get actively involved in the production content, to generate knowledge and to share information online. The prevalence of social media use among students has been confirmed through studies (Avor, 2015; Chanda, 2021; Dadzie, 2019; Kolan & Dzandza, 2018). Previous studies have shown that more than 90% of tertiary school students use social networks, according to Wiley and Sisson (2006). It has also been found that, students of between 16–24-years spend an average of 3 hours a day on the social media (Review42, 2020).

Students are also heavily engrossed in Web 2.0 technologies as they are fashioning on-line lives that excellently integrate with their off-line world (Bicen & Cavus, 2011). Social Network Sites (SNSs) provide smooth access to news, as well as make it possible for people to get involved in the news business by way of commenting, sharing and posting online (Holten & Molyneux, 2017). What people are exposed to, thus, to a great extent hinge on the interest and exploits of those with whom they connect via these channels (Kalsnes, 2015; Thorson & Wells, 2015).

A 2015 Media Insight Project Report indicates that, the 'millennials', (i.e people aged between 18-34) appear to be attracted to news that they might otherwise have been disregarded because their peers are endorsing and putting into particular contexts for them on social networks, as well as on more personal networks such as group texts and instant messaging. The data also shows that social media is supplying millennials

with more news than they were originally seeking. Overall, just 47% of Facebook users state that having news is a primary motivation for visiting, but it has become one of the significant activities they engage in once they are there. Daily, more than 50% of millennials get their news from Facebook. However, young people's news consumption has been perceived as a threat to the news industry, journalism, and democracy as a whole (Elvestad et al., 2014). And even millennials, who spend considerably more time online than other groups, are often incapable of determining the validity of online content (Wineburg, 2016). In a world where citizens are exposed to massive electronic communication and ubiquitous access to a magnitude of information delivered from an array of sources of various degrees of credibility, it is essential for the general public, especially students who are digital natives, to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for evaluating news information (Tang & Oh, 2019).

Further, another Media Insight Project, conducted in 2017 revealed that, 75% of Americans use social media to get news, and social media is a top news outlet for people of all ages, income levels, races, and ethnicities. This move towards digital news media and SNSs is chiefly apparent in large parts of the Western world (Rosenstiel et al., 2017).

Also, a report from the Reuters Institute (2017) shows that more than half (54%) of all online users in 36 countries surveyed use social media as a source of news, and more than one in ten (14%) use social media as their main source of news. However, social media users' news consumption patterns and confidence are cause for concern, as vast amounts of non-journalistic content are posted almost unsupervised (Itzhak et al., 2017).

Media organisations have grasped social media as a means to dispense news and link up with audiences, supplying a variety of tools for users to share and suggest news stories (Duchi et al., 2011). Rosenstiel and Mitchell (2012) confirm in the 2012 American State of the News Media Report that now, Facebook commands the convergence of social media and news. WhatsApp also, declared in mid-February 2020 on its blog that the messaging app is now being busily used by more than 2 billion people globally (Bucher, 2020).

The increase in social media users of more than 10% in the previous year (2019) has increased the global estimate to 3.96 billion users by the beginning of July 2020. This implies that, for the first time, social media users form more than 50% of the world's population. Based on upward trends signals, averagely over the last year, more than 1 million people have signed up for social media for the first time, equating to about 12 new users per second (Datareportal, 2020). In Ghana, as of September 2020, there were 7,518,000 Facebook users, which accounted for 24.1% of its entire population, with people aged between 25 to 34 being the largest, that is, 2.8 million representing 35.9% (NapoleonCat.com, 2020). According to *We Are Social* and *Hootsuite*, with 30% of the population using the famous text messaging service, WhatsApp is the most popular social media site as of January 2018.

1.1.1 Overview of Social Media

The term social media is often used to refer to new forms of media that involve interactive participation (Manning, 2014). Social media are internet-based services that allow individuals to create, share and seek content, in addition to communicate and collaborate with each other (Kim et al., 2010). Arguably, one of the most appealing aspects of social media is its support for user-generated content, which

encourages people to switch from being passive users to active creators (Nov et al., 2009). Social media has been increasingly used to gather and share news stories from mainstream news websites (Cha et al., 2010). Indeed, the use of social media has become popular and a part of daily life for people all over the world. Compared to other communication and internet technologies (i.e e-mail, discussion forums), the use of social media has been discovered to be advantageous and the most preferred platform for people to share news stories (Purcell et al., 2010). Social media is increasingly altering cultural discourse and setting patterns and agendas on subjects ranging from the climate to politics to technology and the entertainment industry (Asur & Huberman, 2010).

According to Mowafy (2018), social media use is one of the most common activities among children, adolescents, and emerging adults because it serves as a platform for entertainment purposes and communication for today's youth while also serving as one of the major portals for accessing news and information. Vorderer (2016), argues that, the younger generation's aggressive embrace of social media can be due to their up-to-date awareness of and familiarity with the new technologies, as well as the ease with which these social networking platforms are available.

Social media use by American adults aged 18-29 years, representing the highest percentage of university students, increased from 12% in 2005 to 90% in 2015 (Perrin & Anderson, 2018). Mobile phone penetration in sub-Saharan Africa has increased dramatically in recent years. According to a report by the Global Systems for Mobile Communication Association (GSMA), an association of mobile network operators worldwide, there are 747 million SIM connections in sub-Saharan Africa, representing 75% of the population (Elliot, 2019).

Nonetheless, a 2020 survey conducted by Global Digital Agencies, *We are Social and Hootsuite*, indicates 10,110,000 Ghanaians are using the Internet. This figure reflects 35% of Ghana's total population of 29,150,000 inhabitants. The study posits that, much of Ghana's rise in internet users was due to more accessible smartphones and mobile data plans. Also, Assabi (2012), is of the view that, Ghana is a perfect place for mobile technology to flourish because there are enough users to support the related technologies. Matteo Lucchetti, the Programmes Manager of the Council of Europe's Cyber Crime Unit, announced on March 18, 2019, at a workshop in Accra on the implementation of the Budapest Convention on Cyber Crime, that Ghana had ranked 9th globally in terms of hours spent on social media (Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation, 2019).

Findings from an Afrobarometer survey in Ghana, (September-October 2019), show that Ghanaians are increasingly using social media as a news source, even though they have lower trust in it than traditional media. The survey shows that, despite the fact that radio and television remain the most prominent news outlets, (used daily by 56% and 47% of Ghanaians, respectively), the use of social media (22% of Ghanaians) and the internet (19%) to get daily news is gradually growing. The findings further suggest that, daily consumption of news via the internet has tripled since 2012 (from 6% to 19%). And the use of social media as a source of news has almost doubled since 2014 (from 12% to 22%). The above statistics is an indication that, Ghana's growth in internet infrastructure and citizens' social media use is flourishing therefore there is the need to pay attention to citizens behaviour and news sharing practices on social media networks as this current study seeks to do.

1.1.2 News and News Sharing

Schudson (2018, p. 999) defines news as usually referring to “novel information about relatively recent affairs”. News writing textbooks also usually refer to news as an account of a recent, significant, extraordinary, and interesting event (Harcup, 2015; Kershner, 2005; Richardson, 2007). According to Palczewski (2018), news are knowledge substitutes that are defined by their information value, which is always relative and based on the subjective judgement of the target audience. He adds that, people’s reaction to news is to tell somebody else about it, this way communication and discussion begin.

According to Armstrong et al., (2015), today young adults are under no obligation to agree with journalists about what news is. They are not bound by the filters and hierarchies imposed by journalists and journalism organisations, digital content is not neatly contained in sections labelled “Opinion” or “Entertainment”. Social media and technology have changed the way news is used and shared. Traditionally, news has been carefully produced and disseminated to the public in a curated format. Former audiences were accustomed to receiving their news at set times and in neatly packaged formats such as newspapers. Audiences today live in a continuous vibration of ambient news, which is accessible at any moment, on almost any computer, and is generated by both professionals and the public (Hermida, 2014).

Ma et al., (2013) describe news sharing as the contribution and dissemination of news stories in various social media platforms by individuals. They posit that, news sharing is different from general information sharing. In terms of public opinion, agenda-setting, and societal influences, news stories are distinct from other types of information (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). News is thought to have a significant impact on people's perceptions of the world (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In addition,

in terms of voluntariness of attention, psychological motives, and other aspects, the circumstances of news consumption differ from those of general information sharing (McQuail, 2005). These distinctions set news sharing apart from other types of information sharing. Furthermore, social media's characteristics make news sharing distinct from broadcast and print media. As rightly put by Hanson and Haridakis (2008), social media enhances individual's participation and interaction as a collaborative community for processing news. Community Members connect with one another through news content in various ways, such as sharing stories, leaving comments, and participating in discussions. Secondly, the content of the news shared is diversified and personalised based on user's interests. Social media allows users to identify individuals with similar interests and establish connections with like-minded others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Thirdly, the impact of news sharing has grown on social media (Lerman, 2007). Individuals can take part in the news sharing process as long as the story is still accessible on the internet. As social media has a global reach, news articles can theoretically be shared and discussed on a global scale (Ma et al., 2013).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Lee and Ma (2012) assert that social media news sharing has become a phenomenon of rising social, economic and political significance because more people are now engaged in the creation and distribution of news in virtual communities. The Media Insight Project, a partnership between the American Press Institute and the Associated Press-NORC Center, conducted a study in 2015 for the Public Affairs Research which revealed that, millennials, consume news in spectacularly unique ways than their predecessors and how they come across news is diversified. University students fall

within this bracket of millennials who Poindexter (2012) avers do not visit news sites, read print newspapers, watch television news, or seek out news in multitudes. Rather, they prefer spending more time on social networks and often on their mobile devices.

While studies on online news sharing abounds, most of the research to date have not focused on the attitudes and behaviours of users of social media (Kümpel et al., 2015). For example, a quantitative study conducted by Naya et al., (2018), sought to explore university students' purposes for reading online news. The study revealed that a majority of them preferred online news because of convenience. However, this study failed to discuss students' news interactivity but rather focused on their passive nature as news readers and not as active sharers.

Chadwick and Vaccari (2019) conducted a quantitative survey to explore the reasons why people share news about politics. Their study revealed that, even though there is a widespread of fake and deceptive information on British social media, very little is still known about the reasons and motivations prompting people to share news on social media. According to them, if investigations are conducted to ascertain what people try to gain by sharing news, and the degree to which these motivations might buttress or undercut the distribution of false or misleading news, then something could be done to decrease these significant online harms. Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2019) echoed this by saying that, information available online is of increasing importance, but knowing the factors shaping the sharing of such information is a crucial step towards enhancing the quality of online discourse.

According to Kalsnes and Larsson (2017) it appears the existing research does not sufficiently cover what characterizes news sharing outside an Anglo-American (Hermida et al., 2012) and European (Thompson et al., 2019; Wadbring & Ödmark,

2016;) contexts spanning different social platforms, or relating to user motivation or satisfaction. Similar to Zhang and Leung (2014), Kümpel et al., (2015) bemoaned the strong focus on US-American research in the domain of news sharing in the context of SNS research. According to their study, a total of 51% of the first authors are affiliated to universities or organisations located in the United States, followed by Australia (6%) and Singapore (5%). Out of the 109 articles studied, 86% deployed the quantitative study approach, 11% combined qualitative and quantitative approaches and 4% only used the qualitative methods. For instance, Wadbring and Ödmark (2016) focused on news sharers and news shared (or rather, interacted), and sought to find out what characterizes the people who share news in Swedish social media. Using the diffusion of innovation theory, a representative survey and a quantitative content analysis, the findings showed that younger people who are single and with greater political interest and are digital savvy are the people who share news in social media. They however admitted that, their use of a standardised questionnaire made it impossible to say anything in-depth about the respondents. At most, the study provides a broad and general picture of the news sharing phenomenon. They therefore recommended that their study needs to be supplemented with more qualitative oriented approaches. This affected the decision to perform the current research in a qualitative manner.

Furthermore, the focus of a qualitative content analysis study conducted by Kalsnes and Larson (2017) was on news outlets and the types of news shared from these outlets. This current study therefore seeks to fill the apparent research gap identified by Kalsnes and Larsson (2017) who admitted that, a different study design would allow researchers to explore in closer detail the social and relational aspects of news sharing practices. They thus suggested a study that examines individual user's news

sharing behaviour on different platforms. Moreover, research has shown that, how people evaluate different sources or stories has an impact on how the content in those stories affects their attitudes and actions (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Wilson & Sherell, 1993). As a result, knowing what variables encourage individuals to trust news on social media can give us insight into how news on social media can impact public opinion and suggest tactics for preventing the spread of misleading information (Sterrett et al., 2019).

In the Ghanaian perspective, scholarship on students and social media seem to border on the growth and usage of the internet (Arthur & Brafi, 2013; Quarshie & Ami-Narh, 2012), students' news consumption patterns (Avor, 2015; Olympio, 2020) and social media's effect on academic success (Dadzie, 2019; Kolan & Dzandza, 2018). For instance, a quantitative study conducted by Avor (2015) looked into the news consumption habits of university students, primarily to see if the arrival of the internet was deterring them from using conventional media. The findings however, showed complementary use of traditional and online news platforms. Further, the study revealed that 41.2% of students sometimes share news on social media. They however concluded that, university students preferred social media for entertainment and networking purposes but not for news.

Flowing from the above, it could be deduced that there is scant research in the area of news sharing practices of students in Ghana. The focus of this current study therefore is a welcoming contrast in a research field that is dominated by studies detailing US and European conditions (as suggested by Malik & Pfeffer, 2016; Sjøvaag et al., 2015). Further, in studying the internet, there is the need to take into account the differences in geographical location of the research. This is due to the internet's ability

to view various trends in which people in various types of locations access and use the internet (Naya et al., 2018).

The extant literature suggests that, the motivations for following media have remained the same, but it is still meaningful to re-identify and re-conceptualise the motivations that may drive people's use of news in social media (Choi, 2015; Newman et al., 2018). The present study therefore seeks to identify the types of news stories students of University of Education, Winneba share on social media, examine their motivations for sharing news and investigate how they assess the credibility of the news they share.

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the problem, this research sought to:

1. Identify the types of news stories shared by students of UEW on Facebook and WhatsApp;
2. Examine the motivations of students of UEW for sharing news stories on Facebook and WhatsApp;
3. Explore how students of UEW evaluate the credibility of the news stories that they share on Facebook and WhatsApp.

1.4 Research Questions

Considering the objectives of the study, the following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. What types of news stories are shared by students of UEW on Facebook and WhatsApp?

2. What motivates students of UEW to share news stories on Facebook and WhatsApp?
3. How do students of UEW evaluate the credibility of the news stories that they share on Facebook and WhatsApp?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this current research will be significant in several ways. In the first place, by investigating the types of news university students share on Facebook and WhatsApp, their motivations for sharing and how they evaluate the credibility of the news items they share, this study will contribute to knowledge by providing an understanding of the factors that lead to any news story spreading and yield practical insights to assist media platforms and consumers to have better control over the types of information that are diffused. For industry, the study will help journalists tune their news stories to the needs of new media users based on the responses derived from interviews and focus group discussions. Identifying the motives that drive knowledge sharing in virtual communities would help academics and practitioners better understand how to encourage knowledge sharing in these settings. Also, insights gained from the study will help policy makers in drawing up policies that will curb the spread of fake news and other online harms.

Finally, while the dissemination of news through social interaction has always played a role in the diffusion of media, this study contributes to a growing body of works that suggests the act of sharing is becoming increasingly important in how people consume news.

1.6 Delimitation

The study mainly focuses on identifying the types of news university students share on Facebook and WhatsApp, their motivations for sharing and how they evaluate the credibility of the news they share. It should be noted that the use of social media anywhere in this study refers to Facebook and WhatsApp. For the purpose of this study, news shared include URLs or links of news items, reframed news, screenshots, videos and pictures. The study covered Facebook and WhatsApp shares and examined the responses of interviews and focus group discussions of sixteen (16) undergraduate students at the School of Communications and Media Studies of the University of Education, Winneba.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The study consists of five interrelated chapters. The first is the introductory chapter, which includes the background of the study, the objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study and ends with the delimitation of the study. Chapter two presents a review of relevant literature on the study as well as the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter three presents the methods through which data was collected for analysis. Aspects of this chapter include the research approach, research design, sample and sampling technique, data collection instruments, data collection procedure and method of data analysis. Four contains the discussion of the findings of the data collected. Content of the data collected from the study were analysed using the theories discussed in the second chapter of the study. Chapter five presents the summary of findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations for further studies.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter begins with the definition of the term Web 2.0, the social use of the Web, which allows people to collaborate, to get actively involved in creating content, to generate knowledge and to share information online. It touches on the evolution of news production as society moves from the traditional news cycle, which is dominated by journalists to a complex cycle that involves ordinary people within the process. The chapter then talks about the shift towards digital news and how SNSs facilitate access to news, how media organisations have embraced social media as a way to distribute news and connect with audiences. Also, the challenges posed by news consumption patterns of young people to the media industry were explicated. An overview of social media based on findings from surveys conducted on social media use from America through Africa to Ghana were also enumerated. The concepts of news and news sharing were also defined while a brief overview of the University of Education, Winneba was discussed. The chapter continues with the statement of the problem, which recognised that, although the field of online news sharing is blooming, minimal research has focused on attitudes, behaviour and motivations of social media users in Sub-Saharan Africa, precisely Ghana. The objectives that guided the study and the research questions that the study aimed to answer were defined. And lastly, the significance of the study, delimitation and the organisation of the study were considered.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This study sought to investigate news sharing practices of university students on social media; the type of news items they share, their motivation for news distribution and how they evaluate the credibility of the news they share. This chapter therefore serves as a review of literature relevant to the study. Discussed in this chapter are, social media and news sharing, motivations for sharing news, news types and consumption patterns and the evaluation of news and source credibility. Additionally, the chapter discusses the theories that underpin the study and their significance to the entire research work.

2.1 The Concept of News Sharing

The word 'sharing' fittingly describes participation in social media at large: sharing can be an act of distribution, communication and consumption (Belk, 2010; John, 2013). On the one hand, sharing entails social interaction, while on the other, it entails distribution and dissemination (Wittel, 2011). Lampinen (2015, p 1) correctly points out that the term "sharing" is not especially useful for scientific studies of social media practices because "it means different things to different people." However, according to Kümpel et al., (2015), The term "news sharing" is more precise because it only refers to the act of disseminating a certain type of content rather than a broader social media activity that could include posting personal photos, stories, or merely speaking about one's feelings. As a result, they define news sharing as the act of disseminating news content to a given group of people through social media platforms, by posting or recommending them (news contents).

While the majority of visitors still access online news sites through direct access or search engines, many of them now rely on social media referrals (Mitchell & Page, 2014). News sharing does not only affect media organizations, but it also affects how audiences interact with news. Individuals' own news sharing activity may increase their participation and interest in news topics (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015), but watching other people's news sharing behaviours contributes to more (incidental) news exposure and, preferably, conflict with other people's opinions and ideas (Yamamoto & Morey, 2019).

Based on the above enumerated definitions of news sharing and its benefits, this study therefore defines news sharing as the dissemination of news content in the form of texts, videos, pictures and links on social media platforms.

2.1.1 Evolution of Social Media

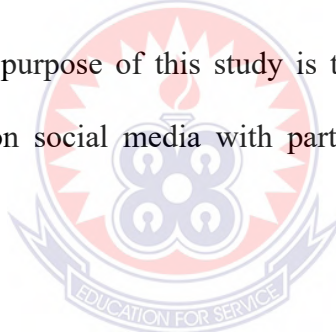
While there are conflicting claims as to who created the term "social media," it appears to have first emerged in the early 1990s in relation to new web-based communication technologies that made online engagement easier (Bercovici, 2010). The term social media is very broad therefore, it becomes difficult to distinguish what qualifies it (Witkemper et al., 2012). Notably, Jaffrey (2011) defined social media as any online platform that invigorates interaction, discussions and sense of belongingness. Social media makes use of digital platforms to facilitate dialogue, creation of contents (visual and textual) and sharing of information among members in the virtual communities (Freberg, 2012).

From the definitions above, social media could be interpreted as a Social Network(ing) Site (SNS) that involves podcasting, wikis, discussion group, text

messaging, forums, news sharing, photo sharing, content communities, video streaming and blogs that facilitates communication (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010; Kirtis & Karahan, 2011). Individuals may use social media to create, upload, and seek information, as well as connect and collaborate with one another, through internet-based services (Kim et al., 2010; Lerman, 2007). Also, Awini (2019) citing Kirtis and Karahan (2011) posits that, social media platforms permit internet users to relate, engage and socialise with one another. Not only is social media utilised by individuals but global organisations at large, of which media organisations are not exception. Interestingly, social media has empowered users by taking active part in forecasting, designing, dissemination, editing and sharing content that is accessible by everyone (Abeza et al., 2013; Watanabe et al., 2015; Willliam & Chinn, 2010). Thus, consumers are recently becoming producers and disseminators of knowledge (Abeza et al., 2013), paving way for real time information and easy access to same. Link promotion, following, favoriting, voting, tagging, bookmarking, and, most frequently, reposting and commenting on news are all examples of social media news sharing (Dwyer & Martin, 2017).

In 2000, social media received a great boost with the witnessing of many social networking sites springing up. Based on social networking, this greatly boosted and transformed the interaction of individuals and organizations who share a common interest in music, education, movies, and friendship. LunarStorm, Six Degrees, Cyworld, Ryze, and Wikipedia were among the first to go live (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Fotolog, Skyblog, and Friendster were founded in 2001, followed by Myspace, LinkedIn, LastFM, and Tribe.net in 2003. Hi5, and so on. In 2004, popular names such as Facebook Harvard, Dogster, and Mixi surfaced. In 2005, big brands including Yahoo!360, Youtube, and Black Planet all made their debuts (Juncoet al., 2011).

Although social media and social network/networking have been used interchangeably, Hartshorn (2010) is of the view that there is a distinction between social media and social networking. He therefore defines social networking as an act of engaging people who share a common interest, who associate together and foster relationships through community. According to Boyd and Ellison (2008), social networking sites (SNSs) are web-based services that allow users to create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and navigate their list of connections, as well as those made by others within the system. The essence and terminology of these relations can differ from one site to the next. In view of the numerous affordances of social media summarized above and how it has evolved to meet the needs of its users at every given time, the purpose of this study is to investigate university students' news sharing activities on social media with particular attention to Facebook and WhatsApp.



2.1.1.1 Social Media Landscape in Ghana

One of the most common online practices worldwide is the use of social media. It has increased by more than 10% in the last year, bringing the global number to 3.96 billion by July 2020. This means that, for the first time, social media is now used by more than half of the world's population (Datareportal, 2020). Nonetheless, as of October 2020, about 4.66 billion people were active internet users, accounting for 59% of the global population. Mobile internet users now account for 91% of all internet users worldwide, making it the most significant medium for internet access. Moreover, by the end of January 2020, the global social media usage rate stood at 49% (Statista, 2020). According to the 2020 Reuters Digital News Report, around a

third (31%) of people now use Facebook and other social media groups for local news.

The United States has one of the highest social network penetration rates in the world. In 2019, over 246 million Americans used social media to share photos, like and comment on other people's content, and send private messages. Social media platforms and services have become one of the most popular online activities in recent decades, with over 70% of the US population having a social media account (Statista, 2020). The use of social media has become an inextricable element of daily internet usage. Internet users spend averagely 30 minutes daily since 2015. On average, internet users in Latin America had the highest average time spent every day on social media (We are Social, 2019).

In Africa, the internet penetration rate stood at 39.3% in 2020, which means that 4 in 10 individuals in the continent used the internet. Kenya is at the top of the chart with 87.2% followed by Libya (74.2%), Seychelles (72.5%) and Nigeria with 61.2% at the tenth position (Statista, 2020). According to the 2017 GSMA Report, Ghana has a vibrant digital technology ecosystem that is evolving rapidly. Telecoms infrastructure has laid the foundations for an environment in which entrepreneurship and creativity have begun to flourish, thus contributing to improving people's lives. In 2005, only one in ten people in Ghana subscribed to a mobile service. Today, according to the report, Ghana has nearly 19 million unique mobile subscribers- equivalent to 67% of the population, which is above the average of 44% in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report further revealed that, in the 25 years since mobile phones were first introduced in Ghana, the sector has connected 19 million people, representing 67% of the population. To date, over half of the population has been connected to the internet by mobile phone.

Moreover, a swift rundown of Ghana's digital conditions as reported by *Datareportal* (2020), indicates that, in January 2020, there were 14.76 million internet users in Ghana. There has been a 1million (7.5%) increase in the number of internet users and Ghana has an internet penetration of 48%. In the case of social media, there were 6 million users and the number of social media users increased by 629,000 (12%) between April 2019 and January 2020 with WhatsApp being the most popular platform closely trailed by Facebook. Also, as at January 2020, there were 39.97 million mobile connections in Ghana which was as a result of an increment of 825,000 (2.1%) users between January, 2019 and January, 2020 (Datareportal, 2020). Interestingly, in the third quarter of 2020, 83.9% of the people connected to the internet in Ghana used WhatsApp. Also, Facebook was a popular social media platform being used by approximately 71% of internet users with people aged 25 to 34 being the largest user group numbering about 2.5 million (37.5%) (NapoleonCat.com, 2020; Statista, 2021). In view of the above statistics, Ghana presents an appropriate context for the study of the concept of news sharing which is made possible through social media. It is also appropriate to use university students (who fall within the bracket of people aged 25 to 34) who according to the above demographics form the largest part of social media users.

2.1.2 Social Media and News Sharing

According to Lee et al., (2011), in the traditional media context, what audiences are exposed to are mainly determined by editors who have control on daily news flow. That, is, people are passive recipients of news transmitted via media outlets. Due to a lack of effective dissemination channels, news dissemination is minimal.

However, the emergence of social media has not only changed the way news is shared, but the way people interact with each other in general. There are pros and cons to both face-to-face and online connections. The increasingly ubiquitous access, convenience, functionality, and flexibility of social technologies are driving factors for their adoption (Brown, 2010; Schroeder et al., 2010). These factors have made social media adoption very simple, and they have greatly improved mankind's lives by exposing him to new ways of creating and sharing information (Kolan & Dzandza, 2018). Social media has transformed the speed and magnitude of information transfer for the world of news and media (Hermida et al., 2012; Ju et al., 2014).

Another advantage of internet-based social technologies is that they are frequently free or low-cost, removing a potential barrier to adoption (Brown, 2010). Online information sharing allows for asynchronous communication between people in different time zones and locations, whereas face-to-face interaction allows for physical cues like facial expressions and body language (Siemens, 2011). According to Wadbring and Ödmark (2016), even though a lot of viral contents originate from traditional media organisations, these corporations have lost some control over the publication process, as news is increasingly being transmitted by a friend on Facebook, a well-known individual on Twitter, or a link in a forum like Reddit. This means that rather than actively pursuing news from a news organisation, news actually emerges in the audience's digital flow, from one's own cumulative network. It is clear that this transition has modified the news process forever, even though it is just at the beginning of a new era (Bakker, 2012; Meijer & Kormelink, 2014; Hermida et al., 2012). More importantly, because of its ability to question and unsettle the mainstream media's agenda-setting authority, social media's emergence as a news dissemination medium is crucial. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This power emerges

from the ability that news editors have to control which stories are published and hence read. Also, technology, social media platforms and applications have also facilitated the sharing of news by providing convenient and easy-to-use content posting tools; people have become accustomed to seeing ubiquitous social sharing buttons and links and undeniably using them (Wong & Burkell, 2017). Consequently, audiences who were hitherto considered mere recipients of “news and information created, packaged and distributed by professional media organisations”, (Hermida et al., 2012, p. 816) now have the devices to filter, choose, transmit, remark, reply to, revise content produced by the media and to create and disseminate their own content.

However, another school of thought believes this shift potentially opens a gateway for the distribution of fake news. The rise of social media has not only increased people's access to a plethora of information, but it has also increased the speed at which they consume it, implying that social media users may make immediate, face-to-face decisions regarding the information they consume (Flintham et al., 2018). Furthermore, through the wide dissemination of news from conventional sources, social media users do not explicitly diminish these outlets' influence; rather, they increase it. However, in choosing which types of news to post, these users are making editorial choices that could have an effect on which news becomes less accessible. (Bright, 2016). Moreover, as information becomes more readily available, a dilemma arises in determining what obligation and ability consumers and platforms must act as news verifiers (Martin, 2017; Narwal et al., 2017).

In view of the above, news sharing cannot be discussed without social media as one (news sharing) is dependent on the other (social media). However, in as much as news sharing on social media diminishes the agenda-setting power of traditional media, its

major drawbacks like the distribution of fake news and the transfer of the agenda setting power to ordinary people is relevant to the current study.

2.1.3 Students' News Sharing Behaviours and Social Media Usage

Today's young news users are found to use traditional devices such as TV, print and radio much less than older news users (Reuters Digital News Report, 2018a). Instead, because their smartphones are always with them, "like another hand," they primarily utilize them to access news (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2015). Millennials (18-34) are considered an appropriate sample for the study of news sharing because they use SNSs more than any other age group (Greenwood et al., 2016). Jackson and Pugliese (2017) also aver that, college students constitute an especially important population in which to study news consumption behaviour. Additionally, Matsa and Mitchell (2014) agree that, the audience using social media have not only been found to be younger but also more educated.

Moreover, studies have shown that the news consumption patterns of young people develop around the time they depart for college (Al-Obaidi et al., 2004; Barnhurst & Wartella, 1998; Schlagheck, 1998) and many media selectively target college students (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1998). Also, research has also shown that people sometimes consume news based on their gender (Avor, 2015). For instance, a 2020 Reuters Institute Digital News Report found that across all the 11 countries studied, 72% of men accessed news several times a day, compared with just 28% of women. Other surveys have also found and exhibited patterns of use that differed between men and women (Bimber, 2000; Benesch, 2012).

Nevertheless, studies have found that young news users often get news incidentally through social media since news articles “pop up” in their feeds (Antunovic et al., 2018; Bockowski et al., 2018). However, the 2019 Reuters Institute report indicates that young people should not be seen as just one type of news users that can be addressed and engaged by a one-size-fits-all approach. In order for the traditional news media to understand how to better appeal to young people, the authors of the report recommended that, attention must be given to how young people value and use news in different ways.

Quan-Haase and Young (2010) citing Greenberg, (1974) and Rubin, (1979) posit that, motivations for media usage vary by age, with motivations to escape or pass time usually highest among younger users. College students are prone to depression, making them particularly vulnerable to developing media habits that alleviate dysphoria through consuming escapist media content (Chang et al., 2019 cf. Rich & Scovel, 1987). However, in terms of social media use, Park et al. (2009) found that one of the gratifications that inspired college students to join Facebook groups was socialising.

Studies have found young people, especially students to be particularly interested in exploring the media options that come along with technology (Aririguzo et al., 2016; Avor, 2015; Chanda, 2021; Dadzie, 2019; Kolan & Dzandza, 2018; Olympio, 2020; Tolokonnikova et al., 2020). Although, the digital revolution is being led by university students (Valenzuela et al., 2009), their highly digital and cross media news use is found to be particularly difficult for the analytics to capture (Sveningsson, 2015). This makes news companies perceive young media users as a “hard-to-reach” (Ferne, 2018, p. 5) since they are unable to comprehend their news usage and preferences (Olsen & Solvoll, 2018). For instance, Tolokonnikova et al., (2020)

investigated the possibilities for satisfying adolescents' basic psychological needs in a digital environment. The findings of their study indicated that, adolescents' basic needs, such as the motivation to learn, the wish to communicate and group with peers, the desire to 'try on' various social media roles, the creation of one's identity, and so on, may all be met in the digital environment. Similarly, a survey conducted by Aririguzo et al., (2016) sought to examine the contemporary patterns of media use among students in five private universities in Nigeria. The study revealed that students are media literate, with the ability to navigate across many media platforms, and they mostly use the internet for entertainment. They therefore recommended that more creators of media messaging targeting this group should put them online, especially social media.

Comparably, Kong (2021) sought to investigate what drives university students to look for news on social media, how much control they believe they have over news influences, and whether news motivations are related to their levels of news media literacy. The findings showed that, socializing was the strongest predictor of news use on social media among the four news motives: information seeking, socialising, entertainment, and status seeking. Furthermore, the majority of students believed they had control over news influences and exhibited a high level of news media literacy. Interestingly, studies of Facebook and Twitter (Cheung et al., 2011; Perez-Carballo & Blaszczynski, 2011) suggest that while younger people are using social media, the majority of them are using it for primarily social gratification. Meaning, by sharing news on social media, users may also participate in discussions, idea exchanges, and other social interactions.

Moreover, Fergie et al., (2015) used a group of young persons familiar with social media platforms and variously engaged in accessing user-generated content to

investigate their attitudes and experiences of engaging with health information online. The outcome indicated that young people negotiated health content based on social media practices and features and assess content heuristically. Participants admit to using a range of assessments strategies, including comparing multiple sources, evaluating the purpose of content and assess the visual impact of the website to ascertain the reliability and credibility of the source. Similarly, Berthelsen and Hameleers (2021) sought to better understand how young news users negotiate and assess news sources “worthwhileness” and it came to light that, young users perceive a news provider as worthwhile if it provided a certain news service that they desire and this include relevant news. That is, news that is useful to their everyday life in the sense of informing them about local news and events or news that they experience to involve them and require their reactions as democratic citizens.

Overall, the above discussions on students’ and young peoples’ news and social media usage yields insight into their news consumption and sharing patterns, their motivations for consuming and sharing news and strategies they employ in assessing the credibility of the news they share.

2.1.4 Sharing in User Communities

The context for connectedness can be labelled a ‘user community’. When users in social media regularly communicate among themselves, they can be said to form an actual community; otherwise, impermanent, transient and atomised user structures simply present a crowd (Bruns, Burgess, Crawford & Shaw, 2012). The conventional concept of a community, which is a spatially compact group of people with a high frequency of contact, interconnections, and a sense of community, does not always suit user communities well. As social media services in particular do not necessarily

make people feel as if they belong to a community. Instead, social media can serve as a hub for a network of interconnected personal communities based on interpersonal ties (Gruzd et al., 2011).

According to Van Dijck (2013), community and connectivity are inextricably linked. Sharing content might be positioned closer to implicit participation than explicit engagement on the participation continuum. Sharing on social media necessitates a sense of togetherness. Those who share content connect with their peers while also connecting with Facebook, Twitter and Google. Villi and Matikainen (2016) affirm this by saying, one way to visualize a user group, is to think of it as interactions between personal networks built around friends, followers, and other social media contacts. Social networking services do not form mutually shared communities; instead, interaction takes place in many interlinked personal communities, such as one's Facebook friends.

In general, the consumption of media content has gone from being an individual activity to one in which consumers have the opportunity to interact with others. In a sense, the consumption of content is a social experience (Villi, 2012) and a networked practice (Jenkins, 2006). As Zang and Hingle (2017) put it, social networking users are not only getting news from news organisations and individual journalists they follow on services like Facebook and Twitter, but also receive news from people they follow. An individual can share their current readings with family, friends, and even strangers on the other side of the world with a single click. They can also post comments that hundreds of thousands other readers can see, respond, or share further.

2.1.4.1 Facebook

“Founded in 2004, Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what is going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them” (Facebook Investor Relations, 2019 FAQs). On February 4, 2020, which marks Facebook’s 16th anniversary, the CEO, Mark Zuckerberg shared this message on his Facebook page:

Today is Facebook’s 16th birthday! When I started building the website I never imagined it would grow to connect billions of people...we believe progress happens when you give people a voice and bring them together. That’s what we stand for. (Personal Communication, February 4th, 2020)

On 4th February, 2004, the web service thefacebook.com opened for students at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard students were able to create a profile page with personal information and communicate with one another via Thefacebook. The requirements were that students had to have an e-mail address ending in harvard.edu and had to be 18 years old. Thefacebook refers to itself as “an online directory that connects people through social networks at colleges and universities” (Facebook FAQ, 2009). Mark Zuckerberg, a 19-year-old Harvard University student, established the service and administered it from a computer in his dorm room. He was supported by four other students, and the inventors' presentation clearly demonstrates that this web service was established by and for students (Brügger, 2015). Shortly after the site was launched, Thefacebook started to add other American universities to the network, first of all Stanford, Columbia and Yale (from February to March), and later New York University, Massachusetts Institute of

Technology (MIT), Cornell University and others (March). Students from other universities were invited to suggest further additions to the network on Thefacebook's open contact page. Thefacebook was made available to 800 American universities in May of the following year (Facebook FAQ, 2009).

Facebook is the biggest of all social networks, by far, based on just about every measure. As of October 29, 2020, there were over 2.74 billion monthly active users (MAUs) worldwide, representing a year-over-year rise of 12% in Facebook MAUs. In December 2019, 2.38 billion MAUs were registered (Facebook 30 September, 2020). On a regular basis, 1.82 billion people log on to Facebook and are considered active users. More than half of all social media users use Facebook, which covers 59 percent of the global social networking population. Males make up 59 percent of Facebook's audience, while females make up 43 percent. However, 32.4% of Facebook audience is aged between 25-34 years. This is the second most downloaded app (only beaten by TikTok) and the third most visited website in the world (beaten by Google and Youtube). When people spend time online, there's a good chance they are spending time on Facebook (Hootsuite, 2021). According to these figures, Facebook is much too large to be overlooked as a source of information when it comes to news sharing. And Chang et al., (2017) asserts that, Facebook has become one of the most important news outlets of our time, and it owes much of its popularity to the vast amount of information that its users post on a daily basis. He continues that the over one billion daily users of Facebook are not simply lurking on the social network, but rather pushing out new information to their friends and followers.

2.1.4.2 WhatsApp

Brian Acton and Jan Koum, co-founded WhatsApp (Logomyway, 2020). WhatsApp, according to Boczek and Koppers (2020), is a smartphone application designed solely for interpersonal communication. It has a desktop browser version, but it was built for mobile devices and is most commonly used on smartphones, making it an intrinsically mobile communication tool. Since smartphones are ubiquitous and WhatsApp is a widely used application, it has become a relevant channel for digital journalism.

WhatsApp came with the tagline “Simple, Personal, Real Time Messaging.” It comes in the form of a mobile messaging app that allows users to send and receive messages without paying for SMS. It was purposefully created to make communication and distribution of multimedia messages easier and faster (Jisha & Jebakumar, 2014). WhatsApp relies on internet access to allow users to communicate with friends, relatives, and anybody else on their contact list who is also on WhatsApp. The application shows all the people on one’s contact list who have it, and helps one to invite other persons who are on one’s contact list but have not yet started using the application. They can then begin communicating, swapping audio files, updating their status, and so on (Afful & Akrong, 2019).

Unlike Short Message Service (SMS) from 20 years ago, WhatsApp allows their users to send and receive not only text, but also to share real-time locations, images, voice recordings, documents, and videos (Church & de Oliviera, 2013). WhatsApp is thought to be a safe app because it has employed end-to-end encryption (E2EE) technology since 2014, which allows “data between communicating parties to be secure, free from eavesdropping, and hard to crack.” (Endeley, 2018, p 96). When two blue check marks appear next to the sent information, WhatsApp users may check whether their messages were properly received and read by the addressee. Keeping

track of information transmission, in addition to the advancements in E2EE technology, enables senders to be certain that messages are received accurately and privately, without fear of being intercepted (Dodds, 2019). WhatsApp has entered the ranks of other social media platforms by offering a variety of chat groups and digital public spaces for political and social discussions (Kibet & Ward, 2018). WhatsApp is the most used messaging app for news and has higher user numbers than other social networks such as Instagram and Twitter. Its news use has almost tripled since 2014, and in many countries, it has surpassed Twitter's prominence (Statista, 2021). According to the Reuters Digital News Report 2020, WhatsApp is used by half of online users in Malaysia and Brazil, and around a third in Spain and Turkey (Newman et al., 2018).

WhatsApp has more than 400 million users in India which is its biggest market in the world, followed by Brazil, with 120 million users (Singh, 2019). In 2019, 68.1 million Americans used WhatsApp to communicate, with that number anticipated to rise to 85.8 million by 2023 (Statista, 2019). In 2018, social media users in Africa numbered 192 million. Mobile users were 172 million and WhatsApp was the most popular app among these users followed by Facebook Messenger (Hootsuite/ We Are Social, 2018). And in Ghana, as at the third quarter of 2020, 84% of the people connected to the internet used WhatsApp (Statista, 2020).

2.1.5 Features of SNSs which Facilitate Sharing

2.1.5.1 Sharing and Creating Contact on Facebook

The user's profile information was available to their network since Thefacebook users were socially networking with one another, which was the most basic form of sharing on Thefacebook. But about six months after the launch, the sharing options were

extended with the introduction of a so called “Wall” on each profile page, where users could post messages for their friends and write on their walls. Users could now share messages with each other, and later on, it became possible to share photos (from October 2005) (Brügger, 2015). When sharing, however, one had to go to friends’ profile pages to see if they had made updates, for example written new messages on their wall or uploaded new photos to their site. Now, not only are there more forms of content to share, but the ways of sharing also changed radically in the current phase of Facebook. The most important breakthroughs were the option of making status updates (April 2006) and the features “News Feed” and “Mini Feed” (September 2006) (Hall, 2021). News Feed and Mini Feed made it easier for one to keep up with friends’ activities in the absence of a status update. Whereas previously one had to visit their friends’ profile pages to secure new information, it was now possible to allow information to flow into one’s own Facebook page automatically by displaying either all network activity (News Feed) or only the activity of one particular user (Mini Feed). In particular, feeds led to an exponential growth in the radius and speed of messages. According to one of the Facebook developer’s News Feed, it was not really their intention to invent a platform that could be used to support global activism, but this seemed to be what had happened (blog.facebook.com, 6th October, 2006).

Another important news sharing functionality was “My Shares” (introduced in October 2006), which appears on all Web sites as small Facebook icons, making it possible to share a link to a site with your Facebook friends with a single click. Users had been able to copy a link onto their profile page or their status updates in the past, of course (Brügger, 2015). But now this could be done quickly and easily by just a single click. In the follow-up to "My Shares," a Facebook toolbar was developed for

the Firefox browser in November 2006, allowing users to keep track of their Facebook networks' activity in the browser, even when they were not on their Facebook wall, as well as making it possible to share to other sites, if the page does not contain the small "share" icon. Finally, an important feature was introduced in 2008, allowing users to import content from other sites, such as photo sites, directly into their Mini Feed (introduced in April 2015). With these features, Facebook extended its scope to the rest of the Web, as well as drawing content from elsewhere into the Facebook universe (Brügger, 2015). Also, not only is Facebook more frequently used for longer periods of time but shared news content also remains visible for a longer period of time (Boehmer, 2016).

2.1.5.2 Sharing Personal and Public Affairs on WhatsApp

WhatsApp is widely used by young people who value their friendships, social lives, and family relationships and a possible explanation for WhatsApp's popularity among youths is that it enables them to send unlimited texts to their mates, family members, and others while remaining affordable since students just pay for data (Jisha & Jebakumar, 2014).

Compared to other social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, WhatsApp serves as a more intimate setting, with users interacting privately with individual contacts or clearly defined groups (Newman, 2018; Vaccari & Valeriani 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2019; Yamamoto et al., 2018). For that reason, it allows for continuous touch in surroundings that are more intimate, closed, and controlled. WhatsApp, in particular, has been described as allowing a more conversational, multimodal media than other texting apps by academics (Dodds, 2019; Matassi et al., 2019). Since it identifies other users based on the mobile number—something one

shares more often among closed network ties—it is “tailor-made for maintaining strong tie and social support networks” (Chan, 2018, p. 260). To the degree that WhatsApp use is largely related to communication with family, friends and colleagues, its affordances have specific consequences for both the personal and political realms. WhatsApp use has been related to social support and well-being (Chan, 2018). It favours political expression and conversation not only among politically active individuals, but also of people who are less confident in posting their political views on public online networks and would rather discuss in more controlled, less confrontational settings (Newman et al., 2018; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018).

With near-real-time sharing and synchronous exchanges, WhatsApp users report a greater sense of presence and togetherness when communicating through the app (Karapanos et al., 2016; Matassi et al., 2019). Its multimodality also opens the door for news consumption and sharing of political information, including links to media content and personal commentaries about public affairs (Yamamoto et al., 2018), as well as images, audios, videos, and emojis. While there is some evidence of a negative correlation between WhatsApp use and incidental exposure to news (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski 2018), some research suggests that selective content curation on WhatsApp is one feature highly valued by users, who consider that news sharing on the app is not haphazard or casual, but a strategic choice by their contacts that results in multiple information flows (Anspach 2017; Goh et al., 2017). In this context, WhatsApp is quite different from other social platforms for news sharing and social messaging. While political talk on Facebook and Twitter has been linked positively to political involvement (Vaccari & Valeriani 2018), the conversational-yet-private nature of WhatsApp enables a different context for open dialogue among trusted ties (Yamamoto et al., 2018).

Users of WhatsApp also report relying less on Facebook for news nowadays, due to content fatigue and exposure to undesirable content, and preferring to go to WhatsApp to take part in a private discussion about news or to discuss personal and public affairs with their contacts (Karapanos et al., 2016; Newman 2018; Newman et al., 2018). In the words of Swart et al., (2018, p.3), “people continue to make sense of and interpret news within specific social contexts,” but need to access and maintain interpersonal relationships with family and friends (Chan, 2018). Not surprisingly then, Vaccari and Valeriani (2018) argued that WhatsApp plays a specific role in the digital environment of people’s everyday life. In view of the above discussions on the features and other affordances of both Facebook and WhatsApp, with respect to sharing, this study investigates the pattern of news stories shared on each platform.

2.2 Motivations for Sharing News

Scholarship has revealed a plethora of reasons that motivate people to share news on social media. The motives influencing individuals to choose and pass on news can be grouped into two; that is, those related to psychological factors on one hand and those that touch on the characteristics of the content itself on the other (Cappella et al., 2015).

Scholars have identified two key reasons for sharing news in general. First, news sharing will improve mutual ties and social standing (Gantz & Trenholm, 1979; McCombs et al., 2011). Sharing information will make the person relaying the message seem knowledgeable and intelligent, and secondly the shared knowledge can be helpful to the recipient. These two things can aid in bolstering the social standing of an individual. This can consequently be a strategy of either establishing a new social relationship or maintaining existing ones (Bright, 2016).

Secondly, researchers have underscored the significance of news sharing as a way to assisting individuals to appreciate and therefore shape beliefs on news. As Neuman and Guggenheim (2011, p. 177) put it, “individuals rely on social cues and interpersonal conversation to interpret and contextualize complex media messages.” For extremely surprising or dramatic happenings, people often reveal sharing news with total strangers, so as to permit them to have someone to talk to (Rogers & Seidel, 2002). Hence a variety of research have recorded how in instances of dramatic events such as assassinations, untimely or tragic demise of popular individuals, most people discover the news through friends (Hill & Bonjean, 1964; Mayer et al., 1990). In these occurrences, sharing news has an undeniable cathartic value (Ibrahim et al., 2008) and studies have registered that people are more likely to share news that they feel a strong emotional connection to (Harber & Cohen, 2005). For instance, Chadwick and Vaccari (2019) explored the reasons why people share news on politics on British social media. Their study revealed that, the two most dominant motivations were to express feelings and to inform others. The need to influence others and provoking discussions ranked third and fourth respectively. However, one worrying revelation was that, a fifth of the overall British news sharing community shared political news to upset other social media users. However, Hasell and Weeks (2016) had conducted a similar study in the US after the 2012 presidential elections and their findings showed that, by generating stronger emotional reactions, partisan news can boost sharing practices among social media users. Nonetheless, these studies were undertaken in the context of political news, which’s dynamics might differ from news in general in a Ghanaian context. Similarly, Dafonte-Gomez (2018) in exploring user-motivation for sharing news in relation to the role of emotions in the process agrees with Hasell and Weeks (2016) on the importance of the emotions that content set off in users in

determining sharing. Consistent with this view, Guadagno et al., (2013) as well as Teixeira (2012) also opined that the probability of a news content to go viral is high, if it conveys positive emotions like surprise or happiness. Some of these studies and others in general refer to content that causes powerful, either positive or negative, emotions and excitements in individuals (Berger 2011; Berger & Milkman, 2012).

However, Picone et al., (2016) in investigating what makes Dutch-speaking Belgians share online news found social connection as a prime intrinsic motivator as well as previous online experience as a strong indicator of willingness to share. Also, in line with previous research, (Cappella et al., 2015; Lee and Ma 2012; Zhang & Zhang, 2013), they confirmed self-presentation (status-seeking) and social connection to be strong predictors for sharing intentions. In this perspective, media users do not consider content sharing merely an exchange of information; it is at the same time a publication of one's personality. As Shin and Thorson (2017) rightly put it, through sharing, users aim at amplifying the reach of a news story in order to 'hack' the status of attention economy by trying to augment the visibility of contents aligned with their views.

Also, studies have found the entertainment gratification to be positively associated with an individual's internet news consumption (Diddi & LaRose, 2006) as the internet can provide functions such as exchanges with other individuals through comments and likes which can result in the release of stress and fulfilling the need for entertainment (Dunn & Lawlor, 2010; Lee & Ma, 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012). For instance, according to Lee and Ma (2011), the internet not only satisfies basic information needs but also provides enjoyment through interactions with others such as discussions and gossip. They add that, the ensuing conversations, discussions,

reactions among others following the sharing of news entertaining in nature serve as sources of entertainment for the sharer and the audience alike. Additionally, Baeke et al., (2011), assert that, individuals share links on Facebook because they are relaxing and entertaining. Moreover, past research (Vettehen et al., 2008; Mojzisch et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2014) has established that, liking news in general underlies feelings of pleasure towards the content of news stories as people are more likely to seek and interact with information content they like.

Nonetheless, in some studies (Choi, 2015; Karimi et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2020), pass time is an independent gratification which refers to the usage of media to alleviate boredom and occupy time (Dunn & Lawlor, 2010; Thompson, 2020). Past research supports that in the context of online news media, pass time gratification expresses audiences' need to fill free time than to do something productive (Yoo, 2011). Choi (2015) for instance posits that, sharing news is related to satisfying the pass time gratification as social media features like Facebook "like" and Twitter's "favourite" functions are frequently used when individuals are not cognitively stimulated by the content presented. Berger (2014) takes it a notch higher by claiming, entertainment becomes a bridge between the motives of socialization and status seeking. However, Ma et al. (2011) found no association between sharing news on social media and entertainment gratification, suggesting that individuals do not derive any pleasure from the activity.

According to Bobkowski (2015), across independent content spheres of technology news and households, the informational utility conveyed in a news story influences the extent to which readers disseminate it with others because of their supposed usefulness to online communities. This supports previous research on mobile content sharing apps, which found that people can predict their own or others' future

information needs by sharing content in order to make future information searching easier (Ma et al., 2010). Therefore, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Luo (2002) believe information seeking was a major reason for using the Internet. Similarly, Chadwick and Vaccari (2019) posit that, the need to inform others is one of the two dominant motivations for news sharing. They argue that, individuals share news to fulfil the need to influence others and provoke discussions. Likewise, Wong and Burkell (2017) assert that, individuals share news to express their opinions and champion causes in order to cause a positive change in the behaviour of society. Individuals, turn to social media to express political opinions, share information, and seek information and opinions posted by others (Glynn et al., 2012; Weeks & Holbert, 2013).

Furthermore, Duffy et al., (2019) are of the view that, building and maintaining relationships is a key determinant of which news stories people share. According to them, people may therefore share news that they know is fake and do so for two reasons. First, if it conforms to their prior beliefs and they are sharing it with like-minded friends (Veenstra et al., 2014). Second, in order to maintain good social relations. Similarly, Lui (2017) notes that, in China, people sometimes forward information they know to be fake because they feel they have a duty to the person who sent them. If they chose not to share the information, it would be seen as a social gaffe. These studies affirm Ma et al., (2011) finding that, a positive correlation between news sharing and socialising gratification. Thus, individuals view sharing news as a convenient way to preserve and expand their social networks as it allows for something to talk about with friends. In relation to this, Chen and Sin (2013) also argue that, sharing news can be a good way to converse. Likewise, Meijer and Kormelink (2015) agree the communicative value of news consumption is usually

more important than its informational value. Taylor and Kent (2010) also posit that, sharing news among users serves as an information source for socialisation.

Moreover, Thompson et al., (2019) have also identified status seeking, socialising, entertainment and information sharing as motivations for sharing news on social media. According to them, individuals will go through the content of the news carefully and pay more attention to news quality when they seek to enhance their image on social media. This finding is consistent with Rogers' (2003) argument that if the content they offer is legitimate, they will appear credible as well, and will be viewed as an opinion leader in the virtual community. This literature has recently been revised to provide detailed references to social media, where research has shown that socialising and status seeking remain important drivers (Baek et al., 2011; Lee & Ma, 2013). Interestingly, Pressgrove et al., (2017) are of the view that, people may share messages that may be unexpected, mysterious or controversial, as messages with these properties are more likely to be reshared. However, Wong and Burkell (2017) aver that, sharing content that distinguishes oneself also involves the decision to avoid sharing content that is widespread. Moreover, it is important to consider a user's self-perception as an opinion leader, as well as their assessment of the importance of their social connections (Ma et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the Media Insight Project 2016 survey report also suggests that trust in the source or the person who posted the story on social media is more likely to motivate a user to share the news story, recommend that source to friends, and follow that source for future news alerts. However, building on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Ma et al., (2014) posited that, news sharing was driven by individual influences and network tie strengths, and has no significant influence of sources

credibility. When these same authors looked at news sharing intentions through the lens of the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, they discovered that people's desire to pursue the gratifications associated with knowledge sharing, social status, and social interactions positively influenced news sharing on social media platforms. In line with this, Bobkowski (2015) also discovered that, across independent content spheres of technology news and households, the informational utility conveyed in a news story influences the extent to which readers disseminate it with others because of their supposed usefulness to online communities.

Also, guided by the Uses and Gratifications theory and the concept of affordances Lou et al., (2021) sought to understand the phenomenon of news consumption on Telegram. The study identified socialising, information seeking and increasing demand for efficiency as key motivations for sharing news. Significantly, a unique social gratification from the internet is its ability to extend an individual's social network and share views with people anywhere and anytime (Krishnatray et al., 2009). Additionally, in China, drawing from the motivational theory, Zang et al., (2017) examined the extrinsic (reputational and reciprocity) and intrinsic (knowledge, self-efficacy, altruism and empathy) motivations of health professionals sharing knowledge on online health communities. They discovered that reciprocity, altruism and empathy have a stronger impact on both health professionals and ordinary users' knowledge sharing intents. Finally, in examining social cognitive factors that influence information sharing related to climate change, a survey conducted in the US and China by Yang et al., (2014) illustrated that, college students' climate change knowledge exchange is consistently predicted by their social motivations and information seeking practices in both contexts. However, while social motivation and information-seeking were the only significant predictors in China, epistemological

motivations, negative emotions and information-seeking activities were significant predictors in the US. This goes to affirm Naya et al., (2018) belief that, in studying the internet, no two contexts are the same, therefore there is the need to conduct studies in different contexts to paint a true picture of online news consumption activities that pertain to a particular environment. In all, the motivations for news sharing discussed above will help situate UEW students' news sharing motivations in the wider context of the online sharing phenomenon.

2.3 News Types and Consumption Patterns

The most basic distinction between news types, defined by Tuchman (1972) is dichotomous: 'soft' news and 'hard' news. 'Hard' news is characterized by Tuchman (1972) and others (Smith, 1985; Whetmore, 1987; Limor & Mann, 1997; Patterson, 2000) as having a high level of newsworthiness, that is, news value (usually in political, economic and social matters) requiring immediate publication. Accordingly, Patterson (2000, p.3) described hard news as the “coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life.” Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010) on the other hand, describe 'soft' news as news that does not require timely publication and has a low level of objective informational value (if any at all), such as gossip, human interest reports, and offbeat events.

According to Fuller (1996, p.6) “news is a report of what a news organisation has recently learned about matters of some significance or interest to the specific community that news organisation serves”. Consistent with Tuchman's (1972) view, Fuller (1996) and many other scholars (Patterson, 2000; Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006 & Wheldon, 2008) in their definition of

'hard' news used the time dimension, that is, urgency of dissemination. Whetmore (1987) emphasises the objective, colourful, or offbeat nature of 'hard' news as against subjective, colourful, or offbeat nature of 'soft' news.

Soft news as defined by the Reuters Institute (2016) is often characterised by topics such as entertainment, celebrity and lifestyle news, whereas hard news refers to topics that are generally timely, relevant, and consequential. Patterson (2000) goes much further, defining 'soft' news as having sensationalist characteristics involving well-known people, being utilitarian in nature (personally beneficial to the average reader), and/or being focused on a particular case (unconnected to any social trend or ongoing story).

Starting with the variations in content, hard news is primarily negative, whereas soft news has a more balanced mix of negative and good items (Baum, 2010). Soft news is frequently blended together with coverage of less important and lighter concerns (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010). Soft news programmes therefore have proportionately less attention for the negative topics that dominate hard news (Baum, 2002; Grabe et al., 2001). Soft news, on the other hand, is more likely to cover celebrities (Grabe et al., 2001), heroics (Baum, 2003), and happy events (Brants & Neijens, 1998), making it less negative overall.

Berger and Milkman (2012) characterised the news content that is posted online by analyzing the psychological features of the most shared stories through email in the New York Times. The authors discovered that stories that succeeded in eliciting strong emotions, whether positive (happy) or negative (angry), had greater viral effects than those that were less emotional. Berger and Milkman (2012) characterised high arousal emotions as an excitatory state of increased activity. Emotions such as

admiration or inspiration, awe, excitement, humour, anger or anxiety have shown to produce high arousal. Based on this, the authors concluded that, in comparison to hard news, social sharing of news may give priority to more soft news. Similarly, Dafonte-Gomez (2018) found that, the emotions that content sets off in users is an important determining factor when it comes to sharing. In line with this, Bright (2016) posits that, stories about celebrities may also be more likely shared. First, because they might be stories to which people feel an emotional connection and second because they have been identified as useful ways of starting conversations amongst social connections

On the other hand, Sjøvaag et al., (2015) and Kalsnes and Larsson (2017), characterised news types based on nine categories: Politics (including political parties, demonstrations and public administrations); Economy (including personal economy, business, finance and markets); Crime (including murders, violence, trafficking, police issues and trials); Social Issues (including work, health and education, environmental issues, consumer, construction and traffic issues); Culture (including arts, media, royalty, celebrities, curiosities, leisure and popular culture); Sports; Accidents; Weather; and Science and Technology issues. Using the above categorisation, Benson (2007) found that, people have an insatiable appetite for celebrity news. This is re-echoed by Derthic's (2013) who believes that with the addition of technology and social media sites including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the public cannot get enough entertainment news and celebrities are happier to feed this addiction to a certain extent. The entertainment news industry's focus on covering those celebrities with attributes that are both "imitable and inimitable" contributes to the spread of entertainment and celebrity news (Gorin & Dubied, 2011, p. 601). Interestingly, according to Billboard (2018), 9 out of 10 social

media users perform a music related activity on their social media application and it is common today to use social media to share and discover new music (Le, 2019). Similarly, Franklin (2019) believes the buzz generated online by people through sharing can dramatically influence sales of a newly released or soon-to-be-released track.

Another news type that is not captured in the nine categorisation of news is flaming news. Flaming is defined as “displaying hostility by insulting, swearing or using otherwise offensive language” in a particular forum (Moor, 2010, p. 7). Flaming as a concept emerged from popular discourse surrounding the online community to describe aggressive, hostile, profanity-laced interactions (O’Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003). According to Landry (2000) flaming means to attack with an intention to offend someone through e-mail, posting, commenting or any statement using insults, swearing and hostile, intense language, trolling among others. Flaming has become quite popular in the Ghanaian media space (Marfo, 2014; Owusu, 2012), where social media users use insulting words, profanity or aggressive language to attack others in posts and short videos on social media. These posts and videos are then captured in news stories by online news platforms and bloggers as news.

Also, studies have shown that, one of the most prevalent subjects of media discourse is crime. Crime has been one of the main topics in news media for decades (e.g., Dominick, 1978; Gans, 2004; Graber, 1980; Johnson, 1998; Leishman & Mason, 2003; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). This is because it serves as one of the key selling items for different media outlets in their competition for readers and viewers (Näsi et al., 2020). It could also be due to the fact that, people prefer to pass on bad news, especially news that is exaggeratedly bad (Heath, 1996), hence news about disasters, crime, accidents and emergencies might be shared more. Research has also indicated

that, this is partly due to emotion being one of the news values that makes certain stories more appealing to journalists and audiences (García-Perdomo et al., 2017; Trilling et al., 2017).

Moreover, a study conducted by Gil de Zuniga et al., (2014) revealed that, socially shared political information is becoming increasingly essential in today's media landscape as both a means of political expression and an amplifier of political news. However, research (Newman et al., 2018; Vaccari & Valeriani 2018) has shown that, WhatsApp favours political expression and conversation among politically active individuals, also people who are less confident in posting their political views on public online networks and would rather discuss in more controlled, less confrontational settings. Research has suggested that, people will avoid sharing political stories in conversations, especially if they are known to be controversial or they think others hold diverging views (Boczkowski, 2010; Jensen & Rosengren, 1990; Martin & Vanberg, 2008). Moreover, according to Mitchell et al., (2013), the role of social media in the distribution and consumption of sports content cannot be overemphasised as sports ranks among the most read topics on social media. However, in spite of it being the third most popular topic on Facebook, it is the least shared news topic (Matsa & Mitchell, 2014; Yao & Sun, 2013). Research has shown that, social media is fundamentally changing the nature of sports media consumption (Hull & Lewis, 2014; Sanderson, 2011). For instance, a study undertaken by Ofcom (2017) and Pew Research Center (2015), indicated that, highly publicised coverage of competitions, primarily the English Premier League (EPL), has influenced football news. Similarly, Abas and Kaur (2019) found that, the media's attention is drawn to more popular teams with better winning records, particularly the EPL's "Big Four" (Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United).

According to Meadows (2013), the importance of local news lies in its unique ability to address the concerns of only one population of media consumers, those who are interested in that particular community. He adds that, local news is significant because of its one-of-a-kind ability to address the problems of a single group of media consumers: individuals who are interested in that given city. That notwithstanding, while there are multiple outlets for national news, weather and sports, there are only a handful of sources in each community that provides the local versions of these stories (Rosengard et al., 2014). Studies (Ofcom, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015) have established that, local news plays a significant role in the social, political and cultural life of communities, and it remains an important part of the news diet of audiences. For instance, a survey conducted by Lottridge and Bentley (2018) to examine the differences in motivations and frequency of sharing news on public, social and private platforms indicated that, local/social news are meant to inform and are often perceived by the sharer to be of interest to a wide range of friends, often related to a school or city.

Nevertheless, Boukes & Vliegthart, (2017) aver that, social sharing of news might give precedence for more so-called soft news compared to hard news. For instance, Larsson (2016) came up with findings that suggest Facebook news consumers might be more open to interacting with 'soft' news. Furthermore, Philips (2012, p. 6) adds that while hard news may be shared on Twitter, Facebook is the site that generates the most traffic. and "most of the stories that attract large numbers of hits are also the jokey stories that people pass on". Interestingly, a previous study had also suggested that online news consumers could prefer more varied news diet (Curtain et al., 2007) and that the priorities made by the news providers might not always match those held by the news consumers. For instance, while newspapers used their websites to publish

stories about sports, entertainment, and celebrities, Bastos (2014) discovered that users of social networking sites (not just Facebook) preferred to share 'hard' news stories. Meanwhile, Hadík and Štětka (2015) posit that, social media tend to become a source for soft news more regularly than for hard news. Likewise, Kalsnes and Larsson's (2017) study echoed this by revealing that while the most shared stories on Twitter were characterised by "hard" news (foreign policy, immigration or military service), those shared on Facebook were characterised by "soft" news (parenting issues pertaining to children, health and education)

In exploring how online news users differ demographically in the domain of usage of different types of online news content, Dutta-Bergman (2010) found readers of online business and finance news have a greater level of education and income. His study also revealed that, young people had interest in reading international, sports and entertainment news with sports news readers being male. Nonetheless, Lottridge and Bentley's (2018) study indicated that, gender differed across groups, where those who share and discuss news through social media and messaging have a larger proportion of women.

According to Rakow and Kranich (1991), hard news is categorically described as extreme, relevant, and male, while soft news is defined as human interest, lifestyle, and the purview of female reporters and readers. However, in view of the dichotomous categorisation of news types and the increasingly blurred distinction between news and entertainment, (Feldman, 2007) Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010) suggested the need for an urgent news category, which they believe has become more evident when thinking about what has historically been referred to as hard and soft news. Their study therefore proposed an intermediate news type

between soft and hard news, which they called ‘general’ news. According to them, ‘general’ news bothers on recent economic, social or cultural news that should be published but not necessarily immediately; important data, academic reports, scientific discoveries or technological inventions that should be reported but not necessarily right away, important news that is relevant or influential, not for society in general but only for a specific group; important news not on the present public agenda, so that if not immediately reported would not be missed and personally useful information for the reader that need not be reported right away.

Like Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010), Berger and Milkman (2012) also believe that people prefer to share news with high informational utility, that is, ‘news you can use’ – which resonates with their own lives. Looking at the retransmission of health stories from the New York Times, Kim (2015) observed that positive stories and those with ‘informational utility’ were most shared. Since utility is based on relevance to the recipient, it is likely to lead to an echo chamber in which people only hear news that supports their worldview (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Similarly, Bobkowski (2015) also draws the link between the people sharing information, the informational utility of what they share, and their position in their network as opinion leaders. However, the research has been criticized as an experiment that does not accurately represent real-world behavior (Trilling et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Pressgrove et al., (2017) aver that, people may send messages that may be unexpected, mysterious or controversial, as messages with these properties are more likely to be shared.

Interestingly, Bright (2016) posits that, people are likely to share news that they consider to be ‘important’. Perceiving a story as important may be relevant for both status-led and emotions-led news motivations. According to him, more essential news

is more likely to improve social status, but news that elicits emotion-driven sharing (surprising and dramatic events) is also often considered as important.

Moreover, some topics may lend themselves more to sharing than others. For instance, research has indicated that, people love to spread negative news, especially exaggeratedly awful news (Heath, 1996), hence news about disasters, accidents and emergencies might be shared more. Other topics like news on politics are usually shunned by social media users. For instance, an American Pew Research Center survey (2021) indicated that only 9% of American adult social media users often share things about political issues. When asked why, participants revealed that they do not want the things they post or share to be used against them (33%), they do not want to be attacked for their views (32%) and they do not want to offend others (20%).

Furthermore, conducting a study to examine differences in motivations and frequency of sharing news on public, social and private platforms, Lottridge and Bentley (2018) found that, local or social stories which were often crime news stories about killers and rapists who were on the loose were to make people aware of a potential threat. They concluded that social news topics were perceived by sharers to be of interest to a wide range of friends often related to a school or city.

Finally, a study conducted by Collins and Armstrong (2008) noted that when faced with competing news, college students are more likely to read campus news that focused on their concerns and issues. The study revealed that, students preferred reading local news which pertains to the campus and the vicinity where the university is located. This confirms Diddi and LaRose (2006) finding that indicates that, this habit was a strong predictor of news consumption among college students, especially in an internet news environment. In all, the above discussions on news types and

consumption patterns will aid the current study in establishing the types of news stories some undergraduate students at the School of Communication and Media Studies of UEW share on Facebook and WhatsApp.

2.4 Trust in News and Source Credibility

Trust in the news is critical because it influences what people pay attention to in the media and how they interact with it. People are more likely to believe news from outlets they trust or regard as reliable (Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Knobloch et al., 2003; Tsfati & Cappelle, 2003). People's confidence levels can influence how they receive and interpret information (Tsfati, 2003). Those who trust news are often more likely to pay for it and to communicate with it in ways such as sharing it with others (The Media Insight Project, 2016).

According to data from the Reuters Institute (2017), more than half of all internet users (54%) in 36 countries use social media as a news source, with more than one in ten (14%) using it as their primary source. However, social media users' news consumption patterns and confidence are cause for concern, as a significant amount of non-journalistic material is posted almost unsupervised (Baum et al., 2017). The kinds of verification and fact-checking duties that used to be the responsibility of editors and journalist now fall on the shoulder of social media users themselves (McGrew et al., 2018). Social media users must make evaluative judgements about the credibility of information that they encounter online and make decisions about whether to share such information with others (Leeder, 2019).

Credibility is defined as an information receiver's assessment of the trustworthiness of information and sources (Fogg, 2003; Metzger et al., 2015). It is crucial for any information source as its audience is generally highly interested in accuracy (Fallis,

2004). Consumers have numerous options for news coverage and the credibility of a given outlet may influence preferred source selection (Bucy, 2003). As individuals become aware that news items from a particular source are likely false, at best they may perceive that source as incompetent. News is generally regarded as more trustworthy than other types of online content (Bulgurcu et al., 2010). And, because practically all information is now distributed online, disintermediation, a process that provides consumers with immediate access to information that would previously require a mediator such as a newspaper, has removed key traditional credibility cues. Individuals are being compelled to analyze large amounts of Internet material on their own, making it more difficult to differentiate between trustworthy and false news items (Eysenbach, 2008).

According to Cooke (2017), critical information evaluation skills can help combat the effect of fake news through the promotion of sophisticated information evaluation skills. However, individuals prefer to use verification techniques that need the least time and mental effort (Metzger, 2007). Therefore, they resort to the use of heuristics and signals when evaluating information on the internet (Sundar 2008; Hiligoss & Rieh, 2008; Metzger et al., 2010; Go et al. 2014).

2.4.1 Methods of News Credibility Evaluation

News consumers recognise a large number of credibility issues with news sources ranging from incompetence to bias and deceptive practices (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017). Upon discovery of credibility issues, individuals commonly seek alternative sources in order to validate the accuracy of the information being conveyed (Bucy, 2003; Fallis, 2004). According to studies, links and recommendations circulating on social media sites like Facebook have become a source of news and information for a

large number of internet users (Hermida et al., 2012; Flintham et al., 2018). Thus, the influx of fake news on SNSs not only heightens scepticism of news sources, but is also likely to encourage network members to be more vigilant in their efforts to assess the veracity of the news they consume via SNS (Torres et al., 2018). Similarly, according to Shklovski et al., (2008), social media is gaining traction as a source of information, despite the fact that the quality of information exchanged across these networks is often questioned. As a result, they call for more research into how people assess the information they consume on social media platforms, especially how they judge the authenticity of that information.

Furthermore, Flanagin and Metzger (2010) discovered in a series of five experiments that people only verified knowledge they found online "rarely" or "occasionally," and that they preferred to use verification techniques that needed the least time and mental effort. Whereas credibility has traditionally been tied to an authority-based approach, users now have to determine credibility through multiple judgements using heuristic strategies (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008). Heuristic strategies rely on rapid examination of credibility cues, focusing on information's surface characteristics (Flanagin & Metzger, 2010).

A slew of studies has highlighted people's use of heuristics and signals when evaluating information on the internet (Sundar 2008; Hiligoss & Rieh, 2008; Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010; Go et al. 2014; Metzger & Flanagin, 2015). According to previous research, two factors that people are likely to consider when analyzing news on social media are (1) who posts the content and (2) the story's original reporting source. For instance, Metzger and Medders (2010) found that people rely on personal connections as heuristic to minimise cognitive effort when deciding if a piece of

information is credible or not; so, if a news item is recommended by a friend on SNS or IM, it may be more readily believed. Likewise, a Pew Research Center 2012 survey, indicated that social media users tend to disseminate news items they find from online friends. Moreover, Turcotte et al., (2015) add that, opinion leader guidelines increase media credibility and enable viewers to follow more news from that specific media source in the future.

Similarly, Tandoc (2018) examined whether perceived news credibility will vary when news is shared by traditional news organisation from when it is shared by a user's Facebook friend. The outcome affirmed Metzger and Medder's (2010) findings that, participants perceived their own Facebook friends as more credible news sources than traditional news organisations. They were therefore willing to share news from friends based on perceived homophily. Interestingly, Fallis (2004) opines that, if the information conveyed by a particular source has been accurate in the past, such consistency is a hallmark of trust. This is confirmed by Lee et al., (2011) who found that, when people share news to provide others access to important content, if the information they share turns out to be reliable and relevant, they will seem to be credible and relevant as well. As a result, they will appear credible and position themselves as a social network thought leader. They in turn will appear to be credible and be established as an opinion leader in the social network (Lee et al., 2011).

Sometimes, the arguments given are the best evidence for the claim's accuracy. An information seeker often knows many other facts about the world that should be taken into account, in addition to the source's credibility. If, given all else the reader knows about the topic, it is highly unlikely that a piece of news is accurate, the reader should be inclined to believe the information is false (Lipton, 1998). Moreover, Fallis (2004)

adds that, the reason offered often can provide the best evidence for the accuracy of the claim (Fallis, 2004). This was confirmed by Fergie et al.'s, (2015) study which found that, young media users evaluate the reasons of content when assessing the credibility and reliability of the source.

Consequently, drawing upon the epistemology of testimony and extant theorising on the development of trust to construct a research model, Torres et al., (2018) explored perceptions of both the network and the media, in conjunction with user intentions to better understand information verification behaviours. They discovered that trust in network, media credibility, and user intention to share are antecedents of information verification behaviour. However, Flintham et al., (2018) are of the view that, aside the credibility of the source URL, other indicators like level of personal interest in the news story itself, the layout of the source website, the writing style and other articles on the source website can be used to evaluate the credibility of news and a news source. Interestingly, some respondents of their study reported that the lack of knowledge of a source is seen as an indicator of fakeness. Individuals pay attention to the manner of the delivery of the information. Several studies have acknowledged the architecture of websites as a predictor of accuracy. Numerous features of websites proposed as indicators of accuracy fall into this category. First if the website is engaged in advertising, they may lack objectivity. Secondly, does the website contain any spelling or grammatical errors as such mistakes may indicate a lack of concern for quality and accuracy (Wilkinson et al., 1997; Cook, 1999). Fergie et al.'s, (2015) study add that, during rapid online navigation, websites must appear 'proper' (well-structured and well-designed) and salient (containing images and language relevant to the experiences of users).

That notwithstanding, on the issue of spelling or grammatical errors, scholars and professionals in the news industry have expressed divergent views. While one school of thought believes that spelling mistakes and grammatical errors can be overlooked when evaluating the credibility of a news source, another is of the view that it affects the credibility of the content. For instance, Lucy Kellaway, an author and Financial Times columnist at the BBC World Service argues that not only are there typographical errors in the New York Times, there are even some in the Bible. She adds that if humans have a competitive edge over machines, it is their ability to write something that provokes a response and not because it contains a spelling mistake. However, Petan (2021) avers that, if a business has errors on their website, social media handles and advertisements, consumers may be less likely to find such a business favourable. She goes on to refer to a survey conducted by a London-based digital agency that found 43% of 1,003 individuals surveyed claiming a spelling mistake would deter them from purchasing goods or services from a business.

Nonetheless, research has established that confirming the credibility of news from autonomous sources is one of the strategies used in verifying news or information (Fallis, 200; Fergie et al., 2015; Wijnhoven, 2012). For instance, according to Fallis (2004), ideally, in order to reduce the risk of all sources disseminating erroneous information drawn from the same source, verifying proof should be sought from sources that obtained the information independently. Wijnhoven (2012) also argues that agreement by multiple sources is sometimes regarded a strong indicator of accuracy and is similar to the academic notion of triangulation. Similarly, Fergie et al.'s, (2015) study revealed that, young people compare multiple sources as part of a range of strategies when assessing content heuristically.

A plethora of studies (Fricker, 2006; Lackey, 2018; Lynch, 2016; McKnight & Chervany, 2002) have also found experts to be heavyweight epistemic sources, with great evidential weight in comparison to a layperson's own reasoning. McKnight and Chervany (2002) opine that, credentials that signify specialized knowledge is another means of establishing authority and also, engender trust on the part of a testimony recipient.

Lastly, in investigating how laypeople should respond to an authority's beliefs if they already have beliefs and reasons of their own concerning some subject matter, Constantin and Grundmann (2018) concluded that, it would be irrational for the layperson to give any epistemic weight to his own everyday experiences in the face of the verdict of clearly identified experts. Therefore, the layperson should follow the authorities' lead. This is a confirmation of Zagzebski (2012) position which was criticised for advocating blind trust and ignoring even the most basic norms for critical thinking. However, in Grundmann's (2017) view, the situation is very different when experts make decisions that appear to be outrageous in their fields of competence. That notwithstanding, interlocutors who are considered as being free of prejudice may be regarded as credible authorities, and the testimony recipient may develop trust in them (McKnight & Chervany, 2002).

In all, it could be realized that, individuals rely on the credibility of the source and their friends whom they perceive to have things in common with, to make good judgement when it comes to the selection and sharing of news based on the recommendations and reviews from these friends.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The focus of this current study is to understand the motivations of students' news sharing behaviours on social media, the types of news stories they share and their sources. The theoretical foundations of this study are built upon the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz & Blumler, 1974; Thompson et al., 2020) and the Epistemology of Testimony (Fallis, 2004; Torres et al., 2018). The following sections will briefly review the research in uses and gratifications theory and the Epistemology of Testimony theory which form the analytical framework to enable the researcher make sense of the data collected.

2.5.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The beginnings of uses and gratifications theory may be traced back to mass communication research in the 1950s and 1960s, when the field shifted attention from primarily focusing on the impacts of media on its audiences to how audiences play a role in media selection (Ruggiero, 2004; Schramm et al., 1961). Thus, audience members were now considered more active than passive in their selection of media. Katz et al., (1974) developed the U&G theory to better understand the complex reasons why people use those media. The needs of the individuals that they strive to satiate guide media consumption patterns (Katz et al., 1999). The uses and gratifications theory's main goal is to understand how and why people prefer some forms of media over others to meet their needs (gratifications). Understanding the potential of uses and gratifications can aid in predicting media usage, as well as its recurring use (Johnson & Kaye, 2002).

Social networking arose as a result of advancements in internet technology over time. According to Nov et al., (2010), among social media's many appealing features, the potential to empower individuals to produce their own content, thus turning them from a passive to an active audience, stands out as the most valuable. This and other related works inspired researchers to look at uses and gratifications through the lens of social media. Lee and Ma (2012), who studied the relationship between the uses and gratifications theory and information sharing, highlight two key points. First, the literature on the relationship between uses and gratifications theory and social media establishes the applicability of the uses and gratifications approach in the study of news sharing behaviour. Second, despite media usage reasons varying across individuals, situations, and type of media, almost all uses and gratifications works investigate the following gratifications: entertainment (escapism), socialising (social interaction), status-seeking and information sharing. Other studies added the pass time gratification, alleviation of boredom, information search and relationship maintenance (Lee et al., 2011).

As social networking sites can be used for a wide range of activities, it is crucial for studies to look at the reasons and motivations for engaging in SNS-specific activities. According to previous research, individuals are also devoted, engaged, and highly motivated to invest effort and time generating content for certain SNS services (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Foregger, 2008; Krause et al., 2014).

2.5.2 The Epistemology of Testimony

The concept of truth has been examined extensively in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and information systems. Truth is, at least in part, the domain of epistemology, a branch of philosophy that examines knowledge and its acquisition

(Torres et al., 2018). This theory is concerned with discerning the validity of information acquired through others (Lipton, 1998). Given individuals' reliance on external sources of information, testimony is critical to the sources of information, testimony is critical to the 'formation of much that we normally regard as reasonable belief' (Coady, 1992 p. 7).

In accordance with Shieber (2015) and Torre et al., (2018), this study conceptualises testimony in the social networking sites context as the conveyance of information through written or audio/visual communication. Thus, testimony is the act of revealing knowledge, whereas epistemology is concerned with how recipients evaluate the veracity of that disclosure.

The epistemology of testimony is based on the premise that the transmission of information by others radically changes the way information is transformed into knowledge (Lipton, 1998). Rather than being able to ascertain the veracity of first-hand empirical proof, the testifier's receiver must make subjective judgments about the truth of the facts conveyed by the testifier. Since the testifier can have secret motivations that influence the knowledge communicated and its conversion into expertise, these tests are needed (Shieber, 2015). Fallis (2004) describes four factors to consider when evaluating the veracity of recorded information, based on the epistemology of testimony: authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support, and presentation. Table 1. Summarizes these considerations.

Table 1. *Establishing the Truth of Testimony*

Consideration	What it seeks to address
Authority	The characteristics of the testifier (who testifies)
Independent Corroboration	The presence of others who offer similar testimony (how many testify)
Plausibility and Support	The nature of the information and logic offered in its support (what they testify)
Presentation	The characteristics of vehicle through which testimony is offered (how they testify)

2.6 Relevance of the Theories to the Study

Investigating the potential gratifications that consumers seek from a media or service can reveal the reasons for people's continuous use of that media (Limayem & Cheung, 2011). The uses and gratifications theory is one of the most often used media use theories by researchers, and it has a wide range of applications for understanding media usage (Dwyer et al., 2007; Foregger, 2008). Due to the strong basis of uses and gratifications theory in the communication literature, its theoretical grounding provides excellent foundations and relevance for research on social media practices (Malik et al., 2015). An increasing number of researchers have adopted uses and gratifications theory for understanding the gratifications obtained from SNS. The popularity and growth of social media has prompted researchers from a variety of sectors to use uses and gratifications theory to investigate the benefits of social media use, as well as its influence and potential drawbacks (Bumgarner, 2007; Pai & Arnott, 2013; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Raacke, 2008).

Some prior studies have also explored users' gratifications derived from social media usage as well content sharing activities (Dunne et al., 2010) and specifically news sharing (Lee et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2019). For instance, Dunne et al., (2010) suggested several gratifications, such as communication, entertainment, alleviation of boredom, information search and relationship maintenance, that were related to the use of social networking sites. Relationship creation and maintenance, passing time, information seeking, entertainment, sharing personal information, affection and social surveillance have all been identified as important gratifications derived from social networking sites use in other studies (Cheng et al., 2014; Joinson, 2008; Leung, 2013; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2010; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Interestingly, of the few studies that were related content sharing activities, Chiu et al., (2006) found that social interaction, reciprocity, identifications were related to knowledge sharing behaviours in virtual communities. These studies demonstrate that, the uses and gratifications theory is appropriate in the context of online environments and shows its potential explanatory ability in predicting individuals' sharing behaviour. Considering the significance of new sharing activity on social media, exploring the specific uses and gratifications is both timely and relevant. Therefore, the present study applied the uses and gratifications theory to investigate users' gratifications derived from news sharing in social media. Specifically, this study used the uses and gratifications theory to explain the data from the research question: *what motivates students of UEW to share news stories on Facebook and WhatsApp?*

The Epistemology of Testimony provides a ground for discerning the validity of information acquired through others (Lipton 1998). Grounded in the epistemology of testimony and extant research, Torres et al., (2018), developed a model that examines

factors that influence verification behaviours among recipients of news shared within social networks. Their findings revealed that an individual's news verification behavior was affected by social tie variety, perceived cognitive homogeneity, network confidence, fake news knowledge, perceived media credibility, and intentions to share. The current study therefore applied this theory to determine how individuals evaluate the credibility of news without much effort but rather relying on heuristic strategies. The Epistemology of Testimony theory specially probes the following research question: *how do students of UEW evaluate the credibility of the news stories that they share on Facebook and WhatsApp?*

2.7 Chapter Summary

In reviewing the literature, it is obvious that news sharing is one of the activities young people engage in on SNSs due to its numerous gratifications which include, socialising, status seeking, entertainment, information sharing among others. It is also apparent that, online news consumers prefer more varied news diet even though social media users preferred to share 'hard' news. Lastly, when evaluating news, individuals preferred strategies that require the least time and mental effort thereby relying on heuristics and cues. Based on the research objectives, this study is underpinned by the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Thompson et al., 2020) and the Epistemology of Testimony theory (Torres et al., 2018). These theories aided in investigating the gratifications people sought in sharing news on social media and the process of news credibility evaluation. These theories are suitable in identifying the motivations of students of UEW for sharing news as well as examine how they evaluate the credibility of the news they share.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures employed to obtain and analyse data pertaining to news sharing practices of students of the University of Education, Winneba. The chapter contains information on the research design, sampling techniques and the data collection and analysis procedures. Essentially, this chapter goes ahead to discuss the principles that underlie the choice of methods employed for the data collection and a further explanation of the procedures used in analysing the data in order to respond to the following research questions:

1. What types of news stories are shared by students of UEW on Facebook and WhatsApp?
2. What motivates students of UEW to share news stories on Facebook and WhatsApp?
3. How do students of UEW evaluate the credibility of the news stories that they share on Facebook and WhatsApp?

3.1 Research Approach

This study is guided by the principles of the qualitative approach of inquiry. Therefore, to help determine the true motives of social media users' behaviour, the qualitative analysis proved to be one of the most appropriate (Pugh, 2010). The qualitative study is a method of investigating and comprehending the significance that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). According to Lindlof and Taylor (2019) the qualitative research methodology attempts to identify and investigate phenomena such as causes and attitudes in greater

detail. They aver that, it also preserves and analyses the situated form, content, and experience of social action rather than transforming it mathematically or otherwise. This means that, it is effective in obtaining and gathering specific information about the norms, values and perceptions of a particular population.

Hancock (1997) also avers that, qualitative research studies the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data. In tandem with the definitions stated above by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) and Hancock (1997), this study seeks to solicit in-depth information on the experiences, opinions and feelings of a group of students on the news sharing phenomenon. Qualitative data instruments such as observation, open-ended questions, in-depth interview (audio or video), and field notes are used to collect data from participants in their natural settings. These methods provide a full description of the research with respect to the participants involved (De Vause, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). Therefore, the researcher's choice of a qualitative approach for this study is based on its affordances like up-close interviews and focus group discussions, where open-ended questions could be asked with follow-up questions and further clarifications sought where need be. This is to create a wider understanding of students' news sharing behaviour as the qualitative approach is known to provide abundant data about real life people and situations (De Vaus, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

Further, according to Pugh (2012), the qualitative research approach has been used in the majority of studies conducted in the online and computer-mediated domains (For instance, Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2017; Kalsnes & Larson, 2017 and Sackey, 2015). Nonetheless, in the field of news sharing studies, out of 78 articles reviewed over a decade, 86% deployed the quantitative study approach with 11% employing the mixed method and a measly 4% using the qualitative approach (Kümpel et al.,

2015). At best, what these quantitative studies do is to provide a broad and general picture of the news sharing phenomenon. However, a qualitative research approach views human thought and behaviour in a social context and covers a wide range of phenomena in order to understand and appreciate them thoroughly. Human behaviours, which include interaction, thought, reasoning, composition and norms studied holistically due to in-depth examination of phenomena (Sherman & Webb, 1990). And the close relationship that exists between the researcher and the participants in this approach makes it easy for the participant to contribute to shaping the research. This however accounts for significant understanding of experiences as its participants understand themselves and also understand experiences as unified (Lichtman, 2013). Therefore, in investigating attitudes to news delivered by social media, and subsequent verification strategies applied, or not applied by individuals, Flintham et al., (2018) adopted the qualitative research approach. Also, in exploring why people choose to share news online, Wong and Burkell (2017) used a combination of qualitative research techniques.

In view of the seeming sparsity of qualitative research in the field of news sharing (Kümpel et al., 2015), the researcher perceives a myriad of rich untapped experiences and adventures, that only interactions and a close relationship with participants could reveal, thus the adoption of the qualitative approach. This is because as participants share and listen to the experiences of others through focus group discussions, they are able to understand their own news sharing behaviors and attitudes and provide rich insights into the phenomenon.

As rightly put by Kozinets (2002), qualitative approaches are especially useful for revealing the rich symbolic world that lies underneath needs, expectations, meanings, and choice. Kozinets's (2002) explanation appropriately places the topic of this study

in the qualitative sphere. As the qualitative approach will help unearth the needs students seek to fulfil by sharing news on social media, the cues they expect to see in order to rate a news story as credible and their choice of types of news to share.

Lastly, qualitative research collects knowledge from people directly by speaking with them and observing how they interact and act in their environment (Creswell, 2014). Likewise, this present study gathers information directly from participants through interviews investigating their motivations for sharing news on social media and how they evaluate the credibility of the news they share.

3.2 Research Design

Research design involves the arrangement of conditions for collecting and analysing data relevant to the researcher in the most economical manner that determines the sample size, sampling technique, the type of data and the means of data collection as well as the method of data analysis (Amoani, 2005). According to Creswell (2014), research design can be described as a strategy, plan and a structure of conducting a research work. He goes on to say that choosing a research design is primarily dictated by the essence of the research issue, the researchers' personal experiences, and the study's target audience. Narrative studies, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study are examples of research designs used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Based on Wimmer and Dominick's (2011) assertion that a case study can be used to understand or describe a phenomenon, this study adopted the case study design. The researcher's goal in this study was to comprehend or justify the phenomenon of UEW students' news sharing activities on social media. As a result, the case study design is effective in collecting comprehensive information on the phenomenon in order to clarify it.

3.2.1 Case Study

Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). Although Stake (2005) argues that case study research is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied, Creswell (2014) posits that, it is indeed a methodology; a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study as well as a product of the enquiry. In other words, the case study research is a qualitative method in which an investigator investigates a real-world, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded structures (cases) over time using comprehensive, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio visual materials and documents and reports). A case study is often an empirical investigation that looks at a phenomenon in its natural setting. The case study method, according to Yin (2018), is particularly useful in circumstances where the context of the events being observed is important and the researcher has little influence over how the events unfold. Similarly, the current study or case examines the news sharing behaviour of some undergraduate students at the School of Communication and Media Studies of UEW, something the researcher has no control over.

The researcher focuses on a problem or concern and then chooses one bounded case to explain this issue in the bounded method, also known as the single instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). Simone (2009) argues that the case study deals with singular, particular unique issues where key elements of a phenomenon are described. Specifically, this study investigated the types of news students share on social media, their motivations for sharing news and how they evaluate the credibility of the news they share. Also, according to Hancock et al., (2006), case studies, enable researchers to gain in-depth understanding of a situation and the meanings. The decision to deploy

the case study is based on the fact that it could provide answers to the ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ questions which can be employed in descriptive or explanatory researches. Therefore, this enquiry is set to investigate and explore in all the depth activities embedded in the interactions in finding answers to ‘how’ students evaluate the credibility of the news they share and ‘why’ they share news on social media.

Furthermore, the case study also allowed for the application of multiple data gathering methods to achieve its purpose of in-depth description of a phenomenon. Case studies allow for gathering information from multiple sources by using different methods such as interviews, direct observations, documents and reports (Creswell, 2014). In tandem with this, the current research adopting case study design employed multiple data collection methods and procedures: interviews and focus group discussions with participants.

More so, according to Yin (2018), there are two types of cases that can be studied: single cases and multiple case studies. Multiple or collective case studies are described by Stake (1995) and Yin (2018) as analysing cases across multiple sites. This entails choosing a variety of events or circumstances to demonstrate various points of view on the subject. The single case study was used in this study. This is because, according to Stake (1995), each case study should be looked at as a whole, even though a researcher can look at several cases at once. Yin (2018) goes on to say that finding valid and manageable samples from which to collect empirical data is critical. He also claims that a single case study may involve subunits of analyses, resulting in a more complex design that provides greater insight. This current study’s adoption of the single case study is to enable the researcher to delve deep into the news sharing phenomenon and develop subunits of analyses which include the

demographics of students' news sharing patterns, reasons for sharing particular news types among others instead of doing a peripheral analysis of the phenomenon.

Lastly, case study research begins with the identification of a specific case. This case may be a concrete entity, such as an individual, a small group, an organisation, or a partnership. The key is to define a case that can be defined or represented by a set of parameters, such as a particular location and time (Creswell, 2014). Based on this, this study explored news sharing practices of graduate and undergraduate students of the Communication and Media Studies Department of UEW within the parameters of particular virtual communities, that is, Facebook and WhatsApp.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

This study is concerned with investigating the news sharing activities of a group of people (students) in a society. Sampling technique directs researchers in knowing whom to interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Qualitative sampling arguably does not concern itself with a large superficial representation of individuals. Instead, the aim is to get in touch with respondents who are able to share their unique slice of reality, and all these slices of experiences put together to illustrate the range of variation and similarity obtained by the researcher. This implies that the researcher did not start with a specific sample size in mind. The researcher keeps sampling until there is a saturated information about the phenomenon under study (Elmusharaf, 2012). Also, the sampling technique for a study is mostly dependent on the objectives of the study (Given, 2008). An intelligent sampling strategy enables researchers to make systematic contact with communicative phenomena with a minimum of wasted effort (Given, 2008). In view of this, the purposive sampling technique was used for this study.

3.3.1 Purposive Sampling

In quantitative research, the idea of random predominates, with the aim of generalisability, which means the results of the study will be applied to the wider population (Patton, 2002). However, qualitative research requires a different sampling technique from the randomly selected and probabilistic sampling often employed by quantitative researchers (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). In qualitative research, the typical approach to sampling is purposive, with the aim of “generating insights and in-depth understanding” (Patton, 2002 p.230).

Many researchers who adopt the qualitative approach use a sampling technique that directs their choice of what to observe or whom to interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Lindlof and Taylor (2019) also note that no qualitative researcher can capture every event as it unfolds, thus, the purposeful selection of data sites for a particular study.

Purposive sampling is defined by Oliver and Jupp (2006) as a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher makes decisions about which individuals to include in the sample based on a variety of criteria such as participants' knowledge of the research issue or capacity and willingness to participate in the research. Similarly, Wimmer and Dominick (2013) also argue that purposive sampling includes data or subjects that are selected for possessing specific features that are in line with the study.

Creswell (2014) also posits that, the purposive sampling technique considers the selection of sites and participants that will aid the researcher in understanding the problem and the research question. He further points out that, when using the purposive sampling, decisions need to be made about who or what is sampled, what

form the sampling should take and how many people or sites need to be sampled. Purposive sampling, according to Bernard (2002), entails the researcher determining what information is needed and then going out to find people who can and are able to provide it based on their expertise or experience.

In line with the above propositions, the researcher adopted the purposive sampling technique in the selection of participants from the School of Communication and Media Studies. This is because, I envisaged that as students of communications, accessing the news for different purposes by virtue of their programme of study is an indication that they will be involved in news sharing activities and their experiences could contribute to the study. Also, given that younger news audience who are mostly students are heavily engrossed in Web 2.0 technologies (Bicen & Cavus, 2011) and are also turning to social media to follow current events at a higher rate than other demographic groups (Holcomb et al., 2013) they serve as perfect participants going by Bernard (2002), Oliver (2006) and Wimmer and Dominick's (2013) postulations. Finally, purposive sampling method was employed as I purposively set out to find what the study demanded, and which people were best and willing to provide the needed information by virtue of their experiences as explained by Bernard (2002). In view of the above, the researcher set out to find undergraduate students with experiences in news sharing.

3.4 Sample Size

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) opine that sample size is the “terra incognita” of a qualitative sampling strategy. Thus, “there is no test that exists to tell the researcher when the sample is big enough or small” (p. 129). Baum (2002) also posits that there are no closely defined rules for sample size. In qualitative study however, Lindlof and

Taylor (2002) opine that a small sample allows the researcher to capture participants' specific responses and individual interpretations. Miles et al., (2014) affirm this and state that, in qualitative research, the sampling mostly relies on small numbers with the aim of studying in depth and detail. Since the current study does not intend to extrapolate its results to the wider population, the sample size comprised of 16 participants. The selection of the 16 participants was also guided by Adler and Adler's (2011) suggestion of an appropriate sample for a qualitative case study being between 12 and 60. Further, the selection was informed by the objective of the study which sought to elicit varying views from undergraduate students on their news sharing experiences. To achieve this, I designed a recruitment form and sent it to the course representative of the level 200 students of the School of Communication and Media Studies students to be shared on their WhatsApp platform. 16 students responded favourably to the recruitment form circulated and they were all recruited for the study.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Creswell (2014) emphasises that, data collection does not only focus on actual types of data and procedures, but also involves obtaining permissions, obtaining a good sample size, recording materials and anticipation for ethical issues that may arise. This section seeks to outline the methods, processes, analysis, validity and trustworthiness and ethical issues that were employed. Data for this study was gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

3.5.1 Interviews

We live in an age of interviews (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), which means that interviews are perhaps the most familiar data collection tool for both qualitative

researchers and for participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) citing Briggs (1986), also affirm that interviews are certainly one of the most common methods of data collection within the social and health sciences and the most common qualitative method of data collection.

In qualitative research, interviews are particularly useful as they help the researcher to comprehend people's perspectives and experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In order to obtain information to answer a particular research question. Interviews also reduce the degree of prejudice and subjectivity on the researcher's part which is prominent on sole reliance, inductive and interpretive analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Bertrand & Hughes, 2005). Interviews are professional conversations (Kvale, 2007), with the goal of getting a participant to talk about their experiences and perspectives, and to capture their language and concepts, in relation to a topic that the researcher has determined (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In tandem with the above propositions, this study adopted semi-structured interview as one of the data collection methods. I used this to gather responses for all the research questions which enquired about the types of news students shared on social media, their motivations for sharing and the evaluation methods they employed in ascertaining the credibility of the news they shared.

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussions

Braun and Clarke (2014) aver that, the focus group discussion is a method involving data collection from multiple participants at the same time. Focus group discussions consist of a relatively unstructured, but guided, discussion centred on a particular topic of interest. Lindlof and Taylor (2019) also affirm that, focus group discussion has become a stand-alone data collection method by itself though it is a form of

interview. In view of this, data was collected based on the responses of participants on topic derived from the objectives of the study. In addition, focus group discussion was used within a group context, where participants were stimulated by the ideas and experiences expressed by each other and thus what occurs is a kind of “chaining” or “cascading effect...” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010) which helped the researcher gain accounts that were more ‘naturalistic’- more like regular conversations- than those generated in individual interviews (Welling et al., 2000).

Variations exist in the literature regarding the optimum size of a focus group depending on the topic's complexity, the type of participants and the skills of the moderator. Most researchers suggest that the appropriate group size ranges from 4-12 participants (Barbour, 2010; Stalmeijer et al., 2014; Webb & Doman, 2008). A focus group session is an in-depth dialogue where a small group of individuals (usually 8-12) from the target community discuss issues relevant to the topic under study (Khan et al., 1991).

Furthermore, since certain experiences take a long time to explore, the number of participants in the focus group might be dependent on the participants having similar experiences. As a result, the group should be limited (Nagle & Williams, 2013), the size can vary depending on the research goal (Muijeen et al., 2019). In tandem with the above propositions, and also based on the objectives of the study, I conducted 2 focus group sessions made up of 8 participants each.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure discusses the various measures, processes, and means by which the researcher gathered data for the research analysis using various data collection instruments.

3.6.1 Interviews

The researcher employed both the face-to-face and virtual interviews within a period of one month (15th February to 15th March 2021). A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix) was piloted using the first 3 participants. This was to enable me reword, remove or add new information to the guide (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). After an interview had been scheduled based on the convenience of the participant, I met the participant usually in one of the classrooms at the University campus. On the day of the interview, using an iPhone 6 (and Tecno Camon 15 premier for backup) I recorded and retrieved the interview data. Non-verbal cues, which could not be recorded on the smartphone were noted down as field notes. The semi-structured interview guide helped to moderate the flow of the questions with the subject, with emphasis on the participant's perspectives and impressions on the phenomenon under investigation. However, new concepts that were not included in the guide were permitted. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes comprising unstructured and open-ended questions to elicit the needed responses from the participant (Creswell, 2014).

According to Braun and Clarke (2014), virtual interviews are no longer regarded as (poor) substitutes for face-to-face interviews but as different types of interview method. Zoom, Facetime and WhatsApp video calls came in handy in this era of COVID-19 pandemic where face-to-face interaction has become extremely difficult. Some of the participants expressed interests in the use of virtual modes for the interviews and this was duly done. The convenience, accessibility and the relatively less resources expended by both the researcher and participants (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Evans et al., 2008; Hamilton & Bowers, 2006) made the virtual interviews the preferred choice for 3 of the participants. On the day of a scheduled virtual interview,

both the participant and I set out about 20 minutes before the time for the interview and locate themselves at spots with higher internet connectivity at their respective locations. The network is tested to make certain that the interview would be successful before the time is due. With the exception of only 1 interview which had to be rescheduled for another date, the rest were successfully conducted on the first attempt. The researcher used WhatsApp Video call for 2 interviews and Facetime for 1. They lasted for 25-30 minutes. I used my Tecno Camon 15 premier to conduct and record the virtual interviews.

3.6.2 Focus Group Discussions

Two focus groups were formed consisting of 8 members each which is in line with Stalmeijer et al.'s, (2014) view that the optimal group size is between 4 and 12 participants. The researcher recruited students from University of Education, Winneba; all participants are undergraduate students at the School of Communication and Media Studies. 9 of them were females with the remaining 7 being males. The first group consisted of 5 females and 3 males, the second was made up of 4 females and 4 males. This was in line with Barbour (2005), who avers that, a focus group needs enough diversity to ensure an interesting discussion and also to bring different views and produce a more diverse discussion. I piloted the focus group guide informally with a group of friends prior to conducting the actual sessions and concluded on the basis of the pilot that only few minor changes needed to be made in the guide which is in line with Braun and Clarke's, (2014) postulations which states that, the focus group guide could be piloted to identify and resolve any issues which may affect the data collection process. The sessions were audio recorded with the researcher's iPhone 6 smartphone with Tecno Camon 15 premier for back up.

Nonverbal cues, which could not be recorded on the smartphone were noted down in my field notes.

The venue and time for the sessions were determined by the group members and I based on our schedules. After speaking to participants individually on phone and proposing a date that the focus group sessions could be held, an understanding was reached based on their timetables. If 3 or more participants indicate an opening in their schedules, the time and date was communicated to the other participants and those who will be available for the session are immediately added to the group. This was however done with Barbour's (2005) proposition of group diversity in mind. The seating for the discussion was arranged in a circle format to ensure that all participants could see one another creating a rapport with participants. These were all based on Jayasekara (2012) and O'Connor & Murphy's (2009) positions on the conduct of focus group discussions. All Covid-19 protocols were duly observed. For instance, the use of hand sanitizers, wearing of facemasks, spacing out seating for participants and opening of louvres to ensure sufficient airflow to ventilate the venue properly.

I introduced myself and allowed participants to do same to create a relaxing atmosphere. The purpose of the study as well as the ground rules were explained at each session. Permission was sought from the participants to allow me to record the sessions. All the above were done based on the postulations of Jayasekara (2012) and O'Connor and Murphy (2009) which states the need to create a relaxing atmosphere, explain the ground rules as well as seek the consent of participants before recording the sessions. The sessions were conducted in lecture halls on Sunday afternoons after all church services had ended, creating safe environments devoid of disturbances from other people or external noise. The length of the focus group discussion was between

40-60 minutes. This is in line with Barbour's (2010) recommendation that, the time for discussion could be limited to 45 to 90 minutes.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis entails preparing and organizing data (such as transcripts or photographs) for analysis and reducing the data into themes through a coding and condensing process, and finally presenting the data in statistics, charts, or a discussion (Creswell, 2014). Thus, data analysis is a step-by-step procedure to minimise vast quantities of data and to make sense of it. Patton (1999) suggests three general approaches to data analysis: data organization, data reduction (via summarisation and categorization), and data identification where the data is displayed in themes. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) state that, data analysis entails synthesizing all of the knowledge a researcher collects in the field and drawing parallel and logical lines in the data in accordance with the researcher's collection of questions. I therefore adopted the thematic analysis method to analyse the data collected.

In line with the above, the data collected for this study were analysed with the aim of getting trends and patterns that run through all the interview transcripts (Krueger, 1994). The interviews and focus group discussions were first transcribed from the audio recordings into written text. Following the organisation of the data, I continued the analysis by getting a sense of the whole database (Creswell, 2014). Seidman (2006) alludes to an existing connection between interviews and how they translate into story telling for purposes of categorisation and creating meanings. This means that, insights from the participants' use of words in their narratives are transcribed, categorised and coded to aid the emergence of themes and to subject them to

extensive analysis. These processes result in personal, detailed descriptions that cannot be easily obtained by other methods of inquiry (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

In view of the above, the I familiarised myself with the data by doing a close reading to make sense of the interviews and focus group sessions before breaking the data into parts. The study employed pre-existing codes to guide the coding process as suggested by Crabtree and Miller (1992). However, as Creswell (2014) suggests, the codes were updated with additional ones which emerged during the analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to a research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done in order to simplify the details into manageable pieces that could best answer the research questions that guided the study. Ultimately, this was done in order to learn more about the different trends in the news types that university students share on social media, their motivations for sharing and the evaluation methods employed to ascertain their veracity before sharing.

The theoretical type of thematic data analysis, whereby the analysis is guided by an existing theory and theoretical concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2014) was adopted in developing themes for all the research questions guiding the study. For research question one these themes emerged: *entertainment/celebrity, flaming, political, sports, crime and local/ campus (social issues)* and this was in line with the findings of Sjøvaag et al., (2015) and Kalsnes & Larsson (2017). Also, for research question two, the tenets of the uses and gratifications (motivations) theory were employed for the analysis of the data (Thompson et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2011, Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019) and these emerged: *socialisation, entertainment, status seeking and information sharing*.

With respect to research question three, some thematic areas were deduced from the transcribed data from the interviews and focus group discussions. The categorizations were done using Fallis' (2004) Epistemology of Testimony theory which describes four factors to evaluate the veracity of any recorded information. They are: *authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support and presentation.*

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Every researcher is required to select and analyse data from documents with objectivity (i.e seeking to objectively reflect the research material) and sensitivity (reacting to even subtle cues to meaning) (Bowen, 2009). In this study, ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity were considered. Firstly, the researcher sought the consent of the participants about the purpose of the study and the expectations from them. They were given the opportunity to seek further clarifications as well. Only those who consented to be part of the study were interviewed. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research if they felt uncomfortable with some questions intrusive or inappropriate even after they had given their consent. Also, in ensuring anonymity and privacy, the researcher did not use names of participants but rather assigned pseudonyms to each of the participants especially when it became necessary to quote portions of their responses as excerpts.

3.9 Trustworthiness of Data

In order to validate and make trustworthy the study, this research was founded on the criteria of trustworthiness accorded to reflexivity, adequacy of data, and adequacy of interpretation (Marrow, 2005). Invariably, this involved an understanding of the researcher's experiences and his/her world and how it could affect the research process. In line with reflexivity, I was aware of my assumptions, predispositions and

personal experiences about research and made them overt to the self and others through bracketing (Fischer, 2009). With the principles of bracketing I shelved any suppositions that could prevent me from understanding the news sharing behaviour of the sample for this study.

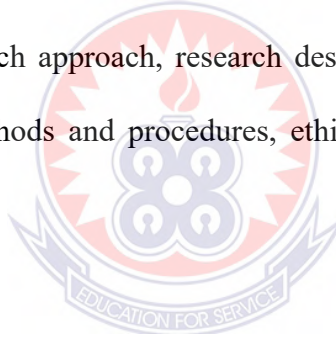
Also, based on the postulations of Lincoln and Guba (2000), in preserving the credibility of the research, I adopted two of the stated means in achieving trustworthiness comprising persistent peer scrutiny of the research project and the use of multiple theories or perspectives in the analysis of the data. Peer and academic scrutiny of the research was employed through the period of the study and was achieved through constructive feedbacks offered by my supervisor, peer researchers and other academics. These fresh perspectives and additions to the study enabled me to fine tune and present stronger arguments for the study. The current study used the uses and gratifications theory to help explain university students' motivation for sharing news while the epistemology of testimony theory explained how they evaluate the news they share. All these, in addition to a combination of thick descriptions of the findings, aided the researcher to ensure the study was credible.

In maintaining the trustworthiness of the study, another factor considered was the adequacy of the data and interpretation as avowed by Marrow (2005). With this, substantial data was gathered from interviews and focus group discussions. The adequacy of interpretation centred on the multi-theoretical approach chosen. This was to ensure the credibility and dependability of the study, which are considerations established in qualitative research alongside transferability and conformability (Anney, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (2000), identify four types of triangulation; data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. This present study, however made use of the

methodological triangulation. According to Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012), methodological triangulation entails using more than one type of method to investigate a phenomenon. This type of triangulation according to them aids in confirming findings, providing comprehensive data and finally increasing validity.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the methods used in gathering data for the study. The case study design was used in a qualitative approach to investigate the news sharing activities of sampled students of the University of Education, Winneba. Through interviews and focus group discussions, data was collected from some undergraduate students of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies. The Chapter discussed subtopics such as, research approach, research design, sampling techniques, sample size, data collection methods and procedures, ethical issues and trustworthiness of data.



CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings, discussions and analysis of data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions conducted on news sharing practices of students of the University of Education, Winneba, on their Facebook and WhatsApp platforms. For the purpose of ensuring the participants' anonymity, pseudonyms have been used for all the sixteen participants. The findings have been grouped into themes and analysed with the tenets of the theories of Uses and Gratifications and the Epistemology of Testimony.

4.1 Participants' Demographic Information

Research has shown that people sometimes consume news based on their gender (Avor, 2015). This study involved 9 female and 7 male participants who responded to a recruitment form shared on their class WhatsApp platform through their course representative. The data obtained revealed that women are slightly more actively engaged in news sharing practices on social media than their male counterpart. This is opposed to a 2020 Reuters Institute Digital News Report which found that across all the 11 countries studied, 72% of men accessed news several times a day, compared with just 28% of women. Other surveys have also found and exhibited patterns of use that differed between men and women (Benesch, 2012; Bimber, 2000). In this research however, the analysis of the data revealed that women formed 56 % of the sample as opposed to 44% for men.

4.2 RQ1: What types of news stories are shared by students of UEW on Facebook and WhatsApp?

In characterising news content that is shared online, Berger and Milkman (2012) assert that, stories that succeed in eliciting strong emotions-arousal, whether positive (happy) or negative (angry), have stronger viral effects than stories that are less emotional. As a result, news pieces that communicate strong emotions (both positive and negative) are shared more frequently. Accordingly, social sharing of news might give precedence for more soft news compared as to hard news (Boukes & Vliegthart, 2017). The soft news is often characterized by topics such as entertainment, celebrity and lifestyle news, while hard news typically refers to topics that are usually timely, important and consequential such as politics, international affairs and business news either positive (happy) or negative (angry) (Reuters Institute, 2016).

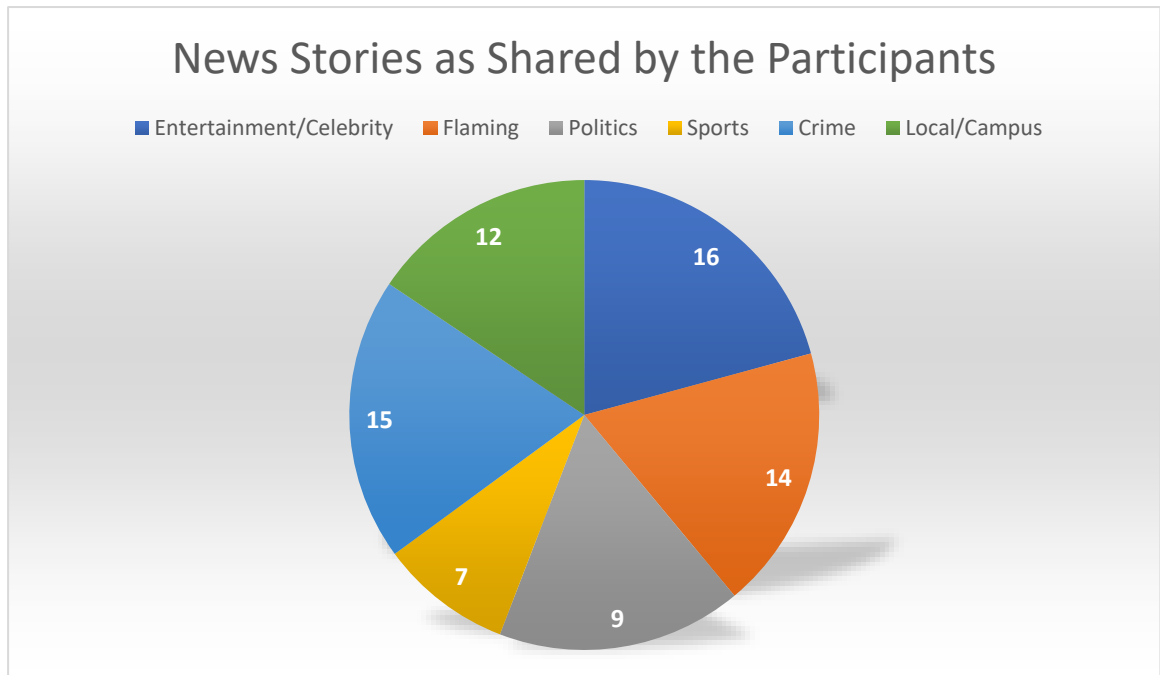
In this study, the research question one sought to identify the types of news stories students of UEW share on Facebook and WhatsApp. Inspired by the categorisation scheme employed by previous studies (i.e Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Kalsnes & Larsson 2017; Olympio, 2020; Sjøvaag et al., 2015), the news types were analysed using the nine categories: Politics (including political parties, demonstrations and public administrations); Economy (including personal economy, business, finance and markets); Crime (including murders, violence, trafficking, police issues and trials); Social Issues (including work, health and education, environmental issues, consumer, construction and traffic issues); Culture (including arts, media, royalty, celebrities, curiosities, leisure and popular culture); Sports; Accidents; Weather; and Science and Technology issues. However, flaming which is a new category of news emerged from the analysis of the data.

The types of news shared by the participants were evident from the data collected through the interviews and focus group sessions. Nevertheless, the present analysis moved beyond the two major categories of news (i.e. soft and hard news) and focused attention on news types that fall within the two categories. This is to enable the researcher delve deeper into the news sharing phenomenon as has been done in past research (for instance, Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Sjøvaag et al., 2015; Kalsnes & Larsson 2017).

Table 2. Distribution of News Stories as Shared by the Participants

News Stories	Distribution	Percentage
Entertainment/ Celebrity	16	100%
Flaming	14	75%
Politics	9	56%
Sports	7	44%
Crime	15	94%
Local/Campus	12	75%

Source: Researcher's Field Data, 2021

Figure 1: Distribution of News Stories as Shared by the Participants

Source: Researcher's Field Data, 2021

The results of the data, as illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 1, reveal the frequency distribution of the news topics shared by the participants. From table 2, it could be realized that all the participants (100%) share entertainment/celebrity news while 9 (56%) out of the 16 participants share news on politics. Interestingly, 14 (75%) participants share flaming news stories. However, the data revealed that only the 7 (44%) male participants shared sports news. This finding corroborates Dutta-Bergman's (2010), assertion that sports news readers are mostly male. The sports news is the least shared news story, and this is inconsistent with Matsa and Mitchell's (2014) position that sports is the third most popular topic on Facebook as compared to other. Further, the data indicated that 15 (94%) participants shared crime news stories while 12 (75%) shared local/campus news. At a glance, Figure 1 provides a visual display of the accuracy and reasonableness of the calculations.

For instance, the data revealed that the participants preferred a more varied news diet. The following themes were identified from the data on RQ1: *entertainment/celebrity, flaming, politics, sports, crime and local/ campus (social issues)*.

4.2.1 Entertainment/Celebrity

This theme refers to news that focuses on popular culture and the entertainment business and its products; music, film, fashion, celebrities, art, biography and events (Derthic, 2013). Rindova et al., (2006, p. 50) citing Rein et al., (1997) define the term ‘celebrity’ as an individual ‘whose name has attention-getting, interest-riveting and profit-generating value. Rindova et al., (2006) continues by saying, one of the distinguishing characteristics of celebrity is that it attracts widespread public attention; the higher the number of people who are aware of and pay attention to the celebrity, the greater the fame's scope and worth. For this particular theme, the key indicators are celebrities and fashion, music and movies.

The data also revealed that, all the participants shared news about celebrities and their lifestyles. For instance, news about entertainment and celebrities easily went viral due to their use of SNSs and this bring the celebrities closer to their fans. Apart from entertainment bloggers, most celebrities also have their own accounts on almost all social media platforms where which they disseminate information about themselves including personal information. As followers, the audience are considered as occupying the front seat on celebrities’ social media handles can therefore share real-time news about them as the news unfolds. One participant indicated that;

There is no shortage of celebrity news as there is always something to gossip about on a celebrity’s social media handle. Some information is shared by

bloggers, and trust me, there is a lot to share as the news keep coming from all corners all the time (P2).

Similarly, another participant admitted that;

Celebrities are ruling the social media world now. News about them moves faster from Instagram to Twitter, to Facebook and to YouTube. You will find them gathering followers like us who are interested in knowing every aspect of their lives as it happens (P10).

It could be seen from the excerpts that, participants P2 & P10 live in a constant buzz of news about celebrities as a result of celebrities themselves generating news from their own social media handles coupled with what bloggers and online news portals also produce. The participants indicated that, the celebrities have amassed for themselves thousands of news-thirsty followers including the participant. The social media platforms provide these participants with incessant entertainment/ celebrity-related news which they share to their followers. This finding is consistent with Benson's (2007) assertion that people have an insatiable appetite for celebrity news. Further, it buttresses Derthic's (2013) finding that with the addition of technology and social media sites including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the public cannot get enough entertainment news and celebrities are happier to feed this addiction to a certain extent. Participant P10 for instance, sounds like an ardent follower of entertainment and celebrity blogs and handles and is willing to share entertainment/celebrity news. This participant contributes to the pervasiveness of entertainment/ celebrity news topics on social media because of his/her willingness to pass on such news.

The findings are also in line with Dubied and Hanitzsch's (2014) position that, celebrity coverage has become omnipresent and pervasive to the point where it has become the new normal in today's media landscape. The above participants admit that celebrities' use of social media sites and their mass audience base make sharing entertainment related news easier and facilitates quicker dissemination. These participants indicated that, their audiences already know these celebrities through their SNSs platforms therefore are always interested in reading news about them.

Moreover, a further analysis of the data revealed that the strong emotions people attach to news about their favourite celebrities, make it a preferred choice when it comes to news sharing. Whether negative (sad, angry) or positive (happy) participants prefer sharing entertainment/ celebrity news because the emotions it elicit from the audience translate into reactions like reshares, forwarding and even discussions. According to the data, these participants are ardent fans of some of these celebrities and like their audiences, news about their favourite celebrities affect them either positively or negatively depending on the kind of news it is. For instance, one participant indicated that;

Fans of celebrities sometimes fight about news concerning them. Shatta and Stonebuoy fans for instance can exchange invectives when you share negative news on their celebrities. So, it is like they are really rallying support for these artistes. News about these artistes often go viral or trend as the fan base is already available and ready to share the positive news (P4).

This finding confirms Dafonte-Gomez's (2018) assertion that, the emotions that content sets off in users is an important determining factor when it comes to sharing. In line with this, Bright (2016) states that, stories about celebrities may also be more likely shared. First, because they might be stories to which people feel an emotional

connection, and second, because they have been identified as useful ways of starting conversations amongst social connections. A participant had this to say during one of the focus group discussion sessions;

I like sharing news about celebrities, both local and international. For instance, when Kobby Bryant died in the helicopter crash, I actually cried because he was my childhood basketball idol. I shared news on his tragic passing on my Facebook page and other fans commented on it. Some even reacted on it using emojis and others shared the news. It was not a pleasant news, but I needed to share it to all her fans (P6 FG1).

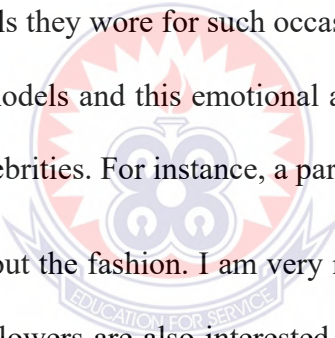
Another participant had this to say;

I mostly share entertainment news. For instance, when Sarkodie was nominated for a BET award, I was over the moon and I shared it. It generated a lot of conversations with some people saying he did not deserve the award. While ardent fans like me were very optimistic that he deserved the award and wanted to brag about it other felt we were over-hyping him (P10).

The above excerpts indicate that participants P6 and P10, share entertainment or celebrity (soft) news because of their tendency to go viral easily and elicit reactions from their audience. This finding is consistent with Berger and Milkman's (2012) assertion that, stories that succeed in creating strong emotions-arousal either positive (happy) or negative(angry)- have been found to achieve higher viral effects than stories considered less emotional. While the type of news that provokes emotion led sharing, (surprising and dramatic events) it is also typically perceived as important. Moreover, the finding is in line with research that indicate that people prefer to pass

on bad news (Heath, 1996), hence the reason why participants prefer sharing news about the death of celebrities.

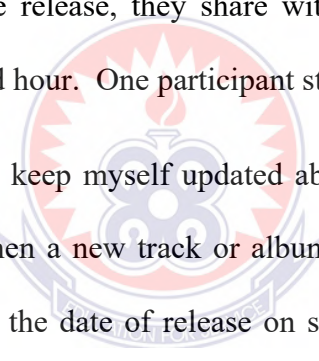
Furthermore, the data revealed that, the standard creation or role model characteristic of celebrities to their audience make entertainment/celebrity news stories more shareable. The entertainment news industry focuses on covering those celebrities with attributes that are both “imitable and inimitable” (Gorin & Dubied, 2011, p. 601). The data also revealed that fashion and lifestyle choices among others are marketed with celebrities. According to the participants, the audiences’ interest in the fashion sense and taste of these celebrities contributes to the sharing of entertainment/celebrity news as they are always looking out for, critiquing and checking celebrities’ pages and news on events for apparels they wore for such occasions. Further, the participants see some celebrities as role models and this emotional attachment leads to the sharing of news concerning such celebrities. For instance, a participant stated that;



For me it is all about the fashion. I am very much interested in fashion trends, and I think my followers are also interested in what celebrities wear cos they set the fashion trend and as young people we want to move with the time and not be left behind (P8, FGD1).

Participant P8 acknowledges that, celebrities are the trendsetters as well as role models. Therefore, they tend to imitate their lifestyles, they see in the news especially on social media. Thus, they monitor and use the behaviours and actions of celebrities as benchmarks to plan and evaluate their own actions. This finding corroborates Gorin and Dubied’s (2011) suggestion that every human being acts as a machine-like system, constantly monitoring, altering and assessing their everyday actions to ensure that they are at ease with them. And in this case, allowing the celebrities to act as role

models for society in terms of behaviour and actions that are acceptable and unacceptable. As rightly put by Derthick (2013), entertainment news has the ability to create the standards to which the rest of society uses to judge itself and behave. Movies and music are an integral part of the entertainment industry and news about new movies and music from popular artists usually make waves on the internet. According to Billboard (2018), 9 out of 10 social media users perform a music related activity on their social media application. Today it is common to use social media to share and discover new music (Le, 2019). Therefore, all the 16 (100%) participants indicated that, they follow news on social media to discover new trends in music and movies. According to these participants, when they come across news about an upcoming music or movie release, they share with their audience while they wait anxiously for the appointed hour. One participant stated that;



As a music lover I keep myself updated about my favourite artists and their music releases. When a new track or album is about to be released, you see news about it with the date of release on social media so I share such news with my friends and those who are interested also 'Like' or reshare it. I love music and movies and I think others like me might want to know about the trending movies as well as hit songs making the airwaves too (P10).

Similarly, another indicated that;

Sometimes we share news about the reviews of movies or songs on social media to generate discussions on the music or video. This is to help promote the song or video and increase their ratings and airplay to encourage others to watch or listen to them too (P5 FGD2).

Participants P10 and P5 recognize music and movies as part of their news sharing endeavours. They indicated that sharing news on reviews of movies and music with their audiences, keep them informed about what is going on in the music world and the film industries. The participants are also, conscious of the power they wield in making a movie or music patronage a success as the news they share help in spreading information that make others curious in wanting to watch the movie or listen to the music. These findings are consistent with Franklin's (2019) assertion that in today's society, ordinary people and bloggers are more influential than journalists from more established institutions as the buzz generated online by people can dramatically influence sales of a newly released or soon-to-be-released track.

4.2.2 Flaming

Flaming as defined by Landry (2000) means to attack with an intention to offend someone through e-mail, posting, commenting or any statement using insults, swearing and hostile, intense language, trolling among others. The concept of flaming emerged from popular discourse surrounding the online community to describe aggressive, hostile, profanity-laced interactions (O'Sullivan & Flanagan, 2003). The key indicator for this theme is obscenities and invectives. From the analysis of the data gathered, it came to light that, 12(75%) participants share news on flaming.

According to these participants, the Ghanaian social media space is inundated with flaming videos of some well-known personalities and some cases celebrities who share videos of themselves hurling invectives, trolling or using foul language on other social media users. According to the participants, these exchanges usually occur as a result of a 'beef' (bone of contention) between personalities and could go on for

weeks and bloggers contribute to the virality of these videos by creating news stories out of them. For instance, a participant noted that;

I remember Kennedy Agyapong (a politician) and Tracy Boakye's (actress/socialite) 'beef', they kept exchanging unprintable words through live videos and TV on social media and this went on for weeks. They used profanity, obscenities and insults on each other, and it was all over social media. It was terrible but interestingly, news stories with vitriolic videos go viral than any other kind of news so I also share them (P9).

Another also stated that;

Afia Schwarzenegger (actress/socialite) is well-known for making posts or making videos to insult others. Almost every week she has someone she is 'fighting' with on social media. She uses a lot of profane language to insult her adversaries and trolls them too. People are interested in such controversies when I share and are quick to reshare or react to them with emojis and comments. (P13).

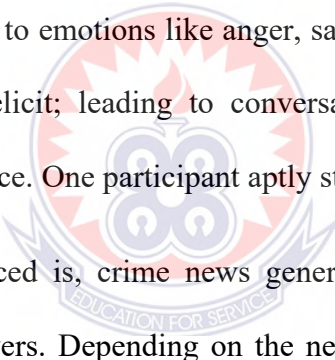
From the above excerpts it is clear that participants P9 and P13 are involved in sharing flaming news stories because of their virality. The data shows that flaming news stories are popular on the Ghanaian social media space and it is an emerging trend among young people. This finding reinforces research (Marfo, 2014; Owusu, 2012) that have suggested that flaming or insulting comments have become popular in the Ghanaian media space.

4.2.3 Crime

One of the most prevalent subjects of media discourse is crime and it has become one of the main topics in news media for decades (e.g., Dominick, 1978; Graber, 1980;

Johnson, 1998). The theme of crime news refers to news that focuses on murders, violence, human trafficking, police issues and trials (Sjøvaag et al., 2015). The key indicators of crime are murders and suicides, armed robberies, violence and human trafficking.

The data obtained revealed that 15 (93.7%) participants share news about murder and suicide in order to open up discussions ranging their cause, what the police can do to fight it as well as the need to be safety conscious. The participants admit that the horrific nature of murders and suicides contributes to the discussions that follow the distribution of crime news. Also, evidence from the data suggested that, these participants wish to be the first to break news topics like murders and suicides to their friends. This is partly due to emotions like anger, sadness, anxiety, among others that such news is likely to elicit; leading to conversations and further reactions like reshares from their audience. One participant aptly stated;

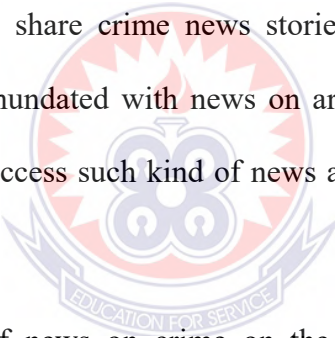


What I have noticed is, crime news generates a lot of feedback from my friends and followers. Depending on the news, for instance, when an armed robber commits crime, you get people expressing their sympathy and disgust upon accessing the news. However, if they are arrested, the audience shower praises on them and in all these instances, people who access the news ‘Share’, ‘Like’, comment or react to them with emojis (P8, FG1).

This finding is in consonance with the assertion that, people prefer to pass on bad news, especially news that is exaggeratedly bad (Heath, 1996), hence news about disasters, crime, accidents and emergencies might be shared more. Also, emotion being one of the news values makes certain stories more appealing to journalists and audiences (García-Perdomo et al., 2017; Trilling et al., 2017). This participant, like a

professional journalist assesses his audiences' likely reactions to news on horrific murders and suicides and perceives them as newsworthy and appealing for sharing. He also acknowledges his audiences' use of emojis, reshares and comments to express their happy or sad reactions such news.

More so, an assessment of the data revealed that the prevalence of news on armed robbery, and other violent crimes on the internet serves as a great source of such news. The overabundance of violent crimes is as a result of crime news stories being reported by all forms of media giving them premium attention in the news space. From the data, the prominence that both traditional and new media give to armed robbery and violent crimes contributes to their shareability on social media. The 15 (93.7%) participants who share crime news stories indicated that, their feeds and online news portals are inundated with news on armed robbery and violent crimes. Therefore, it is easier to access such kind of news and to share them. For instance, a participant stated;



There are a lot of news on crime on the internet. For example, highway robberies, rape, assault, murders, kidnapping, to mention but a few. As long as it is trending, we need to make them viral because people are anxious to know about it (P1).

The above excerpt is in line with findings that suggest that, crime news is one of the most prominent categories in news media; it is covered disproportionately more than other social problems (Gans, 2004; Leishman & Mason, 2003; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising when it gains more shares on social media. Furthermore, it is consistent with studies that have concluded that, crime and particularly violent crimes, serves as one of the key selling items for different media

outlets in their competition for readers and viewers (Näsi et al., 2020). No matter the country, the day or the time, crime is an important news topic (Chermak, 1994).

This finding is however in contrast with Bright's (2016) assertion that stories about crime fall into the category of "guilty pleasures" therefore people tend to shy away from sharing such news since they could have an actively negative effect on their social status because of what they suggest about a person's interests, meaning people avoid sharing them.

4.2.4 Politics

Socially shared political information is becoming increasingly essential in today's media landscape as both a means of political expression and an amplifier of political news (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2014). The theme of politics refers to news that focus on political parties and governance (Sjøvaag et al., 2015). The key indicators for this theme are political parties and governance.

The findings suggested that 9 (56%) participants share news on the two major political parties, that is, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) as they usually make the headlines. However, the data revealed that in sharing news on politics, the participants tried as much as possible to refrain from sharing on Facebook in order to avoid antagonism. According to them, this is based on the experiences of other social media users who went viral for posting comments or sharing political posts or articles. The data indicated that they preferred WhatsApp to Facebook in the sharing of political news especially the ones concerning the NPP and the NDC as WhatsApp provides a private environment because of its architecture compared to Facebook where one could have 'friends' they do not know

in the real world. Also, the open nature of Facebook which allows people who are not even friends with the poster to see and comment (unless otherwise restricted) makes it unpopular for the sharing of news on politics. For instance, one participant indicated that;

Usually, I do not share political news on Facebook because I am afraid of trolls and backlash. So as soon as you share political news, if it goes against either of these two parties, their supporters will come and insult you. However, the only place I share political news is on WhatsApp groups where I feel safe. Eheeer (sic) as for that I know most of the members personally and we can debate respectfully (P14).

From the above excerpt, participant P14 recognizes the privacy WhatsApp platforms afford him in the sharing of news on politics. Due to the political polarisation in Ghana (Bob-Milliar, 2010), P14 is sceptical about sharing news on politics in an open place like Facebook where one may not personally know a majority of their audience. When sharing news articles on social networks, users usually add descriptions or comments to the article which can be seen by friends and followers. The data revealed that, when the participants think their opinions about news articles might offend some of their friends or followers who may hold different opinions about political issues, they either abandon it or rather share it on WhatsApp.

This finding is consistent with research (Newman et al., 2018; Vaccari & Valeriani 2018) that suggest that WhatsApp favours political expression and conversation not only among politically active individuals, but also of people who are less confident in posting their political views on public online networks and would rather discuss in more controlled, less confrontational settings. It further affirms studies (Newman 2018; Valeriani & Vaccari 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2019; Yamamoto et al., 2018) that

have found that compared to other social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, WhatsApp serves as a more intimate setting, with users interacting privately with individual contacts or clearly defined groups. For this reason, it enables perpetual contact in relatively more intimate, closed, and controlled environments. Also, the findings are consistent with Dodds' (2019) assertion that, the advancements in WhatsApp's E2EE technology, enables senders to be certain that messages are received accurately and privately, without fear of being intercepted.

Another participant stated that;

For me, I only share politics in WhatsApp groups I feel comfortable in, like the class pages and social pages with friends from high school. I have seen people being trolled on Facebook and Twitter to the extent that they had to delete their pages. So, I only share stories that we can all joke and laugh about and leave peacefully. I do not want any trouble (P11, FG2).

The above excerpt confirms Philip's (2015) assertion that, most of the stories that attract large numbers of hits on social media are also the jokey stories that people pass on. This is due to the fact that partisan media can be polarising and influence attitudes toward those with opposing views (Arceneaux et al., 2013; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar et al., 2012; Levendusky, 2013b; Stroud, 2010).

A further analysis of the data revealed that the participants share news on governance. The term "governance" refers to a group of organizations and players that include but are not limited to government officials. It questions the authority of the state or government in the traditional sense, arguing that the government is not the exclusive source of power of the state (Keping, 2018). 6 (67%) out of the 9 participants who share political news stories however believe that news about government institutions,

ministries, agencies and their heads are less political therefore are appealing to most of their audience. The participants indicated that, they share news on governance to disseminate information, share their opinions, seek others' opinions as well as engage in discussions that will emanate from sharing such news. The data revealed that news on governance is shared predominantly for their informational utility and not for malice, therefore is unlikely to elicit backlash. A participant stated that;

It is not always about NPP and NDC. Sometimes there is news about what a ministry is doing that needs to be shared to inform others and I do not think people will insult you for such news. It is usually when the news is damaging to the reputation of one of the two parties or a high-ranking member that you see their supporters insult you (P5 FG2).

Participant P5 acknowledges that sharing news on governance does not usually call for antagonism because they are meant to inform the public and share opinions. This participant however recognizes that when the news shared is considered damaging or is likely to cause the party in government to lose face, their supporters are likely to be offended by such news. The above finding corroborates studies (Glynn et al., 2012; Weeks & Holbert, 2013) that have asserted that citizens turn to social media to express political opinions, share information, and seek information and opinions posted by others. This finding is also in line with research (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Valenzuela, 2013) that have found that social media provides an important platform for political opinion expression and discussion. And finally, the finding is in line with research that has suggested people will avoid sharing political stories in conversations, especially if they are known to be controversial or they think others hold diverging views (Boczkowski, 2010; Martin &

Vanberg, 2008). Nevertheless, some participants still maintained their preference for sharing news with political undertones on WhatsApp platforms.

4.2.5 Sports

Sports, as a distinct sociocultural phenomenon, is a historically determined activity of people involving the use of physical exercises with the goal of preparing for and competing in a specially organized system of competitions, as well as the individual and socially significant results of such activity (Sutula, 2018). The theme of sports refers to those activities and games that have become competitive race between teams or individuals and the public (Shilling, 2005). The role of social media in the distribution and consumption of sports content cannot be overemphasized as sports ranks among the most read topics on social media (Mitchell et al., 2013). For this theme, the key indicators are European football and local football.

An analysis of the data revealed that some 7 (43.7%) participants shared news on football leagues in Europe. It is interesting to note that, all 7 male participants are ardent supporters of football clubs in Europe and are heavily involved in following and sharing news on European leagues. These participants indicated that, they have subscribed to sports news portals and social media pages of these clubs to keep up with news on sports especially football. This is because most of the clubs now create their own content and deliver it through their own websites and apps. It also came to light that they get alerts or visit these pages for news which they in turn share on social media. One participant stated that;

I am an ardent Chelsea supporter. I follow Chelsea's Twitter and Facebook pages for news updates to share. Sometimes, I reshare what others have shared (P11).

Similarly, another participant indicated that;

I do not follow only Barcelona's page. I follow foreign football players and general sport news pages too so I can monitor and share news on other leagues, clubs, champions league and even Europa league (P10).

This finding is in line with research that have argued that social media, are fundamentally changing the nature of sports media consumption (Hull & Lewis, 2014; Sanderson, 2011). Social media have become major places to encounter news with media organisations, sports team and athletes allocating significant resources to harness these new tools and gaining substantial following (Mitchell et al., 2013). This finding is however inconsistent with Matsa and Mitchell's (2014) that, sports is the third most popular topic on Facebook as it is the least shared news topic. That notwithstanding, this affirms Yao and Sun's (2013) findings that although sports news articles receive large viewership, it is less likely to be shared or commented.

Coincidentally, the data obtained revealed that, only male participants shared sports news especially news on European football. While no female participant mentioned sharing news on sports, all 7 male participants revealed that they are ardent supporters of foreign clubs and have subscribed to the social media pages of these clubs and sports news portals to keep up with news on sports. This finding corroborates Dutta-Bergman's (2010), assertion that, young people have interest in reading international, sports and entertainment news with sports news readers being male. This is consistent with research (Benesch, 2012) that have suggested that people consume news based on their gender.

A further analysis of the data showed that these participants also shared news on local football even though it is not as pervasive as news concerning European clubs and

European football. The participants bemoaned the decline in the euphoria surrounding the local Ghanaian football as a result of the hype given to the European football by the Ghanaian media at the expense of local sports. Nevertheless, these participants expressed their interests in matches between the top two arch-rival local clubs; Accra Hearts of Oak and Kumasi Asante Kotoko Football Clubs, which also have the largest support base in Ghana. According to the participants, the media frenzy and fans of these two clubs are able to create a euphoria for their matches whipping up interests of everyone. One participant said that;

I am a Hearts of Oak fan but I only share news when we are going to play against Kotoko because that is the only time people are interested in local football news. The media is flooded with news on European football so that is what everyone is interested in. And that is what trends the most (P4 FG1).

This conclusion supports findings from research undertaken by Ofcom (2017) and Pew Research Center (2015), which shows that highly publicized coverage of competitions, primarily the English Premier League (EPL), has influenced football news. It is also consistent with Abas and Kaur's (2019) assertion that, the media's attention is drawn to more popular teams with better winning records, particularly the EPL's "Big Four" (Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United).

4.2.6 Local / Campus (Social Issues)

The importance of local news lies in its unique ability to address the concerns of only one population of media consumers, those who are interested in that particular community (Meadows, 2013). The theme of local/campus news (social issues) refers to news that binds the community and ensures a shared understanding of the civic issues and their potential solutions (Metzger et al., 2011). For this theme, the key

indicators are, student life and academic issues, community engagements and local political participation and crime and security on campus and Winneba township.

First of all, the obtained data indicated that 12 (75%) participants shared information on student life and academic issues. News concerning their academics were usually gleaned from the University website and shared with other students. According to the participants, they share news on academics from the University website to keep themselves and their audience members abreast with happenings on campus. News shared here include news about scholarships, student loans, lecture schedules, university-organised programmes, workshops and seminars among others. One participant indicated that;

I always go for news concerning our studies. Most of the stories I post on the class WhatsApp platform are more about campus life. I share more on campus life and education, anything that concerns student life I share...like news about scholarship opportunities, accommodation, student loans anything... We share all these news because they are related to our studies, so we need to broadcast it ourselves (P16, FG2).

Furthermore, an analysis of the data indicated that the participants had interest in news on community engagements and local politics. It came to light that the 12 participants share news about past and upcoming events and local and students' politics. They indicated that, in the recent general elections, some of them had registered to vote in the Effutu Constituency, which hosts the University, therefore were interested in the parliamentary elections in the area. The data showed that the participants shared news about electoral campaigns of candidates with other social media users. Also, news on social events like the annual Aboakyir festival, which is

celebrated by the Effutu people and other social engagements were shared by participants on social media. The data further revealed the participants shared news about student politics, including news about candidates for Students' Representative Council (SRC), Graduate Students' Association of Ghana (GRASAG), departmental and hall elections. These according to them were mostly shared on WhatsApp platforms. For instance, one participant said that;

Last year, during the elections I shared news about the candidates here in Winneba. Most of us could not travel home to register during the voter registration exercise so we registered to vote here. I thought some of my audience will be interested in news about the local politics so shared activities of the candidates and their campaigns. I also share news about SRC candidates, the election calendar, those who qualified after the vetting process etc (P13 FG1).

During one of the focus group discussion session, participant P13 acknowledged interest in the local politics of the constituency as an inhabitant of Winneba. He therefore shared news about the campaign activities of the candidates with his audience whom he perceived to be interested. This finding corroborates studies (Ofcom, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015) that aver that, local news plays a significant role in the social, political and cultural life of communities, and it remains an important part of the news diet of audiences.

A further assessment of the data revealed that the participants share news about crime and security on campus and the Winneba township as some of them live in hostels sprawled all over the town. They indicated their concern with crime and their security on campus as members of the community. According to them, they share local news

about crime and security to be abreast with happenings in Winneba and take the necessary measures in order not to fall victim to criminals. They believe local news stories form an important part of their stay in the community. One participant indicated that;

I share local news concerning the university community and Winneba...since students are living in hostels in town, I think if we know what is going on in the town it will be beneficial to us all...for instance news about crime in the community must be shared to create awareness so that students can be safe (P15).

Participants P16, P13 and P16 acknowledge the need to share local news because they deem it as important in addressing issues that pertain to the university community and the Winneba township. According to these participants, they are concerned with the consumption and sharing of local news which addresses the concerns of the Winneba population and as inhabitants, they must keep abreast with such news. This finding confirms Meadows (2013) assertion, that local news is significant because of its one-of-a-kind ability to address the problems of a single group of media consumers: individuals who are interested in that given city.

Overall, participants acknowledge sharing local/campus news stories to spread awareness and generally to get broad audiences for specific contents like upcoming events like musical concerts among others. Such posts sought to broaden awareness or promotion of a specific event or story. Other participants also indicated creating awareness about the crime rate on campus and in the Winneba township so that their fellow students could be aware of potential threats to their safety. These findings are all consistent with Lottridge and Bentley's (2018) findings that suggest that,

local/social news is meant to inform and is often perceived by the sharer to be of interest to a wide range of friends, often related to a school or city. The findings also align with Collins and Armstrong's (2008), assertion that, college students are more inclined to read campus news that address their concerns and issues. Furthermore, the findings are in tandem with Bright (2016) suggestion that people are likely to share news that they consider to be 'important'. And finally, these findings corroborate Berthelsen and Hameleers' (2021) position that, young news users consider news to be "worthwhile" when it is useful to their everyday life in the sense of informing them about local news and events or news that they experience to involve them and require their reactions as democratic citizens.

4.3 RQ2: What motivates students of UEW to share news stories on Facebook and WhatsApp?

The research question two the motivations of UEW students for sharing news on Facebook and WhatsApp. Some past researches have shown that different motivations may influence news sharing in social media (Chadwick & Vaccari (2019; Hasell & Weeks 2016; Dafonte-Gomez, 2018). Thus, some individuals consciously, prefer to use media based on a detailed assessment of their instrumental functions, or usefulness, according to motivational viewpoints of media use and its impact (Fry & McCain, 1983; Rubin, 1994b). The goals that trigger an action determine one's motivation (Sinclair & Kunda, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wentzel, 2000). Therefore, individuals are particular about the kind of media they choose to use based on the needs they seek to fulfil. Many researchers under the influence of the "uses and gratifications" (U&G) theory have established this active selection of media use, with

the main point being that people's media preferences are motivated by the intention of meeting their social and psychological needs. (Katz et al., 1974; Katz et al., 1973).

From responses derived from the participants, it is evident the participants have various motivations for sharing news. The perceived motivations were adopted from prior uses and gratifications research including Thompson et al., (2019) and Lee et al., (2010). Thus, the motivations from the data are categorised into the themes; *socialisation, status seeking, entertainment and information sharing*.

4.3.1 Socialisation

This theme refers to the need to converse and interrelate with others, which could address the need for belonging (Lee & Ma, 2012). Studies on Facebook and Twitter (Cheung et al., 2011; Perez-Carballo & Blaszczynski, 2011) suggest that younger people use social media, primarily for social gratification. By sharing news, users of the social media also participate in discussions and exchange of ideas. In terms of social media use, Park et al., (2009) found that one of the gratifications that inspired college students to join Facebook groups was socializing. For this theme, the key indicators are, preservation and expansion of social networks and participation in discussions and idea exchange.

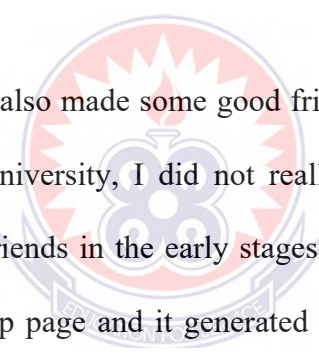
First of all, from an assessment of the data, it was gathered that socialisation is one of the dominant gratifications that motivate 14 (87.5%) of the participants share news on the selected platforms. Through sharing news stories in the virtual community, these participants indicated that they have made contributions to the group and are therefore affiliated with it. Some of the participants stated that they have made some good friends from sharing news on social media. Some they have even met in person

through news sharing while maintaining close virtual friendships with others online. These friendships stemmed from consistent commenting, reacting and discussions on news stories shared sometimes openly and at times through private messages. The data showed that after sharing news stories, participants communicate with other users by leaving comments, voting on stories, reshares, meme and emoji reactions among other kinds of interactions. One participant aptly indicated that;

I have made a lot of friends through news sharing. Sometimes the arguments and discussions the news can generate lead to fostering good relationships with some members of my audience. I share news on my club ahead of very competitive matches. I have made some very good friends because of that. Some of the guys still comment on my posts and we have moved beyond social media to meet in-person (P9, FG1).

Participant P9 recognizes that he can create a social network and preserve it through his news sharing activities. This instance of sharing also reinforces the theoretical understanding of the socialising gratification or interaction gratification, which according to the U&G theory refers to the desire for connection (Katz & Blumler, 1974). This finding is consistent with, Duffy et al.'s, (2019) position that, building and maintaining relationships is a key determinant of which news stories people share. It also affirms Ma et al., (2011) finding that, a positive correlation between news sharing and socializing gratification. Thus, individuals view sharing news as a convenient way to preserve and expand their social networks as it allows for something to talk about with friends.

A further assessment of the data obtained revealed that, news sharing helps participants to participate in discussions that help in fostering the development and maintenance of relationships. Participants indicated that the news they share among users provide the information source for socialising. Participants admit that when they meet new people online it is awkward to start conversations, but news sharing serves as an icebreaker for conversations some of which have led to friendships. Some of the participants acknowledge that by sharing news in a social network, they easily identify users who are also interested in the same topics and sometimes tag them in future Facebook posts or send them news on private WhatsApp chats. By so doing, they can initiate contacts even beyond the social media platforms. A participant stated;



In my case, I have also made some good friends through news sharing. When we came to the University, I did not really have many friends and it was difficult to make friends in the early stages. I started sharing news stories on our class WhatsApp page and it generated into discussions to the extent that when we met in class some of my mates continued the discussions and wanted to know me. So, to me sharing news was the icebreaker for all of us to socialise and get to know each other better. I was motivated to make friends through news sharing (P2, FG2).

From the above excerpt, Participant P2 recognises the role of news sharing in her assimilation into the class and admitted that the news he shared on WhatsApp was an icebreaker to initiate conversations even offline with his classmate. The data indicated that, the 14 participants use the news-related information from social media to initiate or hold conversations. This finding affirms Chen and Sin's (2013), assertion that, sharing news can be a good way to begin conversations and build social capital. This

is consistent with Meijer and Kormelink's (2015) position that the communicative value of news consumption is usually more important than its informational value since it helps to forge relationships. It is also consistent with Taylor and Kent's (2010) finding that sharing news among users serves as an information source for socialisation and the maintenance of social capital.

More so, an analysis of the data further revealed that through news sharing, the participants are able to identify other users who share similar interests with them and in no time create an acquaintance with them through news sharing relationships for their mutual benefits. The participants indicated that they share stories that are more tailored to the interests of specific receivers they identify. One participant said;

I am interested in fashion and trendy stuff, and I have noted that some ladies on my friends list also share similar interests. As a result, when I share news about such things, I tag them, and they also tag me when they share and vice versa. Sometimes, we even chat behind the scenes and share ideas on our shared interests depending on the lines of discussions that the news generate (P5).

From the above, it could be seen that, participant P5 recognizes how news sharing aids in identifying other individuals who share similar interests which is often seen in comments and other reactions. Participant P5 acknowledges that friendships with such individuals can be harnessed for the mutual benefit of all. This corroborates Zang et al.'s, (2017) finding that reciprocity, which is the need to exchange ideas with others for mutual benefit has a greater influence on the knowledge sharing intentions of news sharers. These findings are in line with the socialisation gratification of the uses and gratification theory, which states that, individuals interact with each other to

achieve a sense of belonging (Rubin, 1986). The findings further corroborate Luo et al.'s, (2021) identification of socialisation as a key motivation for news consumption on social media. Most importantly, these findings are parallel to Kong's (2021) study that found that socialisation was the most powerful predictor for news use on social media among university students.

4.3.2 Status Seeking

The theme of status seeking points to the desire to be correct and therefore, strengthening an individual's feelings and morals (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974 cited by Thompson et al., 2019). As a result, using media to make one feel superior and admired, elevate one's status (Lee & Ma, 2012). One of the determining factors of news sharing on social media has been stated as status seeking (Ma et al., 2011). Status seeking describes how sharing news in social media helps one to attain status among peers. The key indicators of this theme include the need to appear knowledgeable, feeling important for being the first to share and looking good for unique sharing.

A careful analysis of the data established that 8 (50%) of the participants sought to be seen as being knowledgeable and up to date on issues among their peers. They seek to gain visibility and reputation among their peers by expressing their positions on specific topics and obtain approval from their audience. The data further revealed that, these participants' comments and captions that they share together with news stories are ways they try to affect the kind of attention they receive from their audience. Through adding counter-information, sarcasm and sometimes even trolling, respondents project an image that increases their visibility. One respondent indicated that;

I have been sharing news all the time and the funny captions I add to the news I share make my audience laugh all the time sometimes even when the news is not funny. I add captions like “this is so hilarious” or “yenkɔ heblews” (sic) which are popular funny sayings on social media. At times, I simply add laughing emojis as well. All these are to capture the attention of my audience because I might not be the only person who is sharing news. I just want to be identified as the ‘funny guy’ on social media (P13).

Similarly, another participant also noted that;

Sometimes I add captions to the news I share just to express my views. This is just to show that I am not just sharing the news for sharing sake but that I know what I am sharing and I have a perspective I want others to also know (P1 FG1).

Participants P3 and P1 acknowledge that, through news sharing, they can enhance their image by standing out among their peer news sharers and non-news sharers alike. They have therefore, devised various means to achieve this status. For instance, participant 13’s sense of humour can be seen in his news sharing activities and this has contributed to carving a niche for him as ‘the funny guy’ further earning him the admiration of his audience. This finding affirms Shin and Thorson’s (2017) assertion that, through news sharing, users aim at amplifying the reach of a news story in order to ‘hack’ the status of attention economy and to augment the visibility of contents which are aligned with their views.

A further analysis of the data also revealed 4 (50%) out of the 8 participants shared news stories due to the apparent need to be the first to post breaking news, in order to be at the forefront of a trend and be unique and different from everyone else in their

social networks. According to these 4 participants sharing trendy stuff timely makes one a go to person when news is trending on social media further making one feel important. However, they indicated that such news must always be credible as sharing fake news could dent one's image. One participant for instance, during a focus group session revealed how she makes it a point to be the first to post content on her Facebook timeline. According to this participant;

I share a lot of breaking news and they always turn out to be credible so now even when news break and I do not share it, some people access my inbox to inquire if what they have read elsewhere is credible (P3, FG2).

It is evident that Participant P3 acknowledges sharing credible breaking news has earned him a status as the go to person for breaking news. This image according to him, even transcends social media as some of his audience contact him to confirm the credibility of trending news. This contributes to making them feel important and needed as their confirmation of trendy issues is highly sought after. This confirms Thompson et al.'s, (2020) observation that individuals will go through the content of the news carefully and pay more attention to news quality when they seek to enhance their image on social media. This finding is consistent with Rogers' (2003) argument that if the content they offer is legitimate, they will appear credible as well, and will be viewed as 'news breakers' in the virtual community.

Also, the analysed data further showed the sharing of news on unique or different issues to set sharers apart from others who share ordinary stuff. The participants indicated sharing news about issues that are not so popular in the Ghanaian context like scientific discoveries and inventions, protests in other countries, gender activism and ridiculous news among others. They indicated sharing news on world events to

make their audience aware of stuff that are happening around the world and to look good. These participants strive to post news different from what everyone is sharing to make them stand out. For instance, 2 out of the 8 participants indicated sharing news about the George Floyd murder and subsequent protests and the EndSars protests in their early days when they were not trending on the Ghanaian social media space. One participant stated that;

I share news that are not trending in Ghana to broaden my friends' and followers' perspective on issues happening on the international scene. I shared news about Black Lives Matter. This has created the impression that I am abreast with what is going on around the world. It has given me an elitist outlook as someone with an international exposure and appeal (P12, FG1).

Similarly, another stated that;

I know the stuff I post are mostly what others have not been exposed to. Sometimes news about foreign artistes and actors who are not widely known in Ghana are the kind of stories that I post. (P10).

Excerpts from participants P12 and P10 indicate they recognize that choosing to share uncommon or unique content is another way to stand out from others. The data from the interviews and focus group discussions pointed out some participants' preference to share content that has not been seen (or shared) by others in their social networks. These participants share news they perceive to be new to others, often from external sources. The above finding is consistent with Pressgrove et al.'s, (2017) position that, people may share messages that may be unexpected, mysterious or controversial, as messages with these properties are more likely to be reshared. It also, affirms Wong

and Burkell (2017), assertion that sharing content that distinguishes oneself also involves the decision to avoid sharing content that is widespread.

In all, these findings are consistent with studies which suggest that individuals treat news sharing as a powerful technique to endorse their status (Ma et al., 2011; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). The findings also confirm Picone et al.'s, (2016) position that self-presentation (status seeking) is one of the strongest predictors of sharing intentions. In this perspective, media users do not consider content sharing merely an exchange of information; it is at the same time a publication of one's personality. The findings further corroborate the theoretical underpinnings of the status seeking gratification, which according to the U&G theory refers to the desire to attain status among peers (Katz & Blumler, 1974).

4.3.3 Entertainment

The theme of entertainment refers to the "media's ability to amuse" the audience. It brings about relaxation and ease of tension and stress among the audience, and elicits the emotions of excitement, enjoyment, interest, and absorption, which incite them to wanting more of such content from the mass media (Baran & Davis, 2010, p. 248). The ability of media content to fulfil users' desires for escapism, relaxation, emotional release, and anxiety relief is due to its importance (McQuail, 2005). In terms of news consumption, studies have shown that entertainment has a strong correlation with people reading the news on the internet (Didi & LaRose, 2006). The key indicators for this theme are, entertaining, break away from routine to relax and pass time and combating boredom.

A careful assessment of the data indicated that all 16 participants seek to entertain themselves and their audience by sharing news. The data showed that participants derive amusement from entertainment-worthy news and the ensuing conversations that are generated as a result of the sharing of such news. Respondents reveal how sharing entertainment and celebrity news generates threads and numerous reactions. According to them some funny replies and clapback make a single news story shared entertaining. One participant indicated during a focus group discussion that;

Sometimes when I access news, I share it and receive all sorts of reactions from my friends. I remember when I shared the news story about Nana Aba Anamoah's birthday Range Rover "gift" which turned out to be false, the trolling on the news story lasted for days with plenty laughing emoji reactions. We all found it entertaining with comments like, "birthday gift too ibi by force hehehehehe" and "we still dey search the real owner of the Range...hehehehe" (P7, FG2).

From the above excerpt, it can be deduced that after sharing news stories such as those with entertainment-oriented content, users may be involved in discussing, liking, gossiping and making fun of persons and issues that were reported. This finding affirms that of Lee and Ma (2011), which explains that the internet not only satisfies basic information needs but also provides enjoyment through interactions including gossip and falsehood. It further confirms Baeke et al.'s, (2011), assertion that individuals share links on Facebook because they are relaxing and entertaining. Moreover, corroborates past research (Vettehen et al., 2008; Mojzisch et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2014) that indicate that liking news in general underlies feelings of pleasure towards the content of news stories as people are more likely to seek and interact with information content they like. Finally, this finding is consistent with Lee and Ma's

(2011) postulation that, the ensuing conversations, discussions, reactions among others following the sharing of news entertaining in nature serve as sources of entertainment for the sharer and the audience alike.

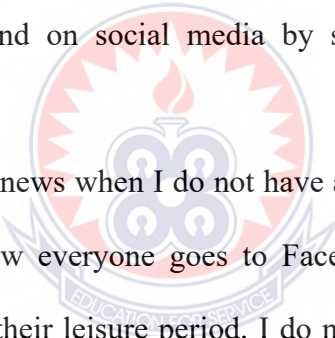
A further assessment of the data revealed that, the participants feel the pressure from their routine lives as students and therefore see news sharing as a way to escape from these pressures and to relax. The amusement they derive from sharing news as stated by Participant 7 helps them to escape even if briefly, from the mounting pressure from their academic works to relax and rejuvenate. Another participant stated that;

As students, the pressure can be very enormous. Anytime I want to destress a little from the hectic academic work, I share some news stories on our class WhatsApp page to release tension and to create humour. Sometimes news about people doing ridiculous things generate a lot of laughter (P8, FG1).

From the above excerpt, it could be realized that, the participants acknowledge the entertainment gratification of news sharing therefore are motivated to share news to take a break from their routine academic lives to relax. Through conversations, gossiping and trolling, following the sharing of news as indicated by Participant 7, news sharers forget their anxieties and pressures momentarily to have fun with their audience. This finding is consistent with previous research (Chang et al., 2019; Rich & Scovel, 1987) that found university students to be more prone to depression, making them more susceptible to the establishment of media habits that reduce dysphoria through viewing escapist media contents. The finding also corroborates studies that have found the entertainment gratification to be positively associated with an individual's internet news consumption (Diddi & LaRose, 2006) as the internet can provide functions such as exchanges with other individuals through comments and

likes which can result in the release of stress and fulfilling the need for entertainment (Dunn & Lawlor, 2010; Lee & Ma, 2012).

The data further revealed that the participants share news to pass time and combat boredom. In some studies (Karimi et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2020), pass time is an independent gratification which refers to the usage of media to alleviate boredom and occupy time (Dunn & Lawlor, 2010; Thompson et al., 2020). Past research supports that, in the context of online news media, pass time gratification expresses audiences' need to fill free time than to do something productive (Yoo, 2011). The data indicated that when participants have nothing doing, they share news to while away time. Participants explained that, as news sharing has become a habit, when they are idle, they prefer to play around on social media by sharing news. For instance, one participant stated that;



I sometimes share news when I do not have anything to do in order not to feel bored just like how everyone goes to Facebook to read through posts and comments during their leisure period. I do not take news sharing as a serious business, just something to play around with and have fun while doing nothing serious (P15 FG1).

Participant P15 acknowledges sharing news as a form of leisure. To this participant, he/she is just catching some fun when he/she has nothing serious doing. This is in line with Choi's (2015) finding that, sharing news is related to satisfying the pass time gratification as social media features like Facebook "like" and Twitter's "favourite" functions are frequently used when individuals are not cognitively stimulated by the content presented.

A further analysis of the data unearthed an interesting finding, which is that the participants' need to fulfil their entertainment gratification further leads to the fulfilment of their status seeking and socialising gratifications. This means that, while sharing news that meet the entertainment gratifications of sharer and other users, the sharer carves a unique reputation for himself based on his sense of humour and at the same time develops a relationship or a network of users in the virtual community. The participants admit making friends through ensuing discussions and comments on shared news which initially was meant to be for just emotional release. One pointed out that;

I share news to release tension and combat boredom but through this, some Facebook friends and followers who also find such news funny and enjoyable have become real life friends who I chat with from time to time. Some of them even tag me when they also share news (P2).

Participant P2 appreciates that even though they did not set out to socialize by sharing news, their initial gratification of entertainment has led to the extension of their social networks and forged reputations for themselves among their peers. This certifies Berger's (2014) claim that entertainment becomes a bridge between the motives of socialisation and status seeking.

Conversely, the above findings, contradict Ma et al.'s, (2011) study that found no association between sharing news on social media and the entertainment gratification, suggesting that individuals do not derive any pleasure from the activity. Nonetheless, the findings are in accordance with the entertainment gratification, which according to the U&G theory refers to the use of media for escapism from the real world to amuse

oneself and satisfy the need for pleasure, emotion release and anxiety (Katz & Blumler, 1974).

4.3.4 Information Sharing

Information sharing describes the extent to which news shared can provide users with relevant and timely information. And social media has an advantage because content can be collectively filtered by users whose news interests are similar to each other (Ko et al., 2005; Luo, 2002). The theme of information sharing refers to individuals' need to improve knowledge of their surrounding environments through information for self-education (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974; Whiting & Williams, 2013). This gratification has been linked to users' media consumption habits in previous studies. For example, both Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Luo (2020) found that information seeking was a major reason for using the Internet. For this theme the key indicators are, to provide information that might be useful to others, to provide practical knowledge or skill with others and the expression of oneself.

An analysis of the data retrieved from the interviews and focus group discussions revealed that, 12 (75%) participants share news to provide information that might be useful to others. The data analysis indicated the participants share news with the desire to inform others with similar interests. Through news sharing, they hope to educate or inform individuals who might be interested in the kind of news they share. A participant stated that;

I share news to inform others about events...some people might not know what is going on so by sharing news I'll be informing them. I can also go back to the news I shared to check the date and time if its news about an upcoming

event in case I forget. So, the news stories I share serves as a source of information to me and to my audience too (P15, FG1).

From the excerpt above, it is evident that participant P15 recognizes the informational utility of the news he/she shares and the need to inform others who may need such information. The satisfaction P15 derives from sharing news therefore is knowing he/she has educated or informed others. This finding is consistent with Chadwick and Vaccari's (2019) finding that the need to inform others is one of the two dominant motivations for news sharing. The finding also confirms Bobkowski's (2015) discovery that, across independent content spheres of technology news and households, the informational utility conveyed in a news story influences the extent to which readers disseminate it with others because of their supposed usefulness to online communities.

Participant P15 however acknowledge how he/she also stand to benefit from the news being shared as such news can always be retrieved from his/her archives. This finding supports previous research on mobile content sharing apps, which found that people can predict their own or others' future information needs by sharing content in order to make future information searching easier (Lo et al., 2010). This is because sharers themselves can retrieve news stories they post on social media as future information needs occur. This is because, the shared news stories are usually archived as a private compilation in the online profile. For instance, on Facebook, shared news content remains visible for a longer period (Boehmer, 2016) making it easier to retrieve.

Another notable finding from an assessment of the data indicated that the participants share news content on social media to voice their concerns about issues that are important to them. According to the data, one thing these participants consider when

sharing news is to express themselves freely, promote personal causes to inform and potentially change the way others act or perceive an issue or event. For instance, a participant indicated that;

I am a feminist and views about feminism are not so popular in our part of the world. However, my aim is to change the narrative, so I use my social media platforms to share news stories and articles on feminism and gender equality. In my own small way, I believe I can make a difference through sharing news stories with information on feminism, to change the attitudes of Ghanaians (P3, FG2).

Similarly, another participant not that;

You can take COVID-19 for example, sometimes I share news concerning COVID-19. That is, we need to adhere to the safety protocols, by washing of the hands, wearing facemask, social distancing. So, in some instances we share to inform and educate others as people did not want to wear the facemask and the disease was spreading fast (P8, FG1).

From the above, it could be realized that Participant 8 acknowledges the need to adhere to the safety protocols to help curb the spread of COVID-19. Since some members of the public were flouting the safety protocols, he sought to share news to champion the cause for strict adherence to the safety protocols. Participant P8 shares news in hopes of educating the public and broadening their perspectives and understanding of issues. He is driven to share in hopes of informing and educating others in order to influence their behaviours. This finding corroborates Chadwick and Vaccari's (2019) suggestion that individuals share news to fulfil the need to influence others and provoke discussions. The finding is also consistent with Wong and

Burkell's (2017) assertion that, individuals share news to express their opinions and champion causes in order to cause a positive change in the behaviour of society. The findings are also in tandem with the information sharing gratification of the U&G theory which refers to individual's need to share news in order to allow others to access relevant content (Lee et al., 2011).

4.4 RQ3: How do students of UEW evaluate the credibility of the news stories that they share on Facebook and WhatsApp?

Trustworthiness is a key dimension of credibility perception, which relates to the perceived goodness of the source in terms of being truthful, fair and unbiased (Fogg et al., 2003; Rieh, 2014). Credibility is defined as an information receiver's assessment of the trustworthiness of information and sources (Fogg, 2003; Metzger et al., 2015). Credibility is crucial for every information source as its audience is generally highly interested in accuracy (Fallis, 2004). Therefore, individuals have resorted to the use of heuristics and signals when evaluating information on the internet (Sundar 2008; Hiligoss & Rieh, 2008; Metzger et al., 2010; Go et al., 2014). In responding to the question, four themes emerged. And these were *authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support and presentation*. Using the epistemology of testimony theory (Fallis, 2004), discussed in chapter two, these themes are critically examined to explain how university students evaluate the credibility of the news items they share on social media.

4.3.1 Authority

The theme of authority is related to the characteristics of the individuals from whom the information is obtained (Fallis, 2004). Authority may be viewed as a symbol of

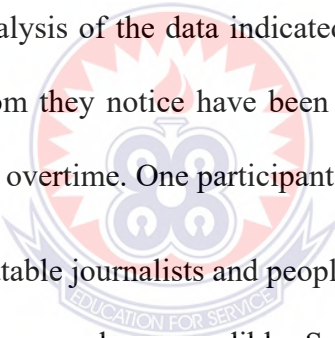
trustworthiness (Shieber, 2015), and information received from a reliable source is often believed to be reliable too (Fallis, 2004). According to Metzger et al., (2010), a testifier's authority may be evaluated in a variety of ways. When it comes to assessing authority, historical accuracy is crucial. Has the knowledge presented by a specific source in the past been accurate? Consistency is a sign of reliability. Credentials, which denote professional expertise, are often used to create authority. Finally, interlocutors who are regarded as being free of prejudice can be viewed as experts and established as reliable (Fallis, 2004). For the purpose of this study, authority was assessed for two groups: news sharers (individuals within the network who share news) and news authors (the organisations responsible for creating news articles). The key indicators for this theme are, friends and family relations and opinion leadership, historical accuracy and consistency, credentials, and nonbiased interlocutors.

Findings from the analysis of the data indicated that, all 16 (100%) pay attention to the source of a news story before sharing on social media. These participants tend to believe in news items when they are shared by friends and relations. According to the participants, they are also willing to share news from friends who have been sharing news overtime in their networks as they have earned the positions of opinion leaders through their consistent news sharing activities. A participant noted that;

If it is someone, I really know then I am tempted to click on the share or forward button. I think I consider the poster a lot when analysing the credibility of news. Whether I like the person, or he/she is a close friend or a family member or someone I respect, I do not think they can lie on social media by sharing news that is fake (P14).

From the above statement, participant P14 acknowledges his/her trust in family and friends not to share news that is not credible. This participant believes that if the source is a friend, a relation or someone he/she respects, not only does he/she find such news interesting but does not hesitate to share. This finding affirms Metzger et al.'s, (2010) findings that, individuals perceived their own Facebook friends as more credible news sources than even traditional news organisations. Metzger et al., (2010) posit that, people rely on personal connections as heuristic to minimise cognitive effort when deciding if a piece of information is credible or not. This finding is also in tandem with findings from a Pew Research Center 2012 survey, which indicate that social media users tend to disseminate news items they find from online friends.

Furthermore, a careful analysis of the data indicated that the participants share news from opinion leaders whom they notice have been consistent with the credibility of the news they have shared overtime. One participant stated that;



I follow some reputable journalists and people who are not even journalists but share news and they are always credible. Some I have followed for over five years, and they have never shared fake news so when such people post something on their platforms, I share without thinking deeply about it. They have been truthful in the past, therefore they have earned my trust (P2, FG2).

To participant P2 these sources can be trusted based on their role as opinion leaders and their past record. The consistency of these sources in disseminating credible news in the past have earned them reputations as being trustworthy. This finding corroborates Lee et al.'s, (2011) assertion that when people share news to provide others access to important content, if the information these people share turns out to be reliable and relevant, they will seem to be credible and relevant as well. As a

result, these sharers will position themselves as opinion leaders in the social network. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with Turcotte et al.'s, (2015) assertions that, opinion leader guidelines increase media credibility and enable viewers to follow more news from that specific media source in the future. Moreover, this finding confirms the authority consideration of the epistemology of testimony theory which states that, historical accuracy is significant when evaluating authority. That is, if the information conveyed by a particular source has been accurate in the past, such consistency is a hallmark of trust (Fallis, 2004). If an individual has been right about things in the past, then he/she is more likely to be right about things now.

A further analysis of the data brought to light that, consistency and historical accuracy is part of a range of assessment strategies employed by the participants when evaluating the credibility of a news source. The data indicated that, the participants tend to see news coming from online news portals of established traditional media as credible. This is as a result of these traditional media online platforms consistently churning out credible news. If the source is the online portal of a reputable newspaper, radio or TV station, all the participants indicated their trust in such sources. According to the data, the participants believe such establishments have reputations to protect, therefore ensure news credibility before publishing them on their portals. Some of the participants mentioned online news portals like Graphic Online, MyJoyOnline.com, GhanaWeb, Citi Newsroom and Peacefmonline.com. For instance, a participant intimated that;

If I come across news from peacefmonline.com or myjoyonline.com, I know it is credible so I can share. I think those media houses really investigate issues before they publish them because they have been consistent with churning out

credible news. Also, they do not want to tarnish their hard-earned reputations therefore, I think they are sources I can trust (P9, FG1).

Another also stated that;

I do not like sharing news stories from bloggers. They can mislead you. They are only after traffic on their blogs. So, except for a few trusted and known bloggers I hardly share news from bloggers. I prefer news from well-known news portals because they always tell the truth and I do not want to lose my credibility on social media (P5, FG2).

The above excerpt from participant P5 is evidence that, he/she assesses the credibility of news stories based on the source. He/she deems well-established online portals as trustworthy enough to share news emanating from such sources. However, where the source is not recognized at all the resulting judgement is that of mistrust. The above findings confirm Torres et al., (2018), assertion that, trust in network and media credibility are the basis for individual information verification behaviour. The findings further reinforce Flintham, et al.'s, (2018), suggestion that the lack of knowledge of a source is seen as an indicator of fakeness as participants seem quick to write off sites and blogs, they are not familiar with.

Also, the data further revealed that all 16 participants evaluate the credibility of news stories based on the credentials of the source. The participants indicated that professional expertise or government credentials like representative, a minister or spokesperson of a ministry or a government agency was sometimes used as a measure of news credibility. Participants in this area based their arguments for instance, on communication concerning COVID-19. During a focus group discussion, one respondent said that;

In the heat of COVID-19, a lot of news was flying around the internet and most of them were fake. So, I started following the Deputy Minister for Information, Kojo Opong Nkrumah, some two health professionals who were considered as experts and the Twitter page of the Information Ministry for all COVID-19 related news (P10, FG2).

Participant P10 recognizes the credentials and expertise of the authorities or news sources concerning COVID-19 issues therefore needs no further convincing that news emanating from such sources is true. This finding is consistent with studies (Fricker, 2006; Lackey, 2018; Lynch, 2016) that have found experts to be heavyweight epistemic sources, with great evidential weight in comparison to a layperson's own reasoning. Moreover, the findings emphasize the authority consideration of the epistemology of truth theory which states that, credentials that signify specialized knowledge is another means of establishing authority and also, engender trust on the part of a testimony recipient (McKnight & Chervany, 2002).

However, a further analysis of the data revealed that, in some cases, the participants doubt the credibility of experts when an expert says something that is obviously false. One participant indicated that;

I believe in expert opinion, but if an expert shares news that by logic you can detect to be false, I will not share simply because it is coming from an expert (P13).

Participant P13 recognizes the need to rely on one's own reasoning on issues when an expert shares a news story which is glaringly false. For instance, in the case of COVID-19, some participants indicate that if any of the experts had shared news that

conflicted with what was being circulated by the World Health Organization (WHO), they would have refused sharing such news, as they would have deemed it false although it was coming from an expert. This finding is in contrast with Constantine and Grundmann's (2018) assertion that it would be irrational for the layperson to give any epistemic weight to his own everyday experiences in the face of the verdict of clearly identified experts. Therefore, the layperson should follow the authorities' lead. However, the finding reinforces Grundmann's (2017) assertion that, the situation is very different when experts make decisions that appear to be outrageous in their fields of competence.

Finally, the participants indicated their trust in sources whom they perceive to be free of bias. The data revealed that, the participants tend to trust news stories when the source or authority is someone, they deem incapable of bias or has no need to be bias. These participants believe people like members of the clergy or astute religious leaders who have reputations to protect are somehow incapable of bias. However, according to the data, they claim politicians are the least credible when it comes to matters of impartiality. For instance, a participant indicated that;

There are people we all look up to as a society to be impartial and some of these people are religious leaders and even that not all religious leaders. I believe such people do not have any reasons to be bias so they call a spade a spade. News from such people can be trusted (P12 FG1).

Another participant noted that;

I am kind of skeptical when politicians make allegations against their opponents knowing what they stand to gain. So, I am very careful with such news stories because they all want to look good in the eyes of the public. They

can therefore lie to tarnish the image of their opponents. So, when a politician is the source of a news story, I do further investigations before I share (P15, FG1).

From the above, it could be realized that participants P12 and P15 recognize sources like politicians, that are not free of bias could be untrustworthy. This finding affirms the authority categorisation, which states that, interlocutors who are considered as being free of prejudice may be regarded as credible authorities, and the testimony recipient may develop trust in them (McKnight & Chervany, 2002). The fact that authority breeds trust is significant in this scenario because trust acts as a form of justification for the testimony, allowing it to be accepted and assimilated as knowledge (Lehrer, 2006).

4.3.2 Independent Corroboration

The theme of independent corroboration refers to an effort by an individual to collect evidence from different and unrelated sources in order to corroborate testimony (Fallis, 2004). This is a significant issue according to Fallis (2004), in the context of the internet, given the ease with which the same information may be distributed via multiple websites. For this theme, the key indicator is confirmation from independent sources.

Findings from an assessment of the data revealed that, 9 (56%) participants look out for confirmation from other sources by way of sharing or commentary. They seek for other independent sources who corroborate what is being shared by everyone. According to these participants, this is to avoid sharing fake news from the same unverifiable source. The participants also stated that past experiences have taught

them a news is not always credible because everyone is sharing it. A reasonable explanation could be that they all fell for a deceptive source. One participant indicated that,

I do not share news because everyone is sharing. I once read a news story about the death of some popular artiste...I also shared it. Not knowing it was not true. I really learnt my lesson from then. When everyone is sharing, I do my own investigations by checking from traditional media sources or social media platforms like MyJoyOnline.com or peacefmonline.com or even watch TV for breaking news or something before I also share (P9).

Participant P9 acknowledges that other news sharers' choice of source could be untrustworthy, therefore does further independent probing by depending on confirmation from the traditional media in order not to fall victim to fake news. This finding is consistent with Fergie et al.'s, (2015) position that, young people compare multiple sources as part of a range of strategies when assessing content heuristically. Furthermore, it is in line with the independent corroboration category of the epistemology of testimony theory which states that ideally, in order to reduce the risk of all sources disseminating erroneous information drawn from the same source, verifying proof should be sought from sources that obtained the information independently (Fallis, 2004). Similarly, another participant indicated that,

For me, there are a lot I do not trust about social media so when everyone is sharing a news story, I do not use that as a justification to also share. I rather double check to be sure that whatever is going around is true before I also share. You cannot tell people's real intentions for sharing some news stories, so I am always on the lookout (P5, FG2).

From the above excerpt from participant P5, it could be realized the participants recognize that, while independent corroboration is a good strategy in verifying the credibility of news, it is not enough to qualify a news story as accurate that is why they do further check like probing the source (authority) too. This confirms what literature on the epistemology of testimony suggests, that authority and independent corroboration are not independent of each other (Fallis, 2004).

4.3.3 Plausibility and Support

This theme refers to individuals looking at what the information is, by considering the plausibility of a claim and the reasons offered in support of the claim (Fallis, 2004). So, for instance a website that depicts Ghana has a winter season is immediately seen as suspect. Individuals also consider the reasons (if any) that an information source offers in support of a claim. For this theme, the key indicator was reliance on one's understanding of issues.

An assessment of the data indicated that, 5(315) of the participants rely on their understanding of certain issues to detect the credibility of the news they share. These participants indicated that through the formal education they have acquired, there are claims they assess based on the logic or reasons given in support of such claims which enable them to easily ascertain the accuracy or otherwise. According to some of the participants, in the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic, they read news stories making wild allegations and claims about the disease but based on their own research and understanding of issues concerning the disease, they detected such news stories were false. For example, a participant intimated that;

On my part, I sometimes read some news stories and I immediately know it cannot be true. I quite remember during the COVID-19 pandemic, people were sharing news that 5G network was the root cause of COVID-19. This is laughable... hahahaha. How can 5G cause a disease? (P8, FG1).

Similarly, another participant also stated that;

I also remember when the government started the vaccination exercise, news started circulating that the whites want to kill all of us, that is why they manufactured COVID-19 so that they can bring us vaccines to kill us all. I know vaccines are meant to help us build immunity so that argument was lame. I even had to explain it to others that it was not true or even possible (P15, FG1).

Participants P8 and P15 based on their understanding of issues concerning the COVID-19 disease and how the vaccination works, were able to tell which of the news stories they encountered were inaccurate and vice versa. The reasons given in support of the claims against the inoculation exercise and the COVID-19 disease were not plausible therefore could not pass the credibility test for these participants. This finding reinforces with Fergie et al.'s, (2015) assertion that, young media users evaluate the reasons of the content when assessing the credibility and reliability of the source of a news story. The finding also affirms the plausibility and support consideration of the epistemology of testimony theory which states that, the reason offered often can provide the best evidence for the accuracy of the claim (Fallis, 2004). In all the cases enumerated above, the reasons given did not make sense to the participants who were knowledgeable in the issues at hand.

4.3.4 Presentation

The theme of presentation refers to the way an individual presents the news story (Hume, 1977). Individuals pay attention to the manner of the delivery of the information. The architecture of websites, for example, has been suggested as a predictor of accuracy. Thus, numerous features of websites proposed as indicators of accuracy fall into this category of the epistemology of testimony theory (Wilkinson et al., 1997). First if the website is engaged in advertising, they may lack objectivity. Secondly, if the website contains any grammatical errors such mistakes may indicate a lack of concern for quality and accuracy (Cook, 1999). The idea is that, if someone is careful enough to get the spelling right, she is more likely to be careful enough to get the facts right as well (Fallis, 2004; Wilde, 2003). The key indicators for this theme are website architecture and grammatical and typographical errors.

The data revealed that, 7 (44%) participants look out for the architecture of the news websites. These participants were particularly concerned with bloggers who also serve as brand influencers, therefore use their blogs and pages to promote products. The data indicated that such bloggers due to their desire to acquire a large following on the social media might share inaccurate news to draw traffic to their social media pages. The reason is that a large following makes them more attractive to companies or brands who would want to sign them up as brand ambassadors. A participant stated that;

When sharing news, I look at the website or blog or page to be sure the blogger or person is not only after followers. A lot of bloggers on Instagram for financial gains. Therefore, if such bloggers want to pull traffic to their pages, they post sensational or even fake news stories to get more followers. If

you are not careful you will fall for it and share these news stories which are not accurate (P8).

Similarly, another indicated that;

Apart from a few news websites like MyJoyOnline.com, peacefmonline.com and others, most of these one-man websites and blogs depend mostly on traffic and clickbait to make money. Therefore, I am a bit hesitant to share news from there as you could end up losing your credibility (P16).

From the above excerpts, participants P8 and P16 look out for certain features of websites in assessing the credibility of news stories and sources. According to these participants, the idea is that the desire to become brand ambassadors/influencers or market products might override the desire to tell the truth. The participants therefore are cautious of news websites and blogs riddled with advertisements of products or services. This finding confirms Flintham et al.'s, (2018), position that, the layout of a source website can be used to evaluate the credibility of news and a news source.

Another interesting finding, after the analysis of the data is that the participants were divided when it comes to grammatical errors in assessing the accuracy of news. According to 3 of the 7 participants who use the presentation cue in assessing the credibility of a news story, when they encounter a story riddled with grammatical errors, it paints a picture that, the author or source does not pay attention to detail, therefore if the author is careless with grammar, he/she would also pay little attention to due diligence. For instance, a participant opined that;

Honestly, it is difficult reading stories with bad grammar. It is tiring reading such news stories. I have read posts on social media about very serious issues

but due to bad grammar nobody pays attention to them. To catch and hold your audience' attention, I believe the writer must write good English. As soon as I see one or two errors I stop reading altogether, so I will not even share such a news story (P10, FG2).

Another also indicated that;

I believe sharing stories with bad grammar or errors reflects negatively on my person. My followers will not even take me seriously. I stay away from such news stories because I do not believe any serious person will write a news story and will not bother to read through it to correct every grammatical or typographical errors before posting it on social media. To be frank, I do not trust such news stories (P6, FG1).

The concerns raised above by participants P10 and P6 indicate that, they place value on impeccability therefore, they do not attribute any seriousness with news stories full of grammatical errors. This finding is parallel with views expressed by Petan (2021) who avers that, errors on websites, social media handles and advertisements may lead consumers to make unfavourable conclusions concerning an entity. Thus, highlights how content can inform an initial impression of relevance when assessing the reliability and credibility of a website or information. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with the presentation consideration of the epistemology of testimony which indicates that, the manner in which an individual presents the news story can affect its credibility.

However, the remaining 4 participants believe grammatical errors could be an oversight and typographical errors are part of writing. In view of this, they do not place too much emphasis on grammatical and typographical errors so far as such

errors do not take anything away from the message of the news story. According to one of these participants;

Grammatical errors or typos do not always mean a news story is not true. We all make mistakes when writing or typing once in a while. Sometimes you post a news story on social media before you even notice it or a friend will draw your attention to it. But that does not mean the story is false because if you read closely, you will find mistakes with every news article you come across (P8, FG1).

According to participant P8, a news story could be riddled with typos and grammatical errors and still be credible. P8 is of the view that, this could be as a result of the writer being in a hurry to post therefore could be forgiven. This is consistent with Kellaway's (2014) assertion that not only are there typographical errors in the New York Times but even in the Bible. Therefore, the ability of humans to write something that provokes a response is the only competitive edge they have over machines and not because a writeup contains spelling mistakes.

4.5 Summary of Chapter

This chapter discusses the findings and analysis of the study. The data gathered on the three research questions were critically explained, described and analysed using the theories of uses and gratifications and the epistemology of testimony. The first research question (RQ1) which sought to identify the types of news stories students of UEW share on Facebook and WhatsApp revealed six (6) themes: *entertainment/celebrity, flaming, politics, sport, local/campus news and crime*. A total of eight (8) themes were discussed and analysed for research questions two (RQ2) and

three (RQ3). Research question two (RQ2) had four (4) themes. They were *socialisation, status seeking, entertainment and information sharing*. While research question three (RQ3) also had four (4) themes: *authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support and presentation*.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the key issues raised in the study, draws conclusions based on the major findings and make recommendations for both academia and industry based on the findings that emerged from the data gathered.

5.1 Summary

The way people receive news and information is rapidly evolving. There is a rapid alteration in the news environment and news consumption practices nowadays. This shift from traditional to social media has brought new facets into the relationship between people and news. It has been established that young news users often get news incidentally through social media and college students constitute an especially important population to study news consumption behaviour. For the traditional news media to understand how to better appeal to young people, scholars (Olsen & Solvoll, 2018; Sveningsson, 2015) have recommended that, attention must be given to how young people value and use news in different ways (Newman et al., 2019).

Based on the above, this study was undertaken to identify the types of news stories students of UEW share on Facebook and WhatsApp. It also examined the motivations of students for sharing news stories and further explored how students evaluate the credibility of news stories they share on social media.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the following research questions were asked;

1. What types of news stories are shared by students of UEW on Facebook and WhatsApp?
2. What motivates students of UEW to share news stories on Facebook and WhatsApp?
3. How do students of UEW evaluate the credibility of the news stories that they share on Facebook and WhatsApp?

A detailed review of the literature was conducted, which served as the foundation for critically analysing the findings of this study. Concepts were used to organise the literature that was analysed. There was an extensive review of literature that served as foundations upon which the findings of this research were critically analysed. The reviewed literature was organised under concepts such as evolution of social media, social media and news sharing, students' news and social media usage, sharing in user communities, features of SNS which facilitate sharing, motivations for sharing news, news types and consumption patterns, trust in news and source credibility and methods of news credibility evaluation. These reviews not only provided insight into what has been researched in the domain of news sharing, but they also allowed the researcher to discover gaps in the research. This insight helped the researcher in establishing the focus of the research such that it was relevant to the literature. The study was underpinned by the Uses and Gratifications theory and the Epistemology of Testimony theory. Overall, the entire study was made up of five chapters with each chapter focusing on various aspects of the topic under study. These chapters came together to address the objectives of the study.

The research approach for this study was qualitative (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019) while the research design was case study (Yin, 2018). These afforded the researcher the

opportunity to obtaining and gathering specific information about the news sharing activities and perceptions of the participating students of U.E.W. These respondents were selected using the purposive sampling technique (Daymon & Halloway, 2011). Through informal semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the researcher was able to elicit responses on the rationalisation that participants had for the types of news they share, their motivations for sharing and how they assessed the credibility of the news they share. Finally, the data was minimally organised and described in rich detail and thematically analysed (Braun & Clark, 2006).

5.2 Summary of Findings

Following the assessment of the data, the key findings revealed, led to several conclusions. In answering the first research question which sought to identify the types of news stories students of UEW share on Facebook and WhatsApp, it emerged that, the type of news shared by students is predominantly soft news. Out of the six themes identified, five of them (*entertainment/celebrity, flaming, sports, crime and local/campus news*) fell under the soft news category while one of themes (*politics*) falls under the hard news category. This finding confirms Larson's (2016) suggestion that social media news consumers might be more open to interacting with 'soft' news. The finding also corroborates Hadik and Štětka's (2015) assertion that social media tend to be a source for soft news more regularly than for hard news.

Also, in responding to research question two which examined the motivations of students for sharing news stories, four themes came up. These were *socialisation, status seeking, entertainment and information sharing*. It was established that entertainment and socialisation were the two most dominant gratifications of

participants for sharing news stories. All the 16 participants admitted to sharing news in order to amuse themselves, breakaway from routine academic work, relax, and combat boredom. While 14 of the 16 also desired to engage in social interaction which could lead to forging relationships. These findings reinforce Lee and Ma's (2011) study which established that the internet provides enjoyment through interactions with others. These findings are also consistent with Duffy et al.'s, (2019) assertion that, building and maintaining relationships is a key determinant for news sharing. Further, the findings reinforce the theoretical understanding of the entertainment and socialising gratifications, which according to the uses and gratifications theory refers to the desire to amuse oneself and the desire for connection (Katz & Blumler, 1974).

Lastly, the findings of the third research question, which sought to explore how students evaluate the credibility of news stories they share on social media revealed four themes. They are *authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support and presentation*. It was established that in assessing the credibility of a news story or a news source, students relied on a range of heuristic strategies with authority being the most dominant heuristic employed by all 16 participants. This affirms Metzger's (2007) finding that individuals prefer to use verification techniques that require the least time and mental effort. The findings further corroborate assertions made by scholars such as Flintham et al., (2018), Hiligoss & Rieh (2008), Metzger et al., (2010) and Sundar (2008) that, individuals resort to the use of heuristics and signals when evaluating information on the internet. These findings also align with the authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support and presentation considerations of the epistemology of testimony theory.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings of the study indicated that the participants share entertainment/celebrity news stories, flaming news stories, political news stories, sports news stories, crime news stories and local/campus news stories. Out of these news stories only political news stories belong to the hard news category. An interesting finding of this study is the discovery of the flaming news category which is now popular with young people in Ghana. The study also indicated that, participants share news stories to amuse themselves, relax and socialize.

The study concludes that overall, news stories shared on Facebook and WhatsApp by the participants are predominantly soft news as participants aim at relaxing, releasing tension and interact with others. Also, participants employ heuristics like assessing the source of a news story, confirming from other independent sources, relying on reasoning and presentation when analysing the credibility of news stories as they preferred verification techniques that required the least time and mental effort.

5.4 Limitations

The study sets out to investigate the types of news stories students of UEW share on Facebook and WhatsApp. It also examined the motivations of students for sharing news stories and further explored how students evaluate the credibility of news stories they share on social media.

It is important to note that there are several limitations to this study, specifically in terms of locality and sample size, and as such the researcher is careful not to attempt to draw broad generalisations on how the public at large may share news online.

First, the single case study design adopted by the researcher was a limitation to the study. As a result, the findings of this research cannot readily be extrapolated to other institutions as there may be dynamics in the news sharing behaviour of students in other institutions.

Another limitation is the small number of participants used for the study which decreased the statistical power of the study. Therefore, the discussion is a reflection upon detailed accounts of participants' news sharing behaviour. The themes that emerged highlight the wide variety of methods and resources drawn upon to engage in the task even given the limited sample size. However, the limitations did not affect the findings of the study as the data gathered through interviews and focus group discussion sessions offered significant insights into the participants news sharing behaviour and experiences.

My contribution to the research process was taken into account. It was difficult for me to remain objective throughout the investigation and separate my perceptions from the phenomenon. Nonetheless, I bracketed myself and resolved to transcribe the interview verbatim, using direct quotes from the participants' news sharing experiences to support my findings, keeping a research journal of my observations and new literature on the phenomenon, and consulting with my supervisor through presentations of my findings were all signs of the rigorous nature of the study. All of this was done to guarantee that the findings were objective and that the constraints had no bearing on my conclusions.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the discussions and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

By catering to the preferences of their readers, media houses can improve the sharing of their own news. For example, emphasising the credibility of news stories (through readership metrics or prizes) will encourage readers who are motivated by gratification to share knowledge to share news stories. Similarly, users must realise that the attention they receive on social media as a result of their news sharing activities can be capitalised on to make financial gains through advertisements.

Finally, the Ministry of Communication in conjunction with the Education Ministry should map out policies that will include the teaching of information and media literacy in the curriculum of senior high schools to prepare them adequately before they even enter the university.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

For further studies, the researcher suggests that a follow up study is conducted using a multiple case study design to draw the similarities and differences in the way this phenomenon is practised by students in other educational institutions.

Moreover, further research can be conducted using other social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram. Also, future research can also expand the sample to participants to include the experiences of diverse social media users and their experiences with news sharing.

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is Harriet Greene, an M.Phil. student from the University of Education, Winneba. I would like to interview you about your news sharing activities. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your responses will only be shared in my academic institution and produced as part of my M.Phil. thesis. Please, remember you do not have to talk about anything you may deem intrusive and you can end the interview at any time.

1. In your estimation what do you consider to be news?
2. Averagely, how often do you share your news stories?
3. On which social media platforms do you usually share your news stories?
4. What type of news stories do you share on Facebook and WhatsApp?
5. Why do you share such type of news stories?
6. Why do you share news stories on these platforms?
7. What is the rational for sharing such news stories?
8. What are the sources of the news stories that you share?
9. Why do you share news stories from these sources?
10. How do you verify the news stories that you share?
11. How important is the authentication of a news story or news source to you?
12. How do you determine the authenticity of your news source or news stories?
13. What do you do when you do not know the source of a news story or the source is unpopular?