

**ASHESI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

**INTERNET ACTIVISM IN GHANA**

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THESIS

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**Internet Activism in Ghana**

By

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**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature:.....

Candidate's Name:.....

Date:.....

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the dissertation were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of dissertation laid down by Ashesi University College.

Supervisor's Signature:.....

Supervisor's Name:.....

Date:.....

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## **Abstract**

If you ask me what comes to mind when I think about the Internet, the first thing I would conceive is, "information." It is a world of information- billions and billions of information. There is really no limit to the information available on the Internet. Today, it is very easy to find answers to questions on subjects you have little knowledge of by simply running a search on the Internet. To me, another word closely tied to information is "power." Knowledge, they say is power. Indeed, knowledge finds its roots in information. One writer, Bruce Coville, in speaking about information says, "Withholding information is the essence of tyranny. Control of the flow of information is the tool of dictatorship." One may argue about the validity of this statement, however, I point it out here because it depicts that there is a correlation between information and power. This being said, I can dare to say that the Internet is power.

Indeed, many people have identified and used this power nature of the Internet to their advantage. Armies around the world rely heavily on the Internet for information and security purposes. Huge amounts of money are transferred daily around the globe via Internet connections without actual movement of physical cash. The Internet plays a vital role in the smooth running of the world's stock markets. Some of the biggest companies in the world have their foundations laid on the Internet. A less desirable example of the power of the Internet is that some of the biggest bank robberies in history have been cyber robberies. In February 2013, seven hackers were arrested for robbing a New York bank of forty-five million dollars. An even bigger heist, which would have been the biggest in history if the hackers had succeeded, is the Sumitomo Mitsui Bank Heist

in 2007. BBC reported that these men carried out the heist via the Internet and Internet-powered software. If they had succeeded in transferring the stolen money into offshore accounts, they would have walked away with three hundred million U.S. Dollars.

All the examples above are just a minute fragment of stories that reveal the power of the Internet. This study is going to look into another way Internet power is used that is relatively less dramatic compared to cyber robberies. Notwithstanding, it has proven to be a powerful tool in addressing some of the problems we face in our world today. Over the past few years, we have seen an increase in how much the Internet is being used as a tool to foster change in the lives of people around the world. We can see evidences of this feature of the Internet in major revolutionary movements like the Arab Spring. Since 2011, there have been several research studies into the role of the Internet and social media in the Arab Spring. Many academics, journalists and politicians around the world have attributed the effectiveness of the Arab Spring to the Internet and social media. The major role the Internet played in revolutions around the world led to the birth of the saying, "Democracy is just a tweet away." Also, another famous saying created by Egyptian Google executive Wael Ghonim asserts, "If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet"(Storck 2012). The goal of this paper is to research into how the Internet has been used and can be used for activism, especially in Ghana.

## Contents

Declaration .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Chapter 1 - Introduction .....	1
1.1 Activism .....	1
1.2 Activism Versus Protests.....	3
1.3 History of the Internet in Ghana .....	3
1.4 Activism in Ghana.....	4
1.5 Problem Statement.....	5
1.6 Objectives .....	6
1.7 Research Questions .....	6
1.8 Hypothesis .....	7
Chapter 2 - Literature Review .....	8
2.1 Analyzing the Influence of the Internet In Activism .....	8
2.2 Mobilization .....	9
2.3 Communication .....	10
2.3 Online Publishing.....	12
2.4 Citizen Journalism .....	13
2.5 Public Discourse .....	14
2.6 Internet Activism in Ghana .....	17
2.6.1 Ghana Decides .....	17
2.6.2 Odekro.....	19
Chapter 3 - Methodology.....	21
3.1 Variables.....	21
3.2 Hypothesis of Research .....	22
3.3 Sampling Strategy .....	22
3.4 Process .....	24
3.5 Data Collection.....	25
3.6 Data Analysis.....	26
Chapter 4 - Analysis .....	27
4.1 Ghana's Future of Internet Activism .....	27
4.2 Growth of the middle class.....	28
4.3 Increased Social Awareness .....	29
4.4 Institutions That Support Internet Activism in Ghana.....	30
4.5 Main Activism Medium.....	32
4.6 Design Process For Proposed Solution .....	33

4.6.1 Empathize .....	33
4.6.2 Research .....	34
4.6.3 Define .....	37
4.6.4 Ideate .....	38
4.6.5 Prototype .....	39
4.6.6 Testing.....	44
Chapter 5 - Conclusion .....	45
Bibliography .....	46
Appendix .....	49
Interview Questions .....	49



## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **1.1 Activism**

To gain a better understanding of what activism is, let us first analyze what the word means. Before giving formal definitions of activism, I would like to share a story, which I believe is a good example of successful activism. In 2006, a group of farmers in Melancthon Township, Ontario, Canada entered a deal to sell their farmlands to a company called Highland Companies. Highland Companies is made up of a group of investors backed by a multi-billion dollar U.S.-based hedge fund (Borthwick 2012).

Highland Companies purchased lands from farmers that totaled about two thousand, four hundred (2,400) acres in total. These lands are some of the richest farmlands in Canada and as such were dedicated to farming. The company told the farmers that they only wanted the lands for potato farming. As weeks passed by, residents watched in dismay as nineteenth century farmhouses were burnt to the ground, woodlots that served as habitat for endangered birds were destroyed and the lands lay dormant. The residents and farmers of Melancthon grew suspicious of Highland Companies. They began probing to find out exactly what the company planned to do with their homelands. Eventually, they uncovered that Highland Companies had no plans to farm at all. The plan was to start a quarry. If the quarry had been built, it would have left a crater deeper than that of the Niagara Falls (CBC News 2012).

News of the Mega Quarry received sharp opposition from the farmers and residents of this small town. They quickly came together to

fight the move of Highland Companies. It seemed the odds were against them. Here was a group of people from a small farming community putting up a fight with millionaire and billionaire investors in the United States and Canada. The people of Melancthon started their fight by creating a website that allowed people to sign a petition against the construction of Mega Quarry. There were about one hundred and thirty thousand signed petitions that were handed over to the government. They then moved on to organizing protest marches around Ontario. They collaborated with chefs from all over Canada to organize an event they named Foodstock that brought over thirty thousand people to the area. However, their main weapon was to organize a series of concerts featuring big music names in Canada. The concerts and other events were intended to create awareness and to raise funds for their battle with Highland Companies.

The efforts of the residents, farmers and activists from across Canada paid off. In 2012, Highland Companies withdrew their application to build what would have been the largest quarry in Canada (CBC News 2012). The story of the Mega Quarry is a practical example of what activism is. Now, let us look at some formal definitions of activism. The Oxford Dictionary defines activism as the "the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change." The Cambridge dictionary puts it this way: "the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one." From these two definitions, we see that activism encompasses all the actions people take to bring about change. In the case of the Mega Quarry, the actions the people took with the aim of stopping the quarry from being built were

part of activism, in this case, social activism because it brought about social change.

## **1.2 Activism Versus Protests**

In studying and speaking to people about activism, the term is more often than not attributed to actions such as protests, street marches and riots. This is one of the biggest misconceptions about activism. Activism is a broad topic that employs different tools to accomplish the goal of activism. The goal of activism is to bring about change- social or political change. The desired change is not achieved just by protests or similar actions.

Good activism has to be thoughtful and planned to achieve the goal of causing change. I agree with Margaret Mead who once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Causing social or political change does not always require citizens taking to the streets.

Activism entails deliberate efforts, campaigns and involvement to achieve some set goals, usually political or social. The idea that activists are just people engaging in street protests and branding placards is a misrepresentation of what activism truly is. In his paper, *Organize to Win*, Jim Britell makes mention of the fact that "Civil disobedience is a last resort, never the first. Protests cannot replace or substitute for community organizing, filing lawsuits and appeals, etc." (2010).

## **1.3 History of the Internet in Ghana**

Ghana was one of the first African countries to be connected to the Internet and the second country in Sub-Saharan Africa to get full Internet

connectivity in 1995 (Quarshie and Ami-Narh 2012). By 1996, there were three Internet service providers (ISPs) operating in the country. The three were Network Computer Systems, Africa Online and Ghana Internet Services (Foster et. Al 2004). Like many other startups, the beginnings were humble with just a few people having access to the Internet. As the year 1999 ended, twenty thousand (20,000) Internet users were recorded in Ghana. By 2012, the number of Internet users in Ghana stood at approximately two million, eighty-five thousand five hundred and one (2,085,501) (Quarshie and Ami-Narh 2012).

Unlike many other African countries, the ISPs in Ghana were connected to the global Internet without having to go through the country's Post, Telegraph and Telephone (PTT). The ISPs had their own satellite connections. This allowed them to avoid depending on the country's national telecommunications company, then Ghana Telecom. In some other African countries, the ISPs had to depend on the national telecom for connection to the global Internet. This reliance gave the state great control over how the Internet was disseminated. The independence of the ISPs was probably one of the factors that led to the Internet boom in Ghana from 1998 to 2000. During these periods, there was a proliferation of Internet cafes across major cities of the country and more and more people had access to Internet services (Foster et. Al 2004).

#### **1.4 Activism in Ghana**

From the definition and explanations given above of what activism is, I can testify then that activism does thrive in Ghana. The presence of activists, professional and nonprofessionals, and their actions in the

Ghanaian society is made evident by taking a close look at the media. Personally, I have noticed that just by scanning through the different channels on my radio set in the mornings, I am greeted by an array of voices making public issues that they see as problems in the society. There are various radio shows in Ghana that are dedicated to debating and discussing issues the country faces. They host panelists who discuss and debate various issues covering social, political and economic topics of the nation. This kind of public discourse has a lot of times caused the larger society to join in in speaking and rising up against negative issues that pertain in the country. It seems to me that radio has been one of the most dominant activism mediums in Ghana via public discourse that take place on radio.

Radio has certainly played a major role and contributed to citizen participation in social and political issues. Citizen participation is one of the driving forces of activism. It feeds the people with power to get their voices out into public domain, knowing that their voices carry some power. Despite this benefaction of radio to the activism culture, a great number of people today, especially the youth are pointing to a new and better medium through which activism is carried out. This paper would look more into the Internet and new media taking over as the preferred medium for activism in Ghana.

### **1.5 Problem Statement**

The preceding sections of this paper have looked into activism: what it is and some of the mediums through which it is executed. We have also seen some of the forces that promote activism and its ensuing success or otherwise. The aim of this research is to investigate how the growth and

usage of the Internet in Ghana is affecting the way activism is done in Ghana and how the Internet can be used for activism in Ghana.

### **1.6 Objectives**

With this research, it is my goal to produce a document that delivers clear and reliable information on Internet-based activism in Ghana. It is my hope the final document would serve as a working blueprint for individuals who have the intention to start Internet-based activism or to extend their activism to Internet presence or use Internet tools. This document would most certainly not answer all questions there are about how the Internet can be used as a potent tool of activism. It is my goal is that it would answer the core and most fundamental questions of Internet activism in Ghana. Furthermore, the insights gained from this document would be used in developing a web application that fosters Internet activism in Ghana.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

1. What is the state of Internet activism in Ghana; is activism in Ghana growing?
2. Are there organizations and systems in place that support positive Internet activism in Ghana?
3. What are the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Internet activism?
4. How is the Internet currently being used for activism in Ghana?
5. Is the Internet an effective way to do activism in Ghana?

### **1.8 Hypothesis**

The general growth, development and increased patronization of the Internet in Ghana have created an environment conducive for the adaptation of a potent means of activism via the Internet.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Analyzing the Influence of the Internet In Activism**

The growth of the Internet over the years has been remarkable. The influence of the Internet has gone far past communication only. Today, the Internet is used in various fields including medicine, advertising, online-education, branding, retail and governance. The bounds of the capabilities of Internet solutions seem limitless. This section of the study would look into the effect of the Internet on activism in general. The question at hand here is how the Internet is being used to cause social change.

In his paper, *Texting, Tweeting, Mobile Internet: New Platforms for Democratic Debate in Africa*, Tom Sarrazin states "One phenomenon which has been linked to both the proliferation of new technologies as well as an underlying social change in human societies is the rise of social media"(Sarrazin 2011). It is virtually impossible to speak of the role of the Internet in activism without talking about the impact of social media. Social media has been the backbone of Internet based and Internet-aided activism. Facebook, twitter and YouTube have played major roles in social changes and revolutions that have taken place around the world. However, the involvement of these mediums in activism and social change is largely unpremeditated (Sarrazin 2011). It is highly unlikely that social networking sites like Facebook and twitter were created with activism in mind. In my opinion, what has made social media a potent tool for activism is its ability to connect individuals to other individuals and to connect individual to organization and groups. Social media presents people with a more organized and fast means of communication. This



quality of the Internet brings with it another potent characteristic of the Internet- the ability to mobilize.

## **2.2 Mobilization**

Mobilization has been one of the most widely talked about uses of online technologies in activism (Surman and Reilly 2003). Mobilization, in this context, refers to the ability of the Internet to bring people together for a particular reason, whether in virtual communities or physical in physical locations. In my opinion, there would be no talk about the Internet being a potent too for activism if the Internet did not hold this power: the power of mobilization. This is supported by empirical evidence in various activism feats that have transpired around the world. It is close to impossible to speak of the impact of Internet new media on activism in modern history without speaking of the protests against World Trade Organization in Seattle, 1993 and the Multilateral Agreement on Investments in France, 1997. The use of e-mail and the web for the Seattle WTO protests and the global fight against the MAI show how successfully the net has integrated with traditional campaigns and protests (Surman and Reilly 2003). New media played a vital role in the organization of the WTO protests. The Internet was considered as a less costly way to mobilize and it also had less obstructions. Beyond this, the Internet allowed for people outside public institutions and political organizations to join the movement (Siddall 2010). Even up to 1999, there were still numerous opportunities for the ordinary citizen to join anti-WTO movements online. In the fight against the MAI, heads of NGOs and other activist built a strong network of anti-MIA movements by

maintaining constant and steady spreading of information, interpreted facts and arguments (Tieleman 1999).

### **2.3 Communication**

In an article for Al-Jazeera, Joseph Stiglitz said something worth reiterating: "Globalization and modern technology now enables social movements to transcend borders as rapidly as ideas can" (Stiglitz 2011). Certainly, where a group of people with a common goal of creating activism to bring about some form of change, communication would be vital. Communication online is different from the one-way communication of television, radio, and newspapers because online users can respond to messages in real time, not just receive them (Sheedy 2011). The real-time nature of Internet technologies and social media creates the opportunity for a more enhanced communication medium. With the constant development of new media platforms, digital communication has become more real-time. Online instant messaging, chat rooms and commenting on posts have made communication online more interactive. This feature is true for mobile phone users too. Mobile phones have contributed greatly to the instant nature of Internet-powered communication.

The communication opportunities provided by the Internet is closely connected to the ability to mobilize people for a particular movement via the Internet. Communication is key to achieve organizational strength (Sibbersen 2012). Both mobile phones and the Internet provide exciting new opportunities for one-to-one as well as one-to-many communication (Sarazin 2011). One user can reach hundreds and thousands of people.

This further fuels the ability to organize. Even beyond the scopes of Internet activism and mobilization, hundreds of people are meeting new people everyday via the Internet. One characteristic of the Internet that promotes mobilization is anonymity. Internet users are able to maintain and control personal anonymity and weak ties with other individuals (Storck 2012). This is highly advantageous for strangers to work together. People may open up and cooperate better when they feel that their identity is somewhat protected.

New media technologies also allow activists and ordinary citizens to go around physical blocks and hindrances put up by governing institutions and regimes (Sibbernson 2012). One would see this by studying the Cameroon protests.

In February 2008, the youths of Cameroon took to the streets of Cameroon. The protestors were dissatisfied with economic conditions and constant increase in fuel prices in the country. Most of these young people were born during the reign of President Paul Biya, who was prime minister since 1975 and president since 1982. It must be noted that in Cameroon, demonstrations are illegal. Most people of Cameroon were taken by surprise by the uproar of the youth. This was by far the most violent protest staged by Cameroonian citizens in recent times. What I want to point out however is how the government responded in the heat of the protests. The government shut down major private media houses comprising television, radio and print media (Suifon 2008).

In February 2011, there was yet another rise of anti-government protests in Cameroon. This time, the protestors wanted their president out. During the protests, the government again shut down all private media

houses. Foreign and international journalists were not allowed to operate in the country. There was a media blackout (Sarazin 2011). All international media houses had no unusual report concerning Cameroon. Search engines gave no report apart from football. However, twitter was telling a different story. Tweets coming from Cameroon insisted that there was a revolution in full swing. These tweets drew attention to Cameroon and before long, international human rights organizations descended on Cameroon. In October 2011, prior to the presidential elections, the government banned suspended access to twitter in Cameroon (Sarazin 2011).

### **2.3 Online Publishing**

Even in isolation or with an initial intent of working solo, one Internet user can gain the attention of other users online and spark off reactions that would ultimately lead to activism. In studying into the benefits of the Internet it is very that online publishing has greatly increased activist activities around the world.

In addition to professional journalists and writers who have secured for themselves an Internet presence, there are numerous people around the globe who have become "Internet journalists and writers" reporting and writing about issues in their societies. This relatively new trend of publishing online has developed to be a vital supplement of print publication. In many cases it has not been just a supplement but has actually replaced it. The days of sending out printed newsletters are rapidly dying and being replaced by electronic format versions (Surmann and Reilly 2003).

Online publication has been the backbone of citizen journalism. The rise of citizen journalism is primarily a result of technology (Kelly 2009). Advances in technology have made online information very mobile and portable. The ease of sharing online publications has contributed largely to the growth of activist activities around the world. Online publication also contributed to the surge in the number of alternative media channels that tell the stories that don't make it into the mainstream media. This is because the low cost of creating a credible web presence has allowed them to 'exist' without the traditional trappings like an office, staff and even funding. This is their strength and their power, which translated into rapid mobilizations of large numbers of people, and the ability to rapidly spread a message around the world (Surmann and Reilly 2003).

In the past (before the introduction of the Internet and web technologies), ordinary people did not have the avenue to voice their findings and opinions about a matter to a large group of listeners (or readers). In order for people to reach hundreds of people, it required capital-intensive investments in printing presses, television transmitters and radio transmitters. This made the 20th century the century of wealthy media barons (Kelly 2009). That has changed now. The material requirements for effective information and communication production are now owned by numbers of individuals several orders of magnitude larger than the number of owners of the basic means of information production and exchange a mere two decades ago (Benkler, 2006).

## **2.4 Citizen Journalism**

One major new feature the Internet and information communication technologies have brought to activism, social movement and social

change is the creation of citizen journalism. The case was not always so. Some years ago, before the widespread of information communication technologies, participation in social movements was traditionally limited to "professional activists," today general citizens who may not consider themselves activists are participating in online mobilization (Hara, 2008). For the first time, everybody can be a journalist. Professional activists did not start the activism movements against WTO in Seattle. The ordinary, everyday citizens rose up to the task. Seattle was described as 'the birth of a global citizen's movement for a new global democracy (Gopal 2001). Citizen journalism is widely viewed as an informal term and there are debates whether these people can actually be called journalists in all rights of the word. The answer is unclear and I would not attempt to answer it. Not for now, at least. However, Egyptian Citizen journalists made an undeniable statement to the world that they are a force to be reckoned with (Sheedy 2011). Theoretically speaking, citizen journalism has been in existence for a very long time. At least the term is not new. It has been stated that the roots of citizen journalism can be found in the debate over the normative nature of journalism. However, practically speaking, it was not until the advent of new media technologies that it exploded globally (Banda, 2010). Technology has been the major catalyst in the revival of citizen journalism around the world. Tilly noted, "It [technological innovation] fits a trend whereby technological developments decrease intrinsic costs of mobilization and organization but increase extrinsic costs of repression" (Tilly, 1978).

## **2.5 Public Discourse**

In his paper *New Media Power: Internet and Global Activism*,

Bennett related "Thus far, I have contended that the Internet is not inherently transformative of either human communication or social and political relations. Rather, it is the interaction between the Internet and its users -- and their interactions, in turn, in material social contexts -- that constitute the matrix within which we can locate the power of the new media to create new spaces for discourse and coordinated action" (Bennett 2003). The Internet gave birth to the advent of new media and social media, which in turn have become a public space for individuals to interact and share information and ideas.

The Internet has provided a platform for people with access to engage in discussions, debates and public discourse. Even the Internet's predecessor, the ARPANET was built as an avenue for the promotion of a particular discourse – the Advanced Research Project Agency's discourse concerning the American Scientific community (Agre, 1998). As far back as when the Internet was still merely a lab experiment, the quality of fostering discourse was attached to its various known benefits. This is evident today where more and more people have become comfortable with letting their opinions be heard on online media platforms. The global scope of the Internet and new media allows for conversations that transcend geographical boundaries. The Internet also provides relative anonymity for online users and opinion contributors, which in turn lead to a relatively more empowered and uninhibited public opinion (Papacharissi, 2008).

As public opinion gets stronger, the will of the people becomes more important and potent. Irene Ward in reflecting this phenomenon

said, "We can all imagine that if the Internet and computerized telecommunications continue to grow then social change will follow... " (Ward, 1997). In the realm of social media, the people have the opportunity to bring their opinions to public attention. Without social media, this would be an opportunity available to only a few citizens because the mass media does not offer these benefits. Due to commercial purposes and a capitalist economy, mainstream media content usually compromise rational and public discourse (Habermas, 2004).

The introduction of hashtag technology has significantly increased the Internet's convenience for discourse and discussions. A hashtag is a word or phrase that is prefixed with the hash symbol without spacing. Hashtags make it possible to group messages under topics or headers. This feature allows easier search of trending topics on the Internet.

In Ghana, one of the most popular hashtags ever has been the #ghanaDecides or #ghDecides hashtags. Both hashtags were started by the Ghana Decides team during the 2012 presidential elections. A great number of Ghanaians engaged in online public discourse and debated using this hashtag. All people had to do was include the hashtag in their messages posted online, mainly via Facebook and twitter. The Ghana Decides team, in an interview said they believe that social media "contributed to the political discourse" in Ghana's 2012 elections by providing accurate information and analysis on issues, and steering conversations to more in-depth and issue-based discussions (Abdulai, 2013). On the other hand, people who wanted to get information about the elections online and to know the views of people concerning the



elections just had to run a search using the Ghana Decides hashtags.

## **2.6 Internet Activism in Ghana**

Internet activism is obviously not an established activity in Ghana. However, it also blatantly obvious that is not nonexistent in the West African nation. It is a new phenomenon, however, it is catching up with the people fast. In this section, we are going to look at some examples of Internet activism in Ghana. Here we look at cases and events that have adapted the Internet in an attempt to spread awareness on a particular issue, to mobilize support for a social or political cause with the hope of creating change.

### **2.6.1 Ghana Decides**

Ghana Decides is fundamentally a nonpartisan social media project that focused on educating the population about election and encouraging people to visit polling stations and vote. The project was started by an organization of bloggers living in Ghana called Blogging Ghana and funded by Star Ghana. The folks at Blogging Ghana wanted to foster a more informed electorate to promote a free, fair and safe 2013 election. A more informed electorate would have better discernment into what are the best practices of the election process. This would also make the electorate more enlightened of the power and consequences of their vote.

The Ghana Decides team employed social media to cover the whole election process. They devised a system that share information and redirected traffic from one platform to another, creating a ripple effect. In addition to the official website, twelve other platforms were involved in the Ghana Decides project. Facebook and Twitter were the big players.

YouTube and Flickr too played a significant role in disseminating information. With the power of social media, they were able to share news, photos and videos of events with Ghanaian voters, citizens and international observers. Social media was not just used for updating the public on election issues. The team also stimulated debates and public discourse on election issues especially around points raised by the various aspiring candidates. Discussions were promoted via twitter using the hashtags #GhDecides and #GhanaDecides. The team also made use of Google Hangouts for this cause.

Ghana Decides also implemented sub-campaigns during the election period. These were social media campaigns that aimed at getting Ghanaian citizens to get more involved with the election process. An example of such a campaign was the iRegistered campaign. This campaign was designed to get Ghanaians of voting age to go out and get registered to make them eligible to vote. Once a person got registered, they updated their Facebook or twitter status with the #iRegistered hashtag. Some persons even uploaded photos of themselves with their cards along with the update. This campaign also afforded people the opportunity to share their experiences with the new biometric voter registration.

The Ghana decides project became a potent movement. It seemed as though it was a nationwide crusade. Ghana Decides hashtags seized the Ghanaian Internet space. And even though social media was the primary tool, the project was strongly represented on the television and radio. The team understood that in order to be truly effective, they had to reach out to both online and offline members of the society. At the end of

the day, an estimated 4,000 tweets were recorded with the #iRegistered hashtag. The Ghana Decides team published 1200 tweets, 2 blog Posts and 6 YouTube videos on the biometric voter registration process. In total 200 people expressively attested of registering as a result of the campaign and 451 Ghanaians sent in photos of their registration cards. In the end, the #iRegistered Twitter coverage reached 10,137 Twitter accounts, with a corresponding exposure of 30,353 impressions (Abdulai, 2012).

### **2.6.2 Odekro**

Odekro seeks to promote transparency, provides online access to public records and empowers citizens to demand accountability from public officials especially parliament. Odekro is a web application launched by Hutspace a technology solutions company located in Accra with funding and support from society.org. Odekro has been referred to as the Parliamentary monitoring site for Ghana.

Odekro in the Akan chieftaincy system refers to the lowest hierarchy for a sub-divisional chief. He is responsible for the daily administration of a town and responsible for the welfare of the people under his rule. He makes sure that the needs of his people are met and they are well represented in the kingdom. Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected to ensure that the needs of the electorate are duly represented in the decisions and policies of government. Therefore the Odekro app monitors the MPs and makes their work and actions made known to the general public who have the power to take them out if the MPs are deemed not to be doing their work properly.

What Odekro does is to make the Hansards which are the detailed reports of parliamentary debate proceedings available online in digital formats of the Odekro platform. So now, the average Ghanaian citizen can log on to the Odekro platform and monitor what their Member of Parliament is doing in parliament to promote development in their respective communities. The Ghanaian citizen can know if the MP is actually working to achieve the promises he has made to his people whom he represents. By doing this, Odekro is empowering the citizens with information; synthesizing them to political and social issues.

There are other apps like 233Law that contains the constitution of Ghana and explains the various laws in the constitution. There are even more application that are being built to facilitate the digital activism movement in Ghana.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

### **3.1 Variables**

This research is a study that seeks to explore and analyze how the Internet is used for activism purposes in Ghana. The main goal is to gain better understanding of the topic. The study was carried out to acquire an in-depth understanding of human behavior regarding the Internet and activism. For all these reasons, this research study is for all purposes a qualitative research study. Therefore, this study employed a qualitative research methodology. The variables of the research study are the factors that this study sought to measure. The topic under consideration is "Internet Activism In Ghana." Thus, the variables here are the Internet and its effect on activism.

#### **1. Independent Variable: The Internet and its growth in Ghana.**

The independent variable is the variable that is selected by the researcher (experimenter) in order to find out its perceived relationship to a corresponding outcome of the research. The independent variable is the variable manipulated by the researcher. In this study, the element being investigated is the Internet. It is being investigated to find out how it is used for activism purposes in Ghana. 'The Internet and its growth in Ghana' is the variable that has been selected by the researcher to study. This makes it the independent variable.

#### **2. Dependent Variable: Activism in Ghana.**

This variable is influenced by the independent variable. The dependent variable of any research is the variable that is measured as an outcome. It is the variable that is measured in a research

study. Under this study, it is the variable that is affected by changes in the growth of the Internet and how people use the Internet. Thus, the dependent variable is 'activism in Ghana.'

### **3.2 Hypothesis of Research**

The general growth, development and increased patronization of the Internet in Ghana have led to the adaptation of a more potent means of activism via the Internet.

### **3.3 Sampling Strategy**

This is a qualitative research study and thus would adapt qualitative research sampling methods. Before the decision on what type of sampling method to use was reached, the research questions of this study had to be analyzed:

1. What is the state of Internet activism in Ghana; is activism in Ghana growing?
2. Are there organizations and systems in place that support positive Internet activism in Ghana?
3. What are the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Internet activism?
4. How is the Internet currently being used for activism in Ghana?
5. Is the Internet an effective way to do activism in Ghana?

After analyzing the research questions, it was concluded that it would not be necessary to try to select a random, representative sample. The reason for this is due to the nature of the research. Some people in the population (Ghanaians) would have better knowledge of the topic than

others. Therefore, it would be more expedient to select the people who would be of greater value to the purpose of the research.

Supposing a random sample was selected, there is no guarantee that the potential respondents would have in-depth knowledge in activism or Internet activism. This would make data gained of little relevance. For this reason, the sampling method adapted for this study is judgment sampling, which is also known as purposeful sampling. Judgment sampling is a sampling method in which the researcher deliberately selects the most productive sample to answer the research questions. In this form of sampling, participants would be selected for their specific knowledge or experience in the field of activism and Internet activism. Therefore, the sample would have some elements of critical case samples and key-informant samples. This sampling method was used because some potential subjects would be better than others for the purpose of this study.

Interviews would be carried out with people who have technical and experiential knowledge of activism, Internet activism and the Internet itself. The system of this methodology allowed respondents to recommend other people who have key information that would be relevant to the study thus making use of snowball sampling.

There are individuals with expert knowledge in matters concerning the Internet, activism and social change. In addition, there are people who are actively involved in activism in Ghana. These include journalists, bloggers and editors of newspapers and magazines. There also individuals like lecturers and professors in Ghana that have in-depth understanding about the social and political terrain of Ghana. These are people who have

studied the social life of Ghana and its people over the years and have knowledge that would benefit this study. This study also made use of snowball sampling methods that allowed respondents recommend other potential participants who had expert knowledge that benefited this study.

### **3.4 Process**

At this point, the research questions of the study would have been clearly constructed. Guided by the research questions, the data collection commenced. The process involved in acquiring data was largely constructed around the research questions. Guided by this knowledge, respondents were chosen and research questions were formulated. Another element that would aid in constructing the research process is the knowledge gained from the literature review.

1. Research questions and literature review was analyzed

The initial action taken in the methodology process was to study the findings from review of existing literature to ascertain which of the findings have answers to the research questions of this study. This analysis threw more light on which areas or questions to focus more on during primary data collection.

2. Tools to use

Interviews were employed as the main tool for primary data collection. Interviews were used in this study because they give a more in-depth and detailed information from respondents

3. Decision on how to reach respondents



After taking decisions on the sampling method and data collection instruments, the next step was to decide how to reach potential respondents. The first alternative was to get in touch Blogging Ghana members who in turn pointed to others who would be helpful in the study.

4. Material and logistic needed to carry out interviews were acquired which included a voice recording application.
5. A schedule and time plan for data collection was created.
6. Interviewed respondents

### **3.5 Data Collection**

As stated earlier, the method of data collection used in this study was interviews. Interviews were conducted in a manner so as to gain as much information as possible from the respondents.

- First step taken was be to make the respondents feel at ease. We would not jump right into the interview questions from the start. The process would begin with a more informal question say, about the respondents nature of work. Personal questions would not be asked at this stage.
- The interview questions would be designed such that it would flow from generalized questions to ones that are more specific. This would be the logical structure for all the interviews conducted.
- Respondents would be made aware of the structure of the interview questions before the actual interview

begins. Interviewees would also be offered a brief introductory outline of the areas to be covered.

- The interviews would consist of a mix of both open-ended and close-ended questions. However, emphasis would be on open-ended questions to allow respondents to provide depth in their answers. Close-ended questions would be brought in when necessary and also to bring some variation in the questioning.
- To facilitate the flow of the interview and give a more natural feel, the construction of the questions would be clear spoken English. Formal, written English would be avoided.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

This stage was the last step of the research methodology. Findings (interviews) were studied into detail by the investigator. The analysis paid attention to and looked out for patterns that may run through the data collected. Contradictory issues would also be noted.

## **Chapter 4 - Analysis**

### **4.1 Ghana's Future of Internet Activism**

Internet activism has not caught up with the majority of Ghanaians. There are various reasons for this phenomenon, which, would be discussed later in this chapter. However, what I would like to focus on at this moment is the potential widespread of Ghanaian Internet activism in the near future. Currently, there are about two million Internet users in Ghana out of about twenty-four million people. Sixty-six percent of Ghana's population is under 30 years. There are about one million, five hundred thousand Facebook users in Ghana of which, youth form a majority. Ghana's Internet culture is driven and sustained by the youth of the country.

Just like Internet adaptation in the country, the youthful population of the country dominates Internet activism. This indicates that, all things being equal, Internet activism is going to keep increasing in Ghana as the youth are going to be the majority of Ghana's population for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the youth of today would be the older generation in the future. Which means there would be a sustained patronization of the Internet and the opportunities it presents. The youth are grossly engaged in using social media platforms like Facebook, twitter and Instagram to initiate and sustain relationships. The urban youth of Ghana virtually live online. The intensity of this is even further compounded by the wide adaptation of smartphones with Internet powered technology and apps that make it even easier to stay connected.

The youth of Ghana are the tech savvy fraction of the population, constantly trying out and adapting new forms of technology. In speaking

with college students in Accra, majority of respondents said they could not imagine their lives without the Internet. Many of these youth rely on the Internet for schoolwork, entertainment and news. A lot of respondents admitted that they keep their Facebook and/or twitter pages open while working on other things on the Internet. Almost all youth respondents in college admitted that they rely heavily on social media especially twitter for news updates. When they see or read something interesting, they in turn rebroadcast it with their own online connections. Incidentally, majority of activist movements around the world have been dominated by the youth. Examples are in Cameroon, 'Enough is Enough' in Nigeria, Occupy Wall Street in USA, Arab Spring in North Africa and the Middle East. The list can go on and on. These activist movements were sustained by the activities of the youth. The same can be said for Ghana; out of the ten people actively engaged in Internet activism I came into contact with, every one of them were less than forty years.

#### **4.2 Growth of the middle class**

Ghana has been reported to have a fast growing middle class. In 2011, Ghana was the fastest growing economy in the world and in 2013 it was the tenth fastest growing economy in the world. The World Bank rates Ghana as a lower middle income nation as stated on Ghana's profile on the World Bank website. In a study carried out by Grail Research, it was published that about 46.6% of Ghana's population belong to the middle class (2013). Theoretically, the increase in middle income means that more and more people are enjoying higher levels of prosperity. More Ghanaians are gaining access to resources that improve their quality of life. One of these resources is the Internet.

In 2011, about half of the population owned mobile phones. Today, the mobile phone penetration in Ghana is estimated to be one hundred percent. Car ownership in Ghana has risen by 85% in the past 5 years. Other things being equal, these metrics are an indicator of a rise in the standard of living for Ghanaians. More and more Ghanaians are gaining the resources to get connected to the Internet.

#### **4.3 Increased Social Awareness**

Social awareness is one of the major catalysts of activism. People are able to do much more when they are equipped with the right information and understanding. Ghanaians have become more conscious of the matters that shape their society. People want to know what leaders are doing with the power that has been entrusted to them by them, the people. The Ghanaian now shows keen concern about the decisions taken by leaders. There is also a heightened scrutiny of government by the average civilian citizen.

There has been an increase in the number of blogs owned by Ghanaians, especially the youth. This phenomenon is made evident by the growth in membership of Blogging Ghana. Blogging Ghana for instance, embarks on various projects that aim at increasing awareness of the general public. Individual members of Blogging Ghana like Jemila Abdulai and Kajsa Hallberg Adu write about issues that inform the Ghanaian society on pressing issues of society and governance. Kajsa's blog talks about Ghanaian politics, education, places, people among other things. She analyzes these issues as an educator and concerned citizen. With vast knowledge in social and political issues she delivers highly relevant knowledge to the attentive Ghanaians who visit her blog. This

sensitization is creating ripple effects. More youthful citizens are asking questions and putting their findings on social media, further increasing awareness.

#### **4.4 Institutions That Support Internet Activism in Ghana**

There are a number of institutions based in Ghana that have shown support to people actively involved in Internet activism. They may not be the ideal number, that is, there are not very many of these institutions as compared to countries that have stronger Internet activism. Out of all the institutions found by this research that support activism and Internet activism directly and/or indirectly, none of them is a government institution. This is not to say there are no government institutions that do support Internet activism. However, during this research and study, no governmental institution was or had given any active support to the individual Internet activists interviewed or the various organizations they belong to.

One of the most popular organizations known for Internet activism in Ghana is Blogging Ghana. Blogging Ghana is an organization of bloggers and social media users in Ghana, outside Ghana and covering Ghana or the Ghanaian experience. This network of bloggers has a common goal of promoting citizen journalism and educating the general public in Ghana on the opportunities of social media. The Blogging Ghana website features a blog that serves as an aggregator of all individual blogs of members which pulls new audiences to the individual member blogs. The content of individual blogs vary widely from technology to education, entertainment to business and news to activism. Blogging Ghana has initiated and been engaged in several projects that fall in line with

activism. Apart from Ghana Decides, which has already been spoken about, Blogging Ghana started a project called 'Inform Ghana'. Inform Ghana, supported by Star Ghana, is a project aimed at fostering information sharing in Ghana to promote a better-informed citizenry. The project focuses on matters related to health, education and governance. Inform Ghana works with Civil Society Organizations who are engaged in activities that fall under these three topics and helps them get their information to reach more people through the use of social media and other media partners.

Star Ghana is the next organization to be considered in this study. Star Ghana is probably the biggest and most influential nonpartisan organization aimed at promoting transparency and citizen participation in social and political issues. It raises funds pooled from multiple donors such as the European Union, DANIDA, USAID and DFID, which aim at increasing the influence of civil society in governance.

Star Ghana has identified the media as a key proponent in the campaign for change, which makes it, in my opinion, the biggest and most potent organization that backs Internet activism in Ghana. Star Ghana funded two of Blogging Ghana's major projects: Ghana Decides and Inform Ghana. As at September 2013, the organization was supporting four other institution that use new media as a tool to promote greater access of citizens to information and services. These beneficiary institutions are Penplusbytes, Blogging Ghana, Ashesi University and Savanna Signatures.

Ghana Think Foundation is a Ghanaian think-thank that is Africa-Focused. The think-thank is technically an online community that serves

as a platform to mobilize open-minded, freethinking, talented Africans living in Africa and the diaspora to share developmental ideas for the benefit of Ghana and ultimately Africa. The think-tank also runs a blog called GhanaConscious which serves as a web portal for like minded Ghanaians with a passion for development and innovation to stay connected through the medium of the Internet. Apart from the aforementioned organizations, there are other organizations like Imani Ghana and PenPlusBytes that are taking advantage of the Internet to increase awareness and the access to information on governance and developmental issues.

#### **4.5 Main Activism Medium**

During this research, there was a split of opinions among respondents as to which is the main medium for activism in Ghana. Half held on to the belief that social media has become the main medium for activism whiles the other half believed that radio was the main medium. However, it was unanimously agreed that if you want to reach majority of the population, use the radio for activism.

Radio in Ghana has hundred percent geographical reach. If you want to reach the people in the villages and the countryside, your best bet is to use the radio. Despite this quality of radio in Ghana, the argument in favor of the Internet (social media) has got some credibility. Most of the people active online are the educated fraction of the Ghanaian society. These are the people who have the relevant knowledge, the skills and ability to engage in more effective and meaningful activism.



As the citizens of Ghana get to understand the power and influence they can wield almost freely by taking advantage of the opportunities the Internet offers, digital activism would spread and grow exponentially,

## **4.6 Design Process For Proposed Solution**

### **4.6.1 Empathize**

To properly design an application that would be useful to the ultimate users, a study was conducted in Accra where most of Ghana's Internet users are concentrated. The topic under consideration was 'Internet Activism in Ghana'. To gain a deeper understanding into the matter, the information technology landscape and culture in Ghana was observed. In this observation, the goal was to find patterns and make sense of the relation between the Internet, new media, social media, civil society, democracy and governance.

At the time this study was in process, a small-scale technology revolution was already on the way in Ghana. I would not call it a technology boom but it was certainly a strong growth of innovation. International observers like the UK's news and media company, The Independent, have called Ghana a mini Silicon Valley. Speaking of Silicon Valley, last year (i.e. 2013). Ghanaian tech startup Dropifi made its way to Silicon Valley. It received the accolade of being the first African Startup to be accepted as a member of the Silicon Valley based 500 Startups program.

It was and still is evident that information technology, the Internet and social media were advancing in Ghana. The question was how to take advantage of this growth in adaptation of Internet usage to create a

solution to some of the problems Internet activism faces in Ghana. The design process took into consideration active players of digital activism to find out what were their main problems.

#### **4.6.2 Research**

Research was carried out in Accra, Ghana. This was a typical qualitative research, which sought to describe the nature of Internet activism in Ghana. The research also sought to make known what were the problems and challenges faced by Digital Activists in order to design a solution to the problem that would be discovered by the research.

The research started off by conducting a general study into what digital activism entails. In doing so, we gain a better understanding of what makes a successful Internet activism campaign. Theoretical concepts that underlie activism and Internet activism were studied. At the end of studies, five factors of Internet activism were drawn up. They are:

1. Mobilization
2. Communication
3. Online Publishing
4. Citizen Journalism
5. Public Discourse

Whatever solution was to be designed must have at least three (a majority) of these features. These five features from the research conducted were the main factors that made activism via social media a potent tool in achieving change.

As part of the research, Ghanaians involved in digital activism were interviewed. The interviews conducted were technically extensive, open discussions about the politics of digital activism of Ghana in the twenty-

first century. Questions such as "Would digital activism succeed in Ghana?" "What are the oppositions?" and "Why would internet activism succeed in Ghana?" were the heart of the discussions. From the results of the interviews, these problems were common to all respondents:

1. Lack of funding

Like many start-up businesses and initiatives, the biggest worry of most pioneers is start-up capital. And in a small developing country like Ghana, money is always a major challenge. Many of the Ghanaians actively involved in activism are technologists. People like Joseph Dankwah is a young technology entrepreneur whose start-up's main business is to develop software applications is one of the people endeavoring to take advantage of the Internet's ability to bring about social and change. Mr. Dankwah has been working on a number of apps that would perform activist functions. He explained that one of the reasons they have not gone live yet is the lack of funding.

2. Policies

Policies are meant to empower the citizens of nations and organizations. The ultimate goal of policies is to ensure the holistic wellbeing of the citizenry. From the analysis of this research, it was discovered that there are lack of policies that empower the citizens to query and question power with the confidence that they are protected by strong national policies. One policy that is lacking in Ghana is a law for free access to information. In cases, where there are policies, the policies are not made to work efficiently. A typical

case in Ghana is the traffic laws of Ghana. The laws exist but are not enforced nor adhered to.

### 3. Culture of Ghanaians

The Ghanaian culture was one of the discussion points that kept coming up in talks with interviewees. Ghana has been famed to be one of the most peaceful countries in Africa, if not in the world. This nature of Ghanaians has come with its costs and benefits. One of its costs is made evident by activism. Generally speaking, Ghanaians are not the people to be actively involved in activism. The average Ghanaian tends to be indifferent about the issues around them. This attitude is changing, however the change is restricted to just a minute fraction of the educated population. Ghanaians can complain a lot but would not actually rise up to question authority or engage in a protest. Dr. Stephen Armah, an economics professor at Ashesi University College says, "All his life, it is only in Ghana that citizens do not react in protest to increases in taxes." The average Ghanaian would say, "What would be, would be" and life goes on.

### 4. Education

Education is a major factor in all aspects of life in our modern day. It is a major determinant of the standard of living of a nation. Education produces informed citizenry. Informed citizens are empowered with knowledge and in a better position to demand their rights in a more effective way. There are still a lot of Ghanaians who are not educated. Currently, Ghana's literacy rate stands at seventy percent (Index Mundi, 2013). There are also a great number of Ghanaians with formal education but are not well

informed, ignorant about their rights and powers as a citizen. This phenomenon renders a lot of Ghanaians handicapped in the pursuit for change.

#### 5. Publicity and relevant reactions

From discussions with key stakeholders of Ghanaian Internet activism, one major grievance common to all was the ultimate reactions a campaign or project would set off. The sentiment gathered was that a lot of people are facing undesirable situations. Majority of these people who have access to the Internet would log on to Facebook or Twitter and there share their grievances. Such posts attract comment and attention from other users online which ensues in an online public discourse. All this is great but the compelling question that comes after this is “and then what?” What is the ultimate end of that post? How much audience can such a post rake in to generate enough power? What is the guarantee that the people with power to cause change would be audience to such a post?

#### **4.6.3 Define**

After the research stage, one of the above problems had to be selected as the main problem to solve. Given the resources available to the author to solve one of these problems, problem 5 above was selected. This is the problem of building audience and attracting the relevant problem solvers. After identifying the main problem to tackle, a problem Statement was crafted:

*The goal of this design process is to create a compelling product that takes advantage of Internet powered technology to direct grievances and*

*issues of society authored by citizens to institutions and organizations who care and have the power to solve such problems. In the end, the final product ought to empower citizens and to make the opinions of the everyday Ghanaian count in decision-making.*

#### **4.6.4 Ideate**

In drawing up ideas for the final design, the problem statement served as the main guide. Secondly, the features of Internet activism that were realized from the research study, namely:

1. Mobilization
2. Communication
3. Online Publishing
4. Citizen Journalism
5. Public Discourse

It was previously stated that the final solution should incorporate at least three of these features.

After brainstorming, the following potential solutions were arrived at:

1. An online petition system

A website that would allow the everyday citizen to write a petition to a particular organization to change or stop a particular project, event or policy. The petition would be sent to the target organization after the petition has accrued enough signatures. This idea was dropped because from research, it was discovered that there was an online petition system being built in Ghana by one of the technology start-ups.

2. A web/mobile app that promotes citizen journalism

This proposed solution would allow users to publish stories about issues that are going on around them. This idea was dropped because there was a lot of citizen journalism being done by independent bloggers. Thousands of other citizens were also involved in citizen journalism via Facebook and Twitter.

3. A mobile app that educates citizens about their rights and powers and also synthesizes them on current social and political issues. This idea was also dropped because through research, we found the existence of apps such as a mobile app of the Ghanaian constitution and 233Law.
4. An app that bridges the gap between public discourses on radios with activism activities than online. This idea was also dropped because an appropriate functionality was not settled upon.

At the end of brainstorming, a final solution was settled upon that incorporated some functionalities of citizen journalism and online petition system plus news sharing. The proposed solution is called Voicer.

#### **4.6.5 Prototype**

Voicer is a web and mobile app designed to give users the opportunity to get their posts on social and political issues to reach a larger audience, some of who may have the power and the resources to solve the issue if it needs solving. The administrators of Voicer would do this by going the extra mile of manually channeling posts to relevant people and organizations if it receives enough votes.

If a particular post receives the minimum votes prerequisite, which would be explained shortly, the post is automatically shared with partner radio stations, TV stations, journalists, individual blogs, Voicer Facebook page and a Voicer Twitter account. Voicer would work at forging relationships with partners who have platforms to reach the public whether through print, electronic or new media. Beyond this, administrators of Voicer would analyze the post and search for organizations and institutions related to the need presented in the post and present a petition to the organization(s).

The minimum number of votes required to validate a post to be shared would not be a fixed number. It would work according to the simple majority principle. By theory, that means that if a post receives fifty percent or more votes of the total number of people registered on Voicer at the time of the post, it would be shared. However, Voicer would work with forty percent of votes, taking into consideration redundant users.

Screen shots of the designed prototype are shown below:



Land Page

Voicer



Share your story with the world

Restart

Highlight

Notes

Is there an issue in your society you are unhappy about?  
Let's make a difference. All it takes is 3 simple steps:

- 1



Share your story
- 2



Your story gets 200 votes
- 3



We share your story with the world  
And with people who matter

email

Password


Login

or

Sign Up

Land Page

Voicer



Name

Password

Forgot Password?

Login

Restart

Highlight

Notes

# Sign Up For Free

Join The Movement

First Name

Last Name

Email

Password

Re-Enter Password

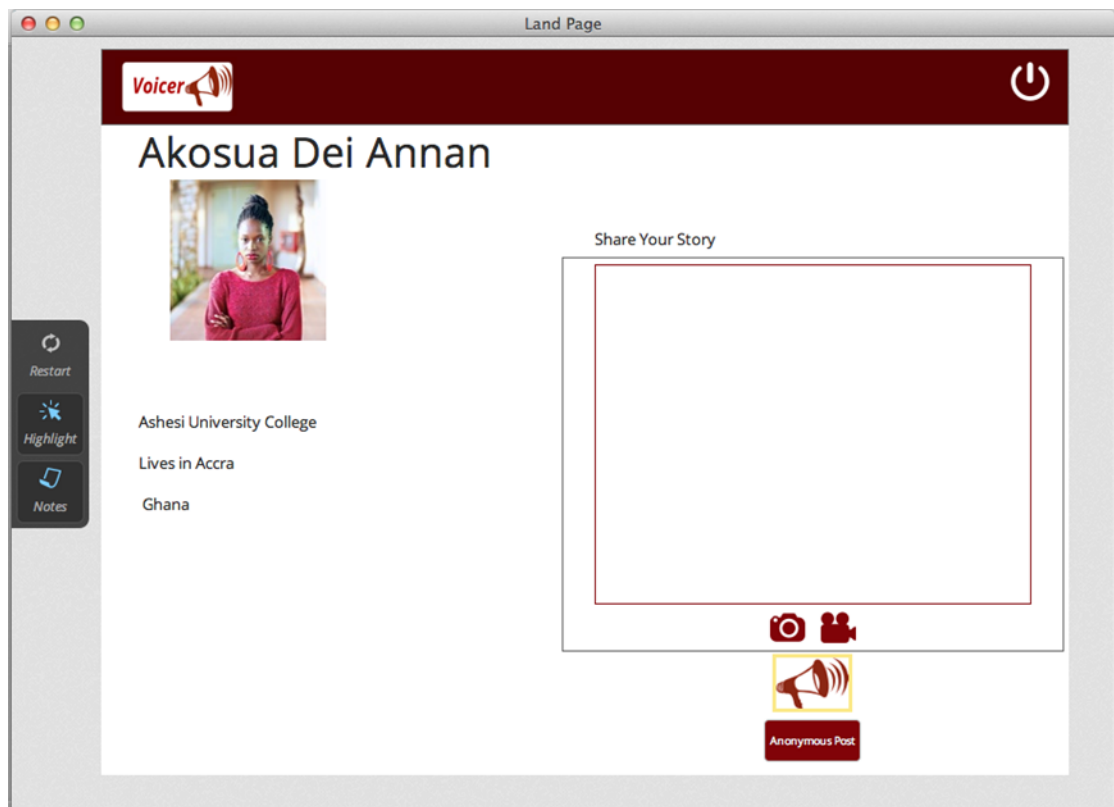
City

Male



Female


Date Of Birth (dd/mm/yy)


Done





Land Page




  
Restart

  
Highlight


  
Notes




Since Ashesi University moved to their permanent campus, students and staff have had to endure one major problem. The Road leading to the school is in its worst shape ever. About two years ago, students were filled with hope after they were promised by the government that road was going to be reconstructed. Years later, the road has grown worse that they came to meet it. They need a change.

 0

Comment

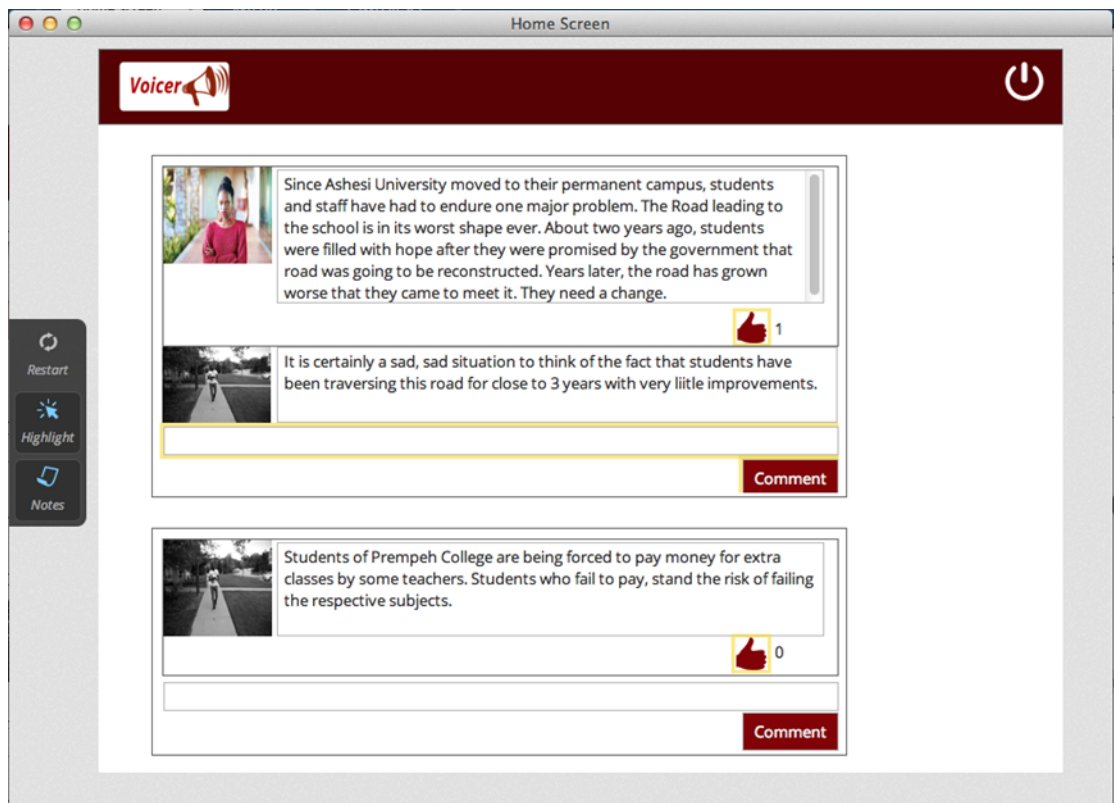


Students of Prempeh College are being forced to pay money for extra classes by some teachers. Students who fail to pay, stand the risk of failing the respective subjects.

 0

Comment

12



#### 4.6.6 Testing

The Voicer app was tested among college students in Accra who were chosen as a sample to represent the youth of Ghana. The youth are the majority of Internet users in Ghana. Before testing the votes prerequisite was pegged at a fixed number of votes - 200 votes. After testing, it was realized that 200 votes failed to appropriately capture the view of society concerning a particular post. The votes prerequisite was then revised to the current simple majority principle.

## **Chapter 5 - Conclusion**

As per the findings obtained from this research, it is safe to assert that Internet activism in Ghana is growing and definitely a viable venture. The engagements of the Ghanaian youth and the continuous expansion of Internet infrastructure are leading to further adaptation of the Internet for activism purposes.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Questions**

1. What is your opinion about activism in Ghana?
2. What do you think is the main medium for activism in Ghana?
3. Have you ever been involved in any form of activism?
4. If yes, please relate your experience.
5. Do you know of any systems or structures that support Internet activism?
6. Is the Ghanaian Internet culture conducive for Internet activism?
7. Do you know of any websites or applications devoted to activism in Ghana?
8. What comes to mind first when you think of activism in Ghana – one word?
9. What do you think is the main medium for activism in Ghana?
10. Can you share your knowledge and experience with online activism in Ghana?
11. Public discourse and activism. Where do we draw the line?
12. Role of radios
13. From your experience and knowledge, in what way is Internet activism beneficial to Ghana?