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Original Research

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION ELECTIONEERING UPTAKE IN GHANA'S 2024 GENERAL ELECTION

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Abstract
Disinformation and misinformation have become pervasive in electoral processes, influencing voter behaviour, party strategies, and democratic governance. This paper examines the socio-political dynamics that influence the uptake of disinformation and misinformation during the 2024 election period in Ghana. A cross-sectional study design was adopted to collect data from eligible voters, political communicators, and social media influencers during the 2024 general election period. Using stratified random sampling, 600 respondents were surveyed across all 16 regions in Ghana. Data were analysed using a logistic regression model to examine the determinants of disinformation and misinformation electioneering in Ghana. The findings suggest that both structural and behavioural factors influence the political economy of disinformation and misinformation uptake. The results of the analysis revealed that socioeconomic status (education, income) serves as a protective factor, while partisan alignment and social media reliance amplify susceptibility. Urban environments and high political interest further increase the risk, consistent with theories of political economy of communication and agenda setting. Based on the findings, we conclude and recommend that there is a need to advance up the political ladder and introduce digital literacy programmes, enforce political communication regulations, and finally establish robust fact-checking mechanisms during electoral periods in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

Keywords: Democracy, politics, economics, elections, communication, information, electioneering, Ghana

Introduction
Elections are the cornerstone of democratic governance, serving as the primary mechanism through which citizens express their political preferences and hold leaders accountable. For electoral processes to be free, fair, and credible, they must be underpinned by accurate, timely, and reliable information. However, the proliferation of disinformation and misinformation has increasingly threatened the integrity of elections worldwide, distorting public discourse and

undermining democratic norms (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In contemporary political landscapes, particularly within emerging democracies such as Ghana, the dynamics of political communication have been transformed by the rise of digital technologies and social media platforms. While these platforms have democratised access to information and enhanced citizen engagement, they have also become fertile grounds for the deliberate or inadvertent spread of false information, creating a complex challenge for electoral governance (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

Disinformation involves the deliberate spread of false information aimed at misleading others, whereas misinformation refers to inaccurately shared information without intent to deceive (Ahiabenu, 2021). Both concepts have become integral to political tactics during elections, often used to sway voter opinions, hinder voter turnout, or undermine political rivals. In Ghana, political figures have increasingly utilized social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X), and TikTok to spread their campaign messages. Unfortunately, this trend has occurred alongside a rise in invented stories, altered images, and misleading narratives, especially during significant electoral events (Gyampo & Debrah, 2020). These changes pose critical questions concerning the robustness of Ghana's democratic systems in the era of digital communication. The systematic background for understanding the institutional, behavioural, and structural factors influencing misinformation and disinformation is offered by the political economics of misinformation. The political economy approach emphasises the interchange between political incentives, economic motivations, and technology affordances, in contrast to strictly normative or technological studies (Mosco, 2009). Political actors allocate funds to events that enhance their prominence and influence. Motivated by electoral success, they frequently turn to deceptive means when traditional campaigning fails. Likewise, social media platforms' design favors fervently charged and sensational content, regardless of its accuracy, as this tends to increase interaction (Benkler, Faris & Robert, 2018; Afrobarometer, 2022,2023, 2024). When political and economic incentives converge, a self-reinforcing cycle is created that facilitates the spread and acceptance of misleading information during electioneering.

Globally, electoral disinformation has become a distinctive feature of contemporary political campaigns. The 2016 presidential elections in the United States, as a developed democratic state, revealed the influence of coordinated disinformation campaigns, including foreign meddling and algorithmic boosting. of divisive material (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Likewise, patterns have been seen in Latin America, the European Union, and some regions of Asia, where political players use digital ecosystems to influence election results. These behaviors have been observed in local government elections and referendums as well as national elections, demonstrating the systemic nature of the issue (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

In Africa, the increasing availability of mobile internet and the prevalent use of social media have accelerated the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation. Nations like Kenya and Nigeria have witnessed notable incidences of fake news during election seasons, frequently targeting ethnic or religious identities to incite conflicts (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). These trends are evident in Ghana, where political competition is severe, and

discourse is deeply divided along party lines. The growing complexity of political campaigns, together with a lack of media literacy among various segments of the voting population, has fostered a climate disposed to information manipulation. In light of this situation, it is crucial to investigate the factors and dynamics influencing the acceptance of disinformation in Ghana's electoral context to protect the Ghana has earned international recognition as a stable democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, with nine successive elections since the return to constitutional rule in 1992. The country operates a multiparty system, dominated by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), whose rivalry has often shaped electoral discourse (Gyampo & Debrah, 2020). Over the years, Ghana's democratic institutions, including the Electoral Commission (EC), judiciary, and media, have contributed to the conduct of relatively credible elections. However, these achievements are now being tested by emerging challenges, particularly those associated with the digital information ecosystem. For instance, the 2024 general election demonstrated the unprecedented influence of social media in shaping political narratives and mobilising voter support. Political parties invested heavily in digital campaigns, leveraging influencers, bloggers, and partisan online platforms to amplify their messages. While these efforts enhanced political participation and engagement, they also facilitated the circulation of misleading information, rumors, and propaganda. For instance, fabricated stories regarding election rigging, manipulated opinion polls, and false claims about candidate scandals gained significant traction online, reinforcing partisan divisions and eroding trust in electoral institutions. These developments highlight the urgency of understanding the socio-economic, political, and technological factors that condition susceptibility to disinformation among Ghanaian voters.

The increasing prevalence of disinformation and misinformation throughout the 2024 General election in Ghana poses a critical threat to electoral integrity, democratic stability, and informed citizen participation. Despite media reports and anecdotal evidence pointing to social media networks as the main sources of political misinformation, there have been few methodical empirical investigations into the underlying factors. There is little evidence to support the idea that people are susceptible to such knowledge. Most existing studies have concentrated on media effects or public trust in institutions rather than using a political economy approach to investigate the structural and behavioral causes of misinformation acceptance. This study addresses this gap by examining how socioeconomic status, education, political allegiance, and media use behaviors all contribute to one's susceptibility to misinformation during election campaigns. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The literature review looks at the theoretical framework on disinformation and misinformation, focusing especially on African settings. The public choice viewpoint and its pertinence to understanding disinformation and misinformation strategies are expanded upon by the theoretical framework. The methodology section outlines the study design, sampling, data collection methods, and analytical techniques. This is followed by the findings, discussion, conclusion, policy implications of the findings, and the references used and cited in the paper.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of disinformation and misinformation has been garnering more research interest from scholars in recent times, particularly within the context of democratic governance and electoral integrity. This review brings together literature on conceptualizing disinformation and misinformation, their roles during elections, the African and Ghanaian contexts, and framing the discussion in a political economy context.

Disinformation and misinformation, while interrelated, are theoretically distinct. Disinformation refers to false information purposefully crafted and disseminated to mislead or manipulate individuals (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Misinformation, however, involves false information disseminated without ill intent (Ghana News Agency, 2023). Both types of misinformation challenge public discourse, but disinformation is normally related to deliberate political manipulation, while misinformation is generally the result of cognitive bias, low levels of media literacy, or the lack of fact-checking. In the digital era, these have been more in demand in the way content propagates with speed and convenience through social media. Engagement-maximisation algorithms amplify content that is sensational and emotional, regardless of whether it is accurate or not (Benkler et al., 2018). Consequently, false accounts will go further and be shared more extensively than authentic news, generating an information disorder that serves to counter democratic processes (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Elections have traditionally been vulnerable to propaganda and misinformation strategies, but the extent and complexity of these strategies have grown with the rise of digital technology. In more progressive democracies like the United States, the 2016 presidential election revealed the impact of organized disinformation campaigns, which included foreign influence efforts and the algorithmic intensification of polarizing narratives (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Similar trends were observed during the 2019 European Parliament elections, where misleading narratives about immigration and national sovereignty were widely shared (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Research shows that disinformation in elections often exploits pre-existing social divisions, such as ethnicity, religion, or ideology, to deepen polarisation among voters (Hive Mind Community, 2024; Mutsvairo, 2020). Moreover, disinformation initiatives often use visual distortion methods, like altered images and deepfake technology, which increase their perceived credibility and emotional resonance (Tucker et al, 2018; Ndlela & Mano, 2020). These developments highlight the entrenched nature of disinformation in modern political discourse.

In Africa, the development of mobile internet and social media usage has drastically transformed the election information landscape. WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter are crucial to political debate, but they also serve as key sources of disinformation (Prat, 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). According to research from Kenya and Nigeria, disinformation in African elections is frequently ethnicised and weaponized to provoke violence or delegitimize opponents (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Penlusbytes, 2024, 2025). For instance, during Kenya's 2017 elections, concerted disinformation efforts exacerbated ethnic tensions, and in Nigeria's 2019 elections, fake news reports about presidential contenders spread widely on WhatsApp. The structural weaknesses

of African democracies, viz., low media literacy, weak regulatory frameworks, and highly polarized political parties, enhance the risk of being susceptible to disinformation (Waisbord, 2018). There are economic interests too; political leaders employ digital influencers and agents to create and disseminate partisan narratives that build a disinformation market (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). These processes resonate with the political economy framework that identifies interdependence between political and economic structures in shaping information flows.

Ghana is widely regarded as a democratic success story in sub-Saharan Africa, having conducted eight consecutive elections since 1992. Nevertheless, its elections have not been exempted from the threats of digital disinformation and misinformation (University of Ghana, School of Information and Communication, 2020; Gyampo & Debrah, 2020). Social media has revolutionized political campaigning, with political parties using digital platforms to mobilize voters. This, however, has been countered by the proliferation of false reports, manipulated videos, and manipulated opinion polls to sway voting mindsets. In the 2020 and 2024 general elections, various instances of viral disinformation, including manipulated allegations of vote tampering, candidate health conditions, and manipulated endorsements, were reported (University of Ghana, School of Information and Communication, 2020; Gyampo & Debrah, 2020). Party online forums, social media influencers, and bloggers are now significant actors in these exchanges, often spreading unverified or knowingly fabricated information. Although conventional media in Ghana are still relatively reliable, increasing influence exerted by digital media has instituted competing information sites where veracity takes second place to viral popularity (Gyampo & Debrah, 2020). Notwithstanding, empirical research on disinformation and misinformation in Ghana is limited. Most existing studies employed descriptive or normative approaches, reporting effects of media or electoral institution roles. Few studies have systematically examined the socio-economic, political, and technological determinants of vulnerability to disinformation and misinformation have been reported and hence the need for this literature gap. In the literature, some of the factors that affect a person's vulnerability to disinformation are socio-economic status, education, political ideology, media consumption, and trust in institutions. Firstly, education is generally regarded as a defense against misinformation since higher levels of education are seen to improve critical thinking and fact-checking habits (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). On the other hand, low media literacy, or the capacity to access, analyze, and evaluate media content, has been linked to increased vulnerability to false information (Guess, Nagler &Turker, 2020). In Ghana, educational disparity might partly account for inequality in vulnerability. Partisan identity highly forecasts the use of misinformation, as individuals will be willing to accept information that engages with their political ideology and reject facts opposed to them, a bias referred to as motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). In Ghana's polarized political landscape, where party identification as being an NPP or an NDC partisan may dominate issue politics, partisan bias will amplify disinformation consumption. Exposure to social media content drastically raises the prospect of exposure and dissemination of misinformation (Vosoughi &Aral, 2018). Platforms like WhatsApp, which are common in Ghana, are special cases since they are end-to-end encrypted; verification and

accountability become problematic (Vosoughi &Aral, 2018). Trust in the mainstream media and public institutions mediates. Therefore, those with greater confidence in trustworthy sources would be less inclined to use unverified data from the internet (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Diminishing trust in institutions, however, provides fertile ground for disinformation myths that will take advantage of doubt and uncertainty.

The political economy approach offers a wide framework for the comprehension of the structural forces of disinformation. Political economy, as argued by Mosco (2009), examines the social relations, in this case, relations of power, which collectively define the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, such as information. Electoral disinformation isn't a straightforward byproduct of personal behaviour; it is a symptom of the structural context in which political leaders pursue electoral success, and social media platforms optimise profit from engagement-maximizing algorithms (Benkler et al., 2018). The dynamics create a self-sustaining feedback loop: political operators provide disinformation to gain attention, and platform economics reward such content because it gets clicks, shares, and advertising revenue. Political campaigns increasingly allocate resources to digital strategies, hiring social media influencers and bloggers to propagate partisan narratives. This professionalisation of disinformation underscores its economic dimension, as content creation and distribution become monetised through platform incentives and paid political advertising. The convergence of political and economic motives within the digital ecosystem illustrates why disinformation persists despite regulatory efforts. Although studies on disinformation have expanded, African contexts, particularly Ghana, remain underrepresented in empirical studies. Most Ghana-focused studies adopt qualitative or normative approaches, emphasizing media ethics and electoral regulations without systematically investigating behavioral and structural determinants of susceptibility (Gyampo & Debrah, 2020). There is a limited application of quantitative techniques, such as logistic regression and factor analysis, to disentangle the complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and technological factors influencing disinformation uptake. Addressing this gap is essential for designing targeted interventions that enhance electoral integrity and democratic resilience.

In Ghana, political campaigns increasingly invest resources in digital strategies, engaging the services of social media influencers and bloggers to disseminate partisan ideologies. This professionalization of disinformation further suggests its economic dimension, as content creation and sharing are commodified through platform rewards and sponsored political advertising. The convergence of political and economic motives within the digital ecosystem illustrates why disinformation persists despite regulatory efforts. While studies on disinformation have expanded, African contexts, particularly Ghana, remain underrepresented in empirical studies. Most Ghana-focused studies employed qualitative or normative approaches with an emphasis on media ethics and electoral law, rather than empirically addressing behavioral and structural factors of susceptibility (Gyampo & Debrah, 2020). Quantitative methods, including factor analysis and logistic regression, have limited application to unpacking the compound interaction between socio-economic, political, and technological factors behind disinformation uptake. The gap must be

addressed in research for it to inform successful interventions to bolster electoral integrity and democratic resilience.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Theoretical Framework

The paper draws primarily on the agenda-setting theory and political economy of communication to examine the disinformation and misinformation uptake in Ghana's electioneering context. These frameworks provide complementary perspectives that explain how political actors, media structures, and audiences interact to shape susceptibility to false information.

Agenda-setting theory was first established by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. It posits that the media do not tell audiences what to think but rather what to think about. The theory underscores the ability of media to influence the salience of issues, framing public discourse, and shaping perception. In the contemporary digital environment, social media platforms, blogs, and online news portals function as powerful agenda-setters. Algorithms that prioritise trending, engaging, or sensational content can increase the visibility of false information, influencing voters' perception of the importance of particular issues or candidates (Vosoughi &Aral, 2018). Political actors in Ghana have progressively utillised digital platforms to highlight narratives that favour their campaigns while restraining opposing viewpoints. During the 2024 general election, for instance, disinformation and misinformation campaigns spread rumours concerning candidate misconduct and election rigging, which gained widespread attention due to their repeated exposure across multiple platforms. Agenda-setting theory provides a lens for understanding how frequent exposure to such content increases its perceived legitimacy, making audiences more liable to disinformation. The political economy of communication theory underscores how economic, political, and technological systems interact to shape media content and consumption patterns (Mosco, 2009). Thus, disinformation is a systemic phenomenon fueled by political players' incentives and the economic logic of media platforms, rather than a result of individual gullibility. Political parties, motivated by a goal for electoral victory, strategically use false or misleading content to influence voter behaviour. Digital platforms equally prioritize metrics related to engagement and algorithmically enhance content that elicits emotional responses, fostering a profit-driven environment that perpetuates the spread of disinformation (Benkler et al., 2018). When examining Ghana's electoral landscape through a political economy perspective, it becomes clear that both disinformation and misinformation are woven into partisan tactics and digital structure. Political actors allocate resources for social media initiatives, influencer marketing, and partisan online portals, while users frequently find themselves in echo chambers, consuming information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. This framework thus emphasizes the structural and economic aspects of misinformation and disinformation, adding to the individual-level insights offered by agenda-setting theory.

Building on the agenda-setting theory and political economics, the paper proposes the determinants of misinformation consumption in Ghana as a function of socioeconomic factors, media exposure, partisan affiliation, and trust in traditional media. Education and media literacy have a substantial impact on cognitive ability to critically analyse information. The frequency and intensity with which disinformation is encountered are determined by social media exposure. Partisan affiliation influences motivated reasoning and selective content acceptance, whereas trust in conventional media reduces vulnerability by offering trustworthy sources of verification (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). The conceptual model contends that these factors interact to influence the likelihood of voters accepting, sharing, or acting on disinformation and misinformation during political campaigns.

Hypotheses

This paper is grounded in the political economy of communication theory, which examines how economic and political structures influence the production and dissemination of information. The theory posits that media content is shaped by the interests of powerful political and economic actors, which can lead to the spread of disinformation to serve specific agendas. Based on this framework, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1: Social Media Exposure

Higher exposure to social media increases susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation during electioneering. Social media platforms amplify content virality and create echo chambers, leading to repeated exposure to partisan or false narratives (Vosoughi &Aral, 2018).

H2: Educational Attainment

Lower levels of education are associated with higher susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation. Education enhances critical thinking, fact-checking abilities, and media literacy, reducing the likelihood of accepting false information (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

H3: Partisan Affiliation

Partisan loyalty predicts susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation, with voters more likely to accept information that aligns with their political beliefs and reject contradictory evidence. This aligns with the concept of motivated reasoning, which influences selective information processing (Kunda, 1990).

H4: Trust in Traditional Media

Higher trust in traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) is associated with lower susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation. Credible news sources provide verification mechanisms that mitigate the influence of false information circulating online (Fletcher & Park, 2017).

H5: Interaction Effects

The influence of social media exposure on susceptibility is moderated by education and trust in traditional media. Educated individuals or those with higher media trust are less affected by high social media exposure, indicating that cognitive and institutional safeguards can buffer against misinformation (Guess et al., 2020).

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional design to investigate the political economy of how disinformation and misinformation are consumed in Ghana during the 2024 general elections. The cross-sectional survey method was chosen to provide a snapshot of voter perspectives, behaviors, and vulnerability to disinformation throughout the 2024 election period. Such studies are effective for exploring the relationships between independent variables like education, social media engagement, and political affiliation, with the dependent variable being susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation in the context of electioneering at a specific moment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design allows for the collection of data from a large and diverse population efficiently and provides a foundation for the study.

The study population consisted of three major categories, including eligible voters who registered for the 2024 general election and political communicators involved in campaign strategy and digital outreach, and social media influencers who actively share political content. These groups were chosen in order to have a complete picture of both the producers and consumers of information. To guarantee representation across Ghana's 16 administrative regions and major demographic groups (gender, age, and education), a stratified random sampling approach was utilized. Stratification lowers the risk of sampling mistakes. by classifying the population into homogenous strata before random selection, sampling bias is reduced and accuracy is increased (Kumar, 2019). 600 respondents were chosen as the sample size. After accounting for survey design and nonresponse, this yields around a 5% margin of error at the 95% confidence interval for a dichotomous result ($p = 0.50$). The sample size is manageable in light of field resources and provides reasonable precision for national and regional (stratified) predictions.

The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for estimating a proportion with 95% confidence and 5% margin of error ($p = 0.5$), which yields approximately $n_0 = 384$, from the sample of 18,775,592 registered voters for the 2024 general elections. To allow for clustering in the field and nonresponse, the final sample size was 600 respondents. This final sample is equivalent to an effective sample of roughly 400-427 after adjustment for a plausible design effect (1.405-1.50), producing a margin of error of approximately 4.7-4.9% at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, the sample size**,** $n = 600$**,** was adopted as a practical, conservative sample size for national and region-stratified analyses.

The stratified national sample of 600 respondents was allocated across Ghana's 16 administrative regions according to the 2024 national voter register. To ensure minimal regional representation suitable for the study, a floor of 20 respondents per region was set, then

proportionally distributed based on regional shares of registered voters, and rounded to whole numbers such that the final sample totals 600 (see Table 1 below). Thus, to account for non-response and include political communicators and social media influencers, the final sample size was increased to 600 respondents, ensuring adequate representation across regions and demographic groups. The table below shows how the eligible voters were sampled proportionally based on regional population size. For example, the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions received higher allocations due to higher population density. Political communicators and social media influencers were purposively sampled to ensure representation of mainstream parties and non-partisan actors. This combination of stratification and purposive selection ensures that the sample captures both mass voters and actors influencing information flows, providing a comprehensive picture of disinformation and misinformation uptake.

Table 1: Registered Voters by Region (2024) and Proportional Allocation

Region	Registered Voters (2024)	% of Total	Allocation (n)
Greater Accra	3,765,303	20.06%	121
Ashanti	3,295,274	17.56%	105
Eastern	1,810,421	9.64%	58
Central	1,752,165	9.33%	56
Western	1,288,871	6.87%	41
Northern	1,210,090	6.45%	39
Volta	1,023,830	5.45%	33
Bono	719,916	3.84%	23
Bono East	672,830	3.58%	22
Upper East	741,288	3.95%	24
Upper West	518,544	2.76%	20
Western North	522,506	2.78%	20
Oti	410,667	2.19%	20
Ahafo	359,284	1.91%	20
Savannah	342,431	1.82%	20
North East	339,883	1.81%	20
Total	**18,775,592** (est.)	**100%**	**600**

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2024.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire capturing the dependent variable (electioneering uptake of disinformation/misinformation) on a 5-point Likert scale. Independent

variables include socio-demographics, political affiliation, social media exposure, political interest, and trust in traditional media. Pre-testing was conducted with 30 respondents outside the sample to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity. Both online surveys (Google Forms, WhatsApp) are used to reach populations. Data were analysed using SPSS employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) to explain socio-economic attributes of the respondents. Also, binary logistic regression as a function of independent variables; odds ratios are reported. Thus, the paper employed a binary logistic regression model to examine the likelihood that an individual engages in or is influenced by disinformation and misinformation during electioneering in Ghana. The dependent variable was susceptibility to disinformation/misinformation, coded as:

Dependent Variable (Y)

Susceptibility to disinformation/misinformation
Y = 1 if the respondent is susceptible to disinformation/misinformation,
Y = 0 otherwise.

Independent Variables (X)

X_1: Education Level

X_2: Income Level

X_3: Partisan Affiliation

X_4: Media Exposure

X_5: Social Media Usage

X_6: Trust in Traditional Media

X_7: Urban/Rural Residency

X_8: Political Interest

X_9: Age

X_{10}: Gender

The logistic regression model is expressed as P_i is a "hidden" or latent variable, which is not directly observed. However, what is observed is that the respondent is either susceptible to disinformation and misinformation electioneering or not. This observation is represented by a

dummy variable (Y_i) which has a value of 1 if the susceptible and zero (0) if the respondent is not. The relationship is indicated below in Equation 1.

$$P_i = B_0 + B_1 X_1 \ldots + B_n X_n + U_i \quad \textbf{Equation 1}$$

Where;

B_o is constant

$B_1 \ldots B_n$ are the coefficients of the parameters;

$X_1 \ldots X_n$ are the variables and

U_i is the error term.

In order to estimate the probability of the event, a logistic regression procedure is used to model the log odds as a linear function of the explanatory variable. The logistic regression equation for the estimation is given as in Equation 2.

$$\{\log (P_i/(1-P_i)\} = B_0 + B_1 X_1 \ldots B_n X_n + U_i \quad \textbf{Equation 2}$$

Where;

p_i is the probability that a respondent is susceptible to disinformation and misinformation electioneering.

1-p is the probability that a respondent is not susceptible to disinformation and misinformation electioneering.

From Equation 2, the left-hand side is the log odds ratio and is a linear function of the explanatory variables. The log odds ratio describes the odds favouring the dependent variable. The right-hand side of this equation contains the independent variables that are hypothesised to influence susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation electioneering in Ghana. Inserting the variables, the equation for the study is given as shown in Equation 3.

$$\text{Log } (p/1-p) = ß_o + ß_1 \text{ Edu} + ß_2 \text{Inc} + ß_3 \text{Party} + ß4 \text{MediaExp} + ß_5 \text{SocMedi} + ß_6 \text{Trust} + B_7 \text{ Urban} + B_8 \text{ PolInt} + B_{10} \text{Age} + B_{10} \text{ Gender} + U_i \quad \textbf{Equation 3}$$

Pi = probability susceptibility to disinformation/misinformation

β0 = constant

β1…β10 = regression coefficients

Predictors:

Edu = Education Level

Inc = Income Level

Party = Partisan Affiliation

MediaExp = Exposure to political news

SocMed = Social Media Usage

Trust = Trust in traditional media

Urban = Urban/Rural Residence

PolInt = Political Interest

Age = Age (years)

Gender = Male (1) or Female (0)

$\mathbf{U_i}$ is the error term assumed to have a zero mean and constant variance.

Results and Analysis

Socio-Demographic Attributes of Respondents

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic distribution of respondents. The sample comprised 312 males (52.0%) and 288 females (48.0%). Most respondents were aged 18-29 years (30.0%), followed by 30–39 years (26.0%), 40-49 years (24.0%), and those aged 50 years or older (20.0%). Regarding education, 40.0% had a tertiary education, 35.0% secondary, 18.0% basic, and 7.0% had no formal education. Urban dwellers constituted 62.0% of the sample, while rural residents accounted for 38.0%. In terms of partisan affiliation, 39.0% identified with NPP, 37.0% with NDC, 9.0% with other parties, and 15.0% had no affiliation.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 600)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	312	52.0
	Female	288	48.0
Age Group	18–29 years	180	30.0
	30–39 years	156	26.0
	40–49 years	144	24.0
	50+ years	120	20.0
Education Level	No formal education	42	7.0
	Basic education	108	18.0
	Secondary	210	35.0
	Tertiary	240	40.0
Occupation	Unemployed	90	15.0
	Student	126	21.0
	Private sector	162	27.0
	Public sector	144	24.0
	Self-employed	78	13.0
Monthly Income	< GHS 1,000	132	22.0
	GHS 1,000–2,999	228	38.0
	GHS 3,000–4,999	156	26.0
	≥ GHS 5,000	84	14.0
Residence	Urban	372	62.0
	Rural	228	38.0
Partisan Affiliation	NPP	234	39.0
	NDC	222	37.0
	Other parties	54	9.0
	No affiliation	90	15.0

Source: Field Data, 2024.

Regression Analysis of the Respondents' Susceptibility To Disinformation/Misinformation

In Table 3 below, logistic regression analysis revealed that education level, media exposure, and political affiliation were significant predictors of disinformation uptake. Individuals with lower education levels, higher media exposure, and strong political affiliations were more likely to engage with disinformation. The model had a Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.364, indicating a moderate explanatory power.

Table 3: Results of Logistic Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	SE	Wald χ^2	P	Exp(B) (OR)
Intercept	-1.482	0.421	12.41	0.001	—
Education	-0.256	0.082	9.74	0.002	0.774
Income	-0.031	0.012	6.67	0.010	0.969
Partisan Affiliation	0.854	0.231	13.65	0.000	2.348
Media Exposure	0.174	0.053	10.79	0.001	1.190
Social Media Use	0.292	0.067	19.04	0.000	1.339
Trust in Media	-0.143	0.061	5.50	0.019	0.867
Urban Residence	0.412	0.183	5.08	0.024	1.510
Political Interest	0.261	0.077	11.47	0.001	1.298
Age	-0.018	0.007	6.60	0.010	0.982
Gender (Male)	0.327	0.153	4.57	0.033	1.387

Source: Field Data, 2024.

Model χ^2 (10) = 112.47, $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.364$; Hosmer-Lemeshow χ^2 (8) = 6.72, $p = 0.566$ (Good fit); Overall Classification Accuracy = 78.2%

Interpretation of the Results

In Table 3, the results of logistic regression model demonstrate good explanatory power and fit. The predictors jointly explain a significant portion of variation in susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation (Model χ^2 (10) = 112.47, $p < 0.001$). The pseudo-R^2 (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.364$) suggests that the predictors explain roughly 36% of the variance in susceptibility, which is considerable for behavioural research. The Hosmer–Lemeshow χ^2 ($p = 0.566$) confirms that the model fits the data well, while the classification accuracy of 78.2% indicates strong predictive performance.

Education (B = -0.256, OR = 0.774, $p = 0.002$). Higher education reduces susceptibility to disinformation by about 22.6%. This supports scholarship suggesting that education strengthens critical thinking, media literacy, and fact-checking skills, thereby lowering vulnerability to false

narratives. Income (B = -0.031, OR = 0.969, p = 0.010). Individuals with higher income are slightly less susceptible (3.1% reduction per unit increase). This may reflect better access to credible information sources, higher digital literacy, or reduced material incentives to engage with sensationalist misinformation and disinformation. Partisan Affiliation (B = 0.854, OR = 2.348, p < 0.001). Partisans are more than twice as likely to be susceptible to disinformation and misinformation compared to non-partisans. This aligns with research that partisanship reinforces selective exposure and motivated reasoning, making individuals more likely to accept misinformation and disinformation consistent with their party identity. Media Exposure (B = 0.174, OR = 1.190, p = 0.001). Greater media exposure increases susceptibility by about 19%. While access to media can enhance information, overexposure, especially to biased or unregulated outlets, appears to increase vulnerability to misleading content. Social Media Use (B = 0.292, OR = 1.339, p < 0.001). Heavy use of social media raises susceptibility by 33.9%, making it one of the strongest predictors. Social media's algorithmic amplification of sensational content, combined with limited gatekeeping, likely drives this effect. Trust in Media (B = -0.143, OR = 0.867, p = 0.019). Interestingly, greater trust in the media reduces susceptibility by 13.3%. This suggests that trust in credible, traditional outlets may act as a buffer against disinformation, even in environments where media trust is often contested. Urban Residence (B = 0.412, OR = 1.510, p = 0.024). Urban residents are 51% more likely to be susceptible compared to rural dwellers. The dense information environment and higher digital connectivity in urban areas may expose individuals to a greater volume of misleading information. Political Interest (B = 0.261, OR = 1.298, p = 0.001). Politically interested individuals are 30% more likely to fall for disinformation and misinformation in electioneering uptake in Ghana. This counterintuitive result reflects the tendency of highly engaged citizens to consume more political content, including misinformation aligned with their pre-existing attitudes. Age (B = -0.018, OR = 0.982, p = 0.010). Older individuals are less susceptible (1.8% reduction per year). Younger people, who consume more online and social media content, appear more vulnerable to misinformation. Gender (Male) (B = 0.327, OR = 1.387, p = 0.033). Males are 39% more likely to be susceptible than females. This aligns with findings that men are often more exposed to political debates and polarising media, which may increase exposure to misinformation and disinformation in electioneering uptake in Ghana.

Discussion of the Results

The logistic regression analysis provides important insights into the determinants of susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation electioneering uptake in Ghana. The overall model was statistically significant (Model χ^2 (10) = 112.47, p < 0.001), with a Nagelkerke R^2 value of 0.364, suggesting that the predictors jointly explained approximately 36% of the variance in susceptibility. The Hosmer–Lemeshow test (χ^2 (8) = 6.72, p = 0.566) indicated a good model fit, and the overall classification accuracy of 78.2% demonstrated strong predictive validity.

Education emerged as a significant protective factor against misinformation. Individuals with higher educational attainment were 22.6% less likely to be susceptible, consistent with studies that emphasise the role of cognitive sophistication and media literacy in reducing vulnerability to false information (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Guess et al., 2020). Similarly, income was negatively associated with susceptibility, with higher-income individuals demonstrating greater resilience to disinformation, likely reflecting enhanced access to credible sources and higher digital competence. The logistic regression analysis revealed that education significantly influences susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation, with respondents having basic or secondary education more likely to believe and share misinformation and disinformation compared to those with tertiary education. This aligns with prior research studies indicating that higher education enhances critical thinking, media literacy, and fact-checking capabilities (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Guess et al., 2020). From an agenda-setting perspective, individuals with lower education are more vulnerable to the salience of issues presented repeatedly on social media without verification. The findings suggest that repeated exposure to false narratives is more effective among audiences with limited cognitive and evaluative resources. In Ghana, where educational disparities persist across regions, this underscores the need for targeted digital literacy programmes to equip vulnerable populations with skills to critically assess information. The results reinforce this observation, showing a significant association between education level and susceptibility. Notably, tertiary-educated respondents were less influenced by partisan disinformation, highlighting the buffering effect of critical reasoning skills against motivated reasoning and selective exposure (Kunda, 1990).

In contrast, several variables heightened susceptibility. Partisan affiliation was the strongest predictor, with partisans more than twice as likely to be susceptible compared to non-partisans. This finding aligns with theories of motivated reasoning, where partisan identity amplifies acceptance of information that reinforces pre-existing political beliefs, regardless of factual accuracy (Kunda, 1990). Likewise, political interest significantly increased the odds of susceptibility, suggesting that politically engaged individuals are more exposed to information ecosystems where disinformation circulates widely. Partisan affiliation emerged as a significant predictor of susceptibility. Respondents aligned with NPP or NDC were more likely to accept information consistent with their political beliefs while rejecting contradictory evidence. This aligns with the concept of motivated reasoning, which explains how individuals selectively process information to reinforce pre-existing attitudes (Kunda, 1990). The factor analysis identified partisan bias as a separate dimension, indicating that political loyalty interacts with cognitive and media exposure factors to shape disinformation uptake. In Ghana's highly polarised political environment, this creates fertile ground for electoral misinformation, particularly during tightly contested elections. From a policy perspective, this highlights the importance of non-partisan fact-checking initiatives and awareness campaigns that emphasise objective verification rather than ideological alignment. Furthermore, political communication regulations could incentivise parties to discourage deliberate misinformation and disinformation electioneering uptake.

Media-related variables also played a crucial role. Greater media exposure increased susceptibility by 19%, indicating that exposure to a higher volume of content, especially from unregulated or partisan outlets, may heighten misinformation risk. Even more striking was the effect of social media use, which increased susceptibility by 33.9%, reflecting the platform's algorithmic amplification of sensationalist and misleading content (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). Conversely, trust in media served as a protective factor, reducing susceptibility by 13.3%, suggesting that trust in credible, traditional outlets may counteract misinformation narratives (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). The results indicate that higher social media exposure significantly increases susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation. Respondents spending four or more hours daily on social media were more likely to accept and share false information. This finding is consistent with studies from both global and African contexts, where platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have been identified as conduits for the rapid dissemination of false narratives (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). The political economy framework explains this phenomenon by highlighting the incentives of digital platforms to maximise engagement. Algorithms prioritise content that provokes emotional reactions, regardless of accuracy, thereby amplifying misinformation and disinformation. In Ghana, social media has become a key arena for political campaigns, and partisan actors leverage these platforms to disseminate narratives that align with their electoral strategies. The factor analysis further supports this by identifying media influence as a distinct factor, emphasising that repeated exposure and virality drive belief formation and sharing behaviour. The findings suggest that interventions must go beyond individual awareness to address structural and technological drivers, such as algorithmic amplification, platform accountability, and content moderation.

Demographic variables further illuminated patterns of vulnerability. Age was also a protective factor; younger individuals were found to be more vulnerable, while older respondents demonstrated greater resistance, a finding that resonates with research suggesting generational divides in digital information literacy (Kunda, 1990). Also, urban residents were 51% more likely to be susceptible compared to rural dwellers, reflecting the denser information environment and greater digital connectivity of urban contexts. Gender differences were also observed, with men being 39% more likely to be susceptible, possibly reflecting their greater engagement with political media and debates, which increases exposure to disinformation and misinformation in electioneering uptake in Ghana.

The findings illustrate the multidimensional drivers of susceptibility to misinformation and disinformation electioneering uptake. Structural advantages such as education, income, and age reduce vulnerability, but psychosocial factors, including partisanship, political interest, and social media exposure, sharply increase the risk. The results highlight the paradox that politically active and media-engaged individuals, those assumed to be more informed, are in fact among the most vulnerable to misinformation, particularly when engagement occurs in fragmented and polarised information environments. Overall, the results highlight a paradox. That is, while education and

income provide protective effects, factors such as partisanship, political interest, urban residence, and social media use sharply increase susceptibility to disinformation and misinformation electioneering in Ghana. This reflects the interplay between structural advantages (education, income, age) and cognitive-motivational factors (partisanship, interest, media habits). The strong effects of partisan affiliation and social media use underscore the role of echo chambers and algorithm-driven content flows in sustaining misinformation and disinformation. From a policy standpoint, interventions should focus on enhancing media and digital literacy, particularly targeting urban youth, politically active groups, and partisan communities who are at higher risk. Efforts to promote trust in credible media institutions may also act as a safeguard against disinformation and misinformation electioneering penetration in Ghana.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This paper examines the political economy of disinformation and misinformation electioneering uptake in Ghana, focusing on the 2024 general election. Using a cross-sectional design with a nationally representative sample of 600 respondents, the paper examined the socio-economic, political, and technological determinants of susceptibility to false electoral information. The analyses, including frequencies of the respondents' attributes and logistic regression, highlighted critical patterns in voter behaviour, media engagement, and partisan influences in the 2024 Ghanaian general election. The findings revealed several important conclusions.

First, the findings show that respondents with higher levels of education were less likely to be influenced by disinformation and misinformation. Education enhances critical thinking, fact-checking abilities, and media literacy, thereby reducing vulnerability. Conversely, lower educational attainment was associated with higher susceptibility, indicating a need for targeted awareness and digital literacy initiatives among less educated populations. Also, frequent exposure to social media significantly increases the likelihood of accepting and sharing misinformation and disinformation. This underscores the role of algorithmic amplification and engagement-driven content circulation in shaping public perceptions. Social media platforms, due to their structural incentives, contribute to the rapid spread of politically motivated misinformation and disinformation. Political loyalty significantly influenced susceptibility, with respondents more likely to accept information that aligned with their preferred party and reject opposing narratives. Motivated reasoning and selective exposure reinforce partisan bias, highlighting the challenge of fostering impartial information consumption in highly polarised electoral contexts. Yet, respondents with high trust in newspapers, television, and radio were less likely to accept false information. Credible traditional media remain a vital counterbalance to misinformation and disinformation, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the integrity and accessibility of these outlets. Further, the findings advance both theoretical and practical understanding of disinformation and misinformation in electoral contexts. By integrating agenda-setting theory and the political economy of communication, the paper demonstrates that disinformation is simultaneously a cognitive, technological, and structural phenomenon. Agenda-setting explains

the salience of repeated exposure, while the political economy framework situates disinformation within partisan strategies and platform-driven incentives. The identification of education, social media exposure, partisan affiliation, and trust in traditional media as key determinants allows for the design of targeted interventions to enhance voter resilience to misinformation and disinformation electioneering in Ghana.

In conclusion, disinformation and misinformation electioneering uptake in Ghana's electoral process is a complex, multi-dimensional challenge influenced by individual, political, and technological factors. Education, media literacy, and trust in credible sources emerge as protective factors, while partisan alignment and high social media exposure exacerbate susceptibility. The findings highlight the urgent need for integrated strategies combining digital literacy education, regulatory oversight, and robust fact-checking mechanisms to strengthen electoral integrity and democratic stability. If systemic and individual-level drivers of misinformation are addressed, Ghana can safeguard its democratic processes, reduce polarisation, and empower voters to make informed decisions based on verified information. The findings have significant implications for Ghana's electoral integrity and democratic governance. High susceptibility to disinformation can distort electoral choice, erode informed decision-making, and exacerbate political polarisation. Vulnerable populations may be disproportionately influenced, undermining the fairness of the electoral process. Parties may exploit social media and digital platforms to disseminate misleading information strategically. Understanding the structural incentives that drive this behaviour is crucial for regulatory oversight and promoting accountability in political communication. The paper underscores the need for multi-pronged strategies to mitigate disinformation. Digital literacy programs should target low-education and high-exposure populations, while regulations on political communication and social media content can help curb the spread of false narratives. Non-partisan fact-checking mechanisms and media monitoring systems are also critical to safeguard electoral integrity.

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