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THE STATE OF THE GHANAIAN MEDIA

REPORT | 2023

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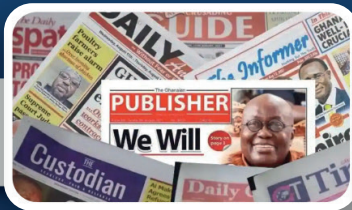
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Preface

Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin, PhD
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Ghana is one of the most stable countries in Africa that has, since its transition to multi-party democracy in 1992, developed a strong democratic culture. Ghana's media is often hailed as one of the success stories of the nation's transition to democracy. With what is perhaps one of the most buoyant media landscapes on the continent, Ghana is often the object of praise for its democratic practice. For instance, the 2017 Reporters Without Borders' world press freedom index ranked Ghana 26 out of 180 countries, ahead of the UK and USA which were ranked 40th and 43rd respectively. In 2018, Ghana's media was the highlight of world attention as the nation hosted UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day celebration in May of that year. While Ghana's press freedom credentials have since seen a dip, the media scene remains a vital part of, and asset to the nation's democracy.

Ghana's media has seen significant growth since the start of the Fourth Republic and its liberalisation of the media. By the third quarter of 2022, the National Communications Authority (NCA), the national frequency regulator, had granted 707 radio broadcast frequency authorisations. Five hundred and thirteen of these are in operation (NCA, 2022). There are also 113 TV stations in operation as at the third quarter of 2022, and more than 100 hundred newspapers to complement radio in the traditional media space. Several digital news, and blogging platforms are also thriving alongside the big social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The present media landscape is in sharp contrast to the picture in 1993 when Ghana begun her democratic journey under the Fourth Republic. At the time, the broadcast space had a solo player, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation operating a number of regional stations. The newspaper scene had more players including a few private titles. Internet-based media were non-existent. Clearly, the media in Ghana is now big business.

However, industry anecdotal evidence suggests that all may not be well. For instance, a recent cleaning up exercise by the NCA resulted in the cancellation of the operational licenses of several radio stations for failure to meet some regulatory obligations. Further, the duopoly on Ghana's political front has significantly affected independence of the media, while the poor state of the Ghanaian economy, and evolutions in global business continue to exert pressure on the industry's financial health. Finally, a general trend towards disregard of ethics and decorum threatens the very foundations and legitimacy of the media.

New configurations in the media landscape provoke new questions and challenge old assumptions about media industries. As well, the challenges confronting the media threaten permanent scars and call for comprehensive reforms to engender much-needed improvements. The State of the Ghanaian Media Report is an initiative to support efforts towards this end through close and regular monitoring of fault lines in the media. The Report covers seven thematic areas of critical importance in the media. These are media and national development, professional practice, financial viability, working conditions, safety of journalists, training and capacity development and media ownership.

The findings in the chapters of this Report, we hope, should serve as tools that help media owners and leaders, regulators and policy makers, scholars, and practitioners to identify areas for individual and collective actions towards reforms.

Key findings

FINANCIAL VIABILITY OF MEDIA
- Generally, many media organisations in Ghana are not profitable; they only break even
- The financial viability of many media organisations in Ghana is threatened.
- Media in Ghana are creatively exploring new business models to stay alive; including digitization, conglomeration, events marketing and crowd funding.
- Digital technologies are fast changing media financing models in Ghana.
- Digital media are now a major source of income in the Ghanaian media.
- One of the biggest threats to the financial health of the media is industry saturation.

WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE GHANAIAN MEDIA
- Recruitment into the Ghanaian media is generally untransparent.
- Many people working in the media do not have contracts.
- There are no established structures for promotion in most media organisations; promotion is largely based on 'whom you know' and owners'/managers' whims.
- Salaries in the media are woefully low. Some employees work long months without pay.
- Most media employees have no healthcare support
- Most media organisations do not provide counselling support for employees who experience trauma in the line of work.

MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND REGULATION
- In Ghana, media pluralism has not necessarily served the public interest, due mainly to concentration of media in a few hands.
- Media ownership is shrouded in opacity.
- There is a growing tendency towards media empire-building.
- Political faces behind broadcast media ownership mean that partisan actors and governments can control public discourse.
- The NCA has a laissez faire attitude to questions about transparency in media ownership.
- The current regime for broadcast regulation allows considerable power and influence to those whose conduct the media are supposed to check.

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS
- There is a growing sense of insecurity among journalists in Ghana
- Violations of journalists' safety are quite common in Ghana.
- Male journalists are more at risk of attacks than females.
- Investigative journalists are the most at risk of attacks
- State actors, including political appointees and police are the worst perpetrators of attacks on journalists.
- Journalists feel that law enforcement agencies and the judiciary do little to protect their safety.

MEDIA AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- Ghana has elaborate constitutional/legislative provisions to support the premise of media for development.
- Journalists and media organisations have a positive disposition towards the promise of media for development.
- There is considerable interest in covering development issues and this is manifested in notable media attention and treatment of such issues.
- Journalists acknowledge deficits in the media's performance relative to its potential to engender and enable national development.
- Coverage of development issues is constrained by limited funding and access to credible sources and subject matter experts/professionals

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
- Journalists in Ghana have a clear understanding of their position in society and their role as watchdogs of society, and as collaborators in nation building.
- However, there seems to be a disconnect between role conception and performance.
- Factors such as ownership influence, journalistic routines, gatekeeper influences as well as advertiser influences interfere with journalists' ability to deliver to the demands of their role conceptions
- Ethical breaches such as of one-sided reportage, and failure to verify news were major challenges to professional practice.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING
- Most media training institutions have been accredited by the Ghana tertiary Education Commission
- Curricular for media training combines theoretical and practical components
- A good number of teachers in accredited institutions do not appear to meet the GTEC requirement for doctoral degree and/or industry experience.
- Journalism students are graduating with basic journalistic skills that require deepening on the job

The State of the Media in Ghana: An Introduction

Audrey Gadzekpo

When Ghana transitioned from military to democratic rule in January 1993 it set the stage for a transformed media landscape that for decades had functioned as a de facto state monopoly. Reasoning that stronger safeguards would allow the media to play their role in supporting democratic culture, the framers of the Fourth Republican Constitution devoted an entire chapter (Chapter 12) to provisions guaranteeing media freedoms, while outlining the media's responsibilities to society. As with all functioning democracies, the Ghanaian media are expected to support democratic life by providing what McChesney (1998) describes as essential political, social and economic and cultural functions. The news media, in particular, deliver on these functions by informing, educating, monitoring society, providing platforms for public discourse, exposing wrongdoing, promoting transparency and accountability and holding those in power answerable to citizens.

Conscious of the intrinsic link between media and democracy, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), with support from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), organised the first 'State of the Media' event in Sunyani in 1994, bringing together the public and various other stakeholders to review the performance of the media in Ghana's new political arrangements. That event, which culminated in the adoption of a code of ethics, was followed a year later with a three-day seminar, the proceedings of which were published in a volume edited by then GJA president Kabral Blay-Amihere and Kwasi Afriyie Badu of FES. The intent was to make such state of the media reviews an annual occurrence, but this did not materialise.

At the time of the first stock-taking exercise, only 37 companies had received approval from the Frequency Board (the precursor to the National Communications Authority) to operate radio stations, and only a few had managed to start broadcasting. Today, Ghana boasts one of the most vibrant media landscapes in Africa with hundreds of newspapers registered with the National Media Commission (NMC), over 500 radio and about 120 TV currently on air, and countless digital platforms in operation. Such exponential growth in the media and information ecology forms the rationale behind this "State of the Ghanaian Media" report.

The Report thus picks up the unfinished business of almost three decades ago by examining the problems and prospects of the media to inform both theoretical understandings and practice on how well they can play their normative roles and functions as one of the key pillars of democracy. The empirical data informing all the assessments were obtained through qualitative, quantitative or mixed method approaches. The seven chapters in the report address interrelated issues that affect media culture and the ability of journalism to contribute to democratic growth in Ghana, namely: media and national development, professionalism, financial viability, conditions of service, safety of journalists, training and capacity building and ownership.

Media and National Development

The first chapter, titled "Media and National Development: Premise, Promise and Practice," signals the dilemma faced by media in a developing nation context. It is premised on the notion of news media as a public good and as elegantly stated by the authors, as "constitutive of and consequential to national development." According to Tietaah and Ayisi, the role of journalism in this context can be inferred from several constitutional provisions as well as legal and policy documents. Based on the theoretical postulations of Christians et. al. (2009), they reiterate the importance of such normative roles as acting as watchdog, providing surveillance, as well as giving timely, and accurate information to enable citizens' decision making. Tietaah and Ayisi argue that it cannot be taken for granted that journalists understand the essence of these roles thus they undertook a study to determine the attitudes and dispositions of Ghanaian journalists

towards national development and to assess their coverage on important sustainable development goals (SDGs) such as health and education. Their findings show journalists were conscious of the important role they play in national development but conceded there was room for improvement. The findings also showed an increase in coverage (almost a doubling) on health and education over a five-year period from 2016 to 2021. Furthermore, over half the stories on health content analysed were assessed as resulting from the initiative of journalists rather than event-driven or from inter-media sourcing. Still the chapter identifies several challenges media confront in bringing stories on development to attention. These include resource constraints, finding experts sources or the right officials to talk to and obtaining credible information. The chapter takes particular note of the tensions between commercialisation and public interest coverage, especially for private media practitioners, and observes that health and education are better covered when media organisations have dedicated desks that compel them to give regular attention to such issues.

Professionalism in the Media

Despite the significant contributions journalists have made to democratic growth in Ghana, professionalism is perceived as in crisis with indices such as Afrobarometer noting a decline in public support for the media on account of perceived falling standards and ethical breaches (Conroy-Krutz & Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, 2019).

In chapter two, Akrofi-Quarcoo and Umejei evaluate how journalists understand their professional roles and the factors that impinge on their performance. The research underpinning the chapter seeks to discover whether or not a link exists between journalistic role conception and role performance as demonstrated in such journalistic tasks as reporting and presenting news, and ethics, editorial independence, and fact checking and verification practices.

The chapter discusses perceptions of professionals regarding public trust in media, their sense of the normative roles they play, and their views on journalistic independence and ethics. The findings showed journalists had differing views on how their work is perceived by the public; some said the profession enjoys high levels of public trust, while others gauged trust levels as low. Some respondents also blamed social media for the erosion of trust in the media. Respondents were generally in agreement, however, that their normative roles included informing, educating, and acting as

watchdogs. They also mentioned the importance of the collaborative role journalists must play in transitional democracies and developing nations such as Ghana. Journalists considered themselves independent but conceded that certain routines and competing interests, including commercial pressures, and subtle rather than overt proprietorial and political influences, sometimes influenced the outcomes of their work.

When it came to ethics, many professed familiarity with the ethical codes governing their profession but admitted to breaches such as one-sided news reports and intrusion of privacy. Opinions were divided on the thorny issue of brown envelope journalism, commonly known in Ghana as *Soli*, where journalists receive money for covering stories. Mainstream journalistic views consider soli as unethical (Skjerdal 2010) although the debate on brown envelope practices acknowledges the poor working conditions of journalists in many African countries and arguments suggesting such practices could be considered as help (solidarity) rather than as bribery. The authors observed that there were few newsrooms with written down policies on *soli*, a situation that encouraged journalists to justify it as money for transportation or honorarium and a matter for individual conscience rather than an issue of integrity for their organisations.

Financial Viability of the Media

One of the pressing issues confronting traditional media in countries across the globe is the question of financial viability in the face of technological advancements that have democratised communication and fueled fierce competition from alternative information platforms. In chapter three, Yeboah-Banin and Adjin-Tettey assess the financial condition of Ghanaian media, establishing the link between economic viability and the capacity of media to perform well and with integrity. They discuss how the struggle for survival due to the weak financial position of many media organisations poses a danger to professionalism and concerns about poor journalistic standards that have long dogged Ghanaian media practice. The chapter charts the patterns of revenue inflows into the media, the revenue generation strategies of media organisations and the factors impacting on their financial health.

The data shows that as in many other African countries, COVID-19 had a devastating impact on the Ghanaian media, causing loss of revenue and job cuts at a time when media were already under stress from disruptions in the information

ecosystem caused by the internet, social media and big tech companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter. Technological advancements, according to Yeboah-Banin and Adjin-Tettey, have also put major financial strains on media companies because they must retool and modernise their operations to remain competitive.

The study identifies another source of dwindling advertising revenue peculiar perhaps to the local context – the fact that increasingly some organisations, especially churches that used to be heavy advertisers have established their own media channels and no longer need to advertise in other media. Yeboah-Banin and Adjin-Tettey blame some of the financial challenges on media over-saturation in Ghana, compared with other African countries, arguing that "about every 64 thousand Ghanaians have a radio station to serve them, compared to Nigeria's average of over 300 thousand people per station in an economy more than five times that of Ghana." They also observe that over-saturation is most exacerbated in big cities such as Accra and Kumasi.

Media strategies for survival include content co-creation, diversification of products and attempts to extend reach by setting up other platforms, organising events, loaning out facilities and taking better advantage of digital opportunities. A few media organisations are also identifying grant funding to augment their sources of revenue.

An insightful finding emerging from the research underpinning this chapter is the heavy dependence of traditional media on advertising from the pharmaceutical sector, especially herbal medicines. Contrary to long-held perceptions that the telecommunications and banking sectors are dominant sources of advertising for Ghanaian media, the study showed herbal medications contributed as much as 24 percent of all advertising revenue for television and 22 percent for radio across the country. The authors point out that the media's reliance on the poorly regulated herbal sector raises concerns about whether the watchdog can bite the hand that feeds it.

The chapter ends by making such recommendations as capacity building to enable media diversify revenue streams, and training to help media managers to work more optimally. It also makes the case that international donors and big tech companies ought to provide more support for media sustainability.

Conditions of Service for Media Professionals

Much like other professional businesses, the media industry relies on the recruitment and retention of good professionals to sustain itself. The remuneration and conditions of service professionals receive influences the outcomes of the recruitment process, the quality of work they produce and their longevity within the company or the profession. This chapter re-echoes the effects of the financial constraints captured in the previous chapter by interrogating more closely the pecuniary and other incentives that drive the media industry. Co-authored by Yeboah-Banin and Braimah, the chapter draws from a study on the conditions under which media practitioners were recruited and how they are treated within their organisations. The findings reveal a lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion practices, which the authors characterise as "shrouded in patronage, nepotism and the absence of structure." Most employees find work in the media not through open competitive means such as advertised positions, but through informal channels such as introductions by influence peddlers, headhunting and cold calls to media organisations. Importantly, the study found that the manner of recruitment and social media popularity affect salaries and conditions of service that media employees are offered. The study also found recruitment was gendered with male professionals more than twice as likely to have been headhunted than their female colleagues and in many cases receiving better salaries.

Findings clearly suggest that although the media industry is considered a formal employment environment, media work is precarious with little job security. Some 40 percent of people working in the industry have no contractual agreements. The situation is even more tenuous for those who work outside cities as less than half of non-city respondents said they had no contracts spelling out their conditions of service.

The precarity of media work is also demonstrated in the low level of salaries employees receive. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) earned monthly incomes of at most GHC1,000. The research also uncovered evidence of unpaid or irregular payment of salaries, with 30 percent of respondents stating they experience frequent delays in salary payments. The lack of other benefits commonly provided in the formal labour market, such as healthcare, paid leave, and family support, is another example of poor working conditions media workers face. Less than 40 percent of the respondents indicated that their organisations provide coverage for the health

of employees with the radio sector identified as particularly bad in this regard. The study also found that few media companies offered psychological support in situations that may be needed and little family support when an employee dies. And while the majority of newsrooms had employee codes of conduct, few had policies on sexual harassment or discrimination, although a majority of respondents (close to 60%) said there were clear sanctions for misbehaviour and that they could seek redress if wronged in the workplace. The authors, however, note with concern that close to 30 percent of respondents either did not know of any provisions on sanctions or said they were non-existent.

Yeboah-Banin and Braimah argue that the implications of poor working conditions are manifold. Lack of clear contractual agreements between employees and their organisations, low incomes and lack of basic benefits compromise journalistic independence by making journalists vulnerable to co-optation and corrupting influences from the powerful forces in society they are expected to hold accountable.

Safety of Journalists

The ability of journalists to play their normative roles in promoting democratic ideals is predicated on the kind of environment in which they operate. Unsafe work environments adversely affect media performance because journalists have to strike a balance between getting their story and safeguarding their safety. Scholars argue that beyond the threats to individual reporters, attacks on media compromise the profession, freedom of expression and democratic society (Slavtcheva-Petkova et. al, 2023). Chapter five discusses both physical and psychological safety as one of the structural constraints media practitioners face in discharging their duties. As Adjin-Tettey argues, much like many places around the world there has been a deterioration in the safety of journalists in Ghana. The research findings underpinning this chapter document safety violations against media professionals both online and offline, the kinds of violations meted out to them, those responsible for the violations as well as the attitudes of institutions and actors responsible for safeguarding journalists. The findings suggest an upward trend in recorded incidents of safety violations against journalists and note the vulnerability they feel on account of their media jobs. For example, three in 10 respondents had experienced some form of safety or security violations while carrying out their duties and almost 70 percent said they had knowledge of violations against some of their colleagues. Journalists were

at increased risk during elections and other periods of heightened political contestation. At least five journalists were attacked during the 2020 elections, according to the study.

The most common violations suffered were verbal abuse, which formed close to 30 percent of violations, followed by intimidation (23.6%); physical abuse (20.9%); threats (14.5%); online trolling (9.1%); cyberbullying (6.4%); public shaming (5.5%); and spying (1.8%). Journalists reported feeling particularly threatened in the course of doing investigative work.

There were gendered patterns observed in the kinds of violations also, with males more likely to suffer physical abuse (18.2%) than females (4.9%). Conversely the likely victims of online trolling were females (9.8%) compared to males (3.6%).

The most commonly named culprits of violations against journalists were state actors, particularly police and security operatives, although close to 46 percent of all violations could be traced to non-state actors, including political fanatics, thugs, business owners, social media influencers, demonstrators, social groups, illegal miners and contractors, and surprisingly, fellow journalists. The study found for example that it was not uncommon to find journalists trading insults with one another both online and in mainstream media. Interestingly, respondents perceived poor working conditions as a form of abuse, particularly in instances where remuneration is withheld or left unpaid.

Still, despite these threats to the safety of journalists they considered Ghana a relatively safe country, with some noting that violations against journalists today paled in comparison with the era of military dictatorship. Respondents also observed that it was still possible for journalists to attack state officials in their reports without worrying about being hounded.

Respondents, however, did not perceive they had adequate protection from their own organisations and associations as well as state institutions mandated to protect them. Close to 30 percent of journalists did not think their workplace provided a safe environment and were skeptical their employers cared for their security and safety. They also noted the failure of many media organisations to provide protective gear and psychological help for their employees. Half of the respondents indicated that there was no medical care for journalists who suffer trauma in the line of duty and a significant minority (37.4%) reported not having medical coverage. Even though close to 60 percent were aware their employers had legal aid for safety violations against them, more than a quarter did not and 15 percent were unsure.

Media professionals also expressed disappointment with the level of support they get from law enforcement, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), the National Media Commission (NMC) and the judiciary and perceived little had been achieved by the newly established Office of the Coordinated Mechanism on the Safety of Journalists, designed to deal with issues of threats on journalists' safety and security.

The findings acknowledged the role some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play in support of journalists' safety and insecurity, notably Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), Imani Ghana, Alliance for Social Equity and Public Accountability (ASEPA) and the Star Ghana Foundation. Also acknowledged was the provision of an insurance package for journalists covering the 2020 general elections initiated by the GJA.

The chapter discusses the provision of tools and remedial actions that make the working environment safer for those who work in the media and ends by proposing a series of recommendations some of which require internal reforms and action, such as enacting and enforcing codes of practice and policies that would create a more secure workplace for journalists.

Training and Capacity Building

Quality journalism requires that professionals are well trained either formally in institutions of higher learning or on the job. Over the years, numerous capacity building initiatives have been organised and financed through external benefactors (international donors, local and international NGOs, etc.) and internal efforts (media organisations and associations) to improve the level of professional standards, ethics and specialisation of journalists. Ofori and Anane examine the status and curricula of journalism and media training institutions and the efforts made to build the capacity of media practitioners to deliver on their promise.

The chapter starts with a brief but useful background on the beginnings of formal journalism education in 1959 with the establishment of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) to the current situation where an explosion in university-based education in communication studies offers more opportunities for formal training of media practitioners. Ofori and Anane comment on the Western-centred nature of journalistic education, noting that although there were texts authored by local and continental experts, foreign texts continue to dominate learning and

teaching materials used in many communication classrooms.

They indicate that the exponential growth in media training institutions has not negated the unprofessional and skilled labour force employed in many media organisations and consequently explored the factors that may explain this seeming contradiction.

Findings from their study showed that most journalism and communication studies programmes were accredited, although accreditation had lapsed in many cases. Ofori and Anane also found that the vision and mission of programmes were poorly articulated and that curricula varied across institutions. However, the evidence showed that as pertains elsewhere, journalism training was geared towards both theoretical and practical learning and that in general students were exposed to professional practice courses, liberal arts and science courses, as well as conceptual courses. In addition, students do internships and have access to facilities for practical work.

The study found lapses when it came to the qualification of faculty. The Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), which is responsible for accreditation, mandates that those who lecture at universities must have doctoral degrees and/or industry experience. Ofori and Anane found there was non-compliance with this provision as many lecturers did not have doctoral degrees, although many MPhil holders were enrolled in PhD programmes. Of concern was the finding that there were instances where lecturers with no degrees in communication studies were employed to teach courses in the discipline. They observed that the lack of qualified teachers may be partly to blame for poor journalistic practices.

The chapter also observed that professional capacity is built both in-house and through external training, including skills development in new media technology, knowledge in ethics and law, and basic journalism.

Media Ownership and Regulation

The symbiotic relationship between media and democracy strongly suggests that democracy thrives where there is media pluralism. However, who owns media, and the form ownership takes can determine whether the media system is truly democratic or not as demonstrated by the diversity of platforms on offer to citizens, regardless of socio-economic circumstances. As McChesney (1998) argues ownership and management arrangements as well as regulatory frameworks within which media

operate exert powerful influences on media content. Tietaah, Braimah and Asante interrogate that claim in the context of Ghana by exploring the nature of media ownership and how the communication industry is regulated. The findings underpinning the chapter confirm the proliferation of broadcast media by noting that the National Communications Authority has since 1996 granted authorisation to more than 700 radio and close to 160 television stations. The findings, however, reveal the skewed nature of authorisation in terms of geographic location and media types. A significant number (46%) of all radio licenses are held by media in only four regions, namely Ashanti, Western, Greater Accra and Bono, and a disproportionate number of these (74%) are commercial stations as compared with 21 per cent classified as community stations and five percent as public stations.

Diversity is even more lacking in the case of television, which is concentrated in a few hands and where most stations are based in Accra but with national reach. According to the authors 85 percent of the 156 TV stations authorised to operate are free-to-air national services and only six stations target delineated markets in the specific regions they operate in.

Of particular concern is the lack of transparency in the allocation of frequencies that emerged from the study. Not only is ownership opaque because individuals who control broadcast frequencies are able to hide behind company names, it is largely perceived as fraught with political partisanship and patronage. Tietaah, Braimah and Asante also found that the lapses in regulatory policy and enforcement have encouraged a trend towards media concentration and cross ownership, which further undermines pluralism in media.

They place part of the blame for these failings on the absence of a holistic broadcast regulatory framework that would ensure equity and balance and prevent conglomeration and the concentration of media in the hands of a few powerful, mostly male elite. The broadcast bill was first drafted in 2014 but despite several assurances over the years by successive governments to enact it into law, it is still in draft form.

The chapter ends with recommendations on how to address these challenges, including a restructuring of the regulatory institution responsible for frequency authorisation in ways that de-politicise and make it more transparent. The chapter also recommends data-driven and policy responses to media ownership guided by a public interest approach aimed at ensuring diversity, equity and less market conglomeration and concentration.

Conclusion

This State of the Media report confirms the centrality of media and the practice of journalism in promoting the public interest in the furtherance of democratic development. Collectively the seven articles contained in the report provide evidence on the role of the media in Ghana's development and the state of affairs regarding key media indicators such as professionalism, financial viability, conditions of service, safety of journalists, training and capacity building, and ownership.

The assessment confirms the positive roles media play and captures the complex and challenging conditions under which the labour force works and how structural and operational constraints hinder their ability to play a more robust role in fostering Ghana's evolving democracy.

The insights provided and the recommendations proffered are useful in instigating appropriate reforms in the media sector. As suggested by some of the authors, clear policies are needed to guide recruitment and remuneration practices and professional standards. Better regulatory frameworks are also needed to safeguard the well-being and security of journalists as well as ensure more equitable growth in the media sector.

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Media and National Development: Premise, Promise and Practise

Gilbert Tietaah and Aurelia Ayisi

Abstract

This study was designed to offer an objective evaluation and verdict on the state of the media as indicator and instrument of national development in Ghana. It proceeded from the point of view that belief informs (or should inform) behaviour, and sought, therefore, evidence on the role perceptions and performances of journalists to assess the current capacity and contribution of the media to development in Ghana. It employed an adaptation of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design to interview media practitioners about their journalistic role conceptions on issues of health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) and to compare these with their role enactments as evident in media output or content on these two goals. The indicative evidence on their role expectations (premise), role intentions (promise) and role enactments (practise) collectively point to the possibilities of the media and/for development in Ghana. Specifically, the findings show an awareness and disposition of individual journalists and their media institutions towards the promise of media for development. The auspicious premise and promise, in turn, reflect in the practice of communication for development, particularly as evidenced in the production and presentation of health and education programs. These findings offer useful fodder for media practitioners and policymakers, development brokers and academics interested in discovering more effective ways of partnering the media in improving the role of media in stakeholder participatory engagement in decision-making and development.

Keywords: Development communication, journalistic roles, SDGs, health, education, Ghana

Introduction

This study was designed to offer an objective evaluation and verdict on the state of the media as indicator and instrument of national development in Ghana. The idea of media as both constitutive of and consequential to national development has informed and framed much of the conversation within scholarly and policy circles. Of interesting note, in this regard, are the insights of US-born journalist and communication professor Wilbur Schramm – as are those of key figures within the discipline (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2021; World Bank, 2022). The thesis of Schramm's (1964, 1967) links of mass media to national development is that the media can catalyse "the urge to develop economically and socially" (p.42) by, for instance, supplementing the instructional resources of local schools; by multiplying the availability and agency of health facilities and providers; and generally, by propagating the information and knowledge that people need to respond to the opportunities and challenges of their environment.

We proceed from the point of view that belief informs (or should inform) behaviour, and we seek, therefore, evidence on the role perceptions and performances of journalists to assess the current capacity and contribution of the media to development in Ghana. Specifically, we do this by interviewing media practitioners about their journalistic role conceptions and comparing these to their role enactments as evident in media content.

This chapter presents, first, the policy framework of the Ghanaian polity within which the role of media as a development variable may be presumed and pursued. In the process, we seek to critique and illustrate the underpinning precepts (the premise) that guide assumptions and applications of media as both indicator and agent of development. Next, and before turning to the evidence about how this potential is being enacted (in practice) by the media

in Ghana, we seek and report the role perceptions (the promise) of journalists about the national development remits of the media and whether and how these potentials might be realised. We then end with conclusions and recommendations on how the development potentials of the media might best be exploited.

Research questions

To establish the foregoing object of inquiry, we were guided by the following three research questions:

1. What is the basis for any expectations of the role of media in national development in Ghana (premise)? Answering this question requires a discursive engagement with the conceptual and constitutional contexts that invite (or should define) the presumption of a development imperative of the media. Informed by the literature (Lennie & Tacchi, 2015; Manyozo, 2012; Servaes, 2021; Tietaah, 2016), we assume that a development-oriented polity should engender or enable the attendant journalistic interest and attention to media and/for development.

2. What are the attitudes and dispositions of journalists in Ghana towards national development as a subject of media attention and action (promise)? This question is based on the idea that it is possible to perceive and predict an individual's behavioural intent by examining their attitudinal cues and subjective norms (Ajzen, 2005; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Anderson, Noar, & Rogers, 2013; Rossmann, 2020). We assume that if journalists are oriented towards media for development, they would be disposed towards the issue salience and news worthiness of development subjects/goals.

3. How do the media in Ghana cover the subjects of health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) (practise)? This question invites attention towards the "particularly Africentric" option of development journalism (Tietaah et al. (2018) which invests in the media the strategic role of "reporting public interest issues on account, primarily, of their importance or implications for the realities and needs of socially and economically disadvantaged members of society" (p. 93). We assume (following Manyozo, 2012) that performance of this role may be ascertained by assessing the process and presence of media output or content.

Methodological considerations

To ensure that the means by which we sought to assess the premise, promise and practice of media and/for development in Ghana were suitable for the three research questions, we employed an adaptation of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 306). First, we applied the interpretive document analysis technique (Bowen, 2009) to reveal and review the regulatory/legal framework within which the media role expectations or enactments might be envisaged or evaluated. Specifically, the publicly available and relevant documents were assembled through an initial reading of their titles and (sub) headings. Where necessary, a key word search was then performed – using descriptors such as media, press, broadcasting (radio, television, ICT), communication, journalism (journalist(s)), editor, freedom of expression, public interest, democracy, development. The specific provisions in each document were then closely read and discursively analyzed in tandem with the normative theories and thoughts on the enabling environment for media, democracy and development. The interpretive analysis also provided the insights for recommendations on how policies might better leverage the instrumentality of the media for/of development.

Next, to address the question of role perceptions, we employed the responsive interviewing process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) in order to gain a sense of the attitudes and value orientations of informants towards development news and issues generally, and where necessary, illustrated with reference to the indicators of SDGs 3 (on health) and 4 (on education). In other words, because national development is a broad and nebulous concept, whenever clarification was required by the interviewee, we used as proxy, the two indicative SDG subjects: health and education. Specifically, an interview guide, partly informed by the evidence of the policy environment (the premise) was developed and administered – with the intent not so much to assess the factual value of their views as to understand the perceptions of key informants and the meanings they give to their role. Thus, we explained to informants our meanings of health and education with reference to their respective goals and targets; nevertheless, we allowed their response to be informed and framed by their organisational cultures and personal practices.

Four key informants were purposely selected to enable inclusiveness of views from the diversity of media types, namely, GBC, Multimedia Group, Despite Media, and Marhaba Radio. We consider that the four media organisations combine to satisfy considerations of diversity and inclusiveness for the following three reasons. First, they represent the

broad categorisations of media according to type: public (GBC), commercial (Multimedia Group and Despite Media Group) and community (Marhaba Radio). Second, their orality and linguistic malleability assure that they cater to the multiple language competences and preferences of audiences: GBC, English and multiple local languages; Multimedia, English language; Despite, Akan language; Marhaba, Hausa language. Third, while the selected media may presumably exclude the print, online and other media offerings and platforms, this concern is attenuated by the imperatives of practice and prudence. Each of these four media organisations employs the range of cross-media channels and trans-media formats, including print and online as illustrated in the fact that we used their online publications as data source. As McQuail (2015, p. 8) has pointed out, "online news and information do not seem to present any insuperable obstacle... by virtue of their ready availability."

With the consent of the key informants, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed to distil responses and identify common or contrary experiences and expectations. An axial coding of the data was then performed to develop and refine emergent thoughts and themes. The identities of the interviewees were anonymised using the first letter of their names along with the name of their organisation.

Finally, to answer the third research question, on the journalistic role enactment (practise) of media and/for development, we combined the individual interview responses with quantitative data on the content of online publications on or related to national development. Again, for the purposes of efficiency and to reflect the exploratory sequential disposition of the study, we reduced the concept of national development to key measurable constructs on or related to health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4). Specifically, we asked informants about their use of media "as instruments and spaces for communicating about and in development" (Manyozo, 2012:54), citing programmes and instances of health and education as examples. We then used insights from their responses to guide a keyword search for news and issues on/about health and education in each of the online portals/platforms of the four media organisations from which we conducted the informant interviews. These are Myjoyonline, GBConline, Peaceonline and Marhabaonline. Furthermore, for the same reasons of data efficiency, we limited the search to related and relevant items published between 2016 – 2017 and 2020 – 2021. We then applied the inductively-driven processes of coding and categorising

responses into a coherent account of the presence and nature of news and information according to the protocols and processes described by Neuendorf (2012), that is, "without attempts to infer or predict to source variables or receiver variables" (p. 73).

Premise: Role expectations

As indicated earlier, the starting point of an objective diagnostic on the role perception (promise) of journalists and, in turn, role performance (practise) of media and/for national development is to examine the policy context that is presumed to engender and enable the verdict reached. To that effect, our thesis is that the role envisaged for journalism and the media in Ghana is – both intuitively and instrumentally – about national development (read, public interest). We find support for this conviction, first, from a close reading of the opinion of the framers of the current (1992) Constitution, who were persuaded that a media environment that is conducive to national development aspirations (as encapsulated in the Directive Principles of State Policy – notably, Article 36 – to which we shall revert shortly) is one in which "objective information is disseminated, different and opposed views are presented and shared, enlightened public opinion is formed and political consensus mobilised and achieved" (Ghana, 1991, p. 85).

Flowing from this, the constitutive role of the media as arbiter of the national public interest is enunciated or anticipated in various provisions of the Constitution, including Articles 12(2), 21(1) *(a)* & *(f)*, 35, 37, 39, 41, 42, 55 (1) (2) (11) (12) and 162–173. In addition, a number of enabling legislations and policies reinforce these rights and responsibilities, including the NMC Act, 1993 (Act 449), the NCA Act, 1996 (Act 524), and the Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD) Policy (2003). Furthermore, the link to development is also variously asserted or inferred in the Constitution; notably in the preamble and in Articles 14 (1), 15 (1) (2), 16, 17 (2), 18, 20 (1) *(a)*, 24–26, 27 (3), 28, 29, 34–41, 85 (1), and 87.

It is significant to reiterate also that in preparing their proposals for a draft constitution, the framers of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana had in mind to produce "an instrument for promoting development" (Ghana, 1991, p. 5). As Tietaah (2013, pp. 66–67) points out, this development philosophy and orientation to constitution-making has been reaffirmed by the Constitution Review Commission, established in 2010 to undertake a consultative review of the 1992 Constitution. Among the values and principles that guided the work of the Review Commission is the objective that "The review exercise, cumulatively, must move the Constitution from a political

document to a developmental document, shifting from the *politics of democracy* to the *economics of democracy*, so that Ghanaians may look at it as the source of renewed hope for the future (Fiadjoe, 2011, p. 3 [italics in original]).

But to loop back to the Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 162*(5)*, which guarantees the freedom and independence of the media, also imposes the duty on "all agencies of the mass media … to uphold the *principles, provisions and objectives* of [the] Constitution." Those *principles* and *objectives* are enunciated in Chapter 6 of the Constitution as "The Directive Principles of State Policy." A re-reading of the eight articles in which the directive principles are expressed shows that the word "development" is mentioned 14 times (not counting the many other denotations – such as "education" and "health" – and connotations – such as "empowerment" and "welfare" – that also operationalize the idea of development). In fact, the whole of Article 38 is dedicated to "Educational Objectives," and although there is no similar exclusive treatment under a rubric of "health objectives," considerations of health are both implicitly conveyed and directly mentioned under Article 36 – on Economic Objectives (specifically, 36*(10)*) – and under Article 37 – on Social Objectives (specifically, 37*(5)*). Obviously, it would require the availability and agency of a conducive media milieu to ensure that the democratic dividend is distributed in a way that "contribute[s] to the overall development of the country" (Constitution, Article 36 (2) *(c)*) for example. This expectation is also based on the vision and promise of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS, 2003), which seeks to pursue a private sector led liberal market economic policy that, nevertheless, ensures "the protection of the vulnerable and excluded within a decentralized, democratic environment" (Government of Ghana, 2003, p. 2).

Extrapolating from the foregoing, it is easy to illustrate the conjunctive role expectations of the media and/for development in terms of what Merrill (1974, p. 45) refers to as the "reference theory" of media-government relationship. What this theory suggests is that investments in, for example, education, health, or agriculture, will benefit from related investments in a "school broadcast media," or a "social marketing foundation" campaign, or a "farm radio forum" program.

Our conclusion on the premise and role expectation, therefore, is that the prevailing legal and policy regime is so sufficiently development-oriented as to engender or enable the attendant journalistic interest and attention to media and/for development.

Promise: Role intentions

As noted earlier, the relationship among media, communication and national development has been normatively asserted (Manyozo, 2012; Melkote & Steeves 2015; Servaes, 2021) and empirically ascertained (Schramm, 1964; Tietaah 2013; Wilkins, Tufte & Obregon, 2014). Studies also suggest both constitutive and consequential links between the presence and nature of media use and such development variables as education, health, agriculture, good governance/democracy and (gender) empowerment (cf. Rogers, 1993, Lennie & Tacchi, 2015; Singh, 2016). Based on the logics of the theories of reasoned action and planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2005; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), we sought to determine from the behavioural intent (promise) of journalists the prospects of their practising or promoting the premise and role expectation of media and/for national development. Accordingly, we asked informants questions pertaining to their personal or attitudinal factors (i.e., ability and willingness) and their social or normative factors (i.e., institutional culture and audience expectations).

In answer to the question about their view of media and/for national development, the responses reflected a general sense that journalists believe their role to be both indicative of, and instrumental to, national development. The media also have the important watchdog responsibility to hold public officials accountable to the people as expressed in the so-called fourth estate mandate. This is illustrated in the following response by an informant:

> *As you know, the media is the fourth realm of the state. And for that matter, we are more like the voice of the people. So, we make a great impact. So, whatever we say, and whatever we do, directly and indirectly affect the community. (B., Marhaba)*

Another point of emphasis is the surveillance function of providing the public with timely, factual and accurate information, particularly to enable citizens to make decisions concerning their lives and also keep the government in check. This response is emphasized by another informant, who said

> *I think that we must be able to bring out the issues that are important in our current situation... not covering up anything; bringing out the truth and helping the people to decide on what to do; helping them to take very important decisions based on the information that we give them. (G., GBC)*

Yet another informant agreed that national development is an important feature of the fourth estate function of the media, but only if journalists first understand what national development is and

what their role is in operationalising that role. As he narrates,

> You see, when the media understand what it means to say this is national development, or this inures to the benefit of the country... and then orient their efforts, as it were – their news programs, selection of topics, issues for discussions – are geared towards that [purpose, they would be carrying out the development agenda]. (N., Despite)

Corroborating this observation, another informant commented that the media promote national development when they exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right and responsibility to hold government and other duty bearers accountable to the people:

> Those of us in the private media view the promotion of national development in terms of holding government accountable on behalf of the people whose mandate they are exercising. The government and its political party assigns will not always be comfortable with such public scrutiny. But that is the responsibility the Constitution confers on the independent media in a democracy. (S., Multimedia)

When asked about the contributions that they, as journalists and their media houses, made to national development, their responses highlighted two key functions, namely, enterprise journalism by way of programme production and content creation that targets the needs of their community (advocacy journalism), and playing a watchdog role particularly through independent news reporting (accountability journalism); both of these functions are dimensions of development journalism. As one informant noted:

> Sometimes we initiate campaigns – like the Joy Clean Ghana campaign, or like the recent case of the shortage of childhood vaccines and the risk they face of contracting polio or measles. If the media hadn't placed the spotlight on this, the Minister wouldn't have been forced to do the press conference to attempt some explanation – remember he had failed to honour a summons to appear on the floor of parliament. (S., Multimedia)

The informant went on to compare the results wrought by the adversarial posture of the private media to the public/state media that, according to him, imagine – or are given to imagine – development journalism in terms of "towing the line and glorifying the government by focusing on projects." Such an approach known as "the Russian or Chinese model," he insisted would be unhelpful to the course of development in Ghana "where

governments tend to abuse power and act with impunity if left unchecked."

This response contrasts, however, with the attitude expressed by an informant from the state media stable, who recounted thus:

> I think that as journalists our first duty, or our first responsibility, is to the public... bringing out the truth in the issue or situation and helping people to understand what's going on. Currently, people don't understand what is really going on... in terms of fuel prices, in terms of the possible shortage of fuel that's already going on... [we need to] take our time to bring out the issues, then people will better understand it. (G., GBC)

This view is also echoed in the following account of another journalist who noted that

> There are some of the things [about which] the media will have to put government on its toes. For instance,... a policy like free SHS, the media really scrutinized free SHS... Something like Planting for Food and Jobs and then One Village, One Dam... Last year, we sent I think about five reporters up North to follow up on all the dam sites and to report to us – with pictorial evidence – whether they are there or not. (N., Despite)

Besides, an informant explained that his media organisation commits substantial resources to the course of advocacy campaigns that yield tangible governance and policy change outcomes:

> Our model is designed in a way that gives our products a national character and impact. For instance, we have 'special assignments' documentaries, which spotlight big projects that have been abandoned, and we dedicate the full arsenals of our multimedia platforms – radio, TV, online – and we play them up the public interest agenda. One example is our documentary on galamsey – in which we produced samples of waterbodies that have been polluted by illegal and indiscriminate mining activities – which had a lot of resonance with the public. Another example is our investigative journalism projects – which focus on the rot and abuse – and force duty bearers to respond. Then we have CSR projects that involve the provision of classroom blocks, potable water, medical bills and similar social welfare support. (S., Multimedia)

Another theme that emerged was the unanimity in the conviction of informants that they were performing their roles well in contributing to development. This, they argued, is evident through the sheer number of media organizations operating in the country and the diversity in the

issues that they cover. They noted that the current constitutional dispensation has encouraged and enabled a nominal plurality of media outlets and output, which, as one of them noted, "are a necessary condition for freedom of expression in a democracy" (S., Multimedia). Their collective verdict on the performance of the media in advancing the agenda of national development is represented in the following response:

> The media largely has contributed, if you look at the media landscape it's so huge; it's so big. In Accra, you're talking about more than 60. So close to 100 radio stations spanning across, and all of these radio stations have a target audience and everybody make reference to a media house, having to say something, and having to talk about issues that affect them, having to talk about things that are of interest, of knowledge; things that are of importance to their health, life and everything. And so, you realize that mainly, people do listen to radio... say, media houses... And number one, get educated, get informed, to correct wrongs, to develop themselves, and also getting details. So, in that realm, we really have the role and responsibility to contribute, and we're contributing immensely. (B., Mahraba)

In making the point about their role conception and capacity to promote national development, the informants conceded that they could do more. They highlighted that in some areas of their practice, there needed to be improvement to better serve their audiences. These areas of improvement were, especially, to do with the politicisation of news reporting, and the preoccupation of some media with the profit-making motive, at the expense of public interest programming. As one journalist recounted,

> We have not totally failed. And we have not totally done what we are supposed to do right. For example, if you take the current discourse going on about a [National] Cathedral... we are not bringing out the information. It is a politician who keeps bringing out the information and we are just running around with it (G., GBC).

A similar sentiment was shared by another informant, who noted the following:

> What we in media are supposed to do – which we're failing to do – is to push the limits and demand results.... For instance, if you have a media house, and your show is only pertaining to politics, which directly or indirectly doesn't affect the community – you don't talk about health, you don't talk about education, you don't talk about some

> of these things – how do you get change? How do we develop ourselves? How do we get employment... because now the number of uneducated youths is skyrocketing? People now do not see education as important. And media houses do not talk about that. How do we develop our community? So, some media houses focus more on politics, things that are not directly benefiting the local community (B., Mahraba).

The response above highlights the peculiar circumstances of journalists working in private media houses, who, notwithstanding their personal convictions and motivations, must nonetheless account for the corporate interest of their media owners and managers, which may not necessarily be isomorphic with the imperatives of media and/ for national development.

When asked about their journalistic orientations and attitudes towards specific beats, such as health or education, the personal and institutional commitments tended to vary according to the subject matter of attention. There was generally a sense of deliberate intent and conscientiousness towards issues of health in their programming, especially in times of health crises like Ebola and Covid-19. As one journalist reported:

> Currently, in our news, our prime news at 12 o'clock, there is a segment that is also dedicated to health... that takes at least 10 minutes or so in our news every midday to also educate the populace. What we do is that we take a particular health issue, and we invite the experts to tell us what it is, the symptoms, diagnosis and all that.... We also do a health morning show every other week... every other Monday. We also invite experts to tell us... but mostly, that one, we deal with the Ghana Health Service. (N., Despite).

The same deliberate motivations and commitments towards health issues are reflected in the account of another informant when she recounted that:

> At GBC, both on radio and on TV we have health programs. ... we have what they call the health desks with an editor. And for the bulletin, every desk must have a story in the bulletin that makes the bulletin complete. Okay, so we take our two o'clock TV news, there must be a health story in the bulletin. It is a must. All other stories will come in. But we have a health segment on TV. Okay, so the health desk is responsible for ensuring that that segment, that five minutes' segment as dedicated to health is filled with health stories. And so I think that that agenda pushes out all the issues that must come from

the health desk, and they are responsible to feature stories and issues happening in the health system, to project those stories in the segment that have been given to them. (G., GBC)

Among some informants, however, the disposition was notably less exuberant with respect to education issues. This observation is illustrated by the following response when education was cited as an example of government priority and SDG attention:

I think that for that area, we are not doing very well. Yes. Putting emphasis on the education sector, looking at what is happening... I think that it boils down to having these desks, the creation of these dedicated desks will solve the problem. I was hoping, and even for me I think I am at fault... [we need to] give more attention to the current changes in our education curricula, and the effects [they may have] on the students (G., GBC).

It has to be stated, however, that there was not as much unanimity in sentiment on the subject of education as was observed about health. This may be because the incident of a disease outbreak (as the Covid-19 pandemic was) has more news values appeal – and, therefore, a stronger agenda setting force – than the routine issues of education. Nonetheless, another informant reflecting a contrary role conception, contended that they and their media organization were as earnest in their committed to education issues as they were to health. This they attributed to the fact that unlike the specialised field of health, there are many more stakeholders and accessible sources within the education sector; thus, making it easier for them to gain access to resource persons to speak to education issues when they arise. He noted that:

I know that education is one of the areas that the media have devoted a lot of interest and time to.... I think that for education, because you have a lot of stakeholders there... the PTAs, the trade unions... [such as] GNAT, UTAG, TEWU, the committee of Vice Chancellors, CHASS ... and all these bodies that at any point in time when there is something to talk about in education it is not too difficult getting the relevant people to speak to... and flowing from that the media get to flow with them; because there is always information available for the use of the media. (N., Despite)

In contrast to the apparent lack of unanimity in attitudes to education as a development variable, the following account illustrates the general approach of informants and their media towards making health information accessible to their audiences:

For instance, some time ago, there was a statistic from the Ghana AIDS commission that one of our communities is... second when it comes to the HIV AIDS spread. And that's Mamobi community. So, what we were able to do at the time was that we went into the communities to speak with chiefs, opinion leaders, mothers, and the youth on why and how they think that HIV is spreading rapidly within that area. And so, the issues came up. And how do you remedy the situation? It came from them... and so the youth were aware of the situation... and what they needed to do to protect themselves. And when we went back just recently, we spoke to some doctors, some nurses, midwives in the community. They said the number of... [people] infected with HIV was reducing... they commended the station... because nobody paid [us for it] but we are able to do that in the public interest. (B., Marhaba)

Another example is as follows:

On Peace FM, we have a program called 'Mpom Te Sen, that is between 2pm and 4pm, every Friday, and that program has been on the station for the past 23 years. 'Mpom Te Sen tackles general health issues. There are times that we invite experts on specific health issues, to seek their opinion on the program. And when that happens, we devote a whole program for them. (N., Despite)

The findings suggest that health issues receive better attention and reporting when the media organization has a dedicated health desk that plans and executes programming of health content and shows enterprise in promoting the health stories agenda rather than being merely transmitters of events that happen.

Recently, they [on the health desk] did a story on the first female heart surgeon. And so because they are already in contact with medical personnel, they're able to pick up stories, they're able to pick up the inefficiencies in the system, and bring out the issues that need to come out.... so, it's not that we have just a bulletin and then we have a health story. But there are specific programs on health that [engage in] extensive discussion on health issues. (G., GBC)

For some journalists and media houses, their health programming is a direct advocacy response to the needs of their local community. These needs, they note, are not currently being met by the larger state apparatus perhaps because they are issues peculiar to their communities. As one informant noted,

We pay attention to sanitation because we realize that if our environment is clean, will be devoid of any diseases we realize that mostly what is affecting it is how to improve sanitation; because most of our communities are more like a slum area... [there is] no proper layout and all of that, so with diseases like malaria, typhoid, cholera... it's [particular to] our community. (B., Marhaba)

Their efforts, he noted, are not limited to outbreaks and treatments but extend to interventions aimed at awareness creation for disease prevention. The use of health professionals, experts and testimonials are among efforts at enhancing the credibility of the health issues that they discuss.

How we're able to help is mainly through awareness creation.... And we also get people who went through some sort of problem after contacting, for example, Coronavirus... to come to the studio, be able to explain how they were able to survive... the problems they've had... and why it's important for [others] to stay safe and to protect themselves. (B., Marhaba)

On the use of sources, one informant explained that

We bring in the experts. We go into the care centres. We talk to people who have been affected... And it doesn't matter how dangerous it is. The health desk does all that. And I think that in almost all our bulletins, there would be an alert on the need to stay safe. There would be an alert on the need to follow the protocols. And so, when it comes to the cholera outbreak, like those infectious diseases as well, yeah, we do not joke with it. We bring in the right people to talk to and go into the communities, look at what is happening, and then try to find a solution through the resource persons that we also use. (G., GBC)

Another informant highlighted their use of prime time to discuss health issues, particularly issues that occur on the African continent:

The continuous dedication of prime airtime for discussion, what we do is because we have a health desk in our newsroom that monitors... health situations in the world, especially in our Sub African region. So, what we do is that once we are aware of any outbreak anywhere we monitor it, to see how close it is. Once we pick the indication that the disease is escalating, then we contact... Ghana Health Service and the Ministry of Health [as] our first targets... to give us the relevant people to speak to on the subject. We devote ample time for them to educate us on the do's and the don'ts [of the issue]. (N., Despite)

What is apparent, however, is that journalists and the media do not demonstrate as much enthusiastic behavioural intent, attention and resources to education news and issues as they do on the subject matter of health. They do not, for instance, tend to have specific programmes or beat reporters dedicated to education as is observable from their attitudes and attentions to health topics and issues. Here is an illustrative response: "As for education, we have not done it like we have done for the health. We do it as and when there is the need to discuss something related to the education sector" (N., Despite).

This view is echoed by another informant, as follows:

I think that for the area of education too GBC is lacking a bit. The focus has changed, such that in terms of the attention on formal education I don't see it that much in our programs. We do discuss it when it comes up from time to time. (G., GBC)

Even so a difference in perspective was expressed by one informant who insisted that, just like health, they run programmes that propagate education information. In her words, "We have an education programme that is aired on Sundays in the afternoon to promote education" (B., Marhaba).

The informant also expressed the following view on the role the media could play in promoting education in Ghana:

By documenting the people who have excelled in education, by exposing the ills within the educational sector, by calling out policy makers who are not making education attractive for youngsters and advocating for people in underprivileged communities to get educated. If we do these three things we will be able to get to where we want to get to. (B., Marhaba)

Practise: Role enactments

Furthermore, findings show that there was substantially higher aggregate media output on both health and education in the period 2020–2021 (522) than in the period 2016–2017 (170). Between the two periods selected for study, there was also a more than two-fold (106%) difference in attention to health in 2020–2021 (260) than there was to health in the period 2016–2017 (126). The difference in attention to education in the period 2020–2021 (262) versus 2016–2017 (44) was even more remarkable.

Moreover, the English language media devoted substantially more aggregate time and attention to health (337) and education (259) as development variables than did the Twi language media (health, 49; education, 47) for both periods. In relative terms,

the media, collectively, committed more attention to health than education in 2016–2017, but committed nearly equal attention to health (260) and education (262) in 2020–2021 as seen in Figure 1 below.

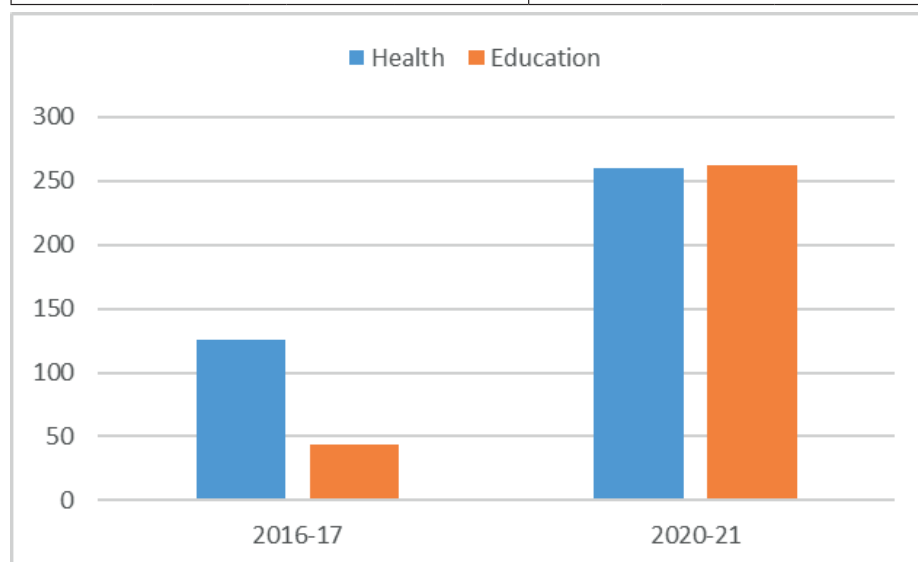| Periods	Health			Education		
	English	Twi	Total	English	Twi	Total
2016-17	104	22	126	24	20	44
2020-21	233	27	260	235	27	262
Percentage change	106.3492			495.4545		

Figure 1: Observable differences in time and language in coverage of SDG 3 and SDG 4

These differences are difficult to explain, particularly as these data are exclusive of the years 2018–2019, thereby disabling any categorical conclusions about possible trends upward. The interview responses also do not offer much explanatory insights as the data here seem to belie the suggestions by some of them that they were more deliberate in their commitments to coverage of health topics than to education topics, a practise for which they cited the outbreak of the Covid-19 disease as basis.

A similar lack of face-value logic is observed in the findings on story type. Here, the data show that across the two development goals over the two time periods the reporting was mostly in the nature of episodic (event) frames – focusing on individual incidents in isolation – rather than thematic (enterprise) frames – addressing, in that case, questions of contexts and trends.

Category	Framing			
	Health		Education	
	2016-17	2020-21	2016-17	2020-21
Episodic	100	118	23	176
Thematic	26	142	21	86

Table 1: Types of health and education story frames

Within specific development topics there was in 2016–2017 a substantially higher number of episodic stories on health (100, 79.4%) than thematic stories on health (26, 20.6%). The reverse was the case (though not by as much) in 2020–2021 when thematic stories on health were nominally more (142, 54.6%) than episodic stories on health (118, 45.4%). On the other hand, on education, there were two times more episodic stories (176, 67.2%) in 2020–2021 than there were thematic stories (86, 32.8%), but there was no essential difference

between stories with episodic frames (23, 52.27%) and stories with thematic frames (21, 47.73) in the years 2016–2017. The total number of stories on education over the period 2016–2017 were substantially fewer (44, 14.28%) than those in 2020–2021 (85.62%).

Category	Source Attribution			
	Health		Education	
	2016-17	2020-21	2016-17	2020-21
Routine	18	20	23	48
Enterprise	92	152	9	140
Press Release	0	8	0	5
Interview	1	4	1	3
Intermedia (SM)	0	1	3	2
Intermedia (WHO)	1	4	0	0
Intermedia (Gov)	2	42	0	59
Intermedia (Int)	7	11	0	0
Intermedia (GNA)	5	18	8	5
Other	0	0	0	0
N/A	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Story source attributions for health and education

Table 2 shows that across the years (2016–2017 and 2020–2021), more health stories were coded as attributable to journalists' own initiative (enterprise) than to any other sources, including routine (event) reports and intermedia (government, international and WHO) sources. A similar pattern is observable for education on which enterprise stories dominated the tallies of sources. These observations boil down to the idea that there was evidence of deliberation and purposefulness in producing/presenting issues on development. On the other hand, not so much attention, on face value, was paid to official/authoritative sources even on the subject of health.

The lack of explanatory logic in these observations is not meaningfully resolved by the key informant interview reports. Notwithstanding the relatively high incidence of enterprise reports across the two periods and two development issues, the informants cited major challenges they faced in developing and delivering development programmes. These challenges fall under three broad categories: financial constraints, challenges with accessing credible information, and challenges with access to subject matter experts/professionals. Underlying these three is also the accrual of political economy influences – of owners, social elites, and politicians. As an example, one informant noted that at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, health professionals were directed to seek permission from their superiors before they spoke to the media. This directive made timely and accurate reporting during the pandemic difficult because the health professionals who were in the frontlines became reluctant to speak to journalists for fear of attracting the displeasure of their employers. As she put it, "Some communiques have gone round directing health offices to seek permission from the top before they talk to you. So that could be a challenge… getting immediate access to information that you need" (G., GBC).

One journalist from a private media organisation recounted that there had been times when their station had set aside prime time to discuss development issues at the economic cost of the station. Even then, they struggled to find resource persons to speak to the issues: "One of the major challenges is resource persons. Sometimes you devote the airtime for discussion on the subject. But to get the right people to speak to us is even difficult" (N., Despite).

For small community stations, informants noted their challenges to be mainly financial in nature as they received no public funding and support in their intervention efforts towards community development. One respondent, for example, noted that "The challenges mainly have to do with logistics… finances. Sometimes

we don't even get to have any support from any government agency. Like for instance, COVID... whatever we did was out of our own goodwill for the community" (B., Marhaba).

With regard to the challenges faced by the media when it comes to education, the respondents shared the following experiences and opinions:

> For me... [given] the situation where everything is politicized in Ghana, can you imagine going to do a story [that reflects negatively] on the senior high school... the Free SHS and the impact it is having? Automatically you are tagged as somebody who doesn't like the government. (G., GBC)

> The challenges mainly have to do, once again, with funding. Programs hardly get sponsored. And we have a lot of people in the community who think education is not important. As we are fighting, we get people fighting us back. As a community, we celebrate people who have gone abroad and made money. They are the mentors; they are the ones the youngsters see; and we are telling them that education is not important. So that is the challenge. Sometimes the community resist [because] they think that [their youth] are going to be pulled astray. (B., Marhaba)

Category	Slant			
	Health		Education	
	2016-17	2020-21	2016-17	2020-21
Positive	96	162	30	207
Negative	30	91	12	45
Neutral	0	5	2	10
Undeter-mined	0	2	0	0

Table 3: Slant of reports for health and education

In spite of these challenges, the reports on health and education were generally more positive across the years (495) than negative (178) as shown in Table 3. The pattern was similar within the specific development issues: health (258 positive, 121 negative); education (237 positive, 57 negative).

Some of the solutions they proffered included improving relationships between the media and various players in the health sector as well as decentralising and de-bureaucratising the processes of gaining access to information because timely health information especially in times of health crisis was important. Here are two illustrative responses.

> I think that if the ministry and its relevant agencies believe that it is important to give health education to the populace, then they must establish a proper channel of communications where media can fit in and get whatever information we want. (N., Despite)

> For me I think it is relationship... so they say that relationship is the currency with which we do everything no. We must be able to form the relationship. And the basis for that relationship should be trust... in that the information you are giving me, I am going to say or give out... in the exact format you have given to me. I am not subtracting. Just as you have given to me that is how I am giving it out. And then if no attention is paid to the health sector, creating desks, having reporters dedicated to the health sector... It helps, so that such a person... anywhere, the people know that this lady is for the health. (G., GBC)

One of the solutions informants offered for improving attitudes and attention towards education news and issues was that journalists needed to be more intentional about covering stories on education and be proactive in that regard. Another suggestion was for the state and its agencies to extend funding

support to media for programs that promote the public interest. Furthermore, regulatory response may be required to ensure the sustainability of media both as growth poles in their own rights, and as agents of national development. In the view of one informant, this is possible on at least two fronts:

> *First, because the numbers of media organisations are expanding and share of the advertising pie is shrinking by the day, the possibility that an advertiser will pull their account if their product or service is criticised may be looming over management choices and editorial decisions. Without some form of regulatory mechanism, it boils down to the capacity of the individual media organisation to withstand the corporate and political pressure and act independently of any interference or influence. For us, our tagline as the home of independent, credible and fearless journalism is our guiding principle. Secondly, some of the content you see in the media – including foreign content – leaves you wondering: what kind of story is this? Some of the sensationalism and scandalous claims charlatans peddling spiritual solutions is also a major concern. But, again, because they attract audiences, some media thrive on it. It may take some form of regulation to sanitize the situation. (S., Multimedia)*

This point is also reiterated in the comments of another journalist when he said

> *Number one, the leaders need to help us in addressing the issues related to education by helping the media propagate the message by owning up to the programs that we do on education so that they own to be able to say that they are in support and also finances and sponsorships on most of these shows that we do so sometimes are unavailable or in short supply. It becomes tiring because you are looking for money to sustain your program and it's something that doesn't come. (B., Marhaba)*

Summary, conclusion and recommendations

This study sought, first, to assess the policy and regulatory contexts in which the role expectations of media and national development might be premised. Secondly, it was designed to gain a sense of individual role conceptions and institutional commitments of journalists and the media towards media and development in Ghana. Third, and flowing from the first two objectives, the study sought to find out the practical applications of media for development.

The indicative evidence on their role expectations (premise), role intentions (promise) and role enactments (practise) on issues of health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) collectively point to the possibilities of the media and/for development in Ghana. Specifically, the findings show that there are elaborate constitutional/legislative provisions to support the premise of constitutive and consequential relations between media and development in Ghana. They also lend support to our conviction of an awareness and disposition of individual journalists and their media institutions towards the promise of media for development. The auspicious premise and promise, in turn, reflect in the practice of communication for development particularly as evidenced in the production and presentation of health and education programs.

The evidence from the content analysis also generally reinforces the responses from the informant interviews, showing that development news and issues received notable media attention and treatment. As acknowledged above, however, some of our content analysis findings were equivocal, including vis-à-vis the qualitative data from the informant interviews. Accordingly, more comprehensive research – in terms of scale and scope – may help establish observable patterns of logical relations within data content analysed and in sequential comparison with informant interview responses.

While the findings demonstrate considerable interest and involvement, there is also an acknowledgement by informants of deficits in performance relative to the potential of media to engender and enable the process and outcome of national development. On that account, informants also showed a disposition towards doing more by way of development journalism.

The disposition and commitment to development journalism is, however, attenuated by the lack of bespoke regulatory and resources enablement, including, insufficient support from policy actors and duty bearers as news sources or resource persons. These may constrain their production of more enterprise-oriented content, such as documentaries and projects exposing graft or addressing gaps in service delivery.

The surveillance and agenda setting roles of the media could also be better harnessed through deliberate policy to catalyse the democratic dividend. This could be done by, for instance, increasing the attention and accountability of policy actors (as duty bearers) on one hand, and facilitating the deliberative participation and empowerment of

citizens (as rights holders) on the other hand within the public sphere.

The constraints of funding for programming, and challenges of access to credible sources and subject matter experts/professionals also all hinder these potentials and their affordances. To effectively operationalise these potentials, therefore, there is a need for conscious commitments of resources and enabling policy responses towards leveraging the multiplier/extensionist role (cf. Merrill, 1974) of the media and/for national development.

For instance, deliberate policy can lead to mainstreaming media literacy capacity enhancement for public officials and build systems of greater accessibility and access between media and experts/professionals as credible information sources and resource persons. Capacity-enhancement interventions should include increasing the orientation and skills of both media and development actors – including in their understandings of the nature and workings of media – on the mutually-beneficial imperative of working collectively towards realisation of development goals.

The findings offer useful fodder for media practitioners and policymakers, development brokers and academics interested in discovering more effective ways of partnering the media in improving the role of media in stakeholder participatory engagement in decision-making and development.

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Media freedom and professional journalism practices

Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo and Lucky Emeka Umejei

Abstract

The past thirty years of democratic governance in Ghana have been crucial times for professional journalism practice. Re-democratization in the early 1990s resulted in constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, including freedom of expression, media independence, and an expanded space for professional journalism development and practice. However, over time, journalism in Ghana has been under constant scrutiny for unprofessional and irresponsible practices, and the role of journalists in a democracy questioned as a result. The chapter examines the interplay between Ghanaian journalists' role conception and actual performance and strives to discover mediating factors that promote or inhibit journalists' ability to practice their craft.

Keywords: Professional practice, journalism, media freedom, political economy of media

Introduction

It is good to be free. But as a journalist, how are you using the freedom to the benefit of the larger society? Are you using the freedom simply because it is freedom and therefore you [as an individual are free] or because you are free to do a lot of things for the people?[1]

The above statement by ace journalist and one-time editor of the *Daily Graphic*, Yaw Boadu-Ayeboafoh echoes a primary concern among media scholars, civil society, and media practitioners over the

1 See Diedong (2008, p. 217)

role of journalists and the standard of journalism practice in a free and liberalised media regime. Having fought for and successfully won the battle for editorial independence, Ghanaians had high expectations of professional performance. Thus, the media attracted considerable public solidarity and "civil society, media activists and trainers and the general public encouraged the press to remain robust" (Gadzekpo (2008: 2).

For example, in the early years of re-democratisation, media exposures of corruption in high public places, triggered corruption investigations by organisations such as Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). Private FM stations were hailed for fostering citizen participation in governance by providing several platforms on phone-in programmes for the public to contribute to national discourses and engage with governance (Tettey, 2001). A most acknowledged contribution to democratic governance in Ghana pertains to media's trouble-shooting role in election coverage. Investigative journalism features by Anass Aremeyaw Anass and Manasseh Azure remain outstanding examples in many accounts of the media's performance, in particular, the performance of the monitorial or watchdog role in exacting public accountability from politicians and duty bearers.

However, for over two decades now, public reactions and assessment of media have been characterised largely by condemnation. Apart from practitioners like Boadu-Ayeboafoh, media educators and researchers have raised issues with professional accountability and declining standards of professional practice (Gadzekpo, 2008; Ofori-Parko & Botwe, 2019; Alhassan, Odartey-Wellington & Faisal, 2018; Tietaah, 2017; Gadzekpo, Yeboah-Banin & Akrofi-Quarcoo, 2018; Alhassan & Abdulla, 2019). These works are worth noting as each exemplifies deficits in professional accountability and role performance. For example, Ofori-Parko and Botwe (2019) have interrogated the legitimacy of using newsgathering tools such as subterfuge and entrapment in producing undercover stories,

despite the public interest such stories engender. Alhassan, Odartey-Wellington and Faisal (2018) focus on the monetization of development content programmes on radio, a growing phenomenon in northern Ghana, pointing out how the practice challenges the civic responsibility role of journalist as information providers for public good. Tietaah (2017) has documented evidence of the use of indecent language on radio during the 2016 elections in Ghana while Gadzekpo et. al. (2018) have raised issues with the use of embellishment and exaggeration in local language news presentation.

Journalistic role conception

Hellmuelar and Mellando (2015:1) define journalistic role conception as "how journalism ought to be." Christians, McQuail, Nordenstreng and White (2009: 119) identify four key roles for journalism as monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative. According to the researchers, the scope of the monitorial role ranges from a more or less channeling of information to carrying out a watchdog role ostensibly on behalf of the public" (p. 125). Facilitative journalism is "deliberately practiced as a means of improving the quality of public life and contributing to deliberate forms of democracy" while radical journalism focuses on "exposing abuses of power and aims to raise popular consciousness of wrongdoing, inequality and the potential for change" (p. 126). Collaborative journalism (between the media and the state) is advocated under crisis or emergency situations. According to Christian et. al. (2009: 127), the role is appropriate in developing nations with their intense pressure towards economic and social development under conditions of scarce resources and immature political institutions."

Several scholars have investigated the role conception of African journalists across diverse countries in contemporary Africa: Evidently, these various roles reflect in one way or another in different countries. For instance, in Tanzania, journalists subscribe to notions of watchdog as well as analyst and entertainer. Tanzanian journalists have also adopted the notion of development journalism that promotes the portrayal of positive images of the country, unity among communities, and supports government and national development programmes (Ramaprasad, 2001) In Kenya, Ireri (2015) finds the most important roles for Kenyan journalists as that of disseminator of information followed by 'advocate for social change,' 'support [of] official policies,' 'motivat[ing] people to participate in civic activities' and 'watchdog'. In Algeria, journalists believe it is very important to criticise government agencies (Kirat, 1998). A survey of South African

journalists shows that while practitioners considered the watchdog role of the media as important, they also agreed it was vital to support the development agenda of government. In other words, journalists play the collaborative and facilitative roles. From these accounts, it could be argued that the dominant role conceptions by African journalists are the watchdog and national development roles, the latter labelled within the literature as the lapdog role.

Nyamnjoh (2015) contends that journalistic roles in Africa extend beyond labelling journalists as watchdogs or lapdogs. He explains that journalists are social beings who are seeking "professionalism in a context of competing and conflicting demands" (Nyamnjoh, 2010, p. 74). Therefore, an assessment of journalists' work performance in relation to role conception ought to take account of all conflicting demands both internal and external as well cultural demands in their role performance.

In Ghana since re-democratisation, journalists have conceived of their roles as watchdogs of society (monitorial role). Hitherto, this role conception was largely dormant as journalists rather saw themselves as allies of nation building (or the collaborative role). A recent capacity building workshop organised for journalists across the country under the auspices of the Ministry of Information, sought to get journalists re-focus attention on nation building. The workshop was themed "Equipping the media to play an effective role in our nation building". In a forward to the programme agenda, Chair of the organising committee, Professor Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo stated:

> The media are among the most important channels for information generation and dissemination available to many citizens, with the mandate to inform, entertain and educate while considering the context of the wider national agenda. Within the framework of their informational role, they have a core duty to help generate transformative change through facilitating access to appropriate and credible information (Brochure, Media Capacity Enhancement Programme, 2022).

The proposed nation building role is not new to Ghanaian journalists, particularly for public sector journalists. It is akin to the collaborative role pursued by pre-democratic governments in Ghana and across Africa. The collaborative role of nation building, as championed by non-democratic states in Africa tended to de-emphasise the watchdog or monitorial role. In championing the collaborative instead of the monitorial watchdog role, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah argued, through his press aide,

that journalists should jettison the kind of journalism seeking to interrogate, but rather adopt one which collaborates with government to engender national development (Hadjor, 1990: 22).

Journalistic role performance

Journalistic role performance is defined as how journalism roles manifest in practice. Scholars have examined the relationship between normative ideals of journalism and the actual practice of journalism (Mellado, 2015; Gadzekpo et al., 2018). Most studies of journalistic role conception have assumed that the way journalists define their roles has a bearing on media content. However, empirical evidence remains, at best, incomplete. This has elicited widespread debate about the relationship between journalistic role conception and the actual performance of journalism (Mellado & Dalen, 2014, p 860). Some maintain that how journalists think about themselves has impact on their work (Mellado & Dalen, 2014, p. 860). Others contend the relationship is not automatic considering there are numerous forces mediating the actual practice of journalism (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Preston, 2009).

Other studies assert that the gap between role conception and role performance is informed by the institution of journalism. For instance, in a study of Chilean journalists, Mellado and Dalen (2014, p. 859) conclude there is a "significant gap between role conception and performance, particularly for the service, civic and watchdog roles." There is a larger gap in the watchdog role than with other roles. This could be attributed to external factors which mediate the actual practice of journalism (Mellado & Dalen, 2014, p. 863). In an empirical sense, the gap between role conception and role performance is defined as the "degree of congruency or discrepancy" between journalistic role conception and the actual performance of journalism (Mellado, Hellmueller & Donsbach, 2017, p. 8).

This chapter examines the interplay between Ghanaian journalists' role conception and actual performance, and the mediating factors that promote or inhibit journalists' ability to practice their craft professionally. Then using the #FixTheCountry anti-government campaign as an empirical signpost, it explores how journalists' role perceptions guide them in the coverage of news events.

The study sought answers to the following questions:

- how do journalists conceive of their roles within Ghana's democratic dispensation?

- how do journalists enact their role conceptions in reporting the news?

- what mediating factors promote or inhibit journalists' ability to perform their roles professionally based on their role concept?

Methodology

This study used semi-structured interviews with five editors and senior journalists from state and private media – *The Mirror, Ghana Television*, (GTV), *Peace FM*, *Ghana News Agency* (GNA), and *Daily Guide* were interviewed. Editors and senior journalists "the central actors in creating guiding principles of journalism ethics" (Diedong, 2018, p. 208). They are the frontliners in ensuring professional and editorial accountability. Their role conception and performance are therefore important in a study of this nature. Interviewees were assigned codes to anonymize their identities as follows:

Interviewee 1: editor of a public newspaper

Interviewee 2: editor of a private newspaper

Interviewee 3: senior journalist of a news agency

Interviewee 4: news editor of a private radio station

Interviewee 5: senior journalist of a public TV station

Findings

Role conception and performance

There was a unanimous agreement that the fundamental roles of the media are to inform, educate and entertain. Beyond these, journalists are guided by public interest values that the media is supposed to serve. These include the watchdog or monitorial role and the nation building or collaborative role. A newspaper editor admitted to the watchdog role of holding leadership to account in a democracy:

> *For instance, if it is the duty of governments to ensure that citizens have hospitals within a certain radius and they are not doing it, you as a journalist needs to prompt society, by letting them know that there should be 10, there are only eight. So that society can hold government accountable to it by asking why that has not been done. (Interviewee 1).*

Similarly, an editor of a private newspaper explained that the role of journalists is to serve as watchdogs of leadership by ensuring that the government is held to account to the electorates in a democracy:

> *So, as a journalist I'm the watchdog for the society. I am there to ensure the government and the powers that be are put in check. And that, things are done properly, proper*

questions are asked, explanations are sought to issues that need clarification. So, I will briefly say that my professional role is to be there for the society I serve (Interviewee 2).

The news editor of a private radio station remarked: "I believe strongly that it is the role of journalists to hold those in public positions and government to account" (interview 4).

However, interviewees were a bit hesitant about the idea of a nation building role for journalists. The sole exception was the senior journalist of the GNA who confidently identified with the collaborative role. He was of the view that the media must collaborate with the government to engender national development. He argued that while such collaboration could occur under certain circumstances, the overriding objective should be to "help build a nation". Even though he preferred to serve as the watchdog of the state, he noted that the focus of his organisation is on "developmental journalism to build one Ghana". He clarified further that while the organisation is part of the state, it did not "mean that when we see something going wrong, we wouldn't put it out there". But some of the editors were not that confident. The evidence demonstrated a lack of consensus on the collaborative role.

For example, Interviewee 5, a senior journalist of a public TV station, who understood his role as a watchdog, disagreed with media organisations 'collaborating' with the government and argued that collaboration is only possible if it is with the people.

The editor of the private newspaper, on the other hand, did not seem comfortable with the word 'collaboration' and preferred to describe jounalists' role as offering support to the government: "I will not say collaboration I will say support. Because, if you say collaboration that means you are working hand in hand with government."

Collaboration, or working hand in hand with the government, may in theory and practice be necessary under certain circumstances (Christian et. Al., 2009). However, it appeared the word was not 'acceptable' to interviewees, not even those who place greater premium on the nation building role. This may be partly because the collaborative role has been labelled as lapdog which suggests lack of journalistic freedom and autonomy, and dependency on state information.

That said, while editors tended to appropriate the watchdog function of the media, circumstances could compel them to switch roles to the nation building or collaborative mode considered important for national cohesion and progress.

Essentially as De Beer et. al. (2016, p.48) has pointed out, serving as a watchdog of society and supporting the development agenda of government are not binary opposites but instead complementary roles.

Autonomy and role performance

Media experts have argued that in order to carry out their professional role successfully and effectively, reporters and editors must enjoy considerable autonomy in the selection and processing of the news (Soloski, 1997). Autonomy confers legitimacy on the profession of journalism when measured against the view that journalists are held in public trust (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Skovsgaard, 2014). Hellmuelar and Mellando (2015, p.1) also contend that "the way journalists conceive of their role will eventually shape the content of stories they produce. We explored how journalists enacted their autonomy in reporting *#FixtheCountry* anti-government protests.

The *#FixTheCountry* campaign was started virtually in May 2021 by young Ghanaians who expressed frustration with governance of the country on Twitter. The campaign transformed into a full-fledged non-political movement with a dedicated platform for mobilization "to build a better Ghana where no person will have to lack their basic rights as a Ghanaian" (FTC, 2022). At the outset, the social movement was resisted by the government which sought, through the Ghanaian Police, a court injunction to refrain the group from organizing protests across the country. Subsequently, the legal impediment was thrown out of court paving the way for the mobilization of youths across political and religious divides to protest against bad governance.

All the interviewees claimed they have autonomy in the news gathering, presentation and reporting process. By implication they would cover all stories including 'anti-government' ones considered newsworthy. Regarding the campaign, each interviewee said their platforms covered it until it turned political and, hence became difficult to cover it as a civil society movement rather than as a corollary of a political party. As explained by Interview 1, the *#FixTheCountry* campaign was "perfect until it became a political group."

Interviewee 3 advanced a similar reason for not covering the campaign because, according to him, at a point the campaign took on a political twist. It is interesting to note, however, the role of culture in mediating journalists' role conceptions and professional practice. As the study found, besides its eventual political undertones, a key consideration in gatekeeping decisions as to whether to cover the

latter stages of the *#FixTheCountry campaign* was how well its actors adhered to cultural notions of decorum. According to the senior journalist of the public TV station, without sacrificing its autonomy, the station would sometimes not cover events critical of government for cultural reasons.

> *We don't have any inhibitions about stories that are critical of government. For many a Ghanaian, critical means insulting. We will not allow you to insult. And that is not trampling on your editorial independence. Because we also have a cultural regime or environment in Ghana. You don't insult your parents (Interviewee 5).*

The cultural influence reflects, in part, the facilitative journalism role which promotes cultural conditions for democracy to thrive (Christian et. Al., 2009). Essentially it would appear that by ending coverage of the campaign, the editors demonstrated bias determined by the way they perceived the movement. Their responses suggest they had certain reservations, culturally rooted or defined, about the growing political coloration of the campaign that could have influenced their reporting.

Interviewee 3 mentioned routine influences of prioritizing events to cover. He explained that his organization received a lot of invitations to cover events. Hence, in setting its priorities, there is the likelihood that a newsworthy event may not be covered because of clashing assignments. Although each of the interviewees confirmed they enjoyed editorial independence while covering the *#FixTheCountry* campaign, they seem to have been influenced by political, cultural and journalistic routine factors.

Internal influences

Beyond political, cultural and news practices as influencing coverage and journalistic autonomy, there are also organizational influences. For instance, the editor of the private newspaper mentioned ownership influence but stated that such influence was minimal.

> *You need to be very sensitive to the owner's interest. I don't know whether you're getting it. Because he who pays the piper will always dictate the tune but in certain instances, they may not…in terms of editorial content, they don't interfere.*

Besides owners, gatekeepers also wield powers of influence. The gatekeepers may be owners or senior officials of the organisation. By causing editors to tow a particular line, the gatekeepers tend to weaken the journalist's autonomy and role performance to the detriment of professional standard and quality and accountability. The private radio station interviewee mentioned the role of gatekeepers in influencing journalistic autonomy, stating that:

> *Those gatekeepers are performing an organizational function. They use that position to more or less get me to tow a certain line. One of the worst things that can happen to a journalist is when he or she is not able to express himself/herself freely (Interviewee 4).*

Interviewee 3 adds that reporters sometimes had to self-censor because "there are some reports we have to re-write or we wouldn't allow to go."

There is also the issue of house style as an influence in journalistic role performance, as explained by Interviewee 1.

> *We work within a certain framework; the newsroom culture. I've been lucky to have worked in a number of newsrooms, so things are sometimes a little different. As in style, etc., even though it's similar. So, I work according to what my organization requires. The newsroom culture here. Style, the dos and don'ts, the ethics.*

Sometimes, style and the dos and don'ts of practice tend to undermine professional standards. An example is the style insertion of embellishments in the presentation of news in the local languages. In contrast, to normative ideas about professional news presentation and principles of objectivity and neutrality; the culture of news presentation in local languages embraces inflections such as opinions, embellishments and dramatization. These might misrepresent the views of newsmakers (Gadzekpo, et. Al., 2018).

Extra-media Influences

The editors of the private media provided evidence to suggest that aside of owners and organizational factors, advertisers' attempts tend to influence news content and that the media sometimes defer to them. This is because the media rely on advertising revenue to fund their operations.

> *Take for instance, you are the marketing manager of MTN and you sponsor a programme. Then on that same programme, I come to run you down, will you continue sponsoring me? Not at all. How do I get paid? That is not to say when it goes extreme, we don't talk about them. For instance, recently, even though MTN is one of our biggest sponsors, there was something about their network. Here, we did not only look at MTN as a company that is going to give us money but the national interest (Interviewee 4).*

He added that:

> There are some advertisers that bring us as much as 200,000 Ghana cedis a week. Now they're involved in a scandal. Do you disregard the money which is coming in from which some would be paying your salary and break the news regardless? It's one of those factors. I've been stopped a couple of times on such occasions (Interviewee 4).

Another private media journalist, Interviewee 2, owned up to the influence of advertisers on content production saying: "We live on advertising revenue" because "if the advertisers don't bring the money we can't live on sales of newspaper."**Ethical breaches and challenges to professional accountability**

Ethical breaches and dilemmas remain serious infractions of the norms guiding journalistic role performance. Generally, the editors expressed concern about the practice. The private newspaper editor, for example, reported incidents of one-sided news reporting. However, he considered ethical breaches as normal attributing many of such incidents to an individual journalist's moral reasoning. That such practice has become normalized is a challenge as it suggests a tendency to pay little attention to addressing the issue.

In addition to interferences from advertisers, the interviewee from the private radio station was also particularly worried about adverts on religion and ethnicity which tend to result in ethical dilemmas. Professional accountability requires of journalists to respect the values, principles and norms of behaviour associated with the profession. These principles and values to guide ethical behaviour are documented in the Code of Ethics of the Ghana Journalists Association. However, all interviewees said they hardly consulted the document when they needed to take ethical decisions.

Some of the ethical breaches could be either filial or political, compromising neutrality in reporting on events in the Ghanaian media. For instance, the interviewer from the public TV station disclosed how a reporter, who had sympathy for the NDC was detailed to cover an NPP rally and made a mess of it because he was trying to choose sides with his political party.

> As we know, crowd at Mantse Agbona, whether for NDC or NPP rallies is always huge. The camera man captured the huge crowd but when this lady was editing, she used just individual shots so you will not see the crowd. But when I took over, I was her editor, I watched it. I said no, it's not possible. Let's go and look at the rushes. So, when we went, behold, amazing crowd (Interviewee 5).

Apart from covert allegiances to political parties, the editors were also concerned about the publication of fake news, fabrication of stories and misinformation as these contrast with the core values of truth and accuracy. All interviewees claimed their institutions would not consciously engage in misinformation. Evidence from two stations indicates that the organisations could fall prey to the publication of fake news due partly to the tendency to rely on social media sources and failure to authenticate the story.

> Our boss, had come out of the newsroom... A story came online that Thabo Mbeki was dead. He quickly forwarded it to the editor, and it was used. Thabo Mbeki was alive. It happened a second time... A Ghanaian, very young guy. He purportedly came from America, from NASA. I mean National Aeronautics and Space Administration of America. He talked big. We featured him; gave him one hour. Apparently, he had cloned the NASA website and inserted himself. We saw him in space gear and everything with people who were genuine at NASA. And if you Googled, it was there (Interviewee 5).

The two incidents were the result of non-verification of facts and the tendency to trust in the "boss" instead of news gathering and production logic. Interviewee 2 shared a similar experience of poor fact-checking in his organization.

> ...there is this DCE that died in the Ashanti region, Kumasi specifically. All sorts of theories were propounded and typical of [newspaper name], we jumped to the story. It got us on the wrong side. People criticized us that why didn't we show some kind of sympathy to even the bereaved family, for publishing that the guy died out of having sex. It was an ethical issue. I'm told that they petitioned the GJA over it.

At the time of the interview, the editor was yet to follow up on the petition. Poor fact-checking in the two organisations was partly attributed to lack of time to meet deadlines. However, the private radio station interviewee claimed that the station has been vigilant in handling incidents of fake news by exercising "a little bit of restraint" when stories of doubtful credibility were received. The approach may or may not involve the more logical one of verification.

"Soli" is another challenge to professional and editorial accountability. "Soli" is the short word for 'solidarity' or brown envelope journalism. Alhassan and Abdullai (2019) described soli as a gift-influencing content, noting the cultural and moral implications of the practice, with particular regard to conflict of interest. Individually, the

editors expressed concern over soli as the practice undermines objective, balanced, and independent news reportage and overall editorial accountability.

> *You're not supposed to take Soli. But here again, the definition of soli is always an issue to me. You would have people calling money that is given to you as honorarium at a function, they may call it soli. You attend a function where there are people of other professions given the same money, it is not a problem. Say, its transportation. Oh, take this for transportation. All the other professionals there will be given the same thing. As soon as the journalist takes that same transportation money, it becomes an issue. To me, that should not be (interviewee 1).*

With this explanation, it is difficult to tell the readiness or willingness of journalists to desist from the taking of soli. The editor of the private newspaper *stated*: "We always advised them to desist from accepting soli but as to whether they take soli or not, how do I know?"

Advice may not be the best option to addressing the issue. Interestingly, none of the stations featured in this study, had a policy on soli. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a radio media group sanctions reporters found to have taken soli. As a way of curbing the practice, the editor of private newspaper reported that reporters were always provided transport for assignments or reimbursed for transportation costs on return from assignments. He admitted to few instances when reporters in the regions were reported to have been taking soli without getting stories of the events published.

Improving journalism standards

The editors were desirous of changing the poor image of journalism and improving professional standard. However, they appeared divided in their perception of the standard of the country's journalism practice. One of them thought public perception of journalists is a bit low. Another thought the Ghanaian media enjoy public trust to a large extent. An editor reported public dissatisfaction with the media based on comments gathered from social media:

> *But increasingly, people are dissatisfied with the work of journalists. In fact, there is no day I don't go to Facebook and Twitter about twenty times every day. I get the sense of how people feel about some news reports. And any time that happens, the comments are explicit against journalists ... the credibility of the report and sometimes it goes to even affect the media house.*

Professional standards could be maintained if practitioners adhered to the norms of practice. Typically, newsrooms would also rely on an ombudsman to respond to public complaint and check ethical breaches. All the interviewees stated that their organisations did not have an ombudsman. The public newspaper had one sometime ago but currently relies on the organisation's lawyer or editorial judgement facilitated by peer review. The private newspaper editor provided phone numbers at the back of the paper as a channel for public complaints. The other media rely on peer review practices to maintain standard and quality.

Self-regulatory and regulatory documents such as the GJA code and the NMC guidelines for local language broadcasting as well as NMC Broadcasting Standards are useful for maintaining professional standards. Ironically, one of the editors said he was unaware of the NMC documents but blamed the Commissions for not encouraging professional practice and improving standards.

Summary and conclusions

Evidence from this study suggest that independent journalism is threatened also by journalists themselves, due to their inability to relate role concepts to performance.

The chapter examined the interplay between Ghanaian journalists' role conception and actual performance. It also sought to discover mediating factors that promote or inhibit journalists' ability to practice their craft based on the conception of their professional roles.

We found that, fundamentally, there is broad agreement on the principles and norms of journalism among the editors. They had a clear understanding of their position in society and the various roles they have been mandated to perform. The editors were positively disposed towards performing their professional roles. Typically, they saw themselves performing complementary roles as both watchdogs of society and as collaborators on the nation building agenda. While journalists tended to appropriate the watchdog function of the media, circumstances could compel them to switch roles to the nation building or collaborative mode considered important for national cohesion and progress.

However, it would appear that there exists a disconnect between role conception and performance. This are attributed to ownership factors, journalistic routines, gatekeeper influences as well as advertiser influences. Ethical breaches such as of one-sided reportage, and failure to verify

news were major challenges to professional practice.

Although editors would not consciously engage in the dissemination of fake news and misinformation, the evidence suggested that they could become unintentional agents of misinformation and the spread of fake news given their tendency to rely on social media and internet sources without verification.

Study limitation

While the findings of this study are relevant to developments in the Ghanaian media, they are limited by the fact that we only studied five media organisations. It is anticipated that further studies will provide a national account of role performance of journalists in relation to their newsgathering, reporting and presentation practices. Hopefully this future study would help highlight the dynamics informing or limiting the manifestation of role conception of Ghanaian journalists in the Ghanaian media.

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Financial viability of the Ghanaian media

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Abstract

This chapter examines the dynamics of financing in the Ghanaian media, focusing on revenue inflows, revenue strategies, and the factors impacting the financial health of the media. Ultimately, it makes a pronouncement on the financial health of the Ghanaian media. It is premised on the idea that the capacity of the media to deliver on their democratic and developmental mandates is directly linked to their finances and how that positions them to work independently. It used a mixed methods design combining content analysis and key informant interviews to gather evidence. The chapter reports that the overall financial health of the media is unstable and, at best, operating at break-even levels. The financial viability of the media is threatened by the poor Ghanaian economy, technology-driven pressures, industry saturation and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also reports on the strategies by the media to expand their revenue sources and inflows. It concludes by recommending regulatory interest in sustainability planning by media organisations.

Key words: Media financing, advertising revenues, revenue strategies, financial challenges of the media

Introduction

Ghana's media is often hailed as an example of what a thriving media in a democracy should look like (Biney, 2019). Since its liberalisation in the 1990s, Ghana's media have grown exponentially. Presently, industry records show that Ghana's 32 million people are served by over 500 radio stations, over 150 TV stations and several newspapers and digital platforms. What gives Ghana's media the respected name goes beyond the extent of expansion, however. Arguably, it is the free public platforms for discourse the media offer for sharing divergent views, including those highly critical of power. As a developing country, Ghana requires an ecosystem that engenders critical public discourse (Luge, 2020). Thus, the business of media must remain sustainable.

However, across the globe, there is increasing evidence that the media's ability to support free expression is declining owing to a host of factors, including their financial independence. Many media organisations have been crippled by shrinking revenues from advertising (Schiffrin et al., 2020). The fall in revenue has been attributed to a myriad of factors including stern competition from digital giants (Kalombe & Phiri, 2019), dwindling public trust in the media, media capture and disinformation (Nielsen et al., 2019). The situation is exacerbated by effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across Africa, an economic downturn in the media is apparent. The Reuters Institute reports that South African media lost between 40 and 100 percent of their advertising revenue by mid-March 2020 (*Reuters*, 2020). In Uganda, four regional local language newspapers had to be suspended because of revenue losses (Ntibinyane, 2020). Multiple outlets in Kenya also cut salaries and put staff on compulsory leave (*Business Today*, 2020).

The situation in Ghana is not much different. A 2020 documentary on the impact of the pandemic on the Ghanaian media showed devastating effects. These included cuts in advertising budgets and outright cancellation of advertising orders, increased operational costs and job losses (Koomson, 2020). In some cases, the media reported losses of up to a third of their revenue. As a result, media organisations have had to downsize, restructure production processes and, in some cases, even temporarily suspend production altogether (Koomson, 2020).

Yet, these challenges are not new, having already showed tell-tale signs in the period prior to the

pandemic. While on paper, Ghana's media appears to be buoyant, questions have been raised about their financial prospects (MFWA, 2017). In this chapter, we explore the dynamics of the financial health of the Ghanaian media with a view to understanding:

- the patterns of revenue inflows in the media

- revenue generation strategies of media organisations

- factors impacting financial health of the media

- the state of the financial health of the Ghanaian media

Methods

The study design was based on the mixed methods approach. This critical realist stance enabled us to explore both the breadth and depth dimensions of the financial health of the media. To explore the patterns of revenue inflows, we employed quantitative content analysis of advertising content on morning shows of a selection of broadcast media across the country. This was complemented with interviews with media managers in which we explored revenue strategies, factors affecting financial viability of media, and perceptions about overall media viability.

We interviewed eleven managers in media organisations across the country. Interviewees were purposively selected using their position and access to information as inclusion criteria. They were assigned the codes below to anonymise their responses.

Code assigned	Description
INT1	Manager and Editor of a newspaper
INT2	Manager of a radio Station
INT3	Manager of a radio Station
INT4	Radio presenter
INT5	General Manager of a broadcasting group
INT6	Director of a broadcasting network
INT7	Head of Marketing of a newspaper group
INT8	Head of Marketing of a broadcasting group
INT9	Chief Operations Manager of a broadcasting group
INT 10	Commercial manager, TV station
INT11	Former editor-in-Chief of a digital news aggregator platform

For the quantitative data, we used the multi-stage sampling method. This enabled the evidence to have geographical spread. The first stage involved the selection of regions from which media were drawn for content analysis. Twelve out of the 16 regions of Ghana were randomly selected. This was deemed representative as it represents 75% of regions in Ghana. We then used convenience sampling to select, at least, two radio stations from each sampled region. In all, a total of 34 radio stations were sampled. Morning shows on these stations were used to assemble advertising content that we used to gauge revenue inflows. The decision to focus on morning shows was informed by GeoPoll's evidence that audience ratings for morning shows in Ghana are consistently higher than for other programmes (GeoPoll, 2019). For each selected morning show, the full complement of one edition was recorded live by trained field assistants. All commercial content found in the recordings were coded to discover patterns of revenue inflows.

Regarding television, a total of 17 television stations were selected randomly using the NCA's record. With most television stations based in the Greater Accra Region, television stations whose content were analysed were based in this region. Again, we focused on one morning show edition per station.

Interview data were recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded and thematically analysed, guided by Bryman's (2016) and Emerson, Fretz and Shaw's (2011) inductively driven taxonomy. The steps included open coding and initial memoing, thematic coding, as well as distillation and synthesis of the most important themes and subthemes.

Quantitative data from content analysis were analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software. Data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools.

Quantitative data profile

Altogether, morning show content of 51 stations were analysed for their commercial/advertising content. Ashanti and Greater Accra regions got the most representation, given the media concentration in these two regions. For television, apart from one station, all sampled stations were based in the Greater Accra Region. Majority of both television and radio stations included in the study were privately-owned, which is reflective of the Ghanaian media ecology. Out of a total of 1,371 morning show commercial/advertising content coded for analysis, 1,078 were coded for radio, while 293 were coded for television.

Table 1: Number of stations and adverts coded per region (Radio and TV)

Radio		
Region	**Number of stations**	**Number of commercials coded**
Greater Accra	6	200 (18.6%)
Ashanti	8	165 (15.3%)
Central	2	47 (4.4%)
Eastern	2	58 (5.4%)
Volta	2	84 (7.8%)
Western	2	60 (5.6%)
Northern	1	26 (2.4%)
Ahafo	2	123 (11.4%)
Bono	2	52 (4.8%)
Bono East	4	195 (18.1%)
Western North	2	45 (4.2%)
Oti	1	23 (2.1%)
Total	**34 100%**	**1078 (100.0%)**
Television		
Greater Accra	16	261 (89.1%)
Ashanti	1	32 (10.9%)
Total	**17**	**293 ((100%)**

Who/what funds the media in Ghana?

This section explores who funds the media by examining types of advertisers (public/private), industries funding the media, among others. Commercial private businesses seem to be the main driver of the mainstream media economy in Ghana. An average of 95 percent of all advertising on the morning shows sampled came from commercial entities. This is consistent across locations. The public sector, not-for-profits, religious organisations and individuals make negligible contributions to media by way of advertising revenue contributions (just about 5% altogether).

Table 2: Profile of advertisers in the media

Funding source	TV	Radio
State/Public institutions	4 (1.4%)	26 (2.4%)
Commercial/Private businesses	284 (96.9%)	1001 (93.0%)
Development Agencies/NGOs	1 (0.3%)	6 (0.6%)
Religious organisations	1 (0.3%)	23 (2.1%)
Individual/family	1 (0.3%)	11 (1.0%)
Political parties	2 (0.7%)	1 (.1%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	8 (.7%)

Not Clear	0 (0.0%)	2 (.2%)
Total	**293 (100.0%)**	**1,078 (100.%)**

Contrary to anecdotal claims that the telecommunication, betting and banking institutions are the main drivers of the media economy, the study found that it is rather the pharmaceutical sector. About a third of advertising on TV (30.4) and radio (27.4) comes from the pharmaceutical sector. However, the main driver, it appears, is the herbal medicine sector which controls some 24 percent of advertising content in TV and 22 percent in radio respectively.

Table 3: Industries that fund the media

	TV (%)	Radio (%)
Telecoms	2.0	3.2
Betting	1.4	1.5
Consumer goods/FMCG	13.7	12.2
Banking/finance/Insurance	4.4	10.0
Herbal medicines	23.9	22.0
Conventional medicine/Pharmacy	6.5	5.4
Real estate/construction	6.5	7.6
Education	8.5	3.4
Transport/Petroleum	.3	3.1
Fashion (including fabrics, salon)	4.8	3.5
Events (awards, conferences, launch)	6.5	4.6
Electronics, tech and accessories (mobile phones, computers, etc.)	11.6	9.3
Other/Not clear	9.9	14.2
Total	**100**	**100**

Beyond the herbal medicine sector, both radio and television stations are mainly sponsored by fast-moving-consumer-goods (FMCGs) followed by the electronics and tech industry. TV tends to receive relatively more advertising from FMCGs, pharmaceuticals, education, fashion, events, and electronics and tech industries. In contrast, radio derives its advertising revenues from transport, telecoms, betting, banking and real estate sectors. Furthermore, TV gets its lowest advertising revenue from transport. For radio, it is the betting industry that recorded the lowest level of advertising.

Beyond industries that fund the media, we also examined which media products fund the media. In other words, which of the variety of media advertising offerings attract revenue? As would be expected, spot advertising tops the chart, commanding more than half of advertising revenues. They are followed by live presenter mentions (LPMs) which control about a quarter of revenues. Obituaries represent the least contributor of revenue to radio stations while documentaries, obituary, and logo displays all attract the least revenue to support television stations.

Table 5: Media products that fund the media

Radio	
Commercial/advert type	**Frequency/ Percent**
Spot ads	567 (52.6)
LPM	266 (24.7)
Sponsorship/branded programme	73 (6.8)
Announcement	157 (14.6)
Obituary	3 (.3)
Studio interview	10 (.9)
Not clear	2 (.2)
Total	**1078 (100.0)**
Television	
Commercial/ advert type	**Frequency**
Spot ad	143 (48.8)
LPM	78 (26.6)
Sponsorship/branded programme	2 (0.7)
Obituary	1 (0.3)
Crawler	48 (16.4)
Logo display	1 (0.3)
Product display	2 (0.7)
Squeeze back	7 (2.4)
Documentary	1 (0.3)
Studio appearance	10 (3.4)
Total	**293 (100.0)**

Revenue strategies in the media

While advertising remains a dominant model of financing in media, it is becoming, increasingly, important for media to diversify their revenue sources. In this section, we explore the strategies deployed by the Ghanaian media. Irrespective of their type [radio, TV, print, digital; public or private], location [urban or rural] etc. media organisations are revising the script for financing their work using four broad strategies - diversification, content upgrade and audience cultivation, innovative solicitation and digitisation.
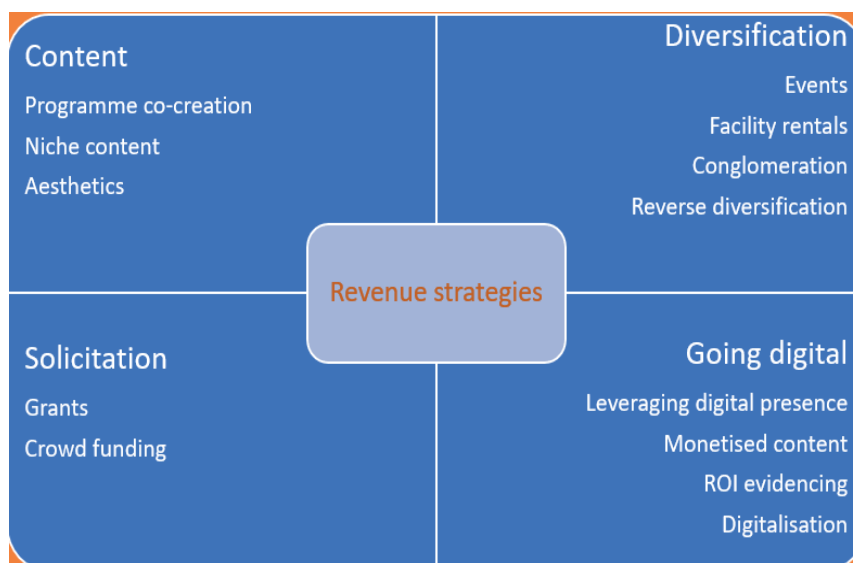
Content-based strategies: In the first instance, media organisations continue to rely on the traditional model of using content to attract audiences as leverage for advertising. With the coming of the digital, audiences of traditional media outlets have dwindled as they continue to move online for on-demand content. In response, media organisations are seeking to create and nurture niche audiences by the content they produce.

> So, as far as you are a generator of content there is an opportunity for you to make money. As to how relevant your content is, how well you understand your target for that kind of content, how you package and ensure that they find it a preferred option. … you need to stand out. (**INT 7**: *Head of Marketing, newspaper group*).

> We have to go back to do research, trace history so that you make yourself relevant. We'll have to say oh, January was this… So, we do a graph so that when you pick it you know it is a graph. So, this is different... (**INT 1**: *Manager/Editor, newspaper*).

It appears that media are also co-creating content with their audiences to assure that such content suits their tastes.

> What we do is we reach out to the people. Sometimes, we ask our audience what they want, anything new that they want. You see they tell us, why don't you add this program? Why don't you bring this or that? So, when this happens, we don't drag our feet. We just put on new programs when we see the merits that it gives. (**INT 5:** *General Manager, TV and radio group*).

Diversification of revenue streams: Media organisations are consciously expanding their offerings having realised a "… need to diversify" as "traditional media, normal media will not be the way to go" (**INT 1**: Manager/Editor, newspaper). A visible trend in this direction is the turn towards conglomeration where media brands acquire more platforms to provide a "one stop shop for the client" (**INT 10).**

> We have as many as 12 registered and active radio stations, springing up in the regions. And so, when their clients come to our office, our marketing department, for example, we are able to take advantage of how vast our reach is and then tell them that okay, 'if you do business with us, even though we are in Accra, people can patronize your goods or service in other regions'. (**INT 5:** *General Manager, TV and radio group*).

> With [organisation name] in mind, you know we are in a very competitive media landscape where we have various media groups of companies. For example, the likes of Multimedia that has Adom, Joy and the rest And Media General that has TV3, Onua and Global Media Alliance that have ETV, YFM. So, a lot of media groups. So, these days there are more of group, conglomerate approach than just one company with one platform (**INT 9**: *Chief Operations Manager for a broadcasting group*).

There is also a turn towards events marketing as media organisations attempt to diversify their means of revenue mobilisation. Media organisations have added to their bouquet of offerings a plethora

of events – entertainment, thought leadership, charity, trade etc. to rake in revenues from gate proceeds, exhibitor fees and sponsorships. Examples include Joy FM's *Easter Soup Kitchen*, Citi FM/TV's *Heritage Caravan* and the Business and Financial Times' *The Money Summit*.

> *You have to start doing events, run events around because events give you money because events are very important and very lucrative, it is a very lucrative thing when you do it very well (***INT 1***: Manager/Editor, newspaper).*

> *… and also organizing events, events, like I have a programme I do. And lots of people come into support, I also have the [Station name] Concert, where I bring in all musicians that people thought are out of the system. People really want to listen to such people. So, when you see them, a lot of people want to come in as entertainment, they come to pay the gate fee, and the money goes to the radio station (***INT 2***: Manager, radio Station).*

> *So, you'll realize that, here at [newspaper name], we seem to be doing a lot more events now. We seem to be doing a lot more activations, we are driving a number of partnerships (***INT 7***: Head of Marketing, newspaper group).*

Finally, the diversification also manifests as venturing into totally non-media ventures. For instance, a media house has expanded and opened up its "internal [staff] clinic to the public and the community around" (**INT 7**: Head of Marketing, newspaper group). Other media organisations have resorted to rental of their facilities:

> *We also have something we call co-location… we have land and towers… where other companies, they could be internet service providers, they could be FM transmission, they could be other TV stations. They also want to hang their equipment on top of the mast on the tower. We rent out space (***INT 6:*** Director, broadcasting network).*

An aspect of this diversification is what appears to be a trend towards reverse diversification into media. Here, organisations operating other business concerns set up media outlets to avert the huge capital flight that their advertising budgets bring. Organisations such as Tobinco, a pharmaceutical company sets up Atinka Media which besides attracting other revenue, is an avenue to advertise Tobinco's products at lower cost. Angel Broadcasting Services came from Angel Group of Companies, an umbrella for Angel Transport and Trading Limited, Angel Estate and Construction Limited, Angel Natural Mineral Water and Adonko Bitters Limited. The strategy behind this is explained by an interviewee,

> *Organisations that used to have a large media budget have now decided to create their own TV stations… A lot of churches which were great spenders in the media market have withdrawn and they are now creating their own TV channels so, that they'll convey their messages… Another type of the same model has to do with for example, businesses that are not into like churches or other things but that are into selling of certain products, they use their stations to add value to the product and the margins that they get, plough back to the media. Let's say for example, you developed a new bottled water and it will go for say GH₵1.00, nobody knows it, you can use your TV station to hype it and increase it by 50 per cent so, the addition is actually the media cost (***INT 6***: Director, broadcasting network).*

Digitisation: The third block of income generation strategies focuses on digital. We find that media organisations are actively leveraging opportunities in the digital space to expand their revenue sources as demonstrated in this quote:

> *The digital, we were doing online as if we were joking. So now we've created, it is now a department on its own. There is an online editor, there's digital data, video editor. So, we are now doing things on YouTube and stuff like that. So, create interviews and put on our online channels for people to watch and we generate revenue from that point (***INT 1:*** A manager/editor of a local newspaper).*

They do this through two primary modes – creating and leveraging digital presence, and monetising content. All media interviewed had online presence for their various platforms. Such online presence took the forms of websites, social media pages and digital apps which media organisations are using to actively expand their access to audiences as leverage for advertising as demonstrated below**:**

> *I sit on [radio morning show] and I'm able to tell you that over a three- or four-hour period on Facebook, on YouTube … that every morning, I can give you close to a million people and its proven… If you go out there and put it on Facebook, it's good, you will get some attention, but I can give you more traction if you put it on my show because I am in that space too, as well as the regular radio space (***INT4***: Radio presenter).*

*We sell our online platforms and like I said, the online platforms are a separate entity. So now we've positioned our digital space as a different entity as part of the [entity name] group. So, they also sell the online platforms like banners, stickers and all that to generate revenue (***INT 10***: Commercial manager, TV station).*

Besides the expanded access to audiences, digital presence also guarantees opportunity to prove their impact using analytics of audience engagement.

*With digital, you cannot lie, I can tell you I've printed 20,000 but with the digital, you can't lie. The man would go behind and see you don't have that numbers, so with that if you have the eyeball with advertising, you get results and you are good to go (***INT 1:*** A manager/editor of a local newspaper).*

*And remember, the digital space is much easier to sell because everybody can access the analytics around it and you know, advertising or marketing communications is now just not advertising for the sake of advertising but placing where you will get the optimum value. So, if you come and you realize that I have 10 million people following me and in that 10 million people, about 25%, 30% of them are within your core target in terms of an addressable market for you as a business, then you can come on board (***INT 7***: Head of marketing for a newspaper group).*

Organisations within the local media space are also monetising their digital content as a means of revenue generation. Through subscriptions and monetised streaming platforms (e.g., on YouTube and radio apps), media organisations are able to supplement their incomes to cover operational costs.

*We know in media content is king. So if you have a very compelling content you could use OTT[1] platforms, you could use video-on-demand. There are so many ways to monetise the kind of content you have. Instead of waiting for you to be playing it on a normal TV, you could find other ways that people could download, you could have a YouTube channel that when people stream on YouTube you are able to get revenue or get numbers that ultimately give you some revenue (***INT 10***: Chief Operations Manager for a broadcasting group).*

*The [digital app] has our publications, the e-version of our publications, so you'll subscribe to it. Now, subscription comes at a certain fee which is some kind of revenue for us. Also, if you're able to aggregate a lot more subscribers on it, then advertisers will see an opportunity there to also advertise on the app (***INT 7***: Head of marketing for a newspaper group).*

*One thing is that the audiences that go there [app], we get something out of it... So, for example, if I just go in and click on Radio [station name], at the end of the month, they have a system to check, how many people listen to Radio [station name] through the Upper West radio app. They can be able to detect that in the month of May, we have about 500 or 600 people listening via the Upper West radio app with Radio [station name]. So with that, we have a percentage that we take (***INT 3***: Manager of a radio Station).*

For online media platforms, (news websites, blogs etc.) revenue also comes from Google and other search engines that annex their news as part of their content. As **INT 11** explained, as much as 90 percent of revenues of such news platforms may come from this source. The challenge here is that the fees paid to these online news platforms are unfairly low compared to those paid to their counterparts abroad. The same could be said of YouTube and other tech platforms.

Solicitation: Finally, there appears to be the use of innovative solicitation strategies to rake in revenues. In what appears to mimic funding approaches in other sectors (e.g., NGO sector), there is a nascent trend towards crowd funding. This is demonstrated in the quote below, as well as the screen shot taken from TV3's Facebook page in which the station is encouraging viewers to support the programme by sending them digital stars.

We have a religious programme that we are running at the station, which is free, we have the given airtime free to those religious leaders... We have an airtime for the Islamic communities, and we have an airtime for the Christian communities. So, we have these churches that are coming in to preach, after preaching, what they do is that, they ask the general public that this is an airtime that has been given free of charge but if they have any support, that they would also support the radio station to also be able to operate, if you

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1 Over-the-top- provision of broadcast content online to be accessed on demand

*have a token of one cedi, you can come to the radio station, you are registered, the name is written, we take the one cedi. So, at the end of the day, at the end of the month, we get something (**INT 3**: Manager of a radio Station).*

Fig. 1: Screenshot of TV3 Facebook page during a live broadcast

Factors impacting financial health of media

Because media organisations do not exist in a vacuum, the success of their revenue strategies may be tempered by environmental factors. This section presents three factors affecting the financial viability of media - COVID-19 and the post-COVID economic down-turn, structure of the media industry and technological evolution.

COVD-19 pandemic and the post COVID economy

It appears the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a double-edged sword to media organisations, helping to facilitate financial viability in some instances but also challenging it in others. In the first instance, the pandemic introduced new logics of doing business that have increased efficiency and savings. For instance, the pandemic revealed operational inefficiencies and ushered in flexible work systems that save costs on transportation, utility etc.

*COVID came as a blessing, because those times we would all be here, we would argue plenty and nothing. But now do you, don't come, stay wherever you are between the two of us, your story is giving five stories a week. If you can give me the stories on Monday, and you go and sleep, that I don't have a problem with you. That's how it has shaped us (**INT 1:** A manager/editor of a local newspaper).*

*For example, when COVID came, we told all non-essential staff to go home and not come to work but they'll be paid. Some of us stayed home for four, five, six months and they got frightened that there is now evidence that they are not needed and if they don't show up at work very soon, when there is redundancy, they will be the first to go… What it taught us is that [organisation name] current staff size of about 1,300, we probably need about 400 or 500 to work, we don't need the rest (**INT 6:** Director, broadcasting network).*

*Instead of you having all your guests driving to your studio, you can do Zoom. So, we were using Zoom, we were using Skype, we were using Google hangouts to be able to just get participations and discussions that are live on the platform…. And all these you could say have cut down cost of production and then fuelling and all that. Apart from that too because people are also working from home you reduce the cost of usage of stationary, electricity and power, AC [air conditioning] and all that (**INT 10**: Chief Operations Manager for a broadcasting group).*

The pandemic has also led to revisions in income generating activities of media. Media organisations are experimenting with newer forms of content and different platforms for content sharing while also imbibing the idea of monetising content on digital platforms to augment their income flows.

*These were not all things that we were doing. Like digital and new media has come so intense during COVID-19, because we were taking them for granted… During COVID, business was slow and therefore the advertisements were not coming in anymore; some businesses ran out of production and supply. And so, they couldn't have come in to continue to advertise… So, the COVID really pushed some of us to come to understand that we need to do more beyond the normal advertisement (**INT 2:** Manager, radio Station).*

*COVID has enhanced the use of digital and streaming. The reason being that during the lock down a lot of people were at their homes so the likes of Netflix had very high subscription rates... And so, streaming became or has become now one of the things that we have gotten used to due to COVID (**INT 10**: Chief Operations Manager for a broadcasting group).*

While these are positive outcomes from the pandemic, there are also downsides. First, it led to significant losses in revenue as businesses revised advertising budgets as part of austerity measures. This posed significant challenges, the effects of which media organisations are still reeling from.

*Covid killed everything. It didn't just change it, it killed everything. You know, we rely on the big spenders to take care of the big bills. So, if you are lucky and AirtelTigo or a bank or, in those days, a brewery decides we want [advertising for] one year. Now, trust me, that one year can take care of your salaries for the whole year. Just that one client. They can take care of your salaries for a year. And so, if you get about three or four of those. You know your salaries have been paid, your running costs have been paid, your utilities, your fuel and you can cream off a little profit (**INT4**: Radio presenter).*

Secondly, there is the significant loss of revenue due to the lockdowns and bans on public meetings during the heat of the pandemic, as the government strived to curb the spread of the virus. Besides advertisements from business organisations, events and announcements about them represent a major revenue source for media organisations. The ban on physical, public gatherings truncated this income source and has brought a lot of hardship on the media, even after its expiry.

But the biggest one for us was "petty cash" as we call it. We get it from the walk-ins. Funeral announcements, event organizing's, someone advertising for two days three days, one week. Most of them are walk-ins and those ones, you can do your little tips here and there, do lunch for the staff, tip the group that stays late overnight and say "'chale, obiaa mmɔ gye 200 bi' for the weekend" [everyone, come for some 200 for the weekend] kind of thing. And then COVID came. No events, no funerals, nobody is going anywhere; nothing is happening anywhere and all of that just dried out. So, you probably are looking at some one-week petty cash of some thirty, thirty-five thousand, forty thousand cedis to about eight hundred

*cedis and then you'll know that COVID has really messed people up and it continued for months, some staff had to be laid off, some had to go home, COVID was a killer (**INT4**: Radio presenter).*

There are also the hikes in operational costs arising out of the economic downturn ushered in by the pandemic and other factors.

*Operationally, like I said, if we are to pay 100 per cent of our electricity bill across the country, we are going to be spending about 60 per cent of our revenue but in business management, you are required to spend not above 20 per cent of your revenue on utilities. That means that we are not operating as a viable business, we are just postponing the problem, accumulating debt (**INT 6**: Director, broadcasting network).*

In the particular case of the newspaper sector, COVID-19 has brought a special challenge to their financial viability. Subscription of newsprints have been badly hit due to fears of contracting the virus.

*There are people who since 2020 have refused to hold a paper because they say they are scared of COVID. So yes, that is how bad it is. So, there are people who used to be subscribers but they are no longer subscribing because they said they are scared that by touching the paper they might be infected (**INT 7**: Head of Marketing, newspaper group).*

Technological evolution

Technological evolutions have significantly changed the way people consume information and interact with media, as well as how media gather, package and share content. These changes, among other factors, are impacting the financial health of media organisations in the country. In the first instance, the pace of technological innovations means that media organisations must frequently invest substantial sums to keep their equipment up to date.

*A digital archival system; how you are able to save and store all your old data information. You know when it comes to content it never expires. There will be some time that you need some old content to depict an advocacy or a campaign or even an informative campaign. That reference, if you don't have the ability to store it well, you can lose it. So, re-equipment, retooling is one key area (**INT 10**: Chief Operations Manager for a broadcasting group).*

*You have to look for the money, even when the government takes care of your salary, you have to buy cars, your studio equipment is breaking down, you need to replace them (***INT 6:*** *Director, broadcasting network).*

Technological evolution has also changed the information habits of the Ghanaian media consumers who continue to throng digital platforms, moving with them the already limited advertising budget. However, rather than suffering the revenue losses that come with this, it appears media organisations are rather leveraging digital platforms to expand their revenue sources.

Structure of the media industry

Another critical issue impacting the financial health of media in Ghana is the local media industry itself, and the extent of saturation in it. National Communications Authority (NCA) data shows that there are 513 radio stations and 113 TV stations in operation. This means that averagely, about every 47 thousand Ghanaians have a broadcast station to serve them. Nigeria, with a population about seven times that of Ghana, has 652 radio and TV stations (Adegboyega, 2021), representing an average of over 320 thousand people per station in an economy more than five times that of Ghana. One can see, clearly, that the media space is over-supplied. Indeed, in a 2020 directive from the NCA to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the regulator alluded to saturation in the digital terrestrial platform as reason for seeking to reduce the latter's channels (Akwa, 2020).

This presents real challenges to the financial health of the local media. There are too many players competing for the same limited and dwindling advertising pot. As one interviewee declared, "the pot of money available for radio and TV Advertising is dwindling in favour of online, at the same time that the number of TV and radio stations are increasing" (INT 6: Director of a broadcasting network).

*It is bad because NCA has licensed all these numerous radio stations. And a radio station that runs cannot generate 40,000 Ghana cedis, you ask that radio station to come and renew these certificates for 11,000 GHS. At the end of five years, you ask the person to pay 60 to 70,000 GHS to renew the person's frequency. Where would the person get the money from? (***INT 2:*** *Manager, radio Station).*

*Yes, you can google NCA and see. Uh huh. So, you go to Jirapa there are two radio stations, if you go to Tumu there are three radio stations. Go to Pelu there is a radio station, go to Peguri, there is a radio station, go to Laura, Nyandum, there is a radio station. So, if you come to Upper West, you can get 17 to 18 to 20 radio stations in Upper West. And the market in Upper West is small (***INT 2:*** *Manager, radio Station).*

*So sometimes, you go out there to source for revenue and then the customer will tell you that, this, your colleague radio station came, they collected this amount, so why are you also charging me this amount? (***INT 3***: Manager of a radio Station).*

Saturation also means unprofessional practice as media organisations strive to outdo each other to attract attention and audiences to leverage for advertising.

So, you realize that it's good for us to broaden the media horizon but you realize that the media horizon that has been brought in is now creating a lot of unethical issues. Instead of educating the people we are rather un-educating the people because qualified people are not recruited to work in these radio stations.

*So unhealthy competition will come in because I need to create traffic and I need to generate traffic to my media house, so instead of people listening to genuine work, how many people would like to listen to my genuine work? (***INT 2:*** *Manager, radio Station).*

*There are so many stations there, like, what's all this about? I think we've gone from plurality to, I don't know what word to use. It's become an all play, all field and so standards are lowered. Because there's nobody checking and if there was anybody checking, it is difficult to check, and everybody wants to be the first to "break the news". So, lack of ethics, the person sitting behind the microphone or in front of the camera will lack basic native wisdom, 'efie nyansa' (***INT4***: Radio presenter).*

Generally, I think the media landscape is becoming tricky and trickier. People are still buying radio license and TV license. When there is too much of everything, sometimes when you're not careful, people even start

*stealing other people's content and then copyright issues start coming in and I think that we are in to compete (**INT 10**: Chief Operations Manager for a broadcasting group).*

Working in close concert with this negative effect of saturation is the political capture of the local media. While figures on media ownership are hard to come by, anecdotal evidence suggests a high level of political interest, pushing media to pander to the political lineages of owners. The result, it appears, presents a challenge to the credibility and professional practice of media organisations, ultimately limiting their viability.

*Most of these official radio stations, particularly those stations have affiliation to political parties and what have you, their aim is not to come to do business, probably they just want to push the agenda of their political party and so, even the set-up of the radio station does not involve business-minded people (**INT 2**: General Manager of a radio station).*

*But when the National Communication Authority was granting licenses for both television and radio and when the social media space also opened up, I don't think they thought through. Any John Thomas could get a frequency, as long as they were politically connected enough. And so, it was dished out as they say 'la confetti' to friends, family, political cronies and we are where we are today. In my opinion, too many radio stations that we don't need. How do you crawl back without being seen as tramping down on somebodies' legitimate business? From the get-go, we should have been more circumspect. But, unfortunately, the environment in which we operate is so politically polarized that if it is Abena in charge, and her husband is Kwame and Kwame's sister is Theodora and Theodora's friend is Kwaku and Kwaku belongs to party 'A' or party 'C', Kwaku alone may get 5 frequencies. 'Ɔde yɛ dɛn' [what is he using them for?]. (**INT 4**: Radio presenter).*

Finally, the local media market is heavily concentrated on the capital city from where most economic activities in the country emanate. Most large businesses are headquartered in Accra from where decisions about advertising spend and strategy are made. Often, this means uneven distribution of advertising budgets across the country, which limits the financial prospects of media operating in communities with smaller economies.

*Whenever I try to find out a reason or two from why they are not able to stand on their feet in terms of revenue generation, they will tell us like other competing media houses have been telling me, that clients choose the media houses that are located mostly in the regional capitals and for that matter, more importantly, the capital of the country here in Accra specifically. And so, on some number of cases they can even rely on us. Sometimes at the end of the month, we have to send them our surplus of the generation (**INT 5**: General Manager of TV and radio media group).*

*With radio outside the city, to tell you the truth, that is what it has been over the years. Because the business is mainly from Accra. Even if you look at our operations, the golden triangle [Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi] is contributing over 70% of all the revenues we are able to generate. So, seriously speaking, even if it is just 2 to 3 areas that are contributing then the other 12 regions have nothing much coming from there and you can imagine the cost daily (**INT 7**: Group Marketing Head for media group).*

*I am privileged to be producing radio and TV commercials. And if I tell you the number of times you know, managers from other media houses come to me asking me to help them solicit for advertisement on to their platforms. It's amazing. It's quite overwhelming. So based on that from a distance, I can tell you, yes. Other media houses have more challenging moments in terms of revenue generation for that matter to stay in the business (**INT 5:** General Manager of TV and radio media group).*

Is the Ghanaian media financially viable?

This chapter set out to explore the financial viability of the Ghanaian media. To do this, it has attempted a picture of the revenue inflows into media, revenue generation strategies as well as factors impacting the financial health of media in the country. Ultimately, however, the chapter seeks a pronouncement on whether the Ghanaian media is viable.

The simple answer, it appears, is 'no'. The media industry is too heavily plagued by saturation, the cost of doing business in Ghana, dwindling advertising budgets [including capital flight onto social media platforms], the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and fast-evolving technological changes to be considered financially healthy. Too often, media owners are having to step in and rescue

their ventures because the latter cannot cover their costs.

> *Sometimes the salary and other things even have to come from the owner. But they're also doing their best but you realize that, probably, there are several things they are not doing properly. But the serious ones today though they are not making profit they are still able to break even (***INT 2:*** *General Manager of a radio station).*

But, perhaps, the more appropriate answer is that while the industry has a lot of prospects, it is derailed by the problems so far highlighted. Industry players describe it more appropriately as, at best, a 'break-even' industry.

> *From where I sit, I should say that the media is at the state of break-even. My point is that, every media house today is hard-hit about rising cost of things, particularly electricity, data, logistics like radio equipment and what have you. As compared to our revenue inflows you realise that, you are unable to break even so you are not well satisfied, you're not well pleased to say that we are really making profit so the media is really viable (***INT 2:*** *General Manager of a radio station).*

> *If you look at the Ghanaian media landscape, one cannot say entirely that it is viable and one cannot also say entirely that it is not viable. It is just in-between, because if you look critically at the media landscape as we speak..., you could see that the media is thriving so much, but sometimes, most of them cannot even break even (***INT 3:*** *General Manager of radio station).*

Discussion

This study shows that the financial health of the local media is patchy, at best. While there are clear signs of healthy indicators of financial potential, there are equally pressing challenges to viability. Factors situated within the structure of the local media scene, the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of the local economy and the fast pace of technological evolutions both hurt the financial health of the media in Ghana.

The media is not helpless to the challenges they face, however. They are resorting to innovative revenue strategies to turn the tide. Indeed, they are resorting to four strategies to augment their revenues derived from non-advertising sources. The strategies relate to content innovations, digitisation, diversification and innovative solicitation. This is an encouraging trend as it means that media are actively diversifying their income portfolios to make them resilient to factors affecting their financial health.

As the media actively innovate revenue strategies, it portends good tidings by expanding their income streams. Yet, the benefits of these creative revenue strategies are hampered by the intense saturation in the broadcasting space. Given the size of the troubled Ghanaian economy and the implications for advertising budgets, there is just too little advertising money to go round. This has the potential to increase the risk of media capture and its attendant unprofessional practices.

There is also the challenge posed by the growing audience taste (particularly among the youth) for news and discourse on global digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram. The flight of audiences onto digital platforms is accompanied by advertising revenue flight and resulting financial distress for traditional media organisations. Even though media organisations are making efforts to monetise their presence on such platforms, it appears the challenges posed by audience and capital flight are more compelling.

The media's efforts to stay financially viable are also countered by the cost of doing business in Ghana's post COVID-19 economy. Like all businesses in the country, media organisations are finding themselves at the mercy of forex rate-induced rising fuel, utility and retooling costs which have become a constant drain on incomes. As these and other costs increase, the capacity for media to adequately resource and remunerate employees to engender professional practice reduces. The high cost of doing business also has implications for content diversity. Indeed, as we find, it costs more to generate local content than to import and do voice translation sound inserts. This explains the increasing levels of imported Asian and Southern American telenovelas which are gradually weaning local audience tastes off local films and drama. The long-term implications for financial viability are dire.

Closely related to this is the challenge that financial constraints pose to professional practice, and content richness and diversity. As resource and work conditions of media personnel worsen as a result of dwindling revenues, the industry will increasingly become vulnerable to co-optation and other forms of unprofessional practice. Already, due to poor conditions of service, a culture of gift-giving in journalism popularly called 'soli' has grown to define journalistic practice in Ghana. The practice, which media personnel consider to be a legitimate supplement to their low incomes (Alhassan &Abdulai, 2019), is known to bias media

content and as a result is the cause of some angst among scholars and industry leaders (Alhassan &Abdulai, 2019). Ultimately, this should erode the financial prospects of the media. Stale, biased and unprofessional reporting practices lead to distrust in media and turn audiences [and with them advertising revenues] to sources perceived to be more credible.

It is also important to note the implications of our findings regarding the patterns of revenue inflows into the media. On the one hand, it is encouraging to note that advertising revenue in the media is sourced from a rich mix of mostly private entities. This means that no single entity, including government, is uniquely positioned to control media using advertising spend as bait. The preponderance of commercial entities in holding the purse strings of media is to be expected as it replicates a common model for media financing (Sehl, Cornia & Nielsen, 2021). However, it does also signal a challenge to media viability in circumstances where economic hardships force commercial organisations to cut advertising budgets.

That said, it is insightful to note the potential influence of the herbal medicine sector over the Ghanaian media. Its unique position as the biggest spender can translate into power that may have negative repercussions for regulatory control of the sector using media as allies.

Recommendations

Despite the significant effort that media organizations are making to ensure their continued existence, there is a need to pay close attention to the sustainability of the sector, given its close links to Ghana's democracy and progress. While there is a strong case to be made that the Ghanaian media scene is not financially viable, the sector has shown itself to be adaptable, particularly, by its use of alternative funding approaches. Below, some suggestions are offered, considering the study's findings, towards enhancing the financial health of the Ghanaian media.

… for media development organisations
- It is imperative that the opportunity to expand revenue inflows is given impetus. We recommend capacity building to enable media organisations, particularly smaller, rural-based ones, to diversify revenue sources and strategies. Media development organisations, the sector ministries and industry associations must lead the way in such capacity building efforts.

- We also recommend that media development organisations provide training to enable media managers to introduce efficient work systems and processes to cut costs. Efficiency measures forced by the COVID-19 pandemic deserve further exploitation by more media organisations.

… for government and regulators
- As media creatively attempt to expand their revenue inflows to, at least, break even, it is imperative to target systemic development support to the sector. Elsewhere [Denmark, Australia etc.], public interventions such as tax breaks [for retooling and employment] as well as tax incentives [for focusing on some content foci] are used to support media sector development. We recommend the Ministries of Information, and Communications and Digitalization to consider advocating for such support to bring relief to the sector and facilitate its resilience capacity.

- As part of requirements for licensing, regulators must introduce and insist on sustainability plans by media organisations seeking licensing. The sustainability plan must address strategies for enabling the organisation to generate enough income to be self-sustaining and viable.

- Given their growing influence and the implications for the financial viability of local media, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram must be engaged to contribute some of their revenues to support the local media. Australia's quest to force big tech companies to share their advertising revenues with local media firms comes to mind. We encourage the government to join forces with other African governments to pursue this to have the tech giants give back to their markets in Africa in a manner that ensures the sustainability of offline information access and quality.

- Local media contribute to the nation's development through taxes, employment etc. It is imperative that they be protected and helped to sustain themselves. African governments must lead the charge in negotiating around the capital flight to the global tech giants.

- African governments must also join forces to negotiate better and fair rates for content generated by African media and annexed by the global tech platforms.

- The NCA should, as a matter of urgency, consider freezing the issuance of more broadcast licenses and take steps to audit and restructure the broadcasting space to reduce the glut and improve financial prospects of media organizations.

... for media organisations

- The efficiency innovations ushered in by the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic have proven to have bottom-line implications for such media. Such cost-cutting measures as working from home [with savings in utility consumption and transport budgets] deserve larger scale adoption by media organisations to reduce their costs and increase their financial viability.

- Media organisations must also continue to innovate new revenue strategies to reduce their heavy reliance on advertising revenues, a model that is increasingly threatened by the influence of global social media giants.

- An important way to ensure a viable media is trust and credibility. Work that is rooted in the principles of good journalism serves as the foundation for media trust and credibility. Without concern for quality, media organizations that want social media clout (because that is where advertising is being diverted to) are likely to cultivate a negative reputation as clickbait peddlers. Media organisations must guard their credibility. High editorial standards must be maintained to avoid the risk of serious media evolving into tabloids in their effort to garner attention that generates income.

- As long as it is beneficial, the media must keep looking to the digital. Media organisations must transform with the times and take advantage of the affordances of the digital. The study's findings demonstrate that media organizations are increasingly turning to financial options other than the paradigm of advertising revenue. This is a fantastic trend that can help media organisations.

... for academic institutions

- The foregoing demonstrates the need for further research into the media sector to enable insights and solutions around:
  - Effectiveness of different revenue strategies
  - Efficiency measures towards reducing operational costs

  - Extent of, and opportunities for new media adoption for revenue generation and expansion

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Working conditions in the Ghanaian media

Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin and Sulemana Braimah

Abstract

Ghana's media remain one of the most celebrated across the continent, for its expansive and liberal ecosystem. With an exponential growth rate and a generally liberal atmosphere for discourse, it is easy to assume that all is well in the media. However, anecdotal evidence about the economics and management practices in the media suggests that all may not be well, particularly, with professionals who work in the space. This chapter examines working conditions in the media by exploring issues of entry and exit, remuneration, welfare, resources for work and policies to govern individual conduct. It reports evidence of high levels of opacity in recruitment practices. Media personnel are also poorly paid with many working without the benefit of healthcare support nor pensions. The study also reveals that media organisations, generally, have no codified protocols to guide employee behaviour. The chapter concludes with a number of recommendations for regulators and media owners/ managers and associations.

Keywords: Working conditions, media professionals, employee welfare, salaries in media

Introduction

Ghana's media industry has seen significant growth in the Fourth Republic. What begun in 1993 as a sector with a handful of newspapers, one national TV station and about a dozen radio stations run by the state broadcaster, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), is now a huge industry. By the third quarter of 2022, some 513 radio stations were in operation (NCA, 2022). There were also 113 TV stations, and over a hundred newspapers. Several digital news, and blogging platforms are also thriving although the big social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are more popular.

Prior to the Fourth Republic, trained media professionals had only a few outlets. The GBC, the then Graphic Corporation, New Times Corporation and the Ghana News Agency, and a few private newspaper outlets were the only available options. The presence and pervasiveness of private media in Ghana today means that professionals have more employment openings. However, once they enter the industry, media professionals must have the wherewithal to produce optimal results. Thus, where resources for work are unavailable, the opportunity for media personnel to produce interesting and impactful stories may be challenged. Similarly, poorly remunerated employees become vulnerable to unprofessional practices (Alhassan & Abdulai, 2019) that ultimately reduce the credibility of the media sector. Clearly, the capacity of media professionals to work to expectation depends on their working conditions (Chukwudumebi & Kifordu, 2018).

While anecdotal claims often reference poor working conditions in the media, empirical evidence remains a challenge, denying policy makers and actors of requisite empirics for remedial responses. This chapter addresses the challenge by presenting evidence on working conditions in the media. It seeks to support policy and advocacy efforts with empirical evidence that enables improvements in working conditions. The specific objectives are to:

- explore recruitment practices in the Ghanaians media.

- explore job security issues in the Ghanaian media.

- examine employee remuneration in the Ghanaian media.

- explore provisions for employee pension, healthcare and support for family in the event of death.

- examine perceptions about the availability of resources for work.

- examine the state of institutional arrangements towards creating conducive work environments.

Design of the study

The evidence presented in this chapter is drawn from a mixed methods study combining a survey, key-informant interviews and digital ethnography.

A survey of employees in 200 media organisations across the country was conducted using Google Forms. A probability sampling technique was used to select the organisations using the NCA's quarterly bulletin on the electronic media, Geopoll's print media rankings and FeedSpot's ranking of top news websites. However, the absence of a database of media employees forced us to use convenience sampling techniques to identify individual participants. We relied on data supplied by the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) and the Media Foundation for West Africa to identify employees in the selected organisations. The former was a list of contact details of personnel from different media houses that the GJA had compiled for Electoral Commission accreditation to cover the 2020 general elections. The MFWA list comprised contact details of persons who had been included in its capacity building workshops.

Persons identified (in the two lists) from each selected organisation were invited by trained research assistants to participate in the study[1]. The first respondents to agree to participate were given the link to the survey through email or text. After two rounds of bi-weekly reminder prompts, 154 survey completions were achieved representing a 77 percent response rate. The survey data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

Three key informant interviews were used to explore the quantitative evidence. The interviewees were a radio presenter (INT 1), a general manager of a broadcasting group (INT 2) and a radio station

manager (INT 3). Interviews were held based on their convenience, on telephone or in-person. They explored working conditions in the media as regards issues of remuneration, welfare, recruitment, among others.

The third method employed in evidence gathering was digital ethnography (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). Conversations on a WhatsApp platform to which the lead researcher has access were mined for comments about working conditions in media. The conversations ensued after a member had posted information encouraging members, predominantly journalists, to take up 'side hustles' [side jobs] to supplement their meagre earnings from media. The discussions that followed centred around working conditions and followed a natural course without any prompts from the researcher. Contributors whose comments are used in this analysis were all notified privately and given the opportunity to consent to the use of their information. Their identities are anonymized as Speaker 1, Speaker 2, Speaker 3 and Speaker 4.

Survey data profile

Survey respondents were drawn from a cross section of media (Table 1), working in the radio sector (60%) or converged media with presence across different platforms (e.g., newspapers, websites, TV and radio) (Fig. 1). The profile of their employer organisations indicates a good spread with 57 percent being small or medium-sized entities with employees ranging between 8 and 30. Sampled media with more than 30 employees constitute 43 percent (Fig. 2).

Table 1: Regional distribution of media from which data was gathered

Region	Frequency	%
Accra	44	28.6
Ashanti	39	25.3
Eastern	2	1.3
Western	7	4.5
Central	2	1.3
Volta	11	7.1
Bono east	7	4.5
Bono	6	3.9

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1 In a few instances, the databases did not include information on some selected media houses. In such cases, a trained research assistant (a graduate student of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana) physically visited the media to administer the instrument to one editorial or production staff member, on a convenience basis.

Northern	14	9.1
Western north	2	1.3
Upper east	3	1.9
Upper west	11	7.1
Savannah	5	3.2
Oti	1	.6
Total	154	100.0

Fig. 1: Frequency distribution of media
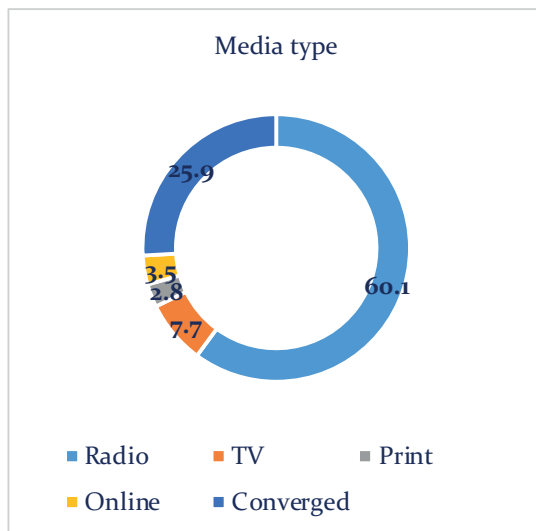
Fig. 2: Frequency distribution of size of media
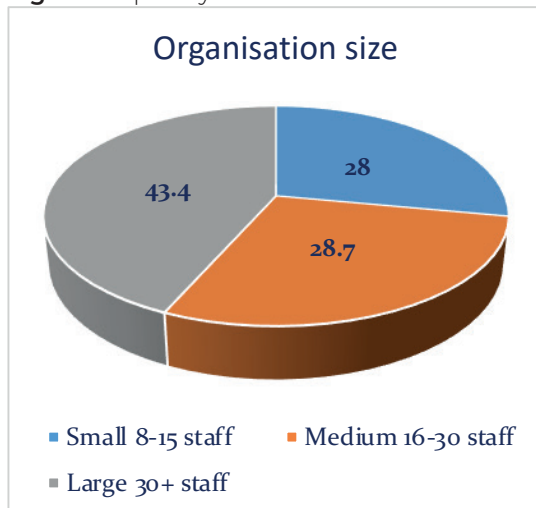
The survey respondents had a gender distribution of three males to one female. Respondents had industry experience spanning one to 25 years with the average being 10 years. Their roles in the media

organisations were varied and included editorial staff, administrative staff and technical staff (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Frequency distribution of respondents' roles
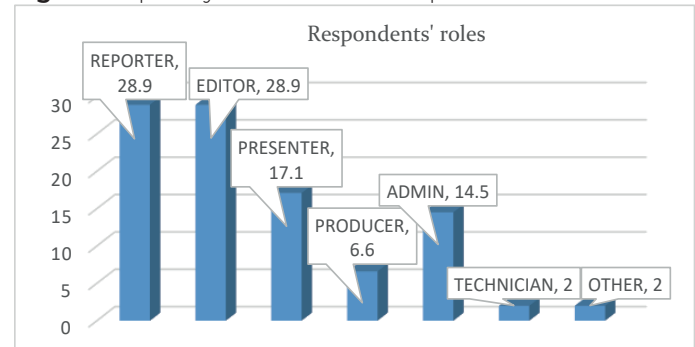
Findings
Entry, progression and exit in the Ghanaian media

Organisational practices around recruitment and employee turnover are critical for the attraction and retention of talent and skill (Yusliza et.al., 2021). This is because employee status and working conditions are often linked to how people were employed (Adeniran et. al., 2020). The study sought to find out how people are recruited into the Ghanaian media i.e., whether through open competition or not. Four recruitment options were given to respondents to choose from – protocol/introduction[2], head-hunting, cold calling[3] and openly advertised roles.

Findings show that most respondents (85%) entered their organisations through channels not open to competition. These included 'protocol/introduction' = 29%; head hunting = 27% and cold calling = 28%. Together, these suggest that recruitment practices are not very transparent.

Fig 4: Modes of respondents' entry into media

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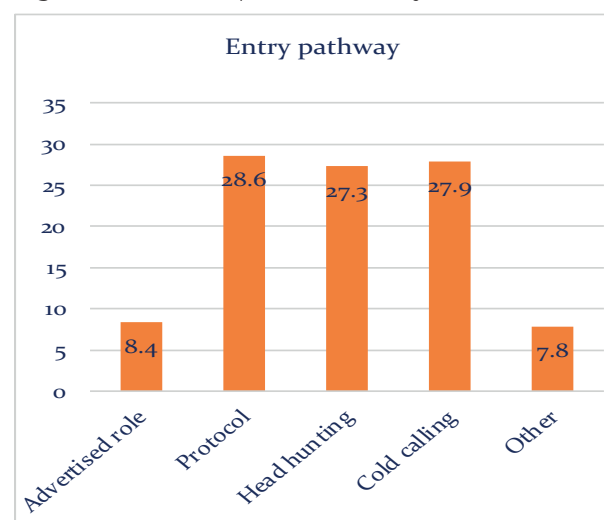
2 Protocol is slang for 'whom you know'-based advantages.

3 Where prospective employees introduce themselves to media owners/recruiters in search of job opportunities.

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of entry mode and gender

Mode of entry into organisation	MALE	FEMALE	Total
Advertised role	12 10.7%	1 2.4%	13 8.5%
Protocol/influence	29 25.9%	14 34.1%	43 28.1%
Headhunting	35 31.2%	7 17.1%	42 27.5%
Cold calling	29 25.9%	14 34.1%	43 28.1%
Other	7 6.2%	5 12.2%	12 7.8%
Total	112 100.0%	41 100.0%	153 100.0%

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of recruitment channel and media location

| Mode of employee entry | Location of media | | |
	City media	Non city media	Total
Applied for advertised role	3 (3.3%)	10 (15.6%)	13 (8.4%)
Protocol	32 (35.6%)	12 (18.8%)	44 (28.6%)
Headhunting	25 (27.8%)	17 (26.6%)	42 (27.3%)
Cold calling	24 (26.7%)	1 (29.7%)	43 (27.9%)
Other	6 (6.7%)	6 (9.4%)	12 (7.8%)
Total	90 (100%)	64 (100%)	154 (100%)

It appears that these pathways of entry into the media are gendered (Table 2). Males (31%) are almost twice as likely to have been headhunted than females (17%) who, on the other hand, tended to come through protocol pathways or cold-calls. It appears that women may have less specialised skills that attract media owners and recruiters. Also, women may not have the visibility or stature to come to attention and be headhunted.

As shown in Table 3, some differences also emerge in the recruitment practices of media depending on whether they are city-based or not. The latter uses four times more openly competitive channels than city-based media.

Respondents were also asked whether they had a contract governing the terms of their employment. At least 40 percent of respondents indicated that there was no contractual agreement between them and their employer. While this means the majority do have contracts, the fact that two out of every five respondents are working without a contract and, therefore, subject to arbitrary treatment (e.g., dismissal) is a cause for concern.

> *Ideally there should be contracts, written properly, signed and witnessed. Some have contracts that I know of. I have a contract. Others, its word of mouth. It is also because, the economic situations in which we operate sometimes people end up selling themselves for less. They need to survive and so they end up feeling like you're doing them a favor by even giving them a job to start with (INT 1: Radio presenter).*

> *"employment without appointment letters so you cannot take them to labour [Commission] when they sack you off without a reason (Speaker 2: broadcast journalist and presenter).*

> *Oh, they can even change your contract terms without your knowledge. And when you ask, you'll be told they changed it. Happened to me (Speaker 1: Journalist).*

As interviewees explain, the general thinking of media owners seems to be that employees are dispensable:

if you leave today, I will get someone else over there" (INT 3: radio station administrator).

This leads that to the feeling that "there is job but no job security", as expressed by Speaker 1. Also, of

interest to note are the seeming linkages between pathways of entry and the contractual arrangements that govern work in the media. Those who entered organisations through openly advertised roles were the most likely to have employment contracts (77%) (Fig. 5). Of those who came in through channels less amenable to open competition, those who were head-hunted are the ones most likely to have defined contracts.

Fig. 5: Cross-tabulation of mode of entry and contract
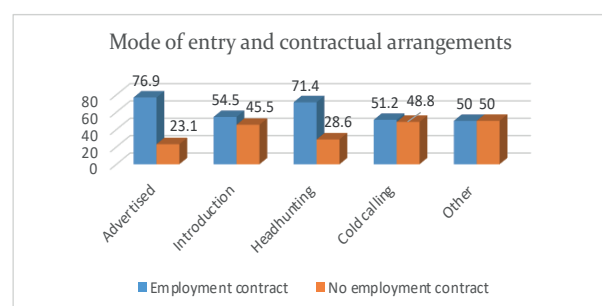
Further, it is interesting to note the pattern that emerges around location of media and the formalization of contractual arrangements with employees sampled. Nearly 70 percent of city-based respondents had contracts binding their connections to their employer. In sharp contrast, less than half of non-city-based respondents had defined contracts. In other words, for every four city-based media respondents, nearly three had contracts. In contrast, less than two out of every four non-city-based respondents had contracts (Table 4).

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of media and contract

Do you have a formal contract?	Location of media		Total
	City media	Non-city media	
Yes	61 (67.8%)	31 (48.4%)	92 (59.7%)
No	29 (32.2%)	33 (51.6%)	62 (40.3%)
Total	90	64 (100%)	154 (100%)

Given the high levels of opacity in entry practices, it is not surprising that career progression in media appears to be nontransparent. Promotion practices are shrouded in patronage and nepotism, in the absence of codified structures. A 2020 report on the status of women in the Ghanaian media

(Yeboah-Banin et al., 2020) gave indications about the opacity of promotional practices in the media. Nearly 45 percent of respondents in that study indicated that they did not know whether their organisations had a promotion policy. It appears that the general practice when it comes to promoting employees is individual owner/manager-led rather than structured. While personal professional development can be recognised, for the most part, promotions remain at the discretion of the top leadership.

> *There is an avenue where you kind of you top up your knowledge yes. As in you have probably a news editor who entered with an HND or a BSC and now has a master's in communication or something, that person is recognized. And probably the COO will talk to you and restructure your salary for you because you are adding knowledge and you are bringing that knowledge back to us to help us grow so with that it will happen that it increases but not to say you are this so we are promoting you to this level (INT 3: Radio station administrator).*
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>
> *Media houses must have a salary structure. And promotion structure just like the banks. You can't be a reporter for 100 years with the same salary whereas someone just comes in and earns three times the amount (Speaker 1).*

With regard to exit from the media, the study sought to establish whether the employees have clarity as to the circumstances under which they may lose their jobs. Fig. 6 shows that a small majority (56%) of the survey respondents know about what could lead to the termination of their appointment. It is important to take note, however, of the over 40 percent of respondents who either do not know (34%) or are unsure (10%) of the circumstances under which they might lose their jobs.

Fig. 6: Frequency distribution of knowledge of terms of employment termination

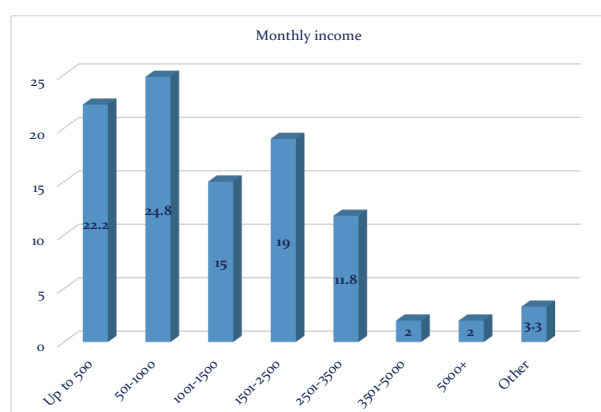| Salary range	Accra and Ashanti	Other regions	Total
Up to 1000	22 26.5%	49 70%	71 46.4%
1001-1500	16 19.3%	7 10.0%	23 15.0%
1501-2500	24 28.9%	5 7.1%	29 19.0%
2501-3500	13 15.7%	5 7.1%	18 11.8%
3500+	6 7.2%	0 .0%	6 2.0%
Other	2 2.4%	3 4.3%	5 3.3%
Total	83 100.0%	70 100.0%	153 100.0%

Remuneration

The study also sought to examine remuneration patterns in the Ghanaian media. How well or not employees are paid has varied implications for their work, conduct and output (Kayode et. al., 2019), loyalty to the organisation (Nguyen et.al., 2020), commitment (Sardjana et. al., 2019), exit intentions and general wellbeing (Asuquo et.al.,2021). Respondents were asked questions about salaries, timeliness of salary payments and whether unforeseen events that befall their organisations easily affect their remuneration.

Findings (Fig. 5) indicate that salaries are generally quite low with nearly half of the respondents (47%) earning monthly incomes of at most GHC1,000 (nearly half of that number actually earn no more than GHC 500 monthly). Salaries of respondents working in media organisations in the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions were much higher than those working outside these two regions. Up to 70 percent of respondents (two of every three) working in the other regions earn no more than 1000. This is irrespective of their roles (e.g. editor, reporter, presenter etc.), which did not seem to make much difference in earnings, surprisingly. This is in sharp contrast to the 26 percent (one in every five) Accra and Ashanti-based respondents earning a similar amount.

Fig. 5: Frequency distribution of incomes

Interview data validates the finding that salaries in the media are woefully inadequate.

> Sometimes you hear the salaries of journalists from both state or public and private media and you're like "really?". Thousand two hundred (1200) cedis for assistant editor, thousand eight hundred cedis (1800), seven hundred and fifty (750) cedis and you pause and ask yourself. "eeii, asɛm no ɛyɛ critical" [this is critical]. Some of them are mothers, some of them are fathers, some of them are married and so, what will they do with that kind of money? Now, the thing also is, generally what are the salary levels in Ghana like? Not much to write home about. But in the media, especially private media, from what I know or from what I hear, it's not the best (INT 1: Radio presenter).

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> So many journalists calling me daily for loans here and there and yet they are employed. I have complaints from some politicians about how they heckle [beg for money from] them (Speaker 3: Journalist).

Clearly, incomes in media organisations are low and can render media personnel vulnerable to influence and corruption. As this speaker argues, the only way to make ends meet as a media practitioner in Ghana is to seek alternative incomes:

> Best solution to our poverty! Stay a media practitioner. That's okay. You can still present, direct, write, whatever. But here is the big secret! One leg in media, one leg in business or another job. That's the only way you may survive in this industry! Strive towards entrepreneurship while working full time; when your strides look good, keep only one leg in by working part time in media, and go advance your business (Speaker 4: Journalist).

Indications from recent empirical data shows that the remuneration also has gendered undertones. As shown by Yeboah-Banin et al (2020), there are strong perceptions of unequal pay practices along gender lines. As one participant in this study concludes, there is "favouritism in salary payments; same role, similar experiences but huge disparities [in salaries]" (Speaker 2: Journalist).
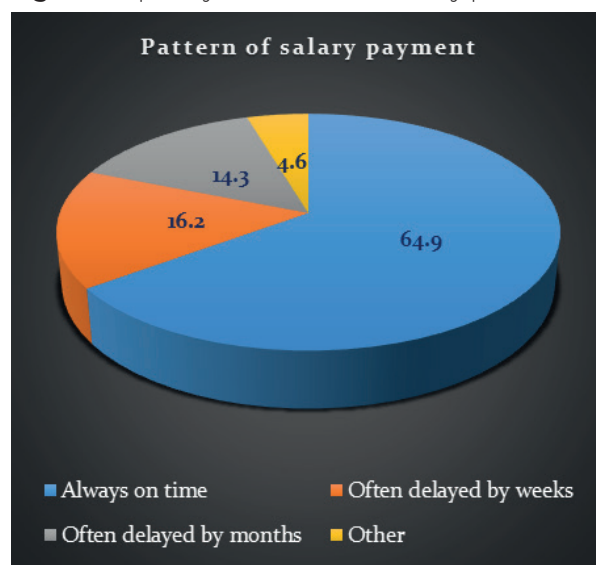
Perhaps even more worrying, besides this trend of low remuneration, is the concerning evidence of unpaid work. As discovered in this study, there are several instances where personnel in the media are working for no pay at all.

> I have worked nearly a year with an organisation right here in Ghana and I had to put fuel in my vehicle, drive to work every single day for nearly a year without a salary. Even up to now, I am trying to track that salary and it never comes at all. When you practice international journalism with organisations outside Ghana, that is when you really know how we are being cheated. There are organisations that you work with and probably, you could buy a vehicle every single month. Because they are caring for every aspect of your life, taking care of your health and so many other things. Comparatively to how we are being treated in this country, it is woefully inadequate (Speaker 4: Journalist).

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> We have permanent workers who are on our monthly wages or salaries others are paid meagre wages. I must be very frank here. And there are others who are not even paid. Not because we don't appreciate what they do but because they are not into the mainstream activities of the station (INT 2: General manager of a broadcasting group).

The silver lining, perhaps, is the finding that for a moderate majority of those who receive salaries, payments are relatively regular. Every two out of three respondents (65%), typically, receive their salaries on time every month (Fig. 6). That said, it is of concern that as much as 30 percent of them experience frequent delays in salary payments. This is even more so when one considers the generally low salaries reported. In other words, for a good number of respondents, they must contend with delays in payments besides their relatively low remuneration.

Fig. 6: Frequency distribution of salary patterns

Pattern of salary payment

- Always on time — 64.9
- Often delayed by weeks — 16.2
- Often delayed by months — 14.3
- Other — 4.6

Welfare in the Ghanaian media

Besides remuneration, the welfare of individual employees helps to boost commitment and productivity. Welfare packages can cover employee healthcare and that of their close dependents, arrangements to support their family in the event of death, as well as contributions towards employees' pension.
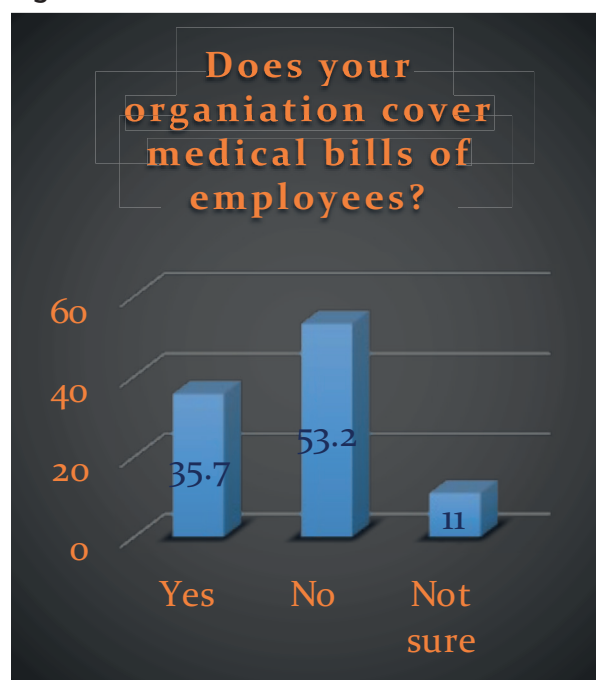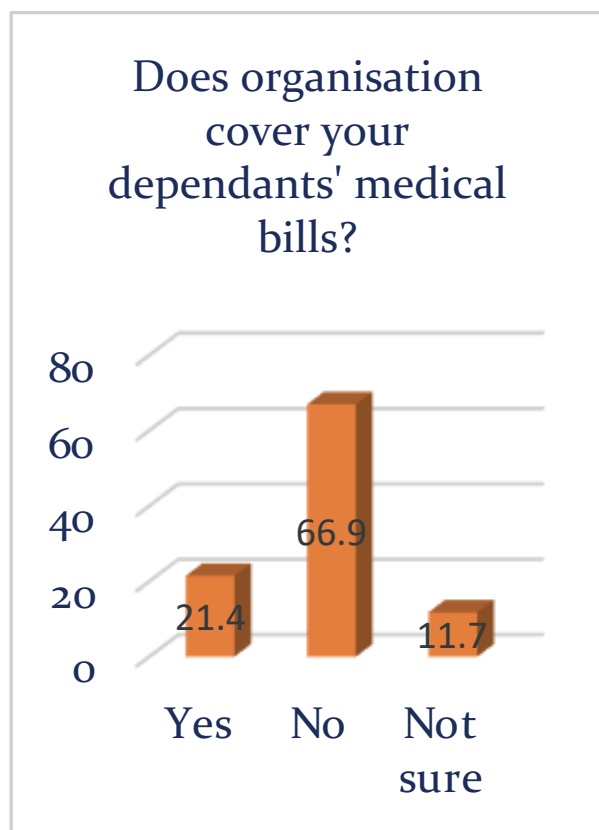
Fig. 8

Does your organiation cover medical bills of employees?

- Yes — 35.7
- No — 53.2
- Not sure — 11

Fig. 9

Does organisation cover your dependants' medical bills?

Findings from the study show that health care support for employees in the Ghanaian media is not very widespread. A small majority (53%) indicated that their organisations extend no such provisions to their employees. For those who have such provisions, terms for medical care appear to be generally fluid and unstated.

> Ok, so there is not a clearly defined policy on that but from the little I have worked over 6 years, I think if it is a norm, then that norm becomes a policy. Then it cuts across all. Because whoever is in that situation probably a month or two is taken care of and irrespective, fully (INT 3: radio station administrator).

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> No, that's another grey area. For the medicals, that is where the favoritism comes in. You know, "oh, mo mpɛ ten thousand bi mma no na ɔnfa nhwɛ ne how far' [get him some ten thousand cedis and let him see how far it will help him]. 'Oh accounts kakra wɔ hɔ? ɔneɛ mo ma yɛnfa thousand bi ɔmma no' [Accounts, do we have some money? Let's get him some thousand cedis]. 'Nti ɔhɔ deɛ favoritism ba mu' [so as for medical care, there is a lot of favouritism in it] because for medicals, it doesn't go well. And you know, no matter what, in every organization there are favorites.

> So, there's always a disparity between who gets the thigh of the grasshopper and who doesn't (INT 1: Radio presenter).

The story is much worse when it comes to health coverage for dependants of employees (Fig. 9). Nearly 70 percent of respondents indicated that their organisations have no such provisions. Where ill-health results in the death of the employee, it appears few of the organisations sampled have any provisions to support their family. Only about a quarter (27%) of the respondents indicated the existence of any such support to families of deceased employees in their organisations. Nearly twice this number (44%) indicated that no such provisions exist in their organisations. There is also some substantial level of ambivalence on the existence of such provisions as 30 percent indicated a lack of clarity on the matter (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10: Welfare provision for bereavement

Does your organisation have any provisions for families of deceased employees?
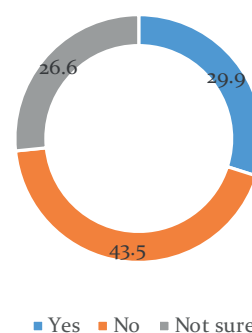
Interestingly, despite the generally poor welfare support from media organisations, employees do not seem to be exploring alternatives. The majority (59%) of respondents indicated that employees in their organisation had no staff welfare fund.

Fig. 11

Do employees in your organisation have a welfare fund?
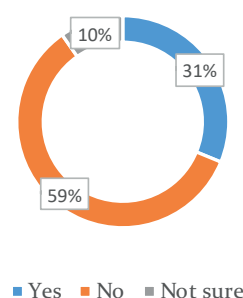
The study also examined the payment of pensions within media. Sixty-one percent of respondents indicated that they have pension cover at their workplaces, leaving nearly 40 percent who either do not have a pension (31%) or are unsure of any such cover (9%). The fact that nearly a third of respondents have no pension cover means that statutory obligations towards them may be being flouted. Interestingly, even among the sixty-one percent who have pension cover, an even smaller number indicated knowledge that their pension deductions were actually being paid to the relevant pension funds.

Fig. 12

Do you get pension cover?

8.5
30.7
60.8

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Fig. 13

Are your pension deductions paid to the relevant agencies?

23%
18%
59%

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
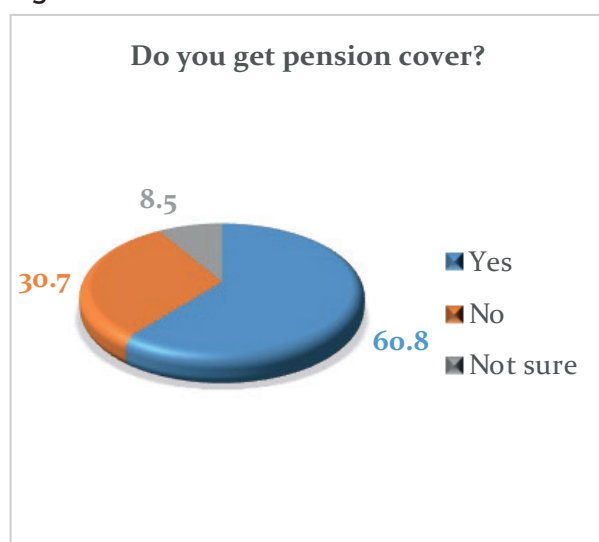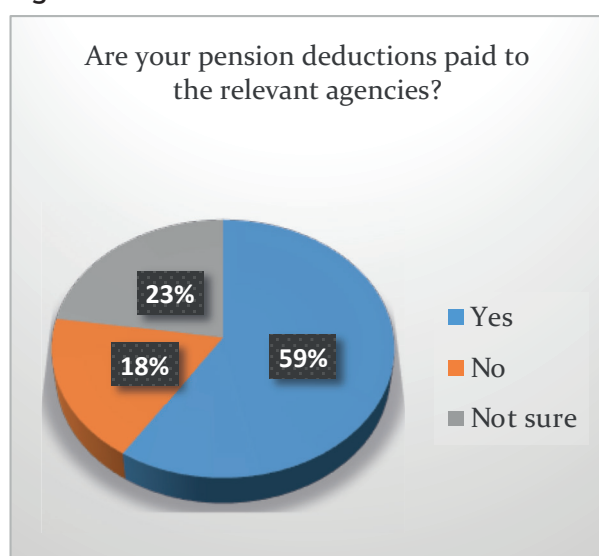
Work support and resourcing

Employee productivity is partly contingent on the availability of work-related resources that facilitate the delivery of their responsibilities. Within media, such resources can be equipment and transportation for newsgathering activities. The study explored how well media organisations in Ghana fare in the provision of resources for work. It also examined the availability of counselling services to support employees who experience trauma and stress as a result of their work.

Opinions on resource availability were divided. While half of the respondents indicated that their organisations ensure resources needed for work are readily available, the other half had opposing views. The equivocality of the evidence is very informative as one would expect that supplying employees with the resources they need to work should be a matter of course. Yet, as the evidence shows, not only is it the subject of divided opinion, indeed, the possibility is that resource inadequacy is a challenge experienced by half the respondents.

Fig. 14

Provision of adequate resources for work

50%
50%

- Yes
- No
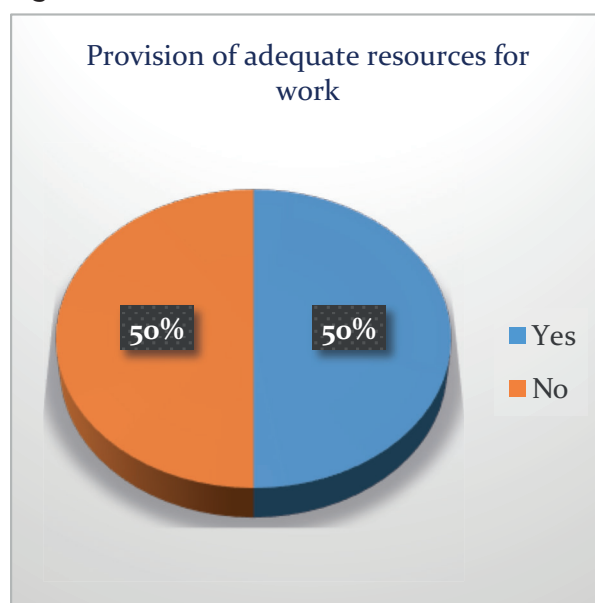
How does the picture apply to non-routine work circumstances such as the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic? From the onset of the pandemic, media professionals joined health and other professionals on the frontline. Their duty of public education and information meant that they could not go on lock-down etc. Rather, and perhaps more so in a pandemic, they were out gathering the news to both inform audiences about the pandemic and also to provide much-needed education on how

to stay protected. In doing this, media professionals were under considerable danger of contracting the disease besides other dangers they routinely face in their work.

The study found that generally, organisations fared well in ensuring the safety of their employees who stayed to work during the pandemic. Eighty-six percent of respondents rated their organisations as having done well (ranging from excellently to just okay) in supplying such protective materials as face masks, hand wash basins etc. that enabled employees to stay safe during the pandemic. The remainder rated their organisations as having done poorly.

Fig. 15
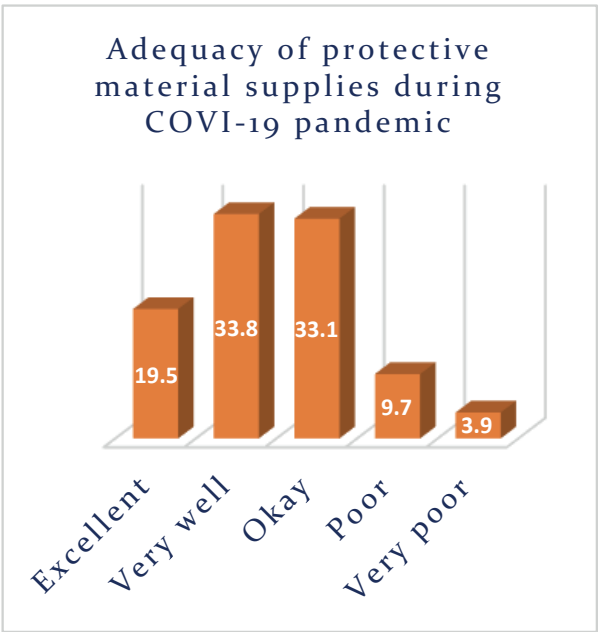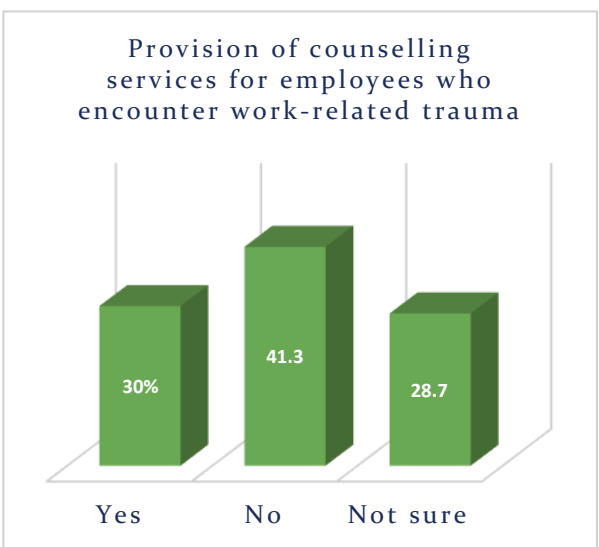
their work, the nature of which can be traumatic. The study sought to find out whether under such circumstances, media organisations have provision for support such as counselling.

The findings show that media organisations have little provision for employees to receive such support. Seventy percent of respondents indicated either the absence of such help (41%) or uncertainty that it was available to them (29%). Only 30 percent indicated that their organisations have provisions for such support.

Structures to guide acceptable behaviour

To ensure fairness and respect among employees, organisations require behaviour guides that specify acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Such guides include documents that specify employee codes of conduct, and organisational posture towards unacceptable behaviour. In addition, organisations also need clearly defined procedures for remediating unacceptable behaviour while ensuring that victims are protected.

The study explored the existence of two such behaviour guides – anti-harassment and anti-discrimination - within the media organisations. Respondents were also asked to indicate whether their organisations had clearly defined disciplinary procedures as well as clearly defined procedures for employees who felt wrongly treated to seek redress.

Media organisations of respondents do not appear to be proactive about confronting issues of harassment and discrimination. Less than 40 percent of respondents indicated the existence of anti-harassment policies in their organisations. Even less (34%) said their organisations have policies against discrimination.

A majority of the respondents (58%) indicated that their organisations have clearly defined procedures for seeking redress for errant behaviour. This means, however, that two out of every five respondents work in organisations where such redress is either not possible nor clearly available.

Fig. 16

Media professionals often face attacks for doing

Summary of findings

The key findings emanating from the study are as follows:

- Recruitment into the media generally relies on channels less open to competition.

- Job security is a challenge for many (40%) media personnel owing to the absence of contractual agreements between employees and their employers.

- Career progression opportunities are largely non-existent. There are no established structures for promotion and practices are shrouded in patronage and nepotism. Salaries in the media are woefully low and, sometimes, delayed or not paid at all.

- Provision of health care support for employees (and their dependants) is neither widespread nor institutionalised.

- Perceptions are divided as to whether media organisations adequately provide resources for work.

- There is little room for provision of counselling support for employees who experience trauma in the line of work.

- About 60% of respondents' organisations do not appear to have institutionalised systems for preventing harassment and discrimination.

Discussion

The media industry in Ghana is a career destination for many, making it imperative to ensure that it offers a viable space to pursue fulfilling careers. To this end, this chapter explored working conditions in the media to understand how well the industry offers a welcoming place for work.

Generally, the findings from this study show that working conditions in the media are not good. Job insecurity, poor remuneration, and poor employee welfare are issues that call for urgent attention. They appear to be foregrounded by a system (whether deliberately or inadvertently formed) that ensures that remedial actions are almost impossible to pursue.

In the first instance, high levels of opacity in recruitment practices makes it almost impossible for change to happen. When employees are recruited through nonmerit-based channels, a foundation for rent-seeking is laid in which they become indebted to owners, managers and their influencers. This takes from employees the power to bargain for better conditions. At the same time,

there is a high potential for low quality output (given that persons recruited may not come with requisite skills), which reduces employees' upward mobility and subsequent bargaining power.

Evidence published by Alhassan and Abdulai (2018) suggest that poor remuneration in the Ghanaian media also fuels the practice of *soli* (where journalists accept money or other forms of gifts as sitting allowance after covering an event) to the extent that journalists have come to expect *soli* as a legitimate obligation of event organisers and a way to supplement their low incomes. The study shows that this affects editorial decisions and content. This suggests that the low remuneration and resultant growing reliance of media personnel on *soli* can result in poor journalism. Importantly, poor remuneration also means that media personnel risk becoming less motivated to do their work as needed to deliver the benefits of democracy to the citizens of Ghana. There is also the implication for high turn-over in media as people seek 'greener pastures' in other industries and fail to stay in media long enough to build capacity and clout which can be leveraged for better conditions.

The implications of the low remuneration are potentially exacerbated by the weak provision of medical care for media personnel and their dependents, and the general absence of counselling support where needed. Not only does this mean that media personnel cannot access such help without recourse to their personal finances, it also signals the possibility of high levels of unattended mental and other health issues. There is also the possibility of self-censorship as media personnel avoid dangerous stories that expose them to attacks for which they must expend their personal resources to seek help. This can result in a conducive atmosphere for corruption and impunity. Equally of concern is the realisation that such support, where available, are not institutionalised but rather subject to the whims of owners and managers. Such state of affairs can increase employee indebtedness to owners and managers, and foment a culture of rent-seeking.

Another cause for concern is the weak structures for ensuring acceptable behaviour, and redress for wrongdoing. Nearly two thirds of respondents work in media organisations that may not have formalised structures in place for guiding employee behaviour away from discrimination and harassment. This is worsened by the fact that in more than a third of respondents' organisations, no clear procedures exist for seeking redress for such wrongful behaviours. Potentially, this means that redress for cases of harassment and discrimination are at the

discretion of owners/managers, or seldom receive attention. This is problematic.

Recommendations

The chapter makes the following recommendations for consideration and action by the underlisted entities.

Media organisations

As a matter of urgency, take steps to improve the working conditions of media personnel. Media organisations must:

» review and revise recruitment practices to make recruitment more open and competitive

» review and improve salaries of employees

» develop and publish standard salary scales and promotion criteria

» institute structures for fair and reliable promotion of employees

» develop and publish standards for acceptable employee behaviour including on anti-discrimination and anti-harassment

» institute health care provision systems for their employees

Media personnel

- Organise and engage owners and managers on conditions of service

- Advocate for improved conditions

Regulatory agencies

- As part of requirements for licensing, regulators must introduce and insist on sustainability plans by media organisations seeking licensing. The sustainability plan must include sections on staff compensation and working conditions.

General labour unions and industry associations

- Labour unions in the country working on general labour issues must take an interest in examining working conditions in media and advocating for improvements.

- Industry associations such as the GJA, Ghana Independent Broadcasting Association, Ghana Employers Association and the Alliance for Women in Media Africa must take an interest in working conditions in media and advocate for improvements.

- The GJA and the MFWA should consider instituting an award category dedicated to best practice in employee working conditions as part of their annual awards ceremonies. This will not only draw attention to the issue but also incentivise action on it.

Ghana Journalists Association (GJA)

- The GJA must serve as a voice for media personnel across the country. While not a labour union, the GJA presents a formidable entity that must promote reforms in the media by actively speaking out on, and calling for change in the mistreatment of media personnel. There is strength in numbers which, at the moment, seems to be best realized under the umbrella of the GJA.

Media/development agencies

- Media development agencies and civil society must assist media organisations to develop standards and protocols to guide employee behavior. These should include standards for

  » fair and open recruitment

  » promotion

- Media development agencies should also develop training programs to help

  » Managers develop sensitivity for fair treatment

  » Managers develop work place behavior codes

  » Media personnel to develop safe work cultures

- Media development agencies should also develop training programmes to help women create niches and visibility and to leverage them for better terms of work.

- Media development organisations and industry associations such as the GJA may consider instituting awards for best media employer to encourage reforms.

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Safety of Journalists in Ghana

Theodora Dame Adjin-Tettey

Abstract

The continual threats against the lives of journalists have been blamed for Ghana's decline in the World Press Freedom Index ranking for the past two years. Even though much of the evidence for this has primarily been anecdotal, various efforts have been undertaken to compile reports of abuses through media monitoring projects to give a realistic picture of the status of safety of journalists in Ghana. While these have proven to be critical reference points, they fall short of giving a comprehensive picture of the scope and depth of issues relating to safety of journalists. This study used a survey and key informant interviews to elicit the views and reflections of key stakeholders on the matter. Among other findings, it was established that police, political fanatics, politicians, security operatives, government officials, and other journalists were among the top perpetrators of safety violations against journalists. Verbal abuse was predominant among violations suffered. Males tend to suffer physical abuse more than females while females, on the other hand, are subjected to more online trolling. Many of the respondents were dissatisfied with the posture of law enforcement agencies and the Ghana Journalists Association concerning journalists' safety. The study also found that safety provisions by media organisations (e.g., counselling support, legal aid, medical support) need to be improved. The study recommends, among others, that the state must ensure the safety and protection of journalists and that media organisations must make proactive investments to secure the safety of their employees.

Keywords: Safety of journalists, freedom of expression, safety violations, Ghana

Introduction

The media play a significant role in promoting democracy. They achieve this through providing the public with information, enabling participation in governance and demanding accountability from duty bearers. In playing their role, media personnel, particularly journalists, often face danger when their stories expose wrong doers.

Across the world, there have been numerous instances of abuse and repression directed at journalists and media organizations (Repucci, 2019; Article 19, 2020) in an effort to sabotage critical (investigative) journalism. The past decade has seen this trend worsen with new forms of suppression taking hold even in societies that hitherto upheld freedom of speech, democracy, and human rights (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). In an attempt to highlight the importance of free media, and curtail attacks on journalists, Reporters Without Boarders publishes the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) each year. The WPFI shows countries' rankings in media freedom and is often a reference point in discussions about the health of nations' democracies.

Ghana's recent ranking in the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) has seen a downward trend. This is after hosting the World Press Freedom Day celebration in 2018. At the time, Ghana ranked 23rd in the WPFI, ahead of the USA and several other countries that are hailed for their democratic credentials. Since then, Ghana's ranking has dipped from 27th in 2019, 30th in 2020, 30th in 2021 and 60th in 2022. Experts attribute this downward trend in Ghana's press freedom rating to insecurity, and continuous threats on the lives of journalists (Reporters Without Boarders, 2020; 2021). Reports by the Media Foundation for West Africa, and attacks on journalists including the murder of Ahmed Suale, an investigative journalist, give credence to suggestions about a state of insecurity of journalists in Ghanaian.

Further evidence of the eroding safety of journalists comes from the National Media Commission and the Ministry of Information's setting up of an Office on the Coordinated Mechanism on the Safety of Journalists in 2021. Its duty is to enable filing of reports on attacks on journalists, follow up on investigations and sanctions. That an office, separate from the Ghana Police Service, is needed

for reporting attacks on journalists is an indication that the decline in the safety of journalists is a reality.

This chapter seeks to understand the scope and severity of the issue. It explores the nature and extent of attacks on journalists and the parties involved. It also examines perceptions about the general attitude, and interventions by key stakeholders, (security agencies, the judiciary, civil society, media organizations, and the government) in ensuring safety of journalists. In particular, it sought to establish:

- the incidence and patterns of safety violations, both online and offline

- the nature and perpetrators of safety violations

- journalists' perceptions about the posture and responses of key stakeholders

- the proactive and reactive responses to safety violations

A background on safety of journalists in Ghana: MFWA Reports 2021-2022

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) produces quarterly reports on the media within West Africa (dubbed *Freedom of Expression Monitor*), citing incidents of violations, perpetrators of violations, targets/victims of violations, and redress in the media space. The violations identified in the reporting years 2021 and 2022 were in ten (10) different categories, including killing, kidnapping, unwarranted sentencing, physical attacks, arrests/detentions, threats, media shutdown/suspension/ban, and seizure or destruction of journalists' equipment. While the reports cover the West African region, findings specific to Ghana in 2021 and 2022 are discussed in this section.

Ghana recorded four incidents of violations (perpetrated against journalists) in the first quarter of 2021 (January – March 2021). A single incident of violation was identified for each of the following: threat, physical attack, arrest/detention, and seizure/destruction of property. A total of three out of four of these violations were perpetrated by security agents and one by an individual, (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2021).

By the second quarter of 2021, incidents of violations against journalists in Ghana had doubled from four in the initial quarter to eight. Out of this number, two were killings, four physical attacks, one was arrest/detention and the other was seizure/destruction of property. Violations were often (7 out 8 times) committed by security agents. Further, these incidents were predominantly against journalists

(4 out of 8), activists (1), media organisations (1), and on some occasions, citizens (2) (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2021).

During the period, National Security operatives assaulted the Western North/Western Regional correspondent of Accra-based *Pent TV*, Peter Tabor. The officers, carrying out a raid on a casino in the town of Asankragua, slapped and kicked the journalist after they heard him on phone reporting their operation to the Divisional Police Commander. The officers, some in police uniforms and others in plainclothes, also seized and destroyed the phone of the journalist who had reportedly earlier identified himself to be a security person.

In the second quarter of 2021, some security personnel arrested and abused Caleb Kudah, a journalist with Accra-based *Citi FM/Citi TV*. For hours, they detained and maltreated the journalist over 'unauthorised' filming at the premises of the Ministry of National Security. Around the time he was being tortured, a team of heavily armed security officers invaded the premises of *Citi FM/Citi TV*, throwing the entire staff into panic. The officers claimed they had come to arrest Zoe Abu-Baidoo, a journalist, whom they suspected had allegedly received some video files from Caleb Kudah.

On a positive note, the country recorded a drastic dip in the number of violations in the third quarter of 2021 – a single incident of threat was recorded (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2021). In this instance, the Member of Parliament (MP) for the Assin Central constituency of Ghana, Kennedy Agyapong verbally abused, and threatened *Luv FM* Journalist, Erastus Asare Donkor. *"That boy should be beaten seriously. He is so annoying. For the foolish submissions he made before the Committee, we have to beat the hell out of him. If I were the President, I would have this boy to be whipped,"* were the harsh remarks of the MP during an interview on July 9, 2021, on *Net2 TV*, a media house he owns.

Ghana recorded two incidents of violations in the last quarter of 2021 - two radio presenters (Nhyiraba Paa Kwesi Simpson of *Connect FM* and Oheneba Boamah Bennie of *Power FM* in the Western and Greater Accra regions respectively) were arrested and detained by the Ghana Police Service (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2021). Nhyiraba Paa Kwesi Simpson was arrested on November 1, 2021 and charged with "publishing false news with the intent of causing fear and alarm to the public, contrary to the Public Order Act, and false publication of news through an electronic device contrary to the Electronic Communications Act". Following a phone

call from a man named Stephen Kumi, who falsely claimed that Nhyiraba Paa Kwesi Simpson and his lover had been abducted during the morning broadcast on Connect FM, the presenter was taken into custody. On December 14, 2021, the Ghana Police Service's National Investigations Bureau (NIB) detained Oheneba Boamah Bennie of Power FM, stating he was under investigation for allegedly insulting and threatening President Akufo-Addo in a Facebook video. Before being released on bond, the host was held in custody for two days.

Contrary to its previous near-impeccable records, during the first quarter of 2022, Ghana recorded eleven (11) infractions (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2022), fomenting worries about a potential deteriorating press freedom environment. Among other violations, in the first quarter of 2022, Ghana recorded two incidents of physical attacks on journalists, one attack on a media organisation, as well as the arrest and detention of two journalists (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2022).

Reporter's Without Boarders (RSF) in 2022 ranked Ghana 101st out of 180 countries when it comes to safety of journalists. According to the report, the criteria that grounded the rankings included the capacity to identify, collect, and disseminate news and information in accordance with journalistic practices and ethics without undue risk of physical harm, mental or emotional distress, or career harm from, for instance, losing one's job, having professional equipment seized, or being ransacked (Reporters without Boarders, 2022).

Methodology

The study adopted the mixed methods approach. The approach's strength lies in its ability to enable insights from both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (survey) data, allowing the researchers to gauge the scope safety violations affecting journalists in Ghana, and explanations for the complexities and contexts of that as a social experience (Mason, 2006).

Survey

The survey method was used to explore the occurrences, nature, patterns and perpetrators of safety violations as well as perceptions about the posture, and actions of law enforcers, state actors and civil society organisations towards the safety of journalists. A convenience sampling approach was used to gather data from 115 respondents both in-person and online via the researcher's networks (e.g. online communities of journalists).

Demographic profile of survey respondents

Table 1: Gender representation of participants

	Frequency	**Percent**
Male	66	57.4
Female	49	42.6
Total	**115**	**100.0**
Type of media represented	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Radio	43	37.4
Television	25	21.7
Print	18	15.7
Digital media	7	6.1
Freelance	1	0.9
Converged media	21	18.3
Total	**115**	**100.0**

More males (nearly 60%) took part in the study than females. Respondents were journalists and reporters from traditional media and well spread across channels - radio (37.4%), television (21.7%), converged media (18.3%) and print (15.7%). Freelance journalists/reporters and journalists who worked in digital-only media outlets were the least represented (7% altogether).

In-depth Interviews

Judgemental sampling was used to draw key informants for the qualitative inquiry. Participants included officials of the Ghana Journalists Association, Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana, the Ministry of Information, and Journalists.

Data analysis

Results of the study are presented and discussed using the integrative mixed methods analysis. The approach posits that effectively integrating more than one source of data in data analyses will deliver a gain over using a single source or type of data (Bazeley, 2018). The value of this approach was that it helped us to complement, compare, converge, corroborate and complete the two kinds of data retrieved all at the same time.

Findings

Incidents and nature of safety violations

To establish the spread occurrence of safety violations, respondents were asked to indicate whether they had personally experienced safety violations in the line of duty within the last year. They were also asked to indicate knowledge of their colleagues who had such experiences. The evidence shows that safety violations is very widespread. Over a third of respondents (38%) reported having faced safety violations in the line of work. While the majority of respondents (61.7%) have had no such experiences the fact that one in every three respondents have is quite worrying.

Table 2: Personal encounters with safety violations

Have you suffered any form of safety or security violation in the line of duty recently (the last one year)?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	44	38.3
No	71	61.7
Total	115	100.0

The picture gets even worse. Two in every three respondents (68%) indicated awareness of a colleague journalists who had experienced safety violations in the line of duty. While this figure may represent references to the same incidents, it does still signal widespread attacks on journalists, and, importantly, the possibility of an increasing feeling of insecurity.

Table 3: Awareness of colleague's experiences of safety violations

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	78	67.8
No	37	32.2
Total	115	100.0

Unsurprisingly, the data points to a general sense of insecurity. Only one in ten of the respondents expressed views of a complete sense of safety. For the majority of respondents, there is a sense of ambivalence about their safety while working.

Table 4: Journalists' perceptions about their personal safety

Are you safe?	Frequency	Percent
Definitely not safe	28	24.4
Somewhat safe	74	64.3
Definitely safe	10	8.7
No response	3	2.6
Total	115	100.0

This, perhaps, explains why interview participants consider Ghana to still be a relatively safe place to practice as a journalist. Some were of the view that the security and safety violations journalists currently suffer is nothing compared to the era of military dictatorship, even though, in their view, there is still room for improvement.

> *Those were the days [referring to the military regime] journalists were incarcerated at random. In some worst cases, some died; they paid the supreme price, but a return to constitutional rule in 1992, the climate is better. But we are not totally out of the woods yet (Interview participant, GJA official).*

> *But let's be sincere, there are journalists in this country who have done biting stories of the system and walked freely; nobody has harmed them, and so, much as there have been attacks on journalists, which we should all condemn, I do not think that we operate in a very unsafe environment. (Interview participant, Journalist and morning show host).*

An official of the Access to Information Division of the Ministry of Information believed that the present information ecology may have contributed to the increased awareness of violations of journalists, resulting in rather high perception levels than used to be decades ago:

> *I'll say, it could have been worse then, but because there was not much access to information as we have now as we have and the technology and everything, where people can record and report, it may seem that now it is worse. Because people didn't have access to new media technologies in the past as we have it now, it was their word against our word. But once there's technology and everything, journalists have a way of bringing out what they are going through without going through gatekeepers. They can go on social media, the public get to know about it and start running commentary (Official, Access to Information Division, MOI).*

Respondents' views were also sought as to whether they felt safe in their workplaces. Generally, perceptions about workplace safety are high with about 70 percent of respondents indicating so.

The study also examined the kinds of violations respondents had suffered.

Table 5: Nature of safety violations experienced

Nature of safety violations	Overall N	Overall Percent	Male %	Female %
Physical attacks	23	18.85	18.2	4.9
Verbal abuse	30	24.5	19.1	14.8
Online trolling	10	8.19	3.6	9.8
Internet stalking	1	0.81	0.9	0.0
Tapping of phone	1	0.81	0.9	0.0
Spying	2	1.63	1.8	0.0
Intimida-tion	26	21.3	16.4	13.1
Public shaming	6	4.92	3.6	3.3
Threats	16	9.4%	10.9	6.6
Cyberbully-ing	7	4.1%	4.5	3.3
Total	122	100.0%	93.7	55.8

According to the results, verbal abuse ranks first (25%) among the violations recorded. It is followed, closely, by intimidation (21%) and physical attacks (19%). It is important to note the gendered undertones to the experiences of safety violations. Males appear to be much more at risk than females. Across all violations but one (trolling), males reported more experiences than females.

Interview data corroborates the finding that verbal abuse is the commonest form of attack on journalists.

> *I've had my fair share in the past, but it's all been verbal attacks. Nobody has physically attacked me." (Journalist and morning show host).*

> *In our line of work, sometimes some of the individuals we expose are not happy with*

what we do so, verbal abuse is normal for many investigative journalists, many people are not happy, so depending on how they get your contact, either via text or phone call, they tell you whatever they want to tell you (Interview respondent, investigative journalist).

The interview data reveals that threats to journalists are mostly related to investigative journalism work, signalling the dangers that come with that terrain and the disincentive to venturing into it.

> *I know that many of our colleagues are quite scared when it comes to a certain level of analysis. They'd rather go and listen to press conferences, write stories about them and publish. They try to veer off the challenging aspect of journalism, which is the most critical part the country needs. Many of the young ones whom I've been trying to mentor into investigative journalism find it scary. So, that does not allow us, as a country which is burdened with corruption, to overcome corruption challenges. But unfortunately, we have a situation where people are running away from investigative journalism because we have recorded, for the first time in recent times, death attributed to the work of an investigative journalist (Journalist and official of PRINPAG).*

Journalists' safety violations are slightly more likely to come from state actors than non-state actors. State actor-initiated infractions were eight percent more than those by non-state actors.

Table 6: Perpetrators of violations

Perpetrator type	Frequency	Percent
State actor(s)	52	53.%
Non state actor(s)	45	45.9
Others	1	1.%
Total	112	100.0

Below is a word cloud of the specific individuals and entities identified by respondents as perpetrators of safety violations. As can be seen, among state actors identified, politicians, security operatives, police, government officials, and the military are common examples of state actors. Non-state actors identified include respondents' colleagues, '*galamsey*' operators, and business owners.

Figure 1: Specific perpetrator of the violation suffered

It is important to note the finding that violations of journalists' safety can be internally sourced. Media professionals, themselves, are sometimes their own abusers. It is also a challenge that state actors including security officials that should protect journalists are among the highest offenders.

> *Police officers brutalise journalists, politicians also mistreat journalists. (Interview participant, GJA official).*

> *When you take a look at statistics on journalists who have been assaulted, I don't readily have the figure available, but I know that many of the journalists have been assaulted by security personnel (Interview respondent, Investigative Journalist)*

As one interviewee explains, the attacks are a means to silence journalists in order to swerve accountability:

> *I think, in my interpretation, that politicians are deliberately setting people, citizens up against journalists, in order to swerve the accountability and transparency requirements that is imposed on them, by governance systems and the Constitution. [...] There are very few occasions where the attacks are not related to politics (Interview participant, Reporter and political show host).*

Perceptions of posturing towards safety of journalists

Ensuring the safety of journalists is a multi-stakeholder responsibility. Key among these are the judiciary and security agencies who have a duty to uphold the law. For instance, a no-tolerance posture from the judiciary can serve a deterrent effect. Generally, respondents expressed negative feelings about the posturing of law enforcement, and security agencies towards journalists' safety. Only four percent of respondents deem the security agencies to display a posturing that forbids violation of journalists' safety. Even though they fare better, the judiciary is equally deemed as not positively disposed to ensuring journalists' safety.

Table 7: Perceptions of attitudes and actions towards safety of journalists

How would you describe the attitude the following groups towards safety of journalists?	Security services		Judiciary	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Not satisfactory	75	65.2	52	45.2
Somewhat satisfactory	24	20.9	36	31.3
Neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory	11	9.6	15	13.0
Satisfactory	5	4.3	12	10.4
Total	**115**	**100.0**	**115**	**100.0**
Statistics: Min. =1; Max = 4; Mean = 1.53; Std Dev. = .84			**Statistics**: Min.=1; Max. = 4; Mean = 1.88; Std Dev. = .997	

Interview participants corroborated the sentiments of the survey respondents.

> *The president has, on two occasions, assured journalists in particular, and the nation in general, that the perpetrators of Ahmed's assassination would be arrested. This has not happened. The police hierarchy also assured us that some seven people had been arrested, that is about three years ago and that they were close to unravelling the circumstances under which Ahmed Suale was killed. Latif Iddrisu was brutalised right at the citadel of the police headquarters and the offenders have not been identified, let alone punished (Interview participant, GJA official).*

According to a journalist, who also happens to be a manager of a radio station, and who had experienced physical attacks, his experience with the police could be best described as nonchalant:

> *I reported the issue. I went to the clinic. Then I submitted the medical report to the police. Later, they asked me to report to the police again. I went to their station and the officer wouldn't invite me nor look into the issue. He promised he would call me, but up to date they have not called me (Interview participant, journalist and station manager).*

Another interview participant said:

> *Those who have been assaulted in their line of work, it is only a few that have seen successful prosecution. So, I was saying that it doesn't appear that we see enough proactiveness from the security agencies or government in ensuring that journalists who have been assaulted get successful prosecution or get compensated. I can cite our own Latif Iddrisu who was assaulted by some police officers, till date he hasn't received any compensation; the case is still pending at the court[1] (Interview participant, investigative journalist).*

Provisions for safety of journalists: Media organisations

This section presents findings relating to provisions that have been put in place to ensure the safety of journalists.

Table 8: Provisions made by media organisations

Safety Gear			Counselling services		Medical care		Legal aid	
	N	%	N	%				
Yes	45	39.1	36	31.3	Yes	59	67	58.3
No	57	49.6	66	57.4	No	43	30	26.1
Not sure	13	11.3	13	11.3	Maybe	13	18	15.7
Total	**115**	**100.0**	**115**	**100.0**	**Total**	**115**	**115**	**100.0**

The study found that the nature of safety provisions varied across media organizations and that the least catered for was the provision of counselling services in cases where journalists experienced trauma. Nearly 60 percent of respondents indicated that such provisions did not exist in their organisations. This is followed by the provision of safety gear; nearly half of the respondents indicate failure on the part of their organisations to provide safety gear. In contrast, organisations do fairly well in providing medical care and legal aid when their journalists face attacks. In both cases, nearly 60 percent indicated that their organisations have provisions for supporting journalists who face attacks.

While some interview participants decried the non-existence of safety provisions in their organisations, one recounted that his organisation has established a protocol for reporting and seeking redress for safety violations:

> *There are protocols that have been established. So, once you feel your safety is under threat, you tell management, and they activate those protocols (Interview participant, journalist).*

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1 Upon the State's request for settlement talks, on January 31, 2023, the Accra High Court gave the State one month to reach a settlement with Latif Iddrisu who, together with his employers, is demanding 10 million cedis in compensation for assault. However, on April 3, 2023, when the case was called, the representative of the Attorney General indicated to the court that the Inspector General of Police does not want to settle but instead wants a full trial. The case will be back in court on May 12, 2023

Provisions for safety of journalists: GJA

At the industry level, the GJA Executive member said the association has an insurance package for journalists who suffer safety breaches during the 2020 elections:

> *About five journalists suffered brutalities in the course of the election, and they were paid. Some lost their phones. As we speak, one of them has undergone three operations. His one leg is fractured, and that package took care of his operation: three operations at Ridge Hospital and he also received some money to cater for his medical care. ... [name of journalist] of GBC also had her hand POP because of what she suffered during the election. So, GJA also facilitated her treatment and financial package. ... [name of journalist] of the Daily Graphic was also operated upon because of what he suffered during the election. Again, GJA's package with SIC proved useful and he was paid the cost of operation (Interview participant, GJA official).*

An executive member of PRINPAG confirmed this during an interview with him, but he was quick to add that initiatives by the GJA had been reactionary rather than proactive:

> *The GJA put together resources, sort of to provide insurance cover for journalists that were covering elections because of the potentially volatile nature. Talking about insurance, yes, insurance is good, but insurance happened at the end of the story when something had happened. Then, I think what we are looking at is what measures to put in place to prevent such adversities from happening to journalists (Journalist and PRINPAG official).*

Another way the GJA lends support to journalists to secure their safety is through training programmes on how they could personally secure their safety when on potentially dangerous beats.

> *We have organized about 10 programmes on safety across the country: Takoradi, Kumasi, Cape Coast and Accra, with support from Norwegian Journalist Union and from our own resources.... In all these, we take journalists through safety guidelines. The idea is to get all of them to internalize them in their work. We do well to tell them that no story is far more important than human life (Interview participant, GJA official).*

Provisions for safety of journalists: Civil Society

Civil society organisations (and actors) and the media complement one another to ensure a progressive society. Besides, as part of their advocacy work, civil society can advocate certain systemic provisions for media development, including provisions for safe journalism practice. The study found that perceptions about civil society support and action towards safety of journalists are partially positive, with about half of the respondents indicating so.

Table 9: Perceptions about how civil society support safety of journalists

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	56	48.7
No	41	35.7
Maybe	18	15.6
Total	115	100.0

Generally, it appears that the perceptions of civil society actions towards safety of journalists emanate from efforts by international NGOs. That sector lead with close to half (48.2%) of respondents saying so. This was followed by national NGOs (24.8%) and community-based NGOs (15.0%). It would appear therefore that when it comes to pushing for safety, journalists believe local civil society organisations have more to do. Fig. 2 shows some of the civil society organisations respondents mentioned.

Table 10: Civil society concern for safety of journalists

	Responses	
	N	Percent
Community-based NGOs	20	15.0%
National NGOs	33	24.8%
International NGOs	64	48.2%
Other	2	1.5%
None	14	10.5%
Total	133	100.0%

Figure 2: Civil societies instrumental in safety of journalists

It is worthy to note the commanding power of the MFWA as a safety of journalist advocate. Besides MFWA, the GJA is also quite prominent.

> *I think Media Foundation for West Africa has been very vibrant when it comes to cases of assault of media practitioners. They have been very consistent in gathering data. In some cases, if your safety is under threat, I know that they've gone to the rescue of some journalists whose safety was under threat, they provided support and, in some cases, they send those journalists to safe houses and a number of interventions that they readily make available. With the GJA, I know in the past, when there is public pressure, the GJA tends to at first issue a statement (Interview participant, journalist).*

A journalist, who doubles as a political show host who was interviewed, recounted a personal experience of how CSOs had intervened when she had suffered incidences of violations:

> *I wish they had more funding to do more, but they have done more than the GJA; they've done more than the NMC and they've done more than the Ministry of Information and that is why I am singling out Media Foundation for West Africa and then CDD-Ghana because more than once the Executive Director of MFWA, Sulemana Braimah and the CDD-Ghana Director, Prof. H. Prempeh and Dr. Pumpuni Asante, have reached out to me and offered assistance. I think that CSOs have done a lot (Interview participants, reporter, and political show host).*

Key Findings

By soliciting opinions and reflections of key stakeholders, including journalists themselves, this study sought to understand the state of journalists' safety in Ghana, which has been cited as one of the causes for the recent decline in the country's press freedom rating. Some of the study's major findings are listed below.

The types, scope, and perpetrators of attacks

- there is a palpable sense, among journalists that their safety is a risk while working

- violations of journalists' safety are common in Ghana.

- the most common form of infraction is verbal abuse, closely followed by physical assaults and intimidation.

- attacks on journalists are gendered; men are more vulnerable to various forms of abuse; women are more likely than men to experience online trolling.

- state actors like the military and police are the worst offenders.

- violations of journalists' safety do occur internally within media organizations.

- Investigative journalists are the most at risk of attacks.

Perceptions about the posture and responses of key stakeholders

- journalists feel that law enforcement agencies and the judiciary do little to protect their safety.

- Civil society is deemed as leading the cause for the safety of journalists.

Provisions of safety tools and remedial actions towards journalists' safety

Provision of support to journalists who suffer attacks is weak in particular:

- the provision of counselling services in situations where journalists encounter trauma is nearly non-existent.

- there is a partial failure on the part of media organizations when it comes to providing safety equipment for reporting dangerous beats.

- when their journalists are attacked, organizations perform better than average in providing medical care and legal counsel.

Discussion and recommendations

As often said, journalism is not a crime. A strong democracy requires strong and independent media to enlighten the public, foster constructive engagement, and hold those exercising or aspiring to public office accountable. Although significant gains have been made, independent media and press freedom are coming under growing pressure globally. Journalists are threatened, harassed, and attacked for doing their jobs. The possibility of self-censorship because of assaults is not encouraging for fearless, independent journalism.

But ensuring the safety of journalists must start with media organisations, even though the state bears equal responsibility for ensuring the safety and protection of journalists and media outlets. A fundamental requirement for the existence of independent media is the creation of a secure workplace. Media organisations have an important stake in creating a sense of safety among journalists by proactively taking an interest in their employees' safety needs. Their proactiveness in providing counselling support for trauma, medical care, safety gear for those reporting dangerous beats as well as legal aid in pursuit of justice for victims of attacks is critical. Additionally, media owners must provide reporters with security training to help them secure themselves.

As the study found, major culprits in safety infractions are state actors who must rather be seen to be protecting the media in respect of the 1992 Constitution. Attacks on journalists from state actors legitimise such actions, exposing them to more harm. At a broader structural level, it is essential that journalists can do their jobs without obstruction nor concern for their safety. State institutions and actors, particularly those in the security services must desist from attacking journalists. Security agencies in the country must prioritize protection for journalists while they perform their duties. They cannot be the ones deemed to mistreat journalists. One way they might show their support for journalists' job is by taking action to arraign perpetrators and finding justice for victims in the wake of claims of abuse. The point must be made, however, that this will largely be based on their understanding of the functions of journalism and the role journalists play in society. Therefore, it is crucial to regularly educate security forces on how they may cooperate with the media rather than view them as foe.

Where infractions occur, the only legal remedy is the judicial system, which as the study found, is deemed just as adversarial. Advocacy should target training activities for the judiciary and top-level security officers to better orient them to supporting the work of the media in pursuit of the freedom aspirations of the Constitution.

Ghana must ensure that the appropriate agencies work to enhance journalists' safety. Investigating attacks and other mistreatment of journalists, prosecuting offenders, no matter the level of influence they have, and fostering an environment that supports the work of journalists are imperative. This is why it is gratifying to note the establishment of the Office of the Coordinated Mechanism on the Safety of Journalists by the Ministry of Information and the NMC. Its duties of receiving reports of attacks and pushing for investigation and justice are critical to building an ecosystem that is intolerant of attacks on media. However, it has since its establishment, been generally dormant. Indeed, a visit by the research team to the office met no one at post. This is a worry and the Ministry of Information and the NMC must act to bring life to the office.

Political actors and their adherents must desist from wantonly abusing journalists and realize that if a reporter appears to be prying into their business, it is only because they have a legal obligation to check what they do as public office holders. If they have any reason to be concerned, they should seek legal redress rather than resorting to abusing the power they wield.

As the umbrella organization representing Ghanaian journalists, the Ghana Journalists Association should collaborate with the various local and international bodies to promote the safety of its members. They must make an effort to alter the unfavourable perceptions that their members and the general public hold about them, including their tendency for off-handedness and impulsiveness. The GJA should be seen as one of the chief advocates for the protection of the safety of its members. The current president must make good his campaign promise of setting up a program for journalists to shield them from any misfortune, including the promise of giving journalists insurance cover and securing the brighter future of journalists, now that he is an office holder.

The positive perceptions participants have about civil society organisations that help to advocate and support the work of journalists must not wane. This means that CSOs like MFWA, CDD and GII must continue their advocacy efforts and other interventions to help journalism grow in Ghana. Their collaboration with media organisations, the GJA and other advocacy organisations may result in greater gains and must therefore be deepened.

Journalists must be motivated to learn about safety, including online safety. They must take advantage of forums that deal with these issues to familiarize themselves with both old and current trends and corrective actions that can ensure their safety.

That said, as efforts are made to prevent abuse and to secure the safety of journalists, all media outlets are urged to uphold strict professional and ethical standards to avoid using their platforms as distribution channels for scandalous and libellous content that may arouse from persons who deem themselves to suffer reputational costs as a result of such publications.

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Training and capacity building of media practitioners in Ghana

Dominic Maximilian Ofori and Caroline Anane

Abstract

This qualitative study sought to investigate the training and capacity building of journalists and other media practitioners in Ghana through the prism of journalism as a professional practice. It uses a purposively selected sample comprising eight universities offering journalism education, seven media houses, and a regulatory institution in the country. The study revealed that while a majority of journalism and media training institutions had been certified and accredited, there were instances in which programme accreditations had expired for some time. Besides, there were instances in which training institutions failed to articulate their existential goals. The sampled training institutions generally offered first degree programmes in communication studies with specialisation options in areas such as print journalism, public relations, advertising, development communication, strategic communication among others. The study also found that it is quite common for faculty teaching communication programmes to be doing so without a doctoral degree as required by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). It was revealed that training institutions, generally, produce graduates with basic competences that require further training on the job. The study recommends that for journalism in Ghana to qualify as a professional practice, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), GTEC, and National Media Commission, and universities offering journalism education should collaborate to design a national journalism curriculum that addresses the issues of quality unethical practices and lack of specialist knowledge.

Key words: Media education, journalism education, media curriculum, professional practice, professional development, capacity building

Introduction

Following the liberalization of the airwaves in the 1990s, Ghana's media landscape has seen exponential growth (Gadzekpo, 1997; Diedong, 2008; see also Ogundimu, Oyewo, & Adegoke, 2007). Today, the country boasts of an abundance of private radio and television stations in all its 16 regions. Besides, a significant number of Ghanaians are able to access the internet and social media platforms through their smartphones and other devices. In the face of this positive growth in Ghana's media landscape, it is important to investigate how media practitioners, members of the fourth estate of the realm, are trained to do their work effectively. Such an investigation is significant because the survival of Ghana's fledgling democracy requires a robust media that not only educates and informs the citizens, but also holds government and powerful individuals and institutions accountable in an ethical and professional manner.

The reality is that, although Ghana boasts of several journalism and media training institutions, scholars and ordinary citizens perennially criticize the quality of journalism and media practice in the country (see Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019; African Media Barometer, 2017). Concerns about the ethical conduct of journalists and other media practitioners, the quality of media reports, who is a journalist, and the use of new media technology are routinely discussed in scholarship, at conferences, and in media spaces (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019; African Media Barometer, 2017; Diedong, 2016). Nevertheless, there is hardly any current empirical study on the nature of the training and capacity

building of Ghanaian journalists and/or media practitioners. It is therefore pertinent to examine the set-up and operations of current journalism and media training institutions in the country.

Accordingly, this study sought to achieve the following objectives: (1) to find out the legal status of existing journalism and media training institutions; (2) to investigate the curricula of journalism and media training institutions; (3) to find out the level of qualification of faculty working in journalism and media training institutions; (4) and to examine the nature and content of non-formal training and capacity building of media practitioners.

To achieve its set objectives, the study sought answers to the following questions:

- What is the legal status of existing journalism and media training institutions in Ghana?

- What are the mission and vision of journalism and media training institutions in Ghana?

- What are the nature and content of the curricula of journalism and media training institutions in Ghana?

- What are the qualifications of teachers in journalism and media training institutions in Ghana?

- What is the quality of graduates of journalism and media institutions in Ghana?

- What kind of non-formal training and capacity building do media practitioners in Ghana receive?

By answering these questions, the study was expected to provide relevant current insights into the general state of the Ghanaian media, and the quality of the training and capacity building of Ghanaian journalists and media practitioners. Such a study is significant for a number of reasons. In the first place, the findings of this study will update research on journalism and media training in a twenty-first century environment that has witnessed exponential growth in media technology. Secondly, it will provide much needed scholarly material for classroom discussions. Thirdly, it will enlighten journalism and media training institutions in Ghana as regards the strengths and weaknesses of their curricula. And finally, it will provide insights to government as to how to enforce the legal regime guiding the running of journalism and media institutions in Ghana.

What is left of this chapter describes the background to the study. It then reviews relevant literature, explicates the conceptual framework that framed the study, and goes on to explain the methodological approach adopted for the study. Next, it presents and discusses the findings of the study, and concludes by re-articulating the coordinates of the study, noting limitations, and making recommendations for future studies.

Background to the study

The formal training of professional journalists in the country began with the establishment of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) in February 1959. GIJ operated as a stand-alone institution, awarding certificates and diplomas for years until the School of Communication Studies (SCS; now Department of Communication Studies) was opened at the University of Ghana in 1973 (Amoakohene, 2015; Boafo, 1988). SCS initially ran three post-graduate programmes in communication studies, namely, Diploma, Master of Arts, and Master of Philosophy (Boafo, 1988). During this period, other journalism training institutions affiliated with journalism schools in the United Kingdom also emerged, preparing students to take external examinations in journalism and communication. Besides, some Ghanaians also took short correspondence courses with journalism institutions abroad. Then, too, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) established a training school to prepare its employees as media professionals. Moreover, the government later established the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) to train broadcast journalists and filmmakers.

Today, public and private journalism training schools and institutions abound in the country. According to Ghana Tertiary Education Certification (GTEC) (2020), the decade 2006–2016 saw a significant increase in university-based education in communication studies with emphasis on journalism, a sharp contrast to the period before the turn of the third millennium when only two educational institutions offered nationally recognised journalism education in the country. Below is a table indicating the list of universities offering journalism and/or communication education in Ghana.

Table 1: Universities offering communication/journalism education in Ghana

Institution	Type	Degrees Offered	Orientation
BlueCrest College	Private	BA	Secular
Islamic University College	Private	BA	Islam
Webster University College	Private	BA	Secular
Central University	Private	BA	Christian
Christian Service University College	Private	BA	Christian
Wisconsin International University College	Private	BA	Secular
Methodist University College Ghana	Private	BA	Christian
Jayee University College	Private	BA	Secular
Pentecost University College	Private	BA	Christian
African University College of Communications	Private	BA MA	Secular
Ghana Institute of Journalism	Public	BA MA	Secular
University of Cape Coast	Public	BA MA	Secular
University of Development Studies	Public	BSc MA	Secular
University of Education, Winneba	Public	MA MPhil	Secular
University of Ghana	Public	MA MPhil PhD	Secular

Source: GTEC (2020)

Key: *BA/BSc – Bachelor of Arts/Science; MA – Master of Arts; MPhil – Master of Philosophy; PhD – Doctor of Philosophy*

Literature review

A review of relevant literature reveals three dominant themes: poor journalistic practices, the dominance of a Western pedagogical model in the training and education of journalists, and journalism education in Ghana. According to the literature, the activities and conduct of journalists in Africa generally and Ghana particularly are poor and, hence, inconsistent with journalism as a profession. For example, a qualitative study by the Media Foundation for West Africa (2019) assessing the Ghanaian media found poor journalistic conduct as a reality in the Ghanaian media landscape. The reason for this situation, the study found, had to do with the unskilled labour force in the media industry. As the study put it,

Regulators, media experts and media managers are in agreement that the single biggest challenge confronting the media industry is lack of skilled labour force. Indeed, the Executive Secretary of GIBA while acknowledging this challenge posits that there is a direct link between the quality of human resources and the quality of output. (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019, p. 9)

In other words, the poor quality of journalism in the country compromises the quality of the work they do. Such a situation has logical implications for professionalism in the industry.

Similarly, African Media Barometer (2017, p. 9; see also Alhassan & Abdulai, 2019) found in a study on the state of the Ghanaian media that in spite of the "open, free and vibrant" media environment in Ghana, "the area of ethics and professionalism" was a big problem. The African Media Barometer (2017, p. 9) partly framed the issue this way:

> *Three basic journalistic principles seem to be comprised: objectivity, cross-checking of facts and the separation of comments from fact. There is also a fair amount of corruption in the media. For example, the practice of 'solidarity' (soli), a synonym for 'brown envelope' in Ghanaian vernacular, seems to be becoming an accepted practice, to the extent that some journalists believe taking soli is their right.*

It went on to report the following as some of the problems plaguing the Ghanaian media landscape: inaccuracies in news reporting, incomplete stories, lack of professionalism, and "ill-preparedness of journalists" (African Media Barometer, 2017, pp. 58–59).

For Schiffrin (2010; 2011), the lack of professional competence of African journalists might be attributed to a lack of proper training and education. Reporting on a qualitative study conducted in Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda to find out the effects of donor-driven training programmes in Africa, Schiffrin (2010, p. 409) wrote:

> *The lack of training and lack of skills were obvious in the business and economic stories we read from Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda. Many of the journalists are not well educated and write extremely poorly. Nor do they have an in-depth understanding of the topics they write about. The result is often confusing stories which skate over complex issues or which appear to be regurgitating press releases issued by companies and government.*

Years later, both Media Foundation of West Africa (2019) and African Media Barometer (2017) still found that the situation had not improved much.

Besides, the literature suggests that African training institutions and programmes seem to be dominated by Western pedagogical models (Rodny-Gumede, 2018; Boafo & Wet, 2002; see Odozi, 2014; Schiffrin, 2010). Such a reality, in the view of Rodny-Gumede (2018), means that the present journalism curricula in much of the global South are misguided, as they do not reflect local realities. Instead of Western-style journalism pedagogies, Rodny-Gumede (2018) argued for a journalism education in Africa to be grounded in African theories and philosophies (see also Kasoma 1994, Sesanti, 2009). Such views,

according to the literature, were not new, as Fourie (2005) had expressed similar sentiments earlier. For Fourie (2005), an African journalism education should impart theoretical knowledge and practical skills to students. Moreover, journalists "need to be conversant with new technologies in information gathering, processing and distribution and to understand the ethical implications of using these technologies" (Fourie, 2005, p. 168).

Finally, existing literature reveals that media education in Ghana has expanded following the country's return to multiparty democracy in 1992. Currently, media education is offered at the university level from first degree all the way to the doctoral level (Finlay, 2020; Acheampong, 2018; Diedong, 2008). In most of these schools, students are offered theoretical knowledge and practical skills. But while some scholars feel that the springing up of journalism and media schools in the country is a blessing as it has enhanced the professionalism of journalists (see Dzisah, 2020; Diedong, 2016), others such as Acheampong (2018) have pointed out that not everybody agrees. The reason for this disagreement, Acheampong (2018) found out in a study, has to do with the fact that a good number of journalism schools are not accredited, and others too lack qualified teachers.

For Mensing (2011), however, the overemphasis of journalism education on professionalism "is a disservice to the industry, to students and to the credibility of the university" (p. 17), in view of the fact that the internet has reconfigured "the way information is produced, consumed and paid, affecting news companies in every way imaginable (p. 17). To buttress her point, Mensing (2011) provides three examples to illustrate the overemphasis on professionalism in journalism education:

> □ *An unexamined focus on turning students into professionals, despite trends towards de-professionalisation and contested meanings of the term "professional"*
>
> □ *A focus on teaching students skills and techniques that reinforce an assumption of one-way communication*
>
> □ *A focus on socializing students for particular types of newsrooms rather than how to engage in critical inquiry (p. 18)*

Of course, Mensing (2011) recognised the ethical value in professionalising journalism (see also Boden, 2007). Her problem, however, was that the overemphasis narrows the "definition of what 'counts' as journalism and who 'counts' as a journalist" (Mensing, 2011, p. 20).

Instead of a curriculum that privileges the industry model of journalism education, Mensing (2011) called for one that promotes networked journalism. Such a journalism education must be one that is "community-centered" and gets teachers and students to "work to evaluate a range of values, standards and practices with the aim of accountability, responsibility and excellence without the dangers of paternalism" (Mensing, 2011, p. 24). It must get teachers and students to "work to identify, develop, and practice skills appropriate for networked journalism," and a journalism education that gets teachers and administrators to "work more deliberately to develop a culture of inquiry within journalism schools" (Mensing, 2011, p. 24). This model of journalism education, not the industry model, can save journalism in a world dominated by interactive media (Mensing, 2011).

What emerges from the reviewed literature is that scholars have shown a keen interest in the quality of journalism as a professional practice in Africa for some time. What is not coherently and systematically engaged yet is the question of the training and capacity building of journalists in Ghana in a post-COVID era of a disrupted world order, a global reality where truth and truth claims must daily contend with propaganda, misinformation and disinformation, as well as conspiracy theories on social media (see Theodosias et al., 2021). In view of this existential reality, are Ghanaian journalists pedagogically prepared to engage their work as communication professionals with a critical turn of mind and a view of communication as constitutive and not linear?

Conceptual framework

Based on the gap identified in the reviewed literature above, this project was grounded in Boden's (2007) construct of journalism as a professional practice. In developing such a construct, Boden (2007) drew extensively on MacIntyre's (2007) theory of practice that implicated a "sense of a cooperative endeavour that gives meaning to moral action" (p. 2). Specifically, MacIntyre (2007) defined practice this way:

> *any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and good involved, are systematically extended. (187)*

In explicating his theory, MacIntyre (2007) distinguished between internal goods and external goods. Internal goods receive their concrete specificity in terms of the practice even as they "can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question. Those who lack the relevant experience are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods" (pp. 188–189). Besides, to achieve the internal goods of a practice, practitioners must submit actions to "standards of excellence" and obey the rules imposed by the practice (p. 190). However, external goods are only tangentially attached to the practice, that is, they are still achievable in other ways other than the practice (p. 188).

For Boden (2007), the construct of practice suggests the idea of roles, which

> *make us accountable to others even when we do not choose them; they entail expectations that affect how we, and others, perceive us. When one chooses a role, one must submit to the expectations that accompany that role. To enter into a practice, you must submit to the authority of the standards and the internal goods of that practice and place yourself into a relationship with that practice's history and previous practitioners (p. 22).*

Therefore, persons who consider themselves as journalists, for example, must not only learn and share information with a mass of interested people, but they must also "accept the standards of excellence that have been established for journalism" (Boden, 2007, p. 22).

Ultimately, the following constitute the criteria for determining what human activity qualifies as a practice: it

> *is coherent and complex; is socially established; is cooperative in nature; possesses goods internal to that form of activity; realizes those internal goods as the natural outcome of trying to meet suitable standards of excellence; systematically extends human powers to achieve excellence as a result of realizing its internal goods (results in self-improvement); systematically extends human conceptions of the ends and goods involved in the practice as a result of realizing its internal goods. (Boden, 2007, p. 26)*

In the view of Boden (2007), journalism qualifies as practice because it "constitutes a…domain of knowledge," "is widely recognized as a distinct human activity," "requires joint action by gatekeepers, reporters, artists, and technical staffers to create, present, and share the news through the mass media," "is distinguished by its internal goods and

how their achievement promotes self-improvement and goal transformation," has a purpose, requires "a moral community that can effectively maintain the kind of relationships needed to achieve the practice's internal goods," and enjoys a distinct institutional context (p. 26). In other words, for Boden (2007), no human action can qualify as journalism if it does not meet his seven criteria.

Boden (2007) solidified his claim that journalism is a practice by proposing the following distinguishing marks: "a link to human flourishing," "commitment to the common good," "reporting as defining activity and news as immediate goal," "an instrument of reform," and "way to make a living" (pp. 51–53). As a practice, journalism is required to know what it does well and proceed to furnish it to citizens to enable them to make informed choices in civic life. In this way, journalistic knowledge imposes epistemic responsibility. In the words of Boden (2007, p. 51), "to flourish, people need to know *well* so that they can actually participate in (not just casually monitor) civic life." Therefore, as Boden (2007, p. 51) saw it, "Epistemic responsibility binds journalists and citizens together by highlighting the moral significance of the investigative processes *both* use to make sense of the world." This bond is one that emerges from the very nature of journalism itself. Besides serving as a link to human flourishing, journalism is committed to the common good through altruistic acts and trustworthy performance.

Another distinguishing mark of journalism as a practice is reporting as a defining activity and news as an immediate goal. Here, what Boden (2007) meant is that journalism by nature is supposed to gather evidence and report the news in a way that is timely and practical. The following are the "7Ds" of news reporting according to Boden (2007, p. 52):

- *Dig (investigate, research, interview, witness)*

- *Document (write down or tape statements and data, duplicate documents, produce a record)*

- *Debunk (check veracity of statements, validity of data)*

- *Digest (interpret meaning, put into perspective, relate to the common good)*

- *Describe (narrate sequence of events, relate quotes and interpretations*

- *Demystify (translate technical terms, relate to possible collective action)*

- *Divulge (expose, reveal, bring out into the open what was hidden or unknown)*

These activities combine to make journalism an excellent activity, and thus a practice. The next principle that Boden (2007) proposed was that of journalism as an instrument of reform. By this principle, Boden (2007) meant that journalism is supposed to fight social wrongs and promote positive change. To that end, investigative reporting exposes wrongdoing in order to arouse public anger "against abuse of power by government and other influential institutions" (p. 53). Finally, people must make a living by practising journalism. Journalists' competence in their practice emerges from "degree programs and/or [from] formative experiences working with veteran journalists so that they can be qualified for a career" (Boden, 2007, p. 53).

Based on the four principles, journalism must perform at least three basic social functions, namely, "surveillance," "interpretation," and "reckoning" (Boden, 2007, p. 55). While the surveillance function "consists of monitoring people, events, and things that affect citizens as individuals and community members," the interpretative function "consists of assessing the relative importance and relevance of specific civic knowledge to the common good" (Boden, 2007, p. 56). However, the function of reckoning "consists of evaluating the *actionability* of specific issues arising in the public sphere; that is, the realistic possibility of influencing them through collective action" (Boden, 2007, p. 57).

Nevertheless, for Boden (2007), the construct of journalism as a practice, significant as it is, is not enough; it must be qualified by the notion of professionalism. He conceptualised the professionalism metaphor as "a source of ethical motivation (that is, a source of moral norms oriented to public service) and as a source of power (that is, a source of occupational privileges oriented to status)" (Boden, 2007, p. 106). In other words, the construct of professionalism orients journalists to make ethical choices even as it bestows on them societal recognition.

Drawing on May (2001), Boden (2007) posited that three coordinates mark every professional. These marks are intellectual, moral, and organizational. The intellectual mark consists of "mastery of rare knowledge related to a specific human need, including both theoretical and clinical knowledge" (Boden, 2007, p. 106). With the help of the expertise made possible by acquired knowledge, professions enhance human flourishing. Regarding the moral mark, Boden (2007, p. 106)) explained that it "includes fidelity to clients and the common good," and obligates professionals to cooperate for the common good "in the areas of self- regulation, self-improvement, production of services, and distribution of services." The organizational mark

means that journalists work for organisations on which they depend for their salaries and their social recognition.

Drawing on Boden's (2011) construct of journalism as professional practice, this study was interested to find out on the one hand the extent to which Ghanaian journalists and media practitioners are trained to promote human flourishing and the common good, to report the news, to work to bring about social change, and to make a living out of what they do. And on the other hand, it was interested to see whether the training and education of Ghanaian journalists and media practitioners enables them to function as professionals endowed with requisite knowledge and moral compass and gives them the chance to work for media organisations.

Methodology

The present study employed qualitative research methodology in gathering data. Consistent with this approach, the study adopted in-depth interviews, and document and website analyses as research methods to gather data. The study samples were drawn from three sets of populations, namely universities offering journalism and communication courses, media houses, and regulatory institutions. Because of the issue of access, the study adopted a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques.

Regarding journalism education, data were gathered from universities that offer undergraduate degrees in journalism. Of the twenty universities that run journalism and/or communication programmes, eight (that is, Uni.1–Uni. 8 for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality) were conveniently selected because they were responsive and willing to provide data for the study.

Apart from the universities, seven media organizations were also conveniently sampled because they were easily accessible to the researchers. Once contact was made, and permission was secured, the researchers went to the institutions and talked to relevant people who were qualified to answer the questions in the interview guide. There were times, too, that repeated visits to some institutions did not yield the needed results; therefore, such institutions were dropped from the original list. The study also purposively selected Ghana Tertiary Education Certification (GTEC) based on its status as the institution with the legal mandate to accredit tertiary institutions.

For the academic institutions, the researchers interviewed heads of departments and examined their course contents and websites for information on faculty. Regarding media houses and institutions, heads of human resource departments and frontline journalists were interviewed. All interviews were recorded with the permission of participants, transcribed, coded, and thematically analysed.

With regard to GTEC, the researchers collected relevant data from the regulator's website. Because the study sought to investigate the training and capacity building of journalists, the researchers sought information on journalism training schools regarding certification and accreditation, as well as GTEC policies.

Findings

This project set out to investigate the training and capacity of media practitioners in Ghana, using the qualitative methods of in-depth interviews, and document and website analyses. Below is a presentation of the findings.

Legal status of existing journalism and media training institutions in Ghana

The first question the study sought to answer related to the legal status of existing journalism and media training institutions in Ghana. Specifically, this question sought information regarding which media schools in Ghana had received government accreditation and which ones had not. The study found that a majority of universities and institutions providing journalism education had been certified. Nevertheless, it was revealed that in some cases, although universities had been certified, the accreditation for the journalism or communication studies programmes they were running had expired. In fact, in some cases, the expiration had been over five years. Besides, the study found one situation in which a public university was offering a communication studies and journalism programme without authorization from the GTEC. These findings mean that the programmes some of these schools were running had no legal backing, raising concerns about the value of the journalism education being offered and the certificates awarded.

The mission and vision of media and communication training institutions in Ghana

Apart from investigating whether journalism schools and institutions had received state authorization to run their programmes, the study sought to answer the question of the mission and vision of these centres of education. In seeking answers to this question, the study looked at the website of the schools sampled. It was found that schools

and institutions founded mainly to provide tertiary education in communication and journalism had mission and vision statements that reflected their existential reality. For example, one university, a private one, had the following mission and vision statements:

> *Mission: To prepare lifelong learners to become innovative problem-solvers and ethical leaders through excellence in inter-disciplinary teaching, research, and collaboration using a Pan-African framework*

> *Vision: To become a centre of excellence in communication, business and related areas by providing opportunities for student learning, research, professional and economic development for the progress of the continent of Africa and the global community. (Uni. 5)*

The study further discovered that although universities established mainly to provide communication and journalism education had mission and vision statements, the journalism and communication departments within such universities did not have mission and vision statements on their own websites.

Next, in the case of communication and journalism departments in universities offering general education, the study found that only a few had mission and vision statements. While such statements were different from those of the universities in which they are located, they reflect the commitments of the communication and journalism departments as illustrated by the examples below:

> *Vision: The become the best tertiary institution in management and journalism in Ghana recognised internationally.*

> *Mission: A citadel for the training of high calibre manpower in management and journalism to meet the demands of a competitive local and global job market. (Uni. 2)*

In these statements, Uni. 2 demonstrates a clear commitment to ensuring that the journalism education it offers its student is top-notch comparable to any in the world. Besides, the study revealed that some journalism and communication studies departments located in universities offering general education did not have any mission or vision statements expressly stated on their websites.

The nature and content of the curricula of journalism and media training institutions in Ghana

Thirdly, the study wanted to find out the nature and content of the curricula of journalism and media training institutions. Regarding this question, the study found that of the eight universities sampled, six ran four-year Bachelor of Arts programmes in Communication Studies, one a four-year Bachelor of Arts programme in Mass Communication and Journalism, and another a four-year Bachelor of Arts programme in Journalism.

It was found that the Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies was offered in a variety of subject areas with a capstone project. Students could also specialise in career options in journalism (print and broadcast), public relations, advertising, development communication, strategic communication, visual communication, and a combination of communication options. Similarly, the Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication and Journalism was offered in a variety of subject areas and included a capstone project. However, it provided specialisations for career options in broadcast journalism and public relations. In the case of the Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, it was found that it provided career options in the mass media in the following specialized journalism areas: sports reporting, economics and business reporting, politics and government reporting, and science, health, and environment reporting.

Courses offered in the sampled universities included Mass Communication, Communication Theories, Media Law and Ethics, Logic and Critical Thinking, Research Methods, Project Work, Entrepreneurship, African Studies, Media, Culture and Society, Development Communication, Introduction to Public Relations, Introduction to Advertising, Science/ Health / Environment, Online Journalism, Media Management, Introduction to Journalism, Introduction to Print Journalism, Introduction to Broadcast Journalism, Political Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Photojournalism, Gender Studies Media and Peace/Conflict, Global Journalism, Investigative Journalism, Sports Journalism, History of Media, Organisational Communication, and Media and Children. These courses may be categorised into four main areas of journalism education, namely, professional practice courses, liberal arts and science courses, conceptual courses, and others. Generally, it was found that the courses were three-hour credit courses. Importantly, while foreign texts continue to dominate the communication classroom, the study found that a good number of the texts assigned to students were authored by African scholars.

Besides the classroom courses, students had the chance to work in studios and undertake internships ranging between four and twelve weeks. Such outside classroom environments provided space for students to put into practice abstract and theoretical constructs.

Qualifications of teachers in journalism and media training institutions in Ghana

Another question that the present research sought to answer had to do with the academic qualifications of teachers in journalism and media training schools in Ghana. It was found that all eight universities that participated in the study employed not only faculty with a doctoral degree but also ones with Master of Philosophy and/or Master of Arts degrees. A good number of teachers in the institutions studied did not meet the GTEC requirement that university teachers should have a doctoral degree and/or industry experience. In some instances, it was found that some of the faculty were pursuing doctoral degrees both home and abroad. Besides, the study discovered that some journalism schools employed teachers with no degree in communication. A participant, for example, who had an MPhil in linguistics made the following point: I teach here at the Department of Communication Studies, but I'm pursuing my PhD in Linguistics at Cape Vars."

Quality of students churned out of journalism and media institutions in Ghana

Furthermore, the study was interested to find out the quality of students who graduate from journalism and media institutions in Ghana. In the first place, the study found that most of the research participants entered the journalism industry with a first degree in journalism or communication studies, while few did so with a diploma or a master's degree in the same disciplines. These participants worked in different capacities such as news gathering, production, writing, editing, anchoring, and reporting for television, radio, newspaper, or wire service entities. One participant, for example, described herself and the work she did at her employer media organisation this way:

> I am a graduate of UCC, where I obtained a BA in Communication Studies. I have been working with GTV for a year now. And as an employee of the state broadcaster, my responsibilities include news reading, event coverage, live reporting, and international news reporting, that is, revising international news stories from say BBC to fit the house style of GTV.

As a relatively new employee, this participant had only technical responsibilities; she was not part of the management of the state broadcaster.

Another participant who had worked at his job for only two years shared similar technical responsibilities, though he had a master's degree in communication studies from the University of Ghana. According to this participant,

> I've been working with this radio station for about two years. My training was in journalism, and I have a MA in Communication Studies from UG with emphasis in broadcast journalism. I must say that not too many of my colleagues at work have master's. In fact, most of them are first-degree holders. And speaking of responsibilities, my responsibilities at my workplace include reporting on happenings in Accra and other regions, news casting, production, and research.

It was clear from the views of the participants that they mostly possessed similar competencies and played technical roles in their employer organisations. However, long service transitioned one into more senior or administrative roles. For example, one participant who had been working for seven years at the same television station indicated that for the first three years she worked as a news editor, supervising and editing news content. In her fourth year, she assumed the role of deputy news editor. Now in her seventh year, she was the head of news.

Non-formal training and capacity building of media practitioners in Ghana

Finally, the study sought to find out the kind of non-formal training and capacity building media practitioners in Ghana receive. The views expressed by the study participants show that Ghanaian journalists receive both in-house and external training. While most of the in-house training programmes have been sponsored by employer organizations, external programmes have been sponsored by international donor agencies and/or media organizations such as Voice of America and British Broadcasting Corporation. Often such trainings are also delivered by local media development organizations.

Regarding the content of the training programmes, the study found that it had to do with skills development in new media technology, knowledge in ethics and law, and basic journalism. One participant described the training programmes she had received this way:

I have had in-house training on ethics run by immediate supervisors and external experts. Also, I have received training in oil and gas reporting. This was an external training programme which took place in Uganda. Apart from that, I have participated in climate workshops and fisheries workshops in Germany. All these training programmes have helped hone my skills as a journalist. Training improves credibility and professionalism. Now I'm a go-to person. I'm a kind of consultant in the office.

In the case of another participant who worked for a television station, the training programmes she had participated in not only improved her basic journalistic skills, but also gave her the ability to navigate new media technology. As he put it, "I've participated in training programmes run by supervisors in-house and external resource persons. Mostly the training has been in digital media such as online publishing, video posting, video editing." Another participant reported that the resource persons that led the training he had participated in taught skills in "cybersecurity, newswriting, google management (that is, storing documents in cloud)."

The views expressed here show that ongoing skills development of media practitioners helps them hone their skills. In the case of the participant quoted earlier, her training helped hone her basic journalistic skills. Non-formal training also gives journalists in Ghana skills in online news management, social media usage for journalism, multimedia journalism among others.

Discussion

In this section, the findings of the present study are discussed. The findings are explained through the prism of the conceptual framework on which the study hinged. The first major finding of this study was that the majority of tertiary institutions that participated in the study had been accredited by the mandated regulatory institution in the country. Such a finding means that the institutions had met GTEC's standards for academic institutions of higher learning, institutions where students are trained to embark on journalism as a professional practice. In other words, GTEC standards are meant to ensure that journalism in Ghana functions as a professional practice.

Secondly, it was found that the curricula of the institutions studied had theoretical and practical components. The communication and journalism undergraduate degrees afford students the opportunity to specialise broadly in either broadcast or print journalism, reporting on sports, economics and business, politics and government, science, health, and the environment. Considering the nature of journalism education in Ghana, its duration, and the number of courses taken to graduate with a journalism degree, this chapter argues that journalism in Ghana is a professional practice. In other words, journalism as taught in Ghana constitutes a domain of knowledge and is widely recognised as a distinct activity (see Boden, 2007). This knowledge imposes responsibility on all involved in the journalism industry. That is, it requires joint action by gatekeepers, reporters, artists, and technical staffers to create, present, and share news through the mass media (see Boden, 2007). Furthermore, journalism education as offered in Ghana arguably has purpose and requires a moral community that can effectively maintain the kind of relationships needed by journalists to report the news in an efficient way (see Boden, 2007). To that extent, journalism education in Ghana is no different from what pertains in the Western world. Such an existing state of affairs means that Rodny-Gumede's (2018; see also Odozi, 2014; Schiffrin, 2010; 2011; Boafo and Wet, 2002) call that African journalism education should be grounded in African theories and philosophies is hardly heeded.

Thirdly, a good number of teachers in the institutions studied did not meet the GTEC requirement that university teachers should have a doctoral degree and/or industry experience. The lack of qualified teachers may account for the poor journalistic practices bemoaned by scholars and researchers (see Schiffrin, 2010; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019; African Media Barometer, 2017). Thus, this finding is significant as it partly explains the reason for the inaccuracies in news reporting, incomplete stories, lack of professionalism, and ill-preparedness of journalists reported by African Media Barometer in 2017. These problems affect the quality of Ghanaian journalism as a professional practice (see Boden, 2007; MacIntyre, 2007).

Fourthly, the study found that journalists graduated with only basic journalistic skills such as news production, reading, editing, reporting, and event coverage. Journalism education in Ghana therefore only endows students with entry-level skills needed in the newsroom (see Mensing, 2011). However, the problem with the education that produces this kind of journalism, in the view of Mensing (2011), is that it tends to overemphasise journalism as a profession instead of de-emphasising it. It focuses on teaching students skills and techniques that reinforce the transmission model of communication, and also on socialising students to specific types of newsrooms instead of training them how to engage in critical

enquiry. In an era of interactive media, journalism curricula must emphasise networked journalism skills and "an education of inquiry [that] would encourage the self-reflective, critical evaluation and productive experimentation" (Mensing, 2011, p. 26).

Finally, it was discovered that employer media organisations and local and international media development stakeholders offered informal training and ongoing education to journalists in Ghana. Such informal training and ongoing education were purposed to augment the basic journalistic skills acquired in journalism schools. In so doing, such training programmes help journalists to hone their skills to deliver the goods internal to journalism as a professional practice (see Borden, 2007). The finding here thus confirms the view of Schiffrin (2010) that donor-driven training programmes improve the quality of journalism in Africa. However, attention is drawn, here, to Tietaah et al's (2018) evidence that such trainings also serve as avenues for pedagogical and philosophical acculturation, which may challenge the quest for defining a journalism practice suited to our circumstances and needs.

Conclusion

This qualitative study set out to investigate the training and capacity building of Ghanaian media practitioners. Using Boden's conceptual framework of journalism as a professional practice, the study looked at communication and/or journalism curricula of eight universities in Ghana, examined the website of GTEC, and spoke to media personnel. An analysis of the data gathered revealed that a majority of the participants had been accredited by GTEC, the curricula had both theoretical and practical components, some university teachers did not have the academic qualifications and/ or industry experience, students graduated with basic journalistic skills, and employer organisations and international stakeholders organised training programmes for journalists in industry to help them hone their skills.

While these findings are significant, there is still more that the study could have done. In the first place, the qualitative nature of the work meant that the sample size of the study was small. Accordingly, it is recommended that journalism and/ or communication students should be surveyed in order to obtain much sophisticated and broad perspectives on the quality of journalism education in Ghana. Similarly, a larger group of practising journalists could be selected in the future for a quantitative study of journalism education in Ghana. Furthermore, the Ghana Journalists Association

(GJA), GTEC, and National Media Commission, and universities offering journalism education should collaborate to design a national journalism curriculum that addresses the issues of poor quality of journalism, unethical journalistic practices, lack specialist knowledge, and investigative journalism.

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Broadcast media ownership and regulation in Ghana: Principle, Policy and Practice

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Abstract

In this chapter, we offer an assessment of the policy and practice – vis-à-vis the principle – of broadcast media ownership in Ghana. It is based on the premise that a pluralistic, public interest driven, approach to the distribution of communicative power offers the best pathway to fulfilling the expectations of the framers of the Constitution of the role of the media within the polity. To this end, ownership regulation has often sought to promote pluralism and serve the public interest. We applied an adaptation of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design; which enabled us to engage, reflexively, with the three-part intersections of interests (principle), intentions (policy) and implementations (practice) of ownership regulation; combining a review of the literature, qualitative document analysis, and key informant interviews. The findings show that there is a growing tendency towards media empire-building through owned-and-operated acquisitions and custodianships of multiple broadcast frequencies. This could lead to the outcome of substituting public monopoly – which the Constitution sought to prevent – with private monopolies – which the NCA's laissez faire attitude could produce. Added to this is the concern that the current regime of spectrum governance allows considerable power and influence by those whose conduct the media are supposed to check. Our main recommendation is for a comprehensive regulatory impact analysis of gains and gaps in goal attainment; to inform reforms that better serve the public interest.

Keywords: Media policy; broadcast regulation; pluralism; public interest; Ghana

Introduction and context

The idea of the media as oxygen of democracy is based on the expectation, as expressed in the report of the Committee of Experts on the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, that the democratic dividend is best served when "objective information is disseminated, different and opposed views are presented and shared, enlightened public opinion is formed and political consensus mobilized and achieved" (1991, p. 85). This assumption also lies at the heart of the normative disposition – reflected in principle and enunciated in policy – towards practice that secures and serves the interests of the public. To this end, regulatory responses are designed to promote pluralism and preclude the prospects of concentration or other structures of closure and control by custodians and owners of media operations. This concern has been given voice in the popular bumper-sticker quip attributed to American journalist A. J. Liebling, that "freedom of the press belongs to the man [*sic.*] that owns one" (cf. Baines, 2009:126).

A recent (2017) report by the Global Media Registry (GMR) and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) noted the imperative of "monitoring and ensuring ownership pluralism" as a means of

securing and sustaining "a healthy democracy" (p. 2). The report of the *Media Ownership Monitor*, which combined key informant interviews and analyses of authorisation/registration documents from the National Communications Authority (NCA) and the Office of the Registrar of Companies (ORC), represents the most comprehensive effort yet at inventorying the identities of persons who own and operate media organisations in Ghana. Nonetheless, the study concluded that the broadcast media scene was characterised by an ominous opacity of ownership information. This revelation raises key governance questions; not only because disclosure is a benchmark principle for regulatory best practice, but also for two practical reasons. First, transparency in ownership identities offers the most objective basis for regulatory agencies wishing to apply appropriate remedial responses towards avoiding the prospects of monopolies and media empire building. Second, onymity affords audience members the legitimate opportunity of deciding the veracity or validity of the news based on their sense of the interests or motivations of those who own and operate the media.

Given these concerns and considerations, we sought, in this chapter, to move beyond the microscopic questions of which natural persons own or exercise custodianship over which broadcast media; to examine and explain their implications on the more structural issues of dimensionality; such as ownership types, spatial distributions, and the prospects of horizontal pluralism. By way of organisation, the rest of the chapter is divided into five parts. In the section which follows, we briefly describe the study design; including the statement of objectives and methodological considerations. Next, we discuss the rationale for, basic principles of, and conceptual links between ownership and considerations of media pluralism and the public interest. In the third part, we stencil out the contours of constitutional and regulatory provisions that have informed policy on media ownership and operation in Ghana. The fourth part presents the respective perspectives of media actors and the regulatory authority on how current operations respond to the best practice principle and policy on ownership. In the final part we draw on the findings and observations of the study to offer a verdict on the state of media ownership and its implications on free expression, democratic pluralism, and the public interest. We also offer recommendations for further scholarly attention and policy responses.

Motivations and Methods

The study was designed to determine whether and how ownership operations are serving the national public interest – defined by the Constitution as the "right or advantage which inures or is intended to inure to the benefit generally of the whole of the people of Ghana" (Article 295*(1)*). To verify these concerns, the study was guided by the following three objectives.

1. **Principle.** To examine the best practice standards and public interest motives of media ownership regulation. Setting forth the principles provides benchmarks and bases upon which policy and practice of media ownership might be objectively assessed. In effect, the study responds to Mosco's (2009) idea of praxis; namely, that principle should inspire the practise of policy.

2. **Policy.** To assess the regulatory structures and goals of media ownership and operation in Ghana. Understanding the context and content of ownership regulation enables policy-relevant responses to the conditions and constraints on pluralism and the public interest. This reflects the recommendations of Puppis and van den Bulck (2019; and citations therein) about the purpose and process of media policy research – to fill any gaps identified between principle and practice.

3. **Practise.** To find out the nature and spatial-typological distributions of media occasioned by current regulation. This objective echoes the mantra that promise doesn't guarantee performance. It responds to McQuail's (2015) recommendation that performance evaluations should extend beyond quality of content and standards of professional practise – to consider structural factors like pluralism and the public interest.

Our interest in the broadcast media per se – rather than the print or other (digital and online) offerings and platforms – was motivated by prudence and reason of practice. Unlike print and online media which do not require licensing to operate in Ghana, regulatory strictures are a condition of broadcasting globally; based on the functional logics of use value (Mosco, 2009) and the public interest (Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova, & Shleifer, 2003). Secondly, as van den Bulck et al (2019) have pointed out about the affordances of convergence technologies, the categorisations of media according to type – as either print or broadcast – are becoming increasingly anachronistic. In the contemporary media milieu,

broadcast organisations are adopting cross-media (one story, many platforms) and trans-media (one storyworld, many forms, many platforms) in order both to account for the dynamics of audience fragmentations and for the economics of low or near zero marginal costs on additional copies of productions (Harcourt & Picard, 2009).

In terms of methodology, we applied an adaptation of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); which enabled us to engage reflexively with the three-part intersections of interests (principle), intentions (policy) and implementations (practice) of ownership regulation; using the following three methods.

First, we sought to establish the general principles underpinning ownership regulation by conducting a review of the scientific and grey literature. In this regard, we treated the literature as data. Our purpose was to provide an integrative account of current thoughts and theories on media ownership; as a warrant for our assessments of the state of policy and practice of media ownership regulation in Ghana. Specifically, we produced a database of the related and relevant materials through keywords searches of common databases – notably, Google Scholar, JSTOR and Scopus. Altheide's (1996:33) "progressive theoretical sampling" rationale offered a useful framework for the purpose. The approach enabled us to delimit the search for material according to their theoretical or conceptual relevance to the descriptors and derivatives of research interest to us; i.e., (broadcast) media, ownership, regulation. At the same time, and guided by our interest in accounting for the dimensions of current claims and contentions on ownership regulation, we were open to pursuing serendipitous and within-text leads that would permit the constant comparative analysis of "similar" and "different" thematic emphases (Altheide, 1996, p. 33). The materials thus assembled were read through and discursively synthesised to provide an integrative account that addressed our first research objective; namely, to contribute to greater understanding of what principles and underlying precepts *should* guide media ownership regulation.

Next, we employed the qualitative document analysis method, using insights from Altheide (1996) and Karppinen and Moe (2019), to help address the second research objective – about the context, content and outcome of current policy. This approach is based on the idea that "policy and industry documents present an obvious starting point for media policy analysis" (Karppinen & Moe, 2019, p. 249). By way of process, we accessed and assessed the historical context and current conditions of media ownership and operations in Ghana; using constitutional provisions, enabling legislations, and administrative guidelines. Specifically, we combined and adapted the protocols respectively enumerated by Altheide (1996) and Karppinen and Moe (2019); the first step of which was to create a folder/database of relevant documents for analysis. Then, benchmarking the "theoretically relevant" (Altheide, 1996, p. 33) tenets and themes identified from the literature review of ownership principles, we performed a focused reading and discursive analysis of the documents assembled in order to form a sense of the enablers and barriers to horizontal pluralism and the public interest. In the third step, the evidence of the policy analysis was used to identify potential gains and gaps within the principle-practise nexus. A value-added benefit of the cross-questioning opportunity is that it served as a quasi-validity check on the interpretations and conclusions drawn from our reading of the documents. The reflexivity of the exploratory sequential design also enabled us to pursue some contingent lines of enquiry in key informant interview process.

Our third objective of the study was to examine and explain the practise, vis-à-vis the policy and principle, of media ownership regulation in Ghana. To achieve this, we sought the thoughts and testimonies of relevant industry stakeholders involved or interested in media ownership and operations. Specifically, we conducted individual in-depth interviews with five individual key informants from among media owners/custodians, media development and civil society/NGO actors, heads/managers of media organisations, and industry/professional association leaders. They are: (1) Kwame Adu-Mante, executive member of Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA) and CEO, Focus 1 Media (2) Wilna Quarmyne, co-ordinating director, Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN); (3) Kwadwo Dickson, general manager, Angel Broadcasting Services Ltd; (4) George Wilson Kingson, public relations and external affairs officer of the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG) and managing editor of ArtCraft Media Consult; (5) Muheeb Saeed, programs manager, Freedom of Expression, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). They were purposively identified for their individual expertise, variable experiences, and collective representativeness of the different actors and interest groups. Their experiences and views about the competence of current regulatory provisions and practices were useful for understanding the reasons for, and structural manifestations of, specific regulatory outcomes. In addition, we conducted an elite interview session with a panel of three officials of the National

Communications Authority (NCA), the regulator of Ghana's broadcast system. They are: (1) Nana Defie Badu, director, consumer and corporate affairs; (2) Kwabena Ameyaw Badu, head of broadcasting; (3) Peter Djakwah, head of television.

With the prior consent of informants, the interview sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed to create or clarify contextually relevant and operationally responsive policy thoughts and themes.

Principle of media ownership regulation

In the reckoning of Gomery (2000:507) "no research in mass communication can ignore questions of mass media ownership and the economic implications of that control." To that extent, Doyle (2002) has argued that "[media ownership] matters to society because a number of potential harms may result from concentrated media ownership, including the abuse of political power by media owners or the under-representation of some viewpoints" (p. 171). Ownership regulation has often therefore been designed to avoid such abuse and overbearing control of the democratic public sphere, and to ensure that fundamental principles of freedom of speech/expression, democratic accountability and the public interest, are preserved.

Thus, public interest justifications have underpinned all models on which regulation of broadcast media ownership has been justified in principle and pursued as a policy goal. There are, towards this regulatory conjuncture, two broad pathways: the marketplace approach, and the public sphere approach. The marketplace approach is based on the notion that media freedom, like the free market economy, creates competition of ideas in free, transparent, public discourse; so that the best ideas ultimately prevail. (Feintuck & Varney, 2006; Napoli, 2001). The model operates a minimalist approach to regulation in which economic principles and competition/antitrust laws are used to promote competition, prevent market failures, and ultimately, serve the public interest.

The public sphere model operates an interventionist regulatory regime, emphasising inclusiveness of all shades of political views and cultural values; the promotion of which may require active public policy interventions. Croteau and Hoynes (2006:34) explain that the media under the public sphere model "must serve the public interest by regularly including ideas that are outside the boundaries of the established consensus." Thus, regulation in the public interest seeks pluralism (and social inclusion) as both a means and an end in its own right (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006; Napoli, 2001).

In practise, the distinction between the marketplace and public sphere models of regulation is not always absolute, and many countries have tended to reflect a hybridised model in which license conditions include specified codes and service obligations; such as ceilings on permissible number of media/ markets and curbs on cross-media ownership and custodianship arrangements. Channelling this reality, Levi (2007, p. 1322) proposes "an incrementalist and intentionally flexible" regulatory system that continually responds to the exigencies of a rather dynamic industry. The overarching objective, according to Levi (2007), would be to produce a pluralistic "balance in which mainstream commercial media, non-profit public media, and alternative media [community, institutional, experimental] can flourish and enrich one another and compensate for one another's weaknesses" (p. 1232).

Flowing from the above, a key objective of the study was to find out how the structural/external-level differences among the three broad broadcast media types reflect in practise. To do that, a brief review of the elements of these differences would be useful. Public service stations reflect an interventionist articulation of regulation as a public interest principle. The attributes of this principle include: geographical universality; provision for minorities; concern for a common national identity and culture; and commitment to quality (Buckley, et al., 2011; Comrie & Fountaine, 2005). Commercial stations normatively follow the free market model, which means that they are generally privately-owned and necessarily profit-making. This is reflected in their preference for commercially lucrative locations, and for rationalising resources to gain economies of scale – though not necessarily of scope (Buckley, et al., 2011; Gross, 1989; Keith, 2010). The underpinning goal of community stations is communal identity. They are generally community-owned and usually voluntarily run. They seek more to deliver social capital than to show a dividend on investment; and tend therefore to serve as outlets for self-expression by communities marginalised by the mainstream media (Buckley, et al., 2011; Karikari, 2000).

Flowing from the above, Mazar (2016) reminds us that in a democracy spectrum management is underpinned by public interest principles; or in his words, "the public common-understanding, and collective constructs" (p. 112). The literature (Cave, Doyle & Webb, 2007; Mazar, 2016; Struzak, Tjelta & Borrego, 2015) offers a range of optional models and formulae for administering the limited resource of frequency spectrums among the different broadcast types. These include a first-come, first-served formula, a comparative hearings process,

and an auction system. The first-come, first-served, approach is presumably more transparent and easiest to automate and operate. However, it may not always yield equity or efficiency of spectrum management. The comparative hearings approach determines allocations based on the comparative merits of all applications received; but it requires the adjudication panel and process to be demonstrably independent and transparent. The auctions approach is economically lucrative, and also avoids the exercise of discretion where there are more applications than frequencies available. However, it overlooks the social consequences and public interest goals of ownership regulation. In order to assure equity as well as engender spatial-typological pluralism, a rationing system and/or discriminatory pricing mechanism may be built into the model in use.

The discourse of justification for ownership regulation has also typically included at least four lowest common denominator goals of both the marketplace approach and public sphere approach; that: (1) it is a matter of national policy how the limited natural resource of the frequency spectrum is distributed; (2) regulation is needed to prevent oligopolies and promote, rather, national and local cultural, social, moral and political goals; (3) the effect of spectrum distribution should be to deliver universal service outcomes and standards – according to pre-decided needs and values; and (4) broadcasting must advance the interests of the state in matters of national security and identity (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006; Napoli, 2001).

It has to be indicated that the question of whether media ownership should be regulated does not elicit as unanimous an answer within scholarly circles as might be supposed. As Waldfoge (2009, p.3) reminds us about much of social science phenomena, whenever a question suggests self-evident answers to a person, there may just be another person for whom "opposite answers are... just as self-evident." A way to resolve such a dilemma is "to define what outcomes we might seek to affect through regulation" (Waldfoge, 2009, p. 3). In the next section we follow recommendation by drawing on historical and current constitutional provisions, enabling legislations and administrative guidelines that inform broadcast media ownership regulation in Ghana.

Policy of media ownership regulation in Ghana

Until the current constitutional dispensation, and excluding the intermittent spells of democratic governance since independence in 1957, media were exclusively state-owned, and government controlled. Such a system of monopoly and closure did not, of course, augur for the spirit of democratic pluralism and free expression, which the 1992 Constitution sought to foster. As we have argued in the opening paragraph of this chapter, there is an implicit constitutional expectation of the media (Article 163) to bring governments (as duty bearers) and citizens (as rights holders) into contact and conversation. Feintuck and Varney (2006) assert this role conception is at the heart of liberal-democratic theory:

> *If citizenship implies effective participation in society..., in an era in which effective participation has come to rely increasingly upon access to the media as the primary arena for political and cultural communication, it can be argued that access to the media... has become a prerequisite of effective citizenship (p. 32).*

This role expectation of the media as the marketplace of competition of ideas in free, deliberative, democratic discourse (Napoli, 1999) is given expression in various constitutional provisions (notably, Articles 12(2), 21(1) (a) & (f), 35, 37, 39, 41, 42, 55 (1) (2) (11) (12) and 162–173) and enabling legislations (including the NMC Act, 1993 (Act 449), the NCA Act, 1996 (Act 524), and the Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD)).

These developments legally abrogated the restrictive Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law on media ownership and control (PNDCL 211) of 1989, repealed the Telecommunications (Frequency Regulation and Control) Decree of 1977 (SMCD 71) and engendered an impressive nominal growth in media outlets in the country. The question that arises, however, is whether the current nature of ownership accrues or inures generally "to the benefit of... the people" (Article 295 (1)) and in a way that "contribute[s] to the overall development of the country" (Constitution, Article 36 (2) *(c)*). In a social and cultural milieu in which patriarchy and patronage tend to determine who and how public resources (including media spectrums and spaces) are procured, it is useful to wonder whether the nature of media ownership in Ghana leads to different ends than expected of the normative roles of the media in a liberal constitutional democracy. The question is also important to verify that the outcome of ownership stakes and controls has not been to substitute state monopoly with private monopoly.

The National Communications Authority (NCA) is the steward of Ghana's frequency spectrum. Its

organising philosophy is reflected in its corporate mission statement available on its webpage; namely, to "regulate the communications industry in a forward-looking and transparent manner that promotes fair and sustainable competition, stimulates innovation, encourages investment, protects stakeholders' interests, and facilitates universal access to quality communications services for national development."

Per this mandate, in order to establish and operate broadcasting services in the country, the applicant must first obtain a broadcast authorisation (licence) from the NCA. Frequencies are expected to be granted based on the merits of the application and the availability of the service. In particular, each prospective licensee is required to present: (1) a business plan, containing a detailed work programme; and (2) the report of a feasibility audit, demonstrating that they have ascertained the operational viability and social value of the proposed service.

Practice of media ownership regulation in Ghana

While these considerations appear, on face value, to be objective, the outcomes do not seem to sufficiently assure equity and transparency; inviting doubt and speculation about political bias in the grant of licenses. In the following sections, we verify these concerns and doubts by examining they nature of ownerships, the spatial-typological distributions of broadcast media within the national territory, criteria, ease, and transparency of the process and ownership identities of grantees of broadcast authorisations, and the presence or possibilities of monopoly controls through practices of ownership concentrations and conglomerations.

Nature and type of ownership

The NCA has, since its establishment in 1996, issued a total of 707 radio and 156 television broadcast authorisations nationwide. Three in four (526, 74%) of the radio authorisations are commercial. Of the remaining one-quarter, 145 (21%) are community stations and 36 (5%) are public stations, as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary distribution of radio stations according to ownership types

Region	Authorised	Public		Community		Commercial	
Ashanti	102	3	3%	20	20%	79	77%
Bono	59	1	2%	8	14%	50	85%
Bono East	30	2	7%	4	13%	24	80%
Ahafo	15	0	0%	1	7%	14	93%
Central	58	2	3%	16	28%	40	69%
Eastern	53	2	4%	16	30%	35	66%
Greater Accra	77	5	6%	14	18%	58	75%
Northern	49	3	6%	12	24%	34	69%
Savannah	12	3	25%	4	33%	5	42%
North East	13	1	8%	5	38%	7	54%
Upper East	35	2	6%	13	37%	20	57%
Upper West	31	2	6%	13	42%	16	52%
Volta	46	3	7%	6	13%	37	80%
Oti	13	1	8%	3	23%	9	69%
Western	87	3	3%	10	11%	74	85%
Western North	27	3	11%	0	0%	24	89%
Total	**707**	**36**	**5%**	**145**	**21%**	**526**	**74%**

†Up-to-date as of December 31, 2022

The table also shows that four of the 16 administrative regions (Ashanti, Western, Greater Accra, Bono) host a disproportionate deployment (46%) of the 707 authorised radio licenses. This, of course, does not account for their relations to geographical size or population ratios; nor does it account for the relative economic or commercial endowments of the regions; which, incidentally, also generally reflects a concentration of commercial stations in premium market locations; This is hardly surprising considering, as the literature suggests, that commercial stations tend to gravitate towards up-market, essentially urban, population segments (Albarran, 2016; Doyle, 2002; Doyle, Paterson, & Barr, 2021).

On the other hand, the regions that have the least total number of stations – Savannah, North East, Oti – are the regions that are also generally relatively better served by their proportions of public or community radio stations – with the notable exception of the Ahafo region, which has a total of only 15 radio stations, 14 of which are commercial.

A more far-reaching implication for pluralism and the public interest, of the prospect of an overbearing dominance of national conversations by a few, mostly urban-based, stations was offered by Muheeb during the *key informant interviews*. He expressed the concern as follows.

> *In terms of diversity in ownership, in terms of geographical spread, we will say there is a very high degree of decentralisation. But the reality is that most of the conversation is taking place on very few media organisations, mostly based in Accra and actually setting the agenda…. because a lot of the smaller radio stations in the hinterlands actually relay the*

broadcast from Accra. So, while it is physically based in Tumu, in Sandema, in Asankragua, the conversation is actually driven from Accra. And so, in the end, it is still the owners of the media organisations in Accra who are driving conversation across the country.

A visual illustration of the (im)balance of spatial-typological distributions of stations is presented in the three maps below; representing regional settlements of public, community and commercial stations. The darker the hue, the higher the density of concentration of the particular station type within the region/geographical space in comparison with the national outlook. An important rider, though, is that the bases for these categorisations could sometimes be brought into question. As Wilna narrates, there are stations identified on the official list of the NCA as "community" radio stations, although they are also credentialed as "LTD.;" meaning (according to the Companies Act 2019 (Act 992) that they are private (profit making) companies limited by shares. A basic attribute of community radio stations (as also explicitly stipulated by the NCA) is that they are non-profit (and, as such to be registered as "LBG;" i.e., "limited by guarantee"). Beyond the question of labels, Wilna also narrated, citing incidences, how requirements and processes that are clearly stated or issued by the NCA are subsequently vitiated without recourse or notice; and coming to attention only through the NCA website. She recommends, as remedy, the passage of the broadcast law (long in the making), which would clearly define and delineate the nature and functional boundaries of the different broadcast types; in the interest of structural pluralism.

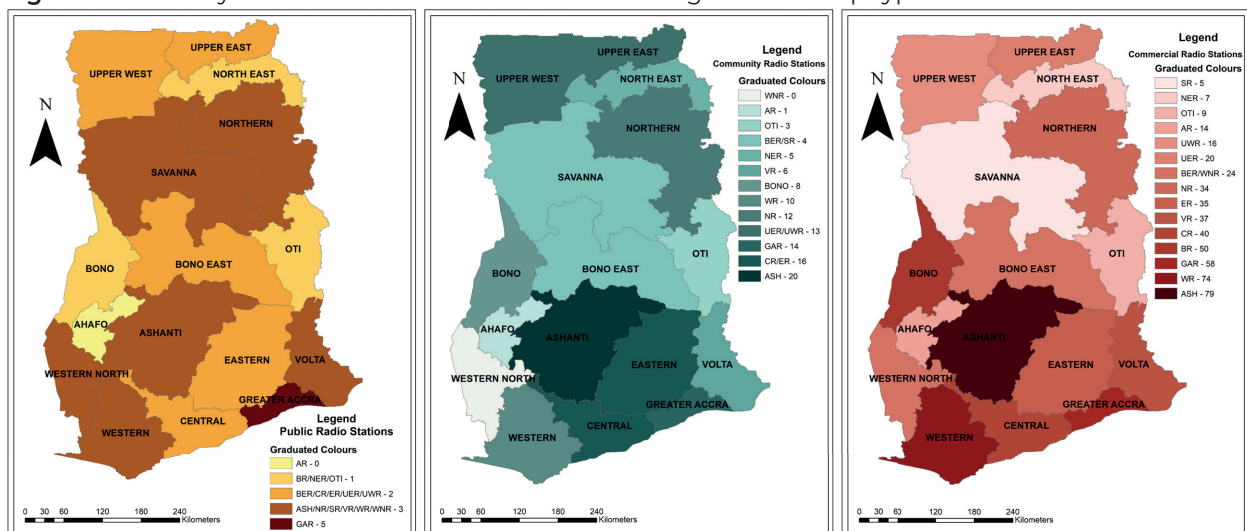**Figure 1:** Summary distribution of radio stations according to ownership types

Table 2: Summary distribution of TV stations according to type and access classification

Type of Television Service	Free-to-air National	Free-to-air Regional	Pay TV National
Analogue Terrestrial Television	2	0	0
Digital Terrestrial Free-To-Air Television Programme Channel (Nationwide Coverage)	40		
Digital Terrestrial Free-To-Air Television Programme Channel (Regional Coverage)		6	
Digital Terrestrial Pay Television (Service and Frequency)			5
Digital Terrestrial Radio Service on TV Multiplex			8
Satellite Television Broadcasting (Pay TV Direct-To-Home Bouquet)			3
Satellite Television Broadcasting (Free-To-Air Direct-To-Home Bouquet)	8		
Satellite Television Broadcasting (Free-To-Air Direct-To-Home Single Channel)	81		
Digital Cable Television	1		
Television over Internet Protocol (Pay TV)			1
Subscription Management Service for a Satellite Television Broadcasting (Pay TV Direct-To-Home Bouquet)			1
Totals	**132**	**6**	**18**

Television does not reflect the same special-typological dynamic as radio – although, as one informant pointed out, "it is almost entirely an Accra affair… Most of the television stations are based in Accra and the most watched stations are concentrated in the hands of very few owners" (Muheeb). Of the combined 156 total authorisations, up to 85% are free-to-air national services; only six stations (fewer than 4%) are limited in spatial scope to selected regions. This means that there is no strong practice by television stations of service delivery based on audience differentiation or market discrimination to warrant concerns over structural pluralism.

Explaining the relatively smaller number and uniqueness of the TV operational model as a mostly national, and sometimes subscription-based, service another key informant, Kwame, attributed it principally to cost. As he pointed out, "it's relatively cheaper to run a radio station than a TV station… until these satellite ones came recently – that people can now just run to studios and beam cheaply produced recordings and presto, it's broadcast – nobody ventured into operating TV stations because it is very expensive."

Criteria and ease of process

One of the curiosities of Ghana's media history is the lack of a clear, comprehensive and self-contained legal code, as would be entailed in a broadcasting law. In the pluralistic broadcast environment, a standard provision of such a law would be the expectation to, thereby, induce the maximum diversity of special-typological dispersal of broadcast media settlements among the whole of the national population. In the absence of such provision, we sought to find out the mechanisms by which the regulator assures equity and fairness in the granting and renewal of authorisations vis-à-vis the experiences and concerns of industry actors about the processes and outcomes.

The NCA interview panel explained that there is a technical committee – made up of representatives from all the key divisions of the Authority – that assesses all the applications according to set

criteria and factors stated in the application forms and guidelines available online. Based on considerations of technical competence and assurances of operational viability, and accounting for considerations of "equity in the distribution of the resources across the country" the committee "make a recommendation for the board's consideration" (Kwabena). Furthermore, they cited the practise of publishing quarterly reports of authorisations granted to illustrate the transparency of their processes and decisions Also, in making recommendations for the grant of frequencies, the NCA considers the type of service for which the applications have been made.

> *For instance, if we think there are too many private stations in an area and there's a community [radio] application we think we should consider, we will make all those recommendations.... All these various factors are all considered: geographic spread, and ownership type, all of them are considered when we make our recommendations (Peter).*

A panel member elaborated the point as follows:

> *NCA also has a duty to respond to the applicants within a certain number of days, especially if your documentation is not [complete] or if the application is rejected. [It]... is also based on the availability of frequency.... They have to also make sure that there's not going to be [spectrum] interference. And then... you have to make sure that within a certain geographical area, certain radio stations are spread across... And it's on the first-come, first-served basis too. So, the NCA really does make sure that we comply by the regulatory provisions. Otherwise, we also held liable and people can take us on (Nana).*

The views of Kwame corroborate the position of the NCA. He noted also that the process is not difficult, and offered the following elaborate explanation for his convictions:

> *You only need... the NCA Form AP02 which can be obtained online and it's just a four-page application form. Once you complete the application form, you need a cover letter stating your desire to acquire an authorization. And then you need a business plan. ...So, the NCA checks all these to make sure that for us in the commercial category, your plan is viable. Then the kind of equipment that you are bringing in, if it's not going to affect any other person, the radiation and all those. They will do all the technical checks and then programming-wise; how you are going to run*

> *the radio station, your company registration documents and any other supporting document... that's basically what it is. I don't think it's difficult [satisfying the requirements and processes to acquire frequencies].*

If Kwame's experience and conclusion is not to be considered atypical, then the reality is different from the impressions of others not directly involved custodianship or control in ownership and operation. Muheeb and George both alluded to the liberal-democratic and constitutional provision of Article 162(3), which proscribes any "impediments to the establishment of private press or media" in Ghana including, "in particular," the provision that "there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a licence as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information." However, they could only positively testify to the unencumbered exercise of that right by the print and online media. In the words of George, "You only need to get your registration done with the NMC [National Media Commission] to ensure that there are no name clashes [with any existing newspaper or platform] ... Even without that registration, you can still go ahead and do your publication. It's quite simple." However, they are adamant that acquiring authorisation for broadcast operation is tedious and non-transparent. As Muheeb expressed:

> *When it comes to radio and television, I think it's quite a challenge getting the license.... And this challenge is often due to the fact that you need to acquire the spectrum from the NCA, which is an organization under the Ministry of Communications. Its heads are appointed by the government and are answerable to the government through the Minister of Communications. Therefore, sometimes they are quite reluctant to give out the spectrum for radio or television if they really have doubts about your affiliation or sympathy, politically speaking.*

In response to the question of the public perception of partisan political influences in the grant of authorisations, a member of the panel (whose sentiment was echoed by her two colleagues) pushed back with an argument that would seem to beg the question.

> *I think it's important to make clear the fact that applications are not [made or granted] on an individual basis. We are all like business entities that apply for these things.... There is no part in the application form that states, 'Political affiliation or religious affiliation...'* (Nana)

Contrary to the assurances expressed by the NCA there seem to be institutional bottlenecks and arbitrariness in the determination of broadcast frequency application outcomes. In the experience of Wilna, "observance by applicants of the given process and requirements does not lead to the issuance of a frequency, or even an official communication on the status of their application." To illustrate, she recounted that between October 2010 and February 2011, eleven Community Radio initiatives applied for frequencies. Under the auspices of a GCRN project in partnership with UNDEF (United Nations Democracy Fund), they not only satisfied all the NCA authorisation requirements but, following industry best practice, also went through a meticulous process of technical preparation, community consultations, and undertakings to adhere to a programming and income-generating code of GCRN, which had been previously endorsed by the National Media Commission. Although the regulator was apprised of every step of the process, they did not even receive an acknowledgment. Of the 11, only three were eventually granted a frequency. One received the frequency after a citizen of the area sidestepped the usual processes. A second received the frequency only in May 2016 after persistent follow-ups. GCRN only got wind of the third frequency having been issued, but a scoping visit established that it was a "community" radio station by assignation only and was, ipso facto, a commercial radio operation.

Kwadwo seemed to share the sentiment about the opacity and apparent arbitrariness in the determination of applications. But even more revealing is his allusion to the possibility of collusion of media owners, to prevent the grant of additional authorisations and preserve market monopolies.

> That depends on the location of media house and especially the region and size of the community where one wants to establish the broadcast station…. For example, the process of acquiring a media house at say Obuasi or Bekwai wouldn't be as difficult as trying to acquire a radio station in Kumasi, Accra or Takoradi…It is [due to] the discouragement of those who already have the radio stations in such places…. The fear of you coming to compete with them comes to [the] fore, you know…. I don't have any evidence whatsoever; but there is that rumour that some of the media owners may use some officers at the [NCA] to block you from acquiring a frequency in the first place; so that you don't come and compete with them.

Transparency of ownership

Beyond the consideration of openness/transparency of the authorisation processes, a key principle of best practise in ownership regulation is transparency of ownership. We were concerned about the observation (reported in the GMR &MFWA (2017) study) that media operations in Ghana tend to be registered under their corporate or juridical names – and not in the personal names of the natural or human owners. The two obvious consequences are that: (a) the regulator is disabled from effectively controlling the prospect or practice of consolidations and monopolies; (b) the interested public are denied the possibility to positively identify the person(s) paying the piper. We asked informants for their views on this concern.

Kwame framed his response with a rider – that he felt unable to directly corroborate or contradict the bases of some of the concerns because they were based on perceptions and projections. However, he provided some useful context for what he thinks is an imprudent spate of (particularly radio) broadcast frequency authorisations. As he explained:

> Before Radio Eye came, when Kofi Totobi Quakyi was Minister for Information, they all knew that radio was going to open up Ghana. But they feared that if it got into the wrong hands, it would also be a big challenge. So as government, you would want to be careful who gets the licence. So, I think in the early days Radio Eye before Joy FM and the rest… it was quite difficult.

This initial nervousness about the political price of the prospective loss of monopoly control of broadcasting was followed by the period of a boon in frequency allocations; which Kwame attributes to a reckoning within government circles that it was in their better interest, while in power, to grant as many frequency authorisations as possible to those who might then owe or show goodwill towards government. Not surprisingly, with the change in political power, each succeeding government has felt a need to even the scales by granting further authorisations to their sympathisers.

> So, if you do the analysis well, you'll realise that [with each change in government] there is a new wave of radio stations springing up all over…. That is what has landed us where we are and I'm one person who believes that that's one thing that [has] killed the radio industry. And for those of you that are watchers, who think that the more radio stations we have, the more there is press freedom… No, I think it's totally wrong… We should have capped it at a point because there are multiple avenues

*now –- social media platforms, TV stations...
(Kwame).*

The apparent absence of regulatory restraints or caps on the number of frequency authorisations that a person or organisation may hold is surprising; given, as Doyle et al. (2021, p. 134) point out, that "curbs on ownership are a widespread feature of media regulation." The threats posed to freedom of expression by the spectre of conglomerations and consolidations, and the observed insidious partisan capture of the media, are counterintuitive. They would seem to subvert, rather than serve, the outcomes envisaged by the "'marketplace of ideas' metaphor" which, as Napoli (1999, p. 151) reminds us, "is one of the foundation concepts in communications regulation." It brings to question the capacity of current regulation to satisfy the purposes of political pluralism (Doyle et al. 2021). And it certainly raises doubts about the normative role enactment of the media as envisioned by the framers of the Constitution. Muheeb's critical view of the governing structure of the regulatory authority also to lend some explanatory support for these concerns.

Radio and television are the most powerful media channels which are quite critical to the political conversation in the country. And given that the board of the NCA is appointed by government, the chair of the board is appointed by government, the director general and deputies are appointed by government... It feeds into the perception that you must belong to the ruling government, or at least be thought to be neutral, to be able to acquire a licence to operate.

He recommends, instead, a demonstrably fair process would be through tender so that the NCA would publish that there is this cohort of frequencies or spectrums that we want to give away for broadcasting in the following regions and districts so that people actually apply, and based on established objective criteria, the best bids are chosen. But it isn't the case. As things are, the NCA almost has open-ended discretion to decide whether you qualify to be given it or not.

Furthermore, he shared the perspective of Kwame about the presumed partisan motivations in the grant of broadcast frequencies by the regime in power at any time.

You would realise that, in a lot of cases, people align with a particular political party, get to establish radio and TV stations during the tenure of their political party; that is when their political party is in power. And we

raised this concern. If I say "we", I mean the MFWA, some time ago, when the Ministry of Communications decided to take up some of the channels of GBC. And we were wondering why certain known party people had been given authorisations and spectrums to open radio and television stations at the time that the Ministry was saying they needed some reserved spectrum for redundancy or whatever reason. So, if the NCA has exhausted its spectrum to the point that the Ministry has to go and sequester one from the national broadcaster, how did private people manage to get spectrums from the NCA? (Muheeb)

Returning to the specific question of the inability to positively identify the owners of some media by the personal names (only by the company names) informants were divided in their views. Kwame explains as follows.

I beg to differ... Then you'd have to go back to the NCA. Per their [NCA's] requirements, it is not individuals that apply for it [frequency authorisations]; it is the limited liability companies-which register. An enterprise cannot even register for it; it is companies with your business registration and your directors and shareholder or shareholders. So, it is the requirement that makes it so....

Elaborating, Kwame pointed to the rubrics of the NCA Form AP02, which apparently only require the applicant to supply the registered (trade) name of company, for the grant of authorisations

No, I don't think there are any transparency issues. Because if you go to Citi FM for example, everybody knows that it is owned by Omni Media. If you go to Peace fm it's Despite Media. Class Group, everybody knows who owns it. It's the company that applied for the authorisation; so that's where you need to situate your question.... The government is willing to give authorisations to companies, not individuals to operate a frequency. I believe in their own wisdom they knew why they wanted a company to operate it instead of an individual. So, I don't think there's a transparency issue (Kwame).

Wilna, on the other hand, has no doubt that the lack of identity disclosures raises legitimate conflict to interests concerns; because she believes that "hiding behind the company names are individuals who may already wield power to which broadcasting should normally be a countervailing resource." In this regard, she believes that "the current initiative by the Registrar-General's Department to better clarify the registration and identification of the different kinds of companies and to have their directors

individually listed is a huge fundamental step towards transparency of ownership." Furthermore, Muheeb has no doubts that the situation is due to passivity and operational omissions of the regulator; which, in his reckoning, must be promptly resolved.

Well, it's the evidence of the allocation process. Because if an individual is seeking a licence, that individual has a name. That individual has an identity. And that identity has to be established. So, to me, it is part of the inadequacies of the current structure at the NCA that we have this situation. And apart from it undermining transparency, I also think that it even prevents civil society from being able to establish the extent to which ownership influences content. Because if we know that A or B are the owners of radio A and we know the backgrounds, particularly the political backgrounds of those people, juxtaposing that against the content, we will be able to establish to what extent the owners actually have an influence on content. So, it's quite a bother and something that needs to be tackled very vigorously.

Beyond the complicity of the regulator, however, Muheeb also doubts that the motives of the media owners are entirely benign.

I will refer to the media ownership monitor that the Media Foundation for West Africa published in 2017. And the main concern that the research was able to bring out was the fact that too many of the media organisations do not have their ownership clearly identified. Sometimes, the records you get from the registrar general and what you have from the NCA or the NMC do not tally as far as the owner of particular media organisations are concerned. To the extent that you get companies registered to do non-media business owning media organisations and clearly you could see that the owners just don't want to be identified.

Kwadwo echoed these concerns about the political economy factors that filter decisions on broadcast authorisations; as follows:

It is very difficult. It is very difficult because sometimes, there is some political, or economic, or social consideration... there is that tendency to try to know your political party affiliation before granting the licence... in that, there is the fear of arming your opponent with a megaphone or platform to attack you. All these things are taken into consideration to deny or grant you the frequency.

Presence or possibility of monopoly controls

Informants offered vivid evidence of the prospect, or practise, of media empire-building through the growing phenomena of concentrations, consolidations and cross-media ownerships; due largely to the gaps in, or lack of enforcement of, the necessary regulatory checks that should secure the interests of democratic pluralism.

Kwesi Nduom had more outlets... stations than anybody; but... now, it's more about Angel [media group]. I think Angel has about two radio stations per region. It's only in Accra that I know they have one radio station that I'm sure of; but in Takoradi, they have two; Kumasi, they have three, if not four; then Obuasi, Tamale, Sunyani... all over... They have about 13 in all. But they are headquartered in Kumasi. Then, take Accra... You have Multimedia that has four radio stations in Accra – Joy, Adom, Hitz and Asempa; Despite has three; Class Media has two or three – two in Kumasi, one in Takoradi; Media General has three – Onua fm in Accra, then I heard they have Connect in Takoradi, they have Sika or something in Kumasi. And, you see, the thing is that, they might be holding authorisations in other regions that they've not switched on or they might have given those authorisations for somebody to run because the NCA is clamping [down] on them that if you don't come on air within the two years stipulated period – those are the technicalities... when they give you the authorisation – they will revoke the authorisation. So, when people are not ready and willing to do that, that is how come we also have an arrangement in Tamale and then also have an arrangement in Kumasi. Because somebody had the authorisation but he wasn't ready. But we were ready so we partnered him and brought it on (Kwame)

Muheeb corroborated the views of Kwame with insights from the Media Ownership Monitor: Ghana study (GMR & MFWA, 2017). The data showed that four media holding companies – The Multimedia Group Ltd, the Despite Media, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) and Media General Ghana Ltd– had more than three-quarters (77%) of the total television audience share. Much less pervasive, but no less poignant, were the aggregates for radio. The four most listened to radio conglomerates – Multimedia, Despite, Omni, and Kessben Media Network – accounted for 45% of the radio audience share.

Kwadwo further reinforced the sentiments about the dominance by a few organisations of the media scene and audience share, revealing that "For example, my director has as many as 16 registered radio stations across the country. They are all commercial. Other people also have two or three radio stations. So, they are not well distributed."

On the implications for pluralism and the public interest of media operations having multiple affiliate (or "sister") stations Kwame had this explanation in response:

> As far as I'm concerned, initially, the NCA didn't have any restrictions on the number of frequencies you own. But commercially, nobody wanted to own more than one station in the same market.... that was basically it until businessmen started doing business with it and acquiring more, and at a point, one person owned about thirteen radio stations.

As explained earlier, this tendency towards unrestrained media assets appropriations is predicated on the logic of unit-cost savings that attend economies of scale. But, in character with the commercial media model – which treats programs as products and citizens as customers – scale does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with scope – or content diversity. On the contrary, diversity is often actually sacrificed in the pursuit of content homogenisation – for reasons of scaling (cf. Albarran, 2016; Doyle, et al., 2021). Kwame offered the following personal example to illustrate the purpose and process of this practise of media empire-building:

> Spice fm, for example, was owned by Flavour and Base... So, if I want to buy Flavour and Base from the directors, I acquire the shares of Flavour and Base – maybe 100%, or a certain percentage – and we only notify NCA that there has been a shareholder transfer. They will do their due diligence and give you consent. Once that happens, then you have control of the station. So, that is how most stations were being acquired and along the line, you can change the ownership structure or the name or stuff like that. So that is where the business bit started coming in. But I know recently NCA has brought up some regulations whereby one person or one group cannot own more than three radio stations or two radio stations in a particular area.... But those of us that have these multiple ones already are keeping it as such (Kwame).

It would seem then, that in the absence of a composite broadcast regulatory framework, the regulatory authority is operating a teleological response to pluralism and the public interest. They

insisted, for example, that operating a broadcast station is an expensive enterprise. "So, people may decide to partner or associate with other people and the NCA cannot stop them. It's people's business decisions... They have externally acquired authorizations" (Nana).

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter offers an assessment of the policy and practice – vis-à-vis the principle – of broadcast media ownership in Ghana. It is based on the premise that a pluralistic, public interest driven, approach to the distribution of communicative power offers the best pathway to fulfilling the expectations of the framers of the Constitution of the role of the media within the polity. To this end, ownership regulation has often sought to promote pluralism and serve the general public interest. Against these factors, the findings of the study include the following:

- In Ghana, media pluralism has not necessarily served the public interest, due mainly to concentration of media in a few hands.
- Media ownership is shrouded in opacity.
- There is a growing tendency towards media empire-building.
- Political faces behind broadcast media ownership mean that partisan actors and governments can control public discourse.
- The NCA has a laissez faire attitude to questions about transparency in media ownership.
- The current regime for broadcast regulation allows considerable power and influence to those whose conduct the media are supposed to check.

These key findings are the bases of the conclusions and recommendations we make as follows. First, the study found that while, in nominal terms, the public interest would seem to be well served by availability of multiple media offerings, option does not necessarily represent choice. The observed trend towards ownership concentration has the possibility of conferring custodianship; which translates into control over content. In turn, control over content has the possibility of homogenising content in the service of economics of scale.

Furthermore, the growing tendency towards media empire-building through owned-and-operated

acquisitions and custodianships could lead to the outcome of substituting public monopoly – which the Constitution sought to prevent – with private monopolies – which the NCA's laissez faire attitude could produce. Such a prospect could confer considerable unaccountable power and influence on the public sphere and polity by those on whose conduct the media are supposed to act as a check.

Related to the above (and as indicated earlier) spectrum management "is about producing welfare" (Mazar, 2016, p. 112). Therefore, frequency authorisations should aim at producing a plurality of users and uses. The NCA's option of the first-come, first-served, model of managing the country's spectrum resources overlooks the concern that that approach may not enable the expected outcomes of equity or efficiency. A more creative, contextually relevant, remedy is required in order to avoid the possibility of spectrum entrepreneurs, or racketeers, acquiring frequencies which they subsequently auction off in what the NCA has described as "externally acquired" authorisation arrangements. The outcome of any revised authorisation arrangement should take into account the social consequences and public interest goals anticipated by the constitution, promised in policy, and recommended in normative principles. This should include building into the applicable model, considerations of a rationing or quota system that enables the equity in opportunities by less-served populations.

The recommendation for revisions of spectrum management practices also invites attention to the need for greater conceptual clarity or appreciation by the regulator of the principle (read philosophy and values) underpinning broadcast regulation. As examples, the regulator has a laissez faire response to the observation that the lack of ownership restraints undermines the values of pluralism, which the Constitution seeks to promote. Beyond that, the indiscriminate application of coverage radius caps on all broadcast operators suggests a deficit in appreciation of the concept of "community" in community media. The reality of many rural communities in Ghana is that their populations are spatially sparsely dispersed. Besides, communities may be defined and identified by factors other than physical location; such as gender, or causes. There is a need for regulatory response to be informed by relevant policy, inspired by principle.

Given the public interest ideological orientation of the Constitution, and the considerable partisan interests and involvements in the determination of frequency application outcomes, there is a need for the passage of a responsive broadcast law to stave off the prospects of media capture by political and economic elites. Such a law must seek also to: engender greater equity in the distribution of communicative power; guard against overt and hidden monopolies and conflicts of interest; and ensure public accountability and transparency in ownership identities and interests.

Finally, the starting point towards addressing the gaps identified in policy and practice above is the need for a comprehensive regulatory impact analysis. The NCA was established in 1996 (by Act 524; now repealed by Act 769). After close to 30 years of existence, there is an overdue need for evidence-driven review and renewal of the provisions, processes and products of current regulation. Concerns and considerations could include: establishing the size of the Ghanaian media market; objectively profiling the players in the media industry based on the values underpinning regulation; determining the optimal numbers and balance of users and uses of broadcast media for yielding the public interest dividend. They should also include operationally defining the measurable constructs of policy interest – such as pluralism, diversity, public interest, commercial, public, community – in order to set objective baselines, endlines and timelines by which to benchmark ownership regulatory goal attainment.

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Collaborators

The Department of Communication Studies, UG is an academic unit in the University of Ghana offering graduate courses in communication studies. Our mission is to provide the environment for the development and promotion of scholarly, as well as professional expertise in media and communication fields. As the foremost graduate training institution and a leader in media and communication research in the country, we have partnered several international and local (both public and private) organisations to guide improvements in the Ghanaian media through our research and rigorous curriculum. We have trained over 1200 graduates who have made important contributions to development at national and international levels through their work as award winning journalists, public relations specialists, media managers, advertising practitioners, media development experts, communication consultants for government and non-profit Institutions and academics.

The Media Foundation for West Africa is a regional independent non-governmental organisation with a network of national partner organisations in all 16 countries in West Africa. It is the biggest and most influential media development and freedom of expression organisation in the region with UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) Consultative Status. The MFWA also has Equivalency Determination Certification with NGOSource that certifies the organisation as being the equivalent of a public charity in the United States. The MFWA is also the Secretariat of the continental Network of the most prominent Free Expression and Media Development Organisations in Africa, known as the Africa Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX).

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