

**NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF PARLIAMENT OF GHANA: A STUDY OF THE  
DAILY GRAPHIC AND DAILY GUIDE NEWSPAPERS**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to the Almighty God, my lovely and treasured better-half, Mrs. Sheila Yawa Akoto-Belley, my beautiful and interesting daughters, Vanessa Edudzi Aku Belley and Hillary Etonam Ama Belley, and my entire family especially, my mother Victoria Anati, my father Obed Kwaku Belley, my siblings, Ernest Belley and Millicent Belley for their indefatigable support and prayers for me.

## DECLARATION

Except for the references and quotations which have been dully acknowledged, I declare that this dissertation is entirely my own original research, and that it has never been submitted in whole or in part for another degree elsewhere.



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## **ABSTRACT**

The study was designed and carried out to investigate, through content analysis, how the Ghanaian media reports Parliament and the extent to which it provides citizens with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. It was undertaken against the background of the fact that Ghana returned to a multi-party democracy since 1993 and as in any democracy, the media is believed to play a public sphere role by informing citizens and helping them engage in public discourses. The focus of this research was not the numerical incidence of newspaper coverage of Parliament but the nature of coverage, particularly the extent to which reportage of the legislature provides information, interpretation and debate on issues that affect citizens.

The method used in this study is content analysis. Seventy-two (72) editions of both the Daily Graphic and the Daily Guide newspapers and in all, Ninety (90) news items were content analysed.

The study established that though the media in Ghana does inform citizens about what is happening in Parliament, it falls far short of educating them on the meaning and significance of the facts deriving there from. The study further revealed that the newspapers do not provide context, background and/or interpretation to the facts. It also revealed that newspaper content in Ghana lacks the kind of policy, political and operational information contrived to inform public opinion, empower citizens and encourage wide and inclusive debate about issues of social, economic and political importance.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

Since the return of the country to constitutional rule in 1993, the expectation of Ghanaians was that the media would contribute to the democratic process by encouraging wide, deep and inclusive debate about issues of social and political importance and giving guidance on the interpretation of information given to citizens. As Parliament is noted to be a representative assembly comprising elected officials (Laundry 1989), media coverage of its activities is regarded as being essential to public communication, defined as “public discussion about the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decision) and official sanctions, what the state rewards or punishes” (McNair 2007).

The study focuses on the genre of news, or in terms of the categories of news, “hard news” and “continuing news” (Tuchman 1991). This is in acknowledgement of a very critical issue in media studies: how media content is produced and what factors play a part in its production. Thus any detailed analysis of news must also take into account the social context of news production and must acknowledge that news is socially constructed and that the process of news production affects the news product; ultimately, what passes as news is influenced by journalistic routines and norms as well as ideology (Tuchman 1991, Schudson 2000)

### 1.1 Background of Study

The health of a democracy is dependent on the media to inform citizens about what is happening around them, educate them on the meaning and significance of the facts, provide a platform for

political discourse and to facilitate the formation of public opinion (Curran 2000). They imply the existence of a realm of social life where the exchange of information and views on questions of common concern (specifically those of political concern) can take place so that public opinion can be formed. The media does play a very significant role in shaping public opinion and in stimulating public discourses on issues that affect citizens.

Parliament, which over the years has provided ordinary Ghanaians and organized political parties an opportunity to represent the interests of their constituents, make input into legislation and effectively participate in the democratic governance process, remain a closed book to many.

One result is the inability of the public to fully grasp the enormous responsibility that the constitution has imposed on parliament. For example, the performance of Members of Parliament is often assessed by the number of projects they have undertaken in their constituencies other than their input into the making of laws in parliament.

The traditional media-television, radio and newspaper remain the primary means by which most citizens are able to understand and be engaged with the work of parliament.

The expectation is that the media will enlighten the public as to parliament's work. Why something is happening and what it means. This expectation is, however, too often unfulfilled, with the consequence that many remain in the dark about what much of our legislation actually means to their lives.

## **1.2 The Daily Graphic**

The *Daily Graphic* as a state-owned daily newspaper was introduced on the news stand on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1950 as one of a chain of newspapers owned by private interest, the *Daily Mirror Group* of London. According to Hasty (2002), the *Daily Graphic* and *Mirror* were not an indigenous effort like the *Accra Evening News*, *Gold Coast Chronicle*, *Ashanti Pioneer* and *The*

*Accra Herald*. Unlike the local press, the *Daily Graphic* had access to transnational capital, to modern technology, ran a more efficient business organisation, and demonstrated better journalistic expertise.

The *Daily Graphic* has carved out a certain niche market based on its distinctive house style (Hasty (2006)). The *Daily Graphic* has the largest nationwide readership and leads the newspaper industry with a daily circulation of over 100,000 copies.

Though a state-owned newspaper, the *Daily Graphic* still operates as an independent newspaper. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana provides for the appointment of the Board Chairman and the Board Members and it is carried out by the National Media Commission in consultation with the President.

Thus, apart from the universal factors of newsworthiness (proximity, newness, controversy, prominence etc.), the *Daily Graphic* considers other issues that border on national security, peace and unity in selecting news for publication.

Its content includes current affairs, politics, economic issues and foreign news. What is published in the newspaper is carefully chosen during a daily editorial conference attended by the various sectional editors of the newspaper. During the editorial conference, the news editor presents a series of potential news items for consideration. The editors then assess the newsworthiness of each news item and which news item is to be given high prominence. What finally comes out as news item is a product of the decision taken by the editorial conference.

### **1.3 The Daily Guide**

The *Daily Guide* is published by Western Publications Limited. It is a privately-owned daily newspaper. It is published in Accra and it comes out six (6) times per week and is regarded as the most circulated independent newspaper in Ghana with a circulation of about twenty two thousand copies a day

### **1.4 Parliament of Ghana**

The evolution of the Parliament of Ghana dates back to the pre-independence era. The first legislative authority was experienced in Ghana the then Gold Coast during the reign of Queen Victoria from the year 1837 to 1901. Between the year 1850 and 1865, the Gold Coast had its own Legislative Council to only advise the colonial Governor in enacting laws mainly in the form of Ordinances. In the year 1888, John Mensah Sarbah was nominated as the first African Unofficial Member to the Legislative Council after which unofficial representation was increased even though European Official Members continued to dominate. In the year 1951, the Legislature elected Sir Emmanuel Charles Quist as its first Speaker. He was the first African to preside over a British Colonial Legislature.

Ghana became a Republican State on 1st July, 1960, under the First Republican Constitution and a National Assembly was elected consisting of one hundred and twelve (112) representatives with a five-year term. On 24th February, 1966, the Government of the First Republic was overthrown in a coup d'état, the National Assembly was subsequently dissolved and parliamentary democracy was interrupted. Ghana returned to constitutional rule again in the year 1969 where a National Assembly was constituted into one hundred and forty (140) elected Members with five-year term. On 13th January, 1972, the Government of the Second Republic

was also overthrown in a coup d'etat and the National Assembly was again dissolved. After this incident, Ghana was led again by a military junta and the National Assembly was in abeyance until 24th September, 1979 when constitutional rule was reinstated and Parliament had one hundred and forty (140) seats and five-year tenure of office.

The military interrupted Ghana's constitutional rule again on 31st December, 1981 through a coup d'etat. The military junta established a Consultative Assembly to draft the 1992 Constitution for the Republic of Ghana which was approved by Ghanaians through a referendum in April 1992. Ghana returned to constitutional rule again with the coming into force of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana which is sometimes referred to as the Fourth Republican Constitution. The Fourth Republican Parliament commenced on 7th January, 1993. The interventions by the military resulted in transitions referred to as Republics. The current Republic is the Fourth and the only one that has journeyed about twenty (20) years with five (5) Parliaments without any military interruption.

The Legislature of Ghana consists of the Parliament of Ghana and the Parliamentary Service of Ghana (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, Chapter.10). Republic of Ghana (1992 Constitution, Chapter.10, Article 93(1)) stipulates that the Parliament of Ghana shall consist of at least one hundred and forty (140) elected Members. The First, Second and Third Parliaments of the Fourth Republic had two hundred (200) elected Members but the Fourth and Fifth Parliaments had two hundred and thirty (230). The increment was as a result of the enactment and implementation of the Parliamentary Constituencies Instrument, 2004 (C.I.46) which increased the number of Constituencies from two hundred (200) to two hundred and thirty (230). Again, the number of MPs for the sixth Parliament was by Constitutional Instrument (C.I. 75) increased to 275.

### **1.5 Statement of Research Problem**

The main criticism aimed at the media few years after the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic, is that their coverage of parliament (the second pillar within the state) is very low and usually focuses on splits, sensations and personalities. Members of the public have also expressed dissatisfaction with the way parliament is portrayed by the media. The politicians mock each other; the media mock the politicians, therefore what possible opportunity is there for the general public to be informed or take any of these organs seriously? (Gibbons, 2007).

As is the case with many emerging democracies in Africa, with the transformation of the country's political culture came the belief that the media could contribute to the democratic process by encouraging wide and inclusive debate about issues of social and political importance and giving guidance on the interpretation of information given to citizens.

While Parliament is generally held to be a representative assembly comprising elected officials, media coverage of its activities is regarded as being essential. As a legislative organ, its functions are seen more in the political realm. In this case political communication or journalism becomes the dominant feature of media discourse. This kind of reportage is defined as "public discussion about the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decision) and official sanctions, what the state rewards or punishes"(McNair 2003).

How the media performs its role in bringing the functions and operations of parliament to the citizens deserve an enquiry. Democracy must allow for choices and diversity while the media is to ensure accountability and watch over resources.

## **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this study is to investigate how the Ghanaian media reports Parliament in Ghana's Fourth Republic and the extent to which they provide citizens with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. The investigation should help show whether the nature of parliamentary coverage by the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and privately-owned *Daily Guide* are such that it leads to the formation of undiluted public opinion. The study is premised on the hypothesis that in a democracy, mass media inform citizens and help them engage in public discourse.

## **1.7 Research Questions**

Research questions according to Wimmer and Dominick (2011) are formally stated questions intended to provide indications about something but not limited to investigating relationships between variables. They also provide essential and relevant information to understanding the research topic and give direction to the study.

The following research questions have been outlined to help in gathering relevant data to understand the research topic

1. What news from Parliament do the media focus on?
2. How is this news represented in the media?
3. Does newspaper coverage of Parliament provide vital political communication and interpretation to citizens?

## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

Principally, this study is considered significant because it will explain the focus of the media in reporting or covering parliament. Secondly, it will also help us to understand how the media frame news about parliament. Thirdly, this study will also make it possible to compare research done in other countries to this research. Finally, the Study may serve as a reference material for anybody who is interested in issues relating to how the media relates with parliament in Ghana and beyond.

## **1.9 Structure of the Study**

The study is made up of five chapters. The opening chapter-chapter one, gives the introduction, presents the general background to the study and explains its objectives, rationale, scope and specifies the research questions driving it.

The second chapter which is the theoretical and conceptual framework, reviews related literature and provides a prognosis of the theories, concepts and models that interrogates the key research objectives and questions in order to situate the study within context.

The third chapter is on the research methodology that was used for the study. It describes the research design used in the study and justifies the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods used in the exercise. It also defines the range of raw data used, why it was chosen and how it was analysed and interpreted.

The fourth chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study in two parts. The first part is a qualitative account and analysis of data derived from a content analysis of newspaper coverage of parliament during the period of study. The second part provided a textual analytical account of the coverage.

The fifth and final chapter provides a short description of the findings of the research and suggested some recommendations in the light of the findings.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THEORITICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.0 Introduction

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to media and parliament, especially how media coverage of the legislature provides and interprets political information.

This section of the research discusses the theoretical framework guiding the research and reviews some studies done by other scholars on the media and parliament.

It looks at the perspectives on media and democracy, especially how the media provide information available to enable the public to form their opinion thereby encouraging wide and inclusive debate about issues of social and political importance.

The discussion of media and parliament is aimed at providing a contextual backdrop for examining media coverage of Parliament, besides providing vital political information, which is meant to stimulate public debate and generate informed discussions and reactions across the spectrum of the larger society.

### 2.1 Media and Democracy: A General Perspective

Scholarly research into the area of media and parliament is quite broad. Coleman and Spiller (2003) in their study of British Parliament, *Exploring New Media Effects on Representative Democracy*, observed that representative bodies have come under increasing pressure to either connect more directly with citizens or risk becoming marginalized. Lusoli, Ward, and Gibson (2006) reported that it has increasingly become commonplace to talk of crisis in parliamentary representation in the United Kingdom as a result of an increasing gulf between the Parliament, its

members, and the British public. Citizens know less about MPs and the Parliament than was the case in the past. Only 42% of the public can correctly name their MPs, a 10% decrease from early 1990s (*Ibid*).

Similarly, The Hansard Society, a leading independent, non-partisan political research and education charity based in the United Kingdom in its briefing at the House of Lords in December 2008, on Enhancing Parliament's Ability to Communicate with Members of the Public highlighted the increasing gap between the British Members of Parliament (MPs), and the public. The Hansard Society reported that just 32% of the people agree that they have a good understanding of the way Parliament works and only 19% of the people surveyed agree that Parliament is working for them. These statistics show increasing citizens' disengagement or lack of trust for the Parliament and/or the parliamentarians.

Many studies (Coleman, Taylor, & Van De Donk, 1999; Leston-Bandeira, 2007 and Williamson, 2009) recognized that digital technologies may provide a way of making representatives more accessible to the public. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has had an important and growing impact on the work of elected representatives. In a study on Communicating with Congress, Fitch & Goldschmidt (2005) concluded that members of Congress have more opportunity to interact easily with many people as a result of the new technologies.

Coleman, Taylor and van de Donk (op.cit) argue that the successful functioning of any parliamentary democracy depends on efficient, multi-directional flows of information for three main reasons: firstly, citizens need information before they can make "sensible choices" about who will represent them; secondly, they need information about their representatives so that

politicians can be evaluated on the basis of their work record, and thirdly, elected representatives, citizens and civil society can collectively pass effective legislation, scrutinise executive functions and generally hold government accountable.

The “health of democracy” is inextricably linked to the “health of the systems of communication” - systems which have certain significant functions: surveillance and reporting of the socio-political environment, highlighting issues and developments likely to impinge on the welfare of citizens; agenda setting and identifying the key issues of the day; dialogue across a diverse range of views and mechanisms for holding public officials accountable in their exercise of power (McNair 1995:21, Blumler and Gurevitch 1995:97).

Dahlgren (1995) argues that the concept of the public sphere in the dialectic of the enlightenment is ambiguous to begin with: modern democracy is no longer seen as a system expressing the will of the people, but rather one which offers consumers a series of choices. He diagnoses “a growing loss of power by centralised political systems; changes in social structure are bringing about new forms of political culture”(Ibid:2). He points at the increasing lack of participation in the political discourse and emphasises a balanced relationship between the state and the civil society as a precondition for democracy and a viable public sphere, which encompasses the media. Dahlgren emphasises the importance of the aspect of socio-cultural interaction. The public sphere is not just a “marketplace of ideas” or an “information exchange depot”, but also a major vehicle for generating and distributing culture (Ibid). Dahlgren leaves no doubt about the relevance of the discussion around the public sphere for journalism. He noted that one could say that journalism has been doing its best to deny the mounting evidence of difficulties in the classic enlightenment formulations, a refusal to air the relevance of such disputes for its own activities.

Scholars like Sussman (1996), Page (1996) and McQuail (2000) state that citizen participation in politics is fundamental to democracy and that citizens require access to the political process in order to gain information and to play a participatory role in decision making.

Murdock (1995), notes that the media in a democracy is implicated in the constitution of citizenship in very distinct ways. He argues that the only way people can exercise their full rights as citizens is if they have access to information, advice, analysis, interpretation and debate on areas that “involve public political choices” (Ibid:21).

Page (1996) agrees, noting that democracy would be dysfunctional if citizens merely chose leaders at election time and then forgot entirely about politics until the next election. In short, a well-functioning democracy depends on media which facilitates public debate by “reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion” (Ibid:5).

A body so reconstituted, notes Curran (1996) becomes a public sphere, that is a neutral zone where access to relevant information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis.

Kuhn (1998) sees the public sphere as an “institutional framework and set of practices which encourage wide and inclusive debate about issues of social and political importance” (Ibid:23-24).

McQuail (2000) theorises that the public sphere is a notional space which provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate and where access to the space is free, and freedom of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed.

These notions of public sphere are significantly different from the original one conceived by German sociologist Jurgen Habermas. Habermas (1995) locates the development of the public sphere in 18th century Britain where the press had already begun its contemporary function of supplying not only information but also opinion, comment and criticism, facilitating debate among the emergent bourgeois and educated classes who met in coffee shops and debating societies to contribute their ideas to the fabric of bourgeois public opinion. For Habermas, when active participants in political life met, discussed, formed political projects and kept a check on government by way of informed and influential opinion, they constituted a public sphere (McQuail 2000).

The rejection of Habermas' idea of public sphere by media scholars stems from what Curran (2000) describes as “an archaic understanding of polity”, one which “fails to recognise that people are represented primarily through political parties, interest groups and the myriad structures of civil society”, “the principal building blocks of contemporary liberal democracy” (Ibid:134). Scholars like Schudson (1998) and Glasser and Craft (Ibid), in response to what McQuail (2000) describes as “discontent of the contemporary public sphere” suggest that journalism will need to re-invent itself in order to enhance democracy. Glasser and Craft (1997) call for a shift away from a journalism of information” to a “journalism of conversation”, essentially because the public needs not only information but also the call for engagement invites discussion and debate.

Sussman (1996) acknowledges that such public engagement depends on citizens who are relatively well-informed about the policy debates taking place within political institutions and are able to access the quality of representation of legislation, in particular, to the inner chambers of the political process. Page (1996) admits that even if the public is capable of a “high level of

rationality and good sense”, public opinion is bound to depend on the political information and ideas conveyed to it. Only then, he argues, can there be “high-level deliberation”, a phenomenon he defines as “reasoning and discussion about the merits of public policy” (Ibid:83).

Recent scholarship in the area of media and democracy acknowledges another form of public sphere which promises more participatory politics through new media, particularly the Internet. McQuail (2000) assesses the ideas of a “Virtual Congress”, an “electronic town hall meeting” and even “electronic democracy” conceived by scholars like Street (1997) and notes that although the new communications technology would solve problems of information and participation, the political status quo cannot change without other basic changes in society. Coleman, Taylor and van de Donk (1999) argue that one response to the “alleged crisis of political communication” alluded to by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) is to examine the potential applications of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to the political process.

They posit that:

If the existence of efficient flows of information are as important for democracy as has been suggested, might not the immense development in the means of communicating information, based upon digital technologies, the convergence of computers and telecommunications (telematics) and the extraordinary development of Internet technology, have a profound effect upon the way that democracy occurs?

Coleman, Taylor and van de Donk (*op.cit*) refer to some of the technological innovations that some legislative assemblies have harnessed. According to them, the Australian parliament, based on the Westminster model, is one of the most hi-tech legislatures in the world. The Scottish parliament has transcended the procedures of Westminster and is using ICTs to make legislators more efficient, transparent and accountable than those in older parliaments.

In spite of the differences in the idea media scholars have about public sphere, there seems to be agreement that on the whole, media must provide a basis for public discussion and for public engagement in matters of political and social concern.

## **2.2 Media, Democracy and the Public Sphere: The African Perspectives**

Ronning (1994) argues that expectations about the role of the African media in the democratic process became a major preoccupation for scholars in the early 1990s when many countries on the continent were catching the contagion of democratization. He notes that the debate about the relationship between the media and the state and about the role of the independent press led, for instance, to the establishment of media institutions to promote and defend press freedom and take appropriate steps where such freedoms are violated and to seek to remove obstacles and impediments to the free flow of information.

In 1990, citizens took to the streets of capital cities in 14 African countries to express discontent with economic hardships and political repression and to demand democratic reform. During the same period, at least 21 governments launched reform efforts to permit greater pluralism and competition within the polity. Bratton and van de Walle (1992) in a discussion relating to the governance process, acknowledge Richard Sklar's "prediction" of 1986 that a time would soon come when Africans would prefer "the unpredictable vicissitudes of democracy to the stifling abuse of development dictatorships" (Ibid:1).

Ronning (*op.cit*) argues that the collapse of one-party regimes (such as Kaunda's in Zambia) and the development of multi-party systems combined with a demand for more democratic structures, and a debate over "the basic principles of democracy will involve questions such as the demand for freedom of expression and the need for independent and critical media" (Ibid:1).

Ansah (1991) identifies what he considers to be the three major crises facing the African media and making them ineffectual as institutions: the crisis of power, the crisis of ownership and the crisis of resources. African states and African media are structurally weak, and because of the weakness of African states, they tend to suspect the media of being tools for sowing dissent and for stirring political opposition. As a result, African states control their media using a variety of means which range from outright censorship to economic control. Ansah (Ibid) further argues that though the independent media in Africa could play a central role in mediating between views and opinions and generally sustaining the democratic process, the fact that African media are weak makes them largely ineffectual. They are weak because their reach is limited and because the market they reach is small. With low literacy levels and lack of education opportunities across the continent, the press especially, he notes cannot be a tour de force. These set of problems, coupled with underdeveloped infrastructure and distribution systems have tended to work against the African media. He further observes that where an independent press exists to counteract the dominance of government-controlled media, they are in the hands of the economic elite, and together with government, they maintain a monopoly on the flow of information.

He suggests that in most African countries where few independent newspapers exist, it is government's responsibility "to provide people with as broad a range of views as possible to enable them reach rational conclusions and thus contribute to national development" (Ibid:12).

Pitts (2000) is sceptical of the kind of solution Ansah (1991) proposes. He argues it does not follow that because "a facade of Western democracy is in place" in several parts of Africa, a libertarian style of press will promote a marketplace of ideas. He bases his opinion on the notion

that modern Africa has very little democratic tradition and that the heritage is predominantly an authoritarian political culture.

He also notes that Africa has never provided a model for free and independent press. Instead, the press is normally controlled through a government information ministry or through a government-owned corporation. He argues that such control creates a closed environment for the media and that “even without restrictions, the press becomes an extension of national government” (Ibid:275).

Nyamnjoh (1999) adds that in most part of Africa, the media have allowed themselves to be used as mouthpieces for divisive forces, often reproducing calls to murder, destruction and hatred, and generally keeping everyone fearful of a Rwanda-type situation where Radio Mille Collines proved what the media can do to spur ethnic cleansing.

Nevertheless, there are scholars who believe that the media did indeed play a significant role in the current democratisation process in Africa. Nyamnjoh (1999) and Okigbo (2000) concede that the democratisation process brought with it multi-partyism as well as media pluralism; however, research on media and elections in Southern Africa suggest that the media have not performed this role properly.

Sartori (1995) discusses what he considers the preconditions of democracy extensively in an essay entitled “How Far Can Free Government Travel?” published in July 1995 in the *Journal of Democracy*.

Okigbo (2000) argues that the African media and civil society are “not contributing enough to speed up the inevitable inauguration of a new political climate founded on popular participation (and the other trappings of political democracy)”. In this regard, Berger notes (1999), this is

because concepts of civil society and public sphere, in the particular forms taken over into Africa, reflect their origins in societies extremely different to most of those in Africa. He argues that firstly, the application of these concepts to Africa's democratisation period has seldom included a focus on how they related to the continent's media. Secondly, there is no clear articulation defined between civil society and the public sphere in Africa.

In the main, scholars like Ansah (1991), Ronning (1994) and Okigbo (2000) posit that media and democracy in African contexts, not to mention the study of it, is plagued by crises. In the absence of a coherent theory to explain the peculiarities of media and democracy in Africa, scholars have consistently relied on liberal democratic theory to provide conceptual and theoretical benchmarks. Undoubtedly, these benchmarks influence how media and democracy in Africa is perceived and studied, irrespective of the fact that they are products of a specific Euro-centric historical, cultural, political, ideological, economic and social experience and are therefore too exclusive as an analytical framework.

However, they do not mitigate the pervasiveness of strong state control and political absolutism in most of the countries on the African continent, the presence of private papers, vibrant civic organisations, legislative assemblies populated by popularly-elected representatives in widely-contested, free-and fair elections in these countries notwithstanding.

### **2.3 The Role of Parliaments in a Democracy**

Parliaments as one of the key state institutions in a democratic system of governance have a critical role to play in promoting democracy and good governance. As the democratically elected representatives of the people, parliaments have the honorable task to ensure government by the people and for the people. In the performance of their key functions of legislation, representation

and oversight parliaments can actively engage in the development and implementation of laws, policies and practices that promote democracy and good governance.

According to Laundry (1989), irrespective of what variant of democracy exists or what theory uses as a point of departure, there is general agreement that a legislative assembly is a symbol of popular participation in government and decision making, however, real or illusory the extent of the participation.

He acknowledges that in terms of structure, size and composition, legislative assemblies differ from country to country and from one political experience to another. Though he refers to legislative assemblies as Parliaments for conceptual convenience, Laundry (Ibid) insists that the term is usually associated with the British system of parliamentary government which has influenced the development of representative assemblies in many parts of the world and whose main responsibilities are making laws, approving proposals for taxation and public expenditure and keeping the work of government under scrutiny and review.

Negrine (1999), in a study of three legislative assemblies, the British House of Commons, the French Assemblée Nationale and the German Bundestag describes the peculiarities of each of these institutions and the roles they play within their respective political systems. The British Parliament is an example of a “speech” parliament (as contrasted with a “work” parliament) where great importance is attached to debate and discussion. It is adversarial and confrontational, with the governing party (the majority in the House) on one side of the chamber and the opposition on the other, especially during Prime Minister's Question Time. This is an important occasion for both parties and for the media: when the prime minister scores points. The party in power is heartened, and when the opposition strikes a blow, the party's morale rises. The role of

such sessions is not so much to get hold of information and let others participate in parliamentary life but also to make political points. In France, by contrast, power is divided between the president and the prime minister, who leads the majority party in parliament, and the Assemblée Nationale. Other differences such as, say that ministers need not be members of parliament or that committees play a significant part in the scrutiny of a government's legislative programme, are important, and give the French parliament its particular role-the role according to John Frears (1990), of an institution that is "inadequate as an arena for political debate and as a check on the executive" (Ibid:24). He adds that "the constitutional and procedural constraints can be summarised thus: complete executive supremacy in the legislative process, severely limited opportunities for general debates criticising the government, virtually no opportunities for scrutinising executive acts and making the executive give account of them" (Ibid:24). In the German Parliament (the Bundestag), power lies more with parliamentary groups within it than with individuals. Furthermore, a lot of work goes on in parliamentary committees, thereby altering the nature of plenary sessions. Plenary sessions are infrequent, numbering only about 60 a year (compared to about 170 in France and Britain) and MPs spend most of their time in party and committee meetings. Unlike their counterparts in the British and French parliament, German parliamentarians need permission from their groups to submit a question to the legislative assembly.

Under the British parliamentary system, the executive is constitutionally subject to parliamentary control. The Prime Minister and the entire cabinet are Members of Parliament and are answerable to the popularly-elected House. This also applies in some countries with constitutional presidencies like India, Malta and Trinidad and Tobago and those with executive presidencies like Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania (Laundry 1989).

In the United States, the system is somewhat different. Under the separation of powers engrained in the American Constitution, the President, the Judiciary and Congress have well-defined powers designed to maintain a balance among them.

## **2.4 Media and Parliament**

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to media and parliament, especially how media coverage of the legislature provides and interprets political information. This coverage, besides providing vital political information, is meant to stimulate public debate on issues of social and political importance (Gurevitch 1995, Page 1996, Negrine 1999).

Keefer (1993) notes that,

Logic dictates that if information-holding is a prerequisite for participation in the policymaking process and if the public must depend on news coverage for most issue-related information, then the public's ability to participate will depend largely on the extent and nature of news coverage of the issue in question. (*Ibid: 412*).

There are ample evidence that suggest that some media scholars and politicians are not satisfied with media coverage of the legislature and the perceived effects of this on the public sphere. In 1993, a British Labor MP, Jack Straw published a report on the decline of parliamentary coverage in the local press. He noted that until 1988, parliamentary debates had received between 400 and 800 lines of daily coverage in the *Times*. By 1992, coverage had declined to fewer than 100 lines (Negrine 1999).

Shaw's report also contrasted the range of activities reported in the Hansard with the range of press coverage and concluded that the British press was not giving the public a holistic account of what was going on in Parliament, such as reported debates, intentions to introduce bills. In the

main, the report drew public attention to just how much parliamentary activity went unreported in the British press, (Negrine 1998).

One British MP recounted that his visitors to the House from Hong Kong took comfort in the debates in Parliament on the handover of their territory to China in 1997, but were dismayed nothing of the debates mentioned in the following day's newspapers. This is noted in Negrine's (1999) study of parliament and the media in Britain, France and Germany.

Negrine (1999) notes that,

Straw's report had one methodological flaw: it did not examine the processes and routines within Parliament which could either be changed or modified to encourage media interest. In other words, besides blaming the British press for being "the cause of Parliament's increasing invisibility", the report did little to establish causes of the decline in coverage. Two years before the Shaw report was published, Times Editor Simon Jenkins decided that his paper would no longer carry extracts from speeches on its parliamentary page because as far as he was concerned, apart from MPs, no-one else read them. He notes, we are not there to provide a public service for a particular profession or, for that matter, for a particular chamber ... Newspapers are about providing people with news. (Ibid:326)

In the United States, media coverage of Congress was changing. Cook (1989) notes that this was the result of changing priorities in news coverage by the American media: what the "consumers" wanted differed from what journalists in the field thought they wanted. By the end of the 19th century, journalists reporting Congress were focusing more on the colour and excitement than on the details of policy disputes. Cook adds that the "intrusion" of television cameras resulted in media focus on personalities and on the spectacle than on the substance of debates and the issues on the floor.

Other scholars raise different concerns about the news media's shortcomings in reporting Congressional decision making. Keefer (1993) notes that the timing of news coverage of public

policy issues tends to hinder citizen participation in the policy-making process. Conway (1985) writes that for mobilisation to occur, the media must convey (before a policy making decision) some idea of how the public can become involved and who should be contacted, and that this information is usually not provided. She adds that the nature of media coverage is such that people are not informed where and how they might act to influence policy decisions and legislation.

Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) describe the situation where the media does not provide people with the kind of information they need to participate in governance and decision-making as a “crisis of civic and political communication”, with the media degenerating into “channels of personalities, dramatisation, witch-huntery, soap operatics and sundry trivialities” (Ibid:1).

Kuhn (1998) acknowledges the crisis Blumler and Gurevitch refer to in a study of the public service credentials of the media (press, radio and television and new communications technologies) in Fifth Republic France. He notes that television in particular has fundamentally changed the process of political communication personalising politics, reducing political discourse to “sound bite” exchanges and turning debate into an entertainment-driven spectacle (Ibid:23). The French voter is taught by their communication advisers how to manipulate the media for their own partisan objectives. Meanwhile, journalists do not have the capacity, the willingness and the time to act as a reflective filter for public opinion (Ibid).

He argues, on the basis of news content and information value, falling newspaper circulation in spite of a significant increase in the population and the spread of formal education since 1945 that the French press is in “a poor condition to contribute to the media's role as a public sphere” (Ibid:26).

Negrine's (1999) study notes that in the late 1960s, the French daily newspaper, *Le Monde*, devoted two pages to verbatim transcripts of parliamentary proceedings. By the 1980s, it had stopped. A similar trend was noted in Germany in the 19th century where parliamentary proceedings were carried by the press on a daily basis. By the 1990s, reports of the Bundestag (the German parliament) had been integrated into general political coverage.

Lee (1997) notes the Swedish media have managed to facilitate public debate, with the press playing a significant role in this regard. It has been used by politicians to air proposed changes in government policy or as agenda-setting pieces, sometimes before taking the issues to parliament. The press, by acting as a link between individual parliamentarians and citizens, creates a mechanism for public debate.

Lee (1997) adds that the introduction of parliamentary television broadcasting system in 1995 funded through state coffers and transmitted free of charge to TV stations around the country has helped raise popular awareness about the issues of public concern. In his view, live transmissions of confrontational debates in parliament involving party leaders as well as the "Question Time" have had the effect of increasing public understanding of and public engagement with issues in the "Riksdag".

The foregoing reveals that media coverage of legislative assemblies have been undergoing significant changes. There have been a number of studies to examine the nature of these changes and the rationale behind them. Tunstall (1970), for instance, traces the evolution of parliamentary coverage in the British press. His study reveals that the British media's coverage of Parliament evolved to make it more informative and more relevant to the needs of the British public. He

notes that initially, coverage was restricted to verbatim transcripts of debates by the “Reporter of Debates” and was undertaken by teams of shorthand reporters.

However, such verbatim transcripts did not interest newspaper readers and was consequently discontinued. Reporters of Debate were replaced in the early 20th century by reporters who summarised the debates. These reporters were eventually replaced by “lobby correspondents” who specialised in reporting government policy, behind-the-scenes coverage of the executive and the legislature.

Recent studies of media coverage of parliament attempt to establish the reasons behind declining media interest in legislature as sources of news. Negrine (1994,1998,1999), in a series of case studies of media coverage of the British, French and German legislative assemblies based on content analyses, argues that firstly, “the routines, practices and traditions of parliamentary institutions were not geared to the needs of the media” (Ibid:325).

In support of this observation, Negrine (1999) quotes the President of the Italian parliament:

There is only one recipe for eliminating the communication gap between parliament and the public ... and that is to proceed more rapidly and resolutely in the direction of modulating the messages in such a way as to take into account the needs and peculiarities of the media system, of bearing in mind that reporters and press organs do not confine themselves to recording our words and deeds but act in accordance with criteria, priorities and patterns that we must not ignore. (Ibid:326).

Secondly, he notes, newspapers had become more and more “depoliticized” as a result of “commercialization”, “visualization” (that is, use of graphics and other design elements to make newspapers more colourful and more aesthetically appealing to readers) and “tabloidization” (that is reducing the prominence of politics on page one in preference of scandal and sensation). In the main, this “downgraded the importance of parliamentary coverage”, resulting in a decline

in public appreciation of the contents of parliamentary pages, particularly the substance of debates (Ibid). Thirdly, he argues that the fact that television has “offered a window on parliaments” by providing extracts from debates in news programmes and countless interviews with politicians has meant that newspapers have moved away from mainstream coverage and focus more on explanation and interpretation. Resultantly, the volume of newspaper coverage of parliament has dropped (Ibid).

## **2.5 Media and the Sociology of News Production**

Many journalists argue that journalism is all about pursuing the truth and reporting it. The professional ethos of journalism, or so notes Fowler (1991) is that journalists collect facts, report these objectively and the media present them fairly and without bias “in a language which is designed to be unambiguous, undistorting and agreeable to readers”.

One of the exponents of this point of view is Fergal Keane, a former BBC foreign correspondent who said in a lecture broadcast on 20 October 1997 on BBC 1 that:

The art of the reporter should more than anything else be a celebration of the truth ... The reason millions of people watch and listen is because we place the interests of truth above everything else. Trust is our byword. That is an unalterable principle. It is our heritage and our mission, and I would rather sweep the streets of London than compromise on that. The fundamental obligation of the reporter is the truth.

Allan (1999) acknowledges the “eloquence” of Keane's words and admits that indeed most journalists believe this “democratic function” is contingent on the realisation of press freedom “as a principle safeguarded from any possible impediment associated with power and privilege” (Ibid:48). He also acknowledges this view is steeped in liberal pluralism where through the unearthing of lies, deceit and scandal, the media provide a system of checks and balances to counteract power and privilege.

However, scholars like Tuchman (1978, 1991), Schudson (1989, 2000) and Franklin (1997) reject this line of reasoning, arguing that news, or what passes for it, is a social construction of reality and that ultimately, the process of news production affects the news product. In the main, they argue, news is shaped and influenced by a whole range of social, business and ideological norms.

Hall (1973, quoted in Watson 1998) perceives two levels of news value and argues that both constitute a “double articulation”. He describes the first level of news value as “formal”, the other as “ideological”. Formal news values belong to “the world and discourse of the newspaper, to newsmen, to a professional group, to the institutional apparatus of news-making”. Ideological news values “belong to the realm of moral-political discourse” in society.

Hall argues that this double articulation, this interplay of the formal and the ideological values of news “binds the inner discourse of the newspaper to the ideological universe of the society.”

So while journalists may argue that they merely report what is happening in the real world, Hall asserts that these events enter the domain of ideology as soon as they become visible to the news-making process.

This, Schudson (2000) notes, is how journalists “make” or “manufacture” the news, acting as “gate-keepers” and making subjective judgements about what should be published and what should be rejected. In this regard, he is cautious not to suggest that journalists “fabricate” the news. His analysis of the sociology of news and its effects on the eventual product is based on three perspectives, namely:

- the political economy of news, which relates the outcome of the news process to the structure of the state, the locus of power, the economy and the economic foundation

- the social organisation of news work, which tries to understand how the practice of journalism is constrained by occupational and organisational demands.
- cultural approaches, which seek to establish relationships between “facts” in the news and culturally-based symbols (Ibid:177).

Schudson (2000) notes that a cultural account of news helps explain generalised images and stereotypes in the news media that transcend structures of ownership or patterns of work relations.

McQuail (1994) points out that though liberal theory assumes that ownership can be effectively separated from control of editorial decisions, there is sufficient evidence to show that commercial imperatives, particularly the profit motive, does influence editorial content.

In the main, as Altschull (1984:113) notes, “the contents of the media always reflect the interests of those who finance them”.

According to McNair (1998), the study of the concrete manifestations of journalism reveal typologies such as news reports and feature articles with distinct rhetorical styles which are occupationally founded and organisationally entrenched.

Negrine (1994) writes that because news production is continuous and newspapers, radio and TV bulletins have to be produced every 24 hours, the process is “organised, routinised and freed from a haphazard supply of news”. He notes that to regularise the flow of news, journalists are placed in institutions (Parliament, the courts, police stations). A related practice which also makes news predictable is the reliance of the news organisation on set events and the “diary” - a record of forthcoming events (example political conferences, speeches by prominent people, press conferences).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework for investigating how the Ghanaian media reports Parliament and the extent to which they provide citizens with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. It describes the research design used in the study and justifies the use of qualitative method in the exercise. The chapter describes and discusses the processes through which data was gathered and analysed for the study.

#### **3.1 Method**

This study used a qualitative method of research. It assesses general newspaper content of parliamentary coverage in Ghanaian in two national dailies over a 12-month period using content analysis as the main research technique. This methods was chosen because it provides a practical methodological basis for finding out how the Ghanaian media reports Parliament and the extent to which it provides information, interpretation and debate on issues that affect citizens and should therefore concern them.

In other words, the method was chosen for its capacity to help the researcher answer the following questions:

- when Parliament is reported, what news does the media focus on?
- how is this news presented in the media?
- how does newspaper coverage of Parliament provide vital political communication and interpretation to citizens?

### 3.2 Sampling technique

The study was based on coverage in one government daily, the *Daily Graphic* and one private daily, the *Daily Guide*. To investigate media coverage of Parliament in Ghana and to be able to make inferences about it, it was imperative to study both types of papers, their editorial positions notwithstanding.

A period of twelve months between January and December 2014 was chosen as the basis for the study. It was chosen to represent the extent of parliamentary activity as well as the extent of parliamentary coverage in the Ghanaian media.

The Parliament of Ghana meets three times in a year. The first meeting takes place from mid-January to the end of March. The second meeting takes place between May and July, and the third from October to December, which means that in reality, Parliament meets for nine months in a year. Seventy two (72) editions of both the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* papers were reviewed for news on Parliament of Ghana.

Parliament sits from Tuesday to Friday during the period that the institution is in session. Because of the days of sitting, newspaper reports about activities in Parliament normally run only from Wednesdays to Saturdays in both newspapers.

A composite week was constructed to get a representative sample. Riffe, and Lacy (1993, cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2011) demonstrated that a composite week sampling technique was superior to both a random sample and a consecutive day sample when dealing with newspaper content. For example, a study might use a sample of one Monday (drawn at random from the number of possible Mondays in the month), one Tuesday (drawn from the available Tuesdays), and so on, until all weekdays have been included (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

The universe was publications of the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* spanning January 1 to December 31, 2014.

Using the constructed composite week, six (6) editions were selected from each month and that amounted to seventy two (72) editions for the *Daily Graphic* and seventy two (72) editions of the *Daily Guide* for the sample size (for the content analysis). And forty eight (48) news items for the *Daily Graphic* and forty two (42) news items for the *Daily Guide* were analysed (see Appendix I for the list of news items studied). Using Wimmer and Dominick's (2011) example as a model, a sample of one Monday (drawn at random from the number of possible Mondays in the month), one Tuesday (drawn from the available Tuesdays), and so on, was considered until all weekdays including Saturdays had been included for the month of January (see Appendix A for the 72 editions of the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* respectively, and the list of news items studied). This was applied to all the twelve months.

### **3.3 Content Analysis**

Content analysis has been defined by Walizer and Wienir (1978, cited in Wimmer and Dominic, 2011) as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information; Krippendorff (2004, cited in Wimmer and Dominic, 2011) defines it as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context whereas Kerlinger (2000) views it as a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. This means that the content to be analysed is selected according to explicit and consistently applied rules; the researcher's personal idiosyncrasies and biases should not enter into the findings. This definition points out the

quantifying focus of quantitative research methods and the objectiveness of the findings because the procedures followed in a study must be clearly spelt out.

In this study, parliamentary news items published in the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* over a period of 12 months were content analysed. Content analysis as a method is said to amply provide answers to the questions a researcher wishes to study (Deacon et al., 2007 cited in Alowo, 2010).

The study was based on the analysis of “hard news” and “continuing news” reports from Ghana’s Parliament appearing in *the Daily Graphic* and *the Daily Guide* from January to December 2014. The typology or category of “hard news” and “continuing news” used in this study are derived from Tuchman (1978). She notes that “hard news” refers to “factual presentations of events and occurrences deemed newsworthy” (like a train accident, a bank hold-up and the presentation of legislative proposal before Congress) whereas “continuing news” refers to “a series of stories on the same subject based upon events occurring over a period of time” (such as a the process of passing a legislative bill).

It was imperative, as part of the study, to define parliamentary news in the context of Tuchman's (1978) typology of hard and continuing news. In this regard, the study abstracted definitions of what constitutes parliamentary news from Negrine (1998:133).

He notes that a “parliamentary news item” could be:

- an item which was located in a parliamentary institution, for example, a debate, or
- an item which involved a parliamentary actor in a parliamentary institution, for example, a ministerial statement, or

- an item which involved a parliamentary actor in a non-parliamentary location, for example, a minister making a speech in a public forum (Ibid).

Negrine (1999) insists on this distinction for the practical reason of coding so that straight parliamentary news items could be distinguished from ordinary political news items featuring Cabinet Ministers and other parliamentary actors in non-parliamentary locations.

In defining parliamentary news, Negrine (1999:21) acknowledges Franklin's (1995) earlier definition:

Any report predominantly appertaining to parliament or featuring an MP in any of her/his parliamentary roles, or any report where an MP is the major focus of the story in their capacity either as a member of a political party or as a private individual.

In the wider context of the objective of the study, it was imperative to also acknowledge Keefer's (1993) concept of parliamentary news. He identifies three distinct forms of empowering news, which he classifies as: policy information: information about the substance of an issue, including information defining and backgrounding the issue and information describing the competing proposals; political information: information “about the composition, strength and views of the competing forces and information about the likely effects of a policymaker's action on his or her career”; and operational information: information about the locus, timing and procedures for issue-related decisions that need to be made by policymaking bodies (Ibid:136)

Keefer (1993:413-4) argues that “any news coverage of an issue, even a one-paragraph newspaper article provides at least some policy information to the reader. That is because the mere mention that an issue exists is policy information. A news item might contain detailed policy information such as the relative merits of the competing policy proposals or the potential effect of those proposals on the average citizen. News coverage could offer political information

such as the identity of the government officials and private-sector organisations that are leading the competing forces, information that helps citizens form judgements on an issue” (Ibid).

As a research method, content analysis facilitated the investigation of the nature as well as the amount of newspaper coverage of Parliament of Ghana, the specific issues from the institution that found their way into publication and the relative importance the papers attached to them through the actual placement of the news reports in the media.

Newspaper coverage of Parliament was analysed based on the following categories:

- Subject categories based on government ministries (given that some of the issues that are presented before the House are brought by cabinet ministers. Furthermore, most of the standing parliamentary committees are formed around the constituency of government ministries and their areas of operation. In this regard, subjects like agriculture, social welfare, defence and security, land and natural resources are suggested.
- Member of Parliament-constituency-related stories, where MPs make statements and contributions of relevance to their constituencies, using the plenary of the House;
- Bills (that is, proposed laws tabled before Parliament for discussion and possible enactment or amendment);
- Points of order (that is, official objection raised by Members of Parliament regarding what they consider to be an infringement of parliamentary procedures)

The other categories used were based on “information sources used in the stories”. In this case, the following sources were categorised:

- Front-Bencher (leadership of both the majority and minority side)
- Back-bencher (both the majority and minority)

- Minority parties
- Speakers of the House

The final category used to facilitate the content analysis was “editorial importance given to stories”. In this regard, “importance” was determined by and graded according to where the story was placed in the newspaper and categorised as follows:

- front page placement/main headline story
- editorial page placement
- inside pages.

The data was broken down per newspaper but was discussed comparatively on a day-by-day basis to show which issues and what stories made the headlines on the particular days chosen for analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study into media coverage of Parliament as a source of news against the theoretical and conceptual background of media and democracy. Besides discussing the nature of parliamentary coverage in Ghana and the trends that characterise it, the chapter outlines how reportage can be enhanced for better public opinion formation as well as gives newspaper readers authoritative news and information about issues of national importance.

#### Content Analysis of Newspaper Reports from Parliament

The study investigated Ghanaian newspaper reportage of Parliament to establish the kind of news the press focuses on, how this news is presented and whether, in the main, such coverage provides citizens with vital political communication, interpretation and debate on national issues. It focused primarily on the news genre as the basis for analysis, examining hard news from Parliament appearing in the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and the privately-owned *Daily Guide* between January and December 2014. In the context of the study, the typology of news genre in question is derived from Tuchman (1978), Reinemann et al (2011) who define “hard news” as the “factual presentation of events and occurrences deemed newsworthy” (such as a train accident, a bank hold-up and the presentation of a legislative bill before Congress) and “continuing news” as “a series of stories on the same subject based upon events occurring over a period of time” (such as the process of passing a legislative bill).

It was also necessary for the study to recognise a more specific type of “hard news” and “continuing news” from Parliament which Franklin (1995) describes as parliamentary news. For him, “Any report predominantly appertaining to parliament or featuring an MP in any of her/his parliamentary roles, or any report where an MP is the major focus of the story in their capacity as a member of a political party or as a private individual,” is parliamentary news.

The classification of topics, issues or themes covered in the news reports chosen for analysis is a common point of departure for studies of media content (Hansen 1998).

In the particular case of this study, the analysis of news was restricted to the following categories: subjects (i.e. based on government ministries of standing parliamentary committees such as agriculture, social welfare, defence and security, land and health, constituency-related stories, bills), information sources used in stories (i.e. ministers, back benchers, minority MPs, Speaker of the House) and editorial importance given to stories (on the basis of stories appearing in the front pages and editorial comments in the papers). The subject categories cited above were chosen in line with the study's general area of investigation, and that is to establish whether media coverage of Parliament provides citizens with vital political communication, interpretation and debate on national issues. The information sources as well as stories in individual newspapers used as categories in the content analysis illustrate how the process of news production affects the news product, making news, as Tuchman (1978), Schudson (2000) and Franklin (1997) argue, a social construction of reality. All these aspects are crucial to the study of news content and its informational and interpretative value for the newspaper-reading public. Analysing and quantifying the information sources quoted in the news reports as well as the placement of the reports in the newspapers illustrates how social power is expressed in news production and signifies the relative importance attached to stories. The following section

describes the content of news reports from Parliament published in the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* of selected dates from 1st January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014.

**Newspaper Coverage of Parliament in the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* during the period of study**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Subject<br/>Daily Guide</b>             | <b>Informa<br/>tion<br/>Source<br/>(Daily<br/>Guide)</b> | <b>Subject<br/>Daily Graphic</b>   | <b>Informatio<br/>n<br/>Source<br/>(Daily<br/>Graphic)</b> | <b>Editorial<br/>Importanc<br/>e</b> |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| 6 Jan       | Fireworks in parliament over merchant bank | Dominic Nitiwil  | MP for Agona East fetes children   | Pokuah Sawyer  |                                      |
| 14 Jan      |  |  | Newmont involve in galamsey?<br><br>Speakers wrath to descend on MPs<br><br>Parliament to acquire transcription machinery to aid production of | Kwabena Donkor<br><br>Speaker<br><br>Speaker               |                                      |

|        |  |                   |  |                       |  |
|--------|--|-------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
|        |  |                   | hansard  |                       |  |
| 18 Jan |  |                   | Presidency clashes with minority leader over alleged use of public funds for 2012 congress         | Minority Leader       |  |
| 22 Jan |  |                   |  |                       |  |
| 23 Jan | Annor Dompokh donates to SMARTS        | Annor Dompokh     |  |                       |  |
| 31 Jan | Parliament freezes GWCL's prepaid plan | David Oppong Kusi |  |                       |  |
| 3 Feb  | MPs Adopt Tweaa                        | Frank Boakye      |  |                       |  |
| 15 Feb |  |                   | Government takes steps to enforce judgement<br><br>Plant Breeders Bill will not promote GMO-Bagbin | Minister Alban Bagbin |  |
| 18     | Dome MP                                | Adwoa             |  |                       |  |

|           |                                     |          |  |  |  |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|----------|--|--|--|
| Feb       | troubled over<br>drug abuse         | Safo     |  |  |  |
| 19<br>Feb | Sherry Ayittey<br>hot in parliament | Minister | Minority attributes<br>fall of cedi to bad<br>economic<br>management<br><br>Parliament bans use<br>of tweaa in House<br><br>First Deputy<br>Speaker retracts<br>directives to roads<br>and transport<br>committee on<br>Legon toll<br><br>President to present<br>state of the nation<br>address | Anthony<br>Akoto<br><br>Speaker<br><br>Dominic<br>Nitiwil<br><br>Kumbour<br>Kyei<br>Mensah |  |
| 27<br>Feb |                                     |          |  |  |  |
| 28        | Minister dodges                     | Minister | Minority calls on  | Osei Akoto   |  |

|             |                         |                  |   |  |            |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------|---|--|------------|
| Feb         | MPs                     |                  | government to<br>increase cocoa<br>price  |  |            |
| 3<br>March  |                         |                  |   |  |            |
| 11<br>March |                         |                  | Probe Bagbin's<br>bribe claims  | Bagbin                                 | Front Page |
| 19<br>March | Okudzeto sweats         | Minister         | MPs disagree over<br>restrictions at<br>Legon<br><br>Speaker urges<br>media, parliament<br>to expand<br>democratic practice | Muntaka<br><br>Mubarack<br><br>Speaker |            |
| 20<br>March |                         |                  | MPs condemn<br>sports hooliganism   | Kwaku<br><br>Baah                      |            |
| 28<br>March |                         |                  |   |  |            |
| 29<br>March | MPs face Afari-<br>Gyan | Agyema<br>n Manu |   |  |            |

|             |                                    |                 |   |  |  |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|---|--|--|
| 1<br>April  |                                    |                 | Parliament worried about spate of gruesome murders<br><br>MP calls for guidance and counseling coordinators | Ursula Owusu<br><br>Robert Kwesi Amoah |  |
| 2<br>April  |                                    |                 | Economy in dire straits – Minority  | Akoto Osei                             |  |
| 7<br>April  | Minority Leader calls for RTI Bill | Minority Leader | Present Petroleum exploration, production bill to parliament-ACEP calls on parliament                       | Civil Society                          |  |
| 10<br>April |                                    |                 | Aflao honours Osei Ameyaw   | Osei Ameyaw                            |  |
| 25<br>April |                                    |                 |   |  |  |
| 26<br>April |                                    |                 | Parliament bemoans failure of pre-tertiary institutions to abide  | Kwaku Agyemang Manu                    |  |

|        |                                       |                    |  |   |  |
|--------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|---|--|
|        |                                       |                    | by guidelines  |   |  |
| 5 May  | MP blames government for workers woes | Freda Prempeh      |  |   |  |
| 6 May  |                                       |                    | Minority against use of Heritage fund to bail economy<br><br>MP for Gomoa West to rehabilitate roads | Anthony Osei<br><br>Francis Kojo Arthur |  |
| 14 May |                                       |                    |  |   |  |
| 22 May | MPs mad at postponement               | Benito Owusu       |  |   |  |
| 30 May | Parliament is rubber stamp            | Richard Amoaku Baa |  |   |  |
| 31 May |                                       |                    | Obuasi West MP urges government to cut waste and corruption  | Kwaku Kwateng                           |  |

|         |   |                         |  |                       |  |
|---------|---|-------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
| 2 June  | Parliament reconvenes June 10   | Minority Leader         | MP for Agona East embarks on "Life First" project                                  | Pokua Sawyer          |  |
| 10 June | Parliament finally today  | speaker                 |  |                       |  |
| 18 June | 100 MPs back Nana, says Ayorkor Botchew                                 | Ayorkor Botchew         | MPs on saga of missing babies at Okomfo Anokye Agona East MP fetes BECE candidates | Speaker Pokuah Sawyer |  |
| 26 June | Tarkwa MP visits flood areas MP fights minister over teachers' salaries | Gifty Kusi Joseph Andoh | Baptism of fire for deputy minister of local government                            | Osei Bonsu Amoah      |  |
| 27 June |   |                         |  |                       |  |
| 28 June | MPs stripped of Protocol Services                                       | Emmanuel Bedzra         | Ghana still reeling from corruption- Bagbin restates in                            | Alban Bagbin          |  |

|         |   |                                 |   |                                |           |
|---------|---|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-----------|
|         | Brace up for more fuel shortages-MP   | Robert Moosore                  | House   |                                |           |
| 7 July  |   |                                 | Agona East MP supports aged   | Pokuah Sawyer                  |           |
| 8 July  | \$156 million World Bank loan is chop chop-Minority<br><br>Western MPs visit Gladys Asmah | Agyema n Manu<br><br>Gifty Kusi | Loan for SHS likely to end in private pocket-minority                         | Kwaku Agyemang Manu            |           |
| 16 July | NDC approves \$300 million loan   | minority                        | Loan deal for Ghana Armed Forces divide parliament                            | Akoto Osei                     |           |
| 17 July | Terkper hot over statutory funds  | minority                        | Putting economy on an even footing<br><br>Mid-year review, indication of more | Editorial<br><br>Asibey yeboah | Editorial |

|            |   |                      |   |                   |  |
|------------|---|----------------------|---|-------------------|--|
|            |   |                      | hardship  |                   |  |
| 25<br>July |   |                      |   |                   |  |
| 26<br>July |   |                      |   |                   |  |
| 4 Aug      |   |                      |   |                   |  |
| 12<br>Aug  |   |                      |   |                   |  |
| 13<br>Aug  | MP cries foul<br>over electoral<br>register | Owusu<br>Amank<br>wa |   |                   |  |
| 21<br>Aug  |   |                      |   |                   |  |
| 22<br>Aug  |   |                      |   |                   |  |
| 30<br>Aug  |   |                      |   |                   |  |
| 1 Sept     |   |                      | Government will<br>address economic<br>challenges | Georgina<br>Aboah |  |
| 9 Sept     | RTI coalition<br>commends MPs               | Alban<br>Bagbin      |   |                   |  |
| 10         |   |                      |   |                   |  |

|         |  |                                |  |                  |  |
|---------|--|--------------------------------|--|------------------|--|
| Sept    |  |                                |  |                  |  |
| 11 Sept | MPs common fund frozen   | Akoto Afriyie                  | Lower Manya MP supports Yokwenor Community | Oklertey Terlabi |  |
| 19 Sept |  |                                |  |                  |  |
| 20 Sept | Minority Leader okays Nana MP mad at galamsey activities         | Minority Leader Kingsley Gyedu | MP presents scholarship to 95 students     | Owusu Akoto      |  |
| 2 Oct   | Bagbin back as Leader Government goes for \$2.2 billion loan     | Minority Leader Speaker        | Bagbin back as Majority Leader             | Alban Bagbin     |  |
| 3 Oct   | Bagbin collapses-rushed to hospital Spio Garbrah shows arrogance | Ben Kumbour Mathew Prempeh     | Parliament approves Spio-Garbrah           | Kumbour Ben      |  |

|           |                             |                           |  |                    |  |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|--------------------|--|
|           | Asokwa MP<br>fights malaria | Patricia<br>Appiagy<br>ei |  |                    |  |
| 4 Oct     |                             |                           | Parliament<br>reviewing standing<br>orders-Burton Odro                 | Deputy<br>Speaker  |  |
|           |                             |                           | Parliament<br>approves loans for<br>three road projects                | Deputy<br>Speaker  |  |
| 7 Oct     |                             |                           | Committee on<br>Bagbin bribery<br>allegation presents<br>report        | Alban<br>Bagbin    |  |
| 8 Oct     |                             |                           | Minister to appear<br>before Parliament<br>on Ebola response<br>centre | Health<br>Minister |  |
| 25<br>Oct |                             |                           | MPs not happy<br>with deplorable<br>roads in<br>Akyemmansa             | Deputy<br>Speaker  |  |

|           |  |                                | District                             |                    |  |
|-----------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| 3 Nov     | New chamber for<br>MPs   | clerk                          |                                      |                    |  |
| 4 Nov     |  |                                |                                      |                    |  |
| 12<br>Nov | Probe cost of<br>Chinese chairs<br><br>Plant Breeders<br>Bill suspended<br>again               | Osei<br>Akoto<br><br>Speaker   |                                      |                    |  |
| 13<br>Nov | Speaker clashes<br>with Majority   | Speaker/<br>Minister           |                                      |                    |  |
| 21<br>Nov | Speaker angry<br>over dumsor<br><br>Minority set for<br>demo against<br>17.5% petroleum<br>tax | Parliame<br>nt<br><br>Minority | Mixed reactions<br>greet 2015 budget | Nana Ato<br>Arthur |  |
| 22<br>Nov |  |                                |                                      |                    |  |
| 1 Dec     |  |                                |                                      |                    |  |
| 2 Dec     |  |                                |                                      |                    |  |

|           |  |                         |   |                   |  |
|-----------|--|-------------------------|---|-------------------|--|
| 10<br>Dec | MP goes to Antoa<br>over NDC<br>congress | Emman<br>uel<br>Didieye | Use of \$ 1 billion<br>Eurobond-Tell us<br>the truth-NPP          | Akoto Osei        |  |
| 11<br>Dec | MP stops NDC                             | Emman<br>uel<br>Didieye |   |                   |  |
| 19<br>Dec |  |                         | Parliament<br>approves Dr.<br>Kwabena Donkor<br>as Power Minister | Mathew<br>Prempeh |  |
| 20<br>Dec |  |                         |   |                   |  |
|           |  |                         |   |                   |  |

**Total number of stories published in the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* newspapers during the period of study**

|                         | <b>Daily Graphic</b> | <b>Daily Guide</b> | <b>Daily Total</b> |  |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--|
| January                 | 5                    | 3                  | 8                  |  |
| February                | 7                    | 4                  | 11                 |  |
| March                   | 4                    | 2                  | 6                  |  |
| April                   | 6                    | 1                  | 7                  |  |
| May                     | 3                    | 3                  | 6                  |  |
| June                    | 5                    | 7                  | 12                 |  |
| July                    | 5                    | 4                  | 9                  |  |
| August                  | 0                    | 1                  | 1                  |  |
| September               | 3                    | 4                  | 7                  |  |
| October                 | 7                    | 5                  | 12                 |  |
| November                | 1                    | 6                  | 7                  |  |
| December                | 2                    | 2                  | 4                  |  |
| <b>Cumulative Total</b> | <b>48</b>            | <b>42</b>          | <b>90</b>          |  |
| <b>Percentage %</b>     | <b>53.3 %</b>        | <b>46.7 %</b>      | <b>100 %</b>       |  |

The above table shows that in the six days chosen to represent the twelve months of parliamentary sitting in the Year 2014, a total number of 90 news reports were published by the two newspapers. The *Daily Graphic* published forty eight (48) stories, which represents 53.3 per cent of the total; the *Daily Guide* published 42 stories, which translates as 46.7 per cent of the

total. On the basis of these figures, it can be concluded that the *Daily Graphic* devoted more editorial space to parliamentary news than the *Daily Guide* during the study period.

**Information sources used in story (Speaker or Deputy Speaker appearing as main sources) during the period of study**

|                                     | <b>Daily Graphic</b> | <b>Daily Guide</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| January                             | 2                    | 0                  |
| February                            | 1                    | 0                  |
| March                               | 1                    | 0                  |
| April                               | 0                    | 0                  |
| May                                 | 0                    | 0                  |
| June                                | 1                    | 1                  |
| July                                | 0                    | 0                  |
| August                              | 0                    | 0                  |
| September                           | 0                    | 0                  |
| October                             | 3                    | 1                  |
| November                            | 0                    | 2                  |
| December                            | 0                    | 0                  |
| <b>Total Cumulative</b>             | <b>8</b>             | <b>4</b>           |
| <b>Total Number of Stories</b>      | <b>48</b>            | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>% of total number of stories</b> | <b>16.7%</b>         | <b>9.5%</b>        |

This Table shows that in the study, the *Daily Graphic* carried eight reports which featured the Speaker of Parliament (or his Deputy) whereas the *Daily Guide* carried four reports as the main source of information. This means that Speaker-driven accounted for 16.7 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Graphic* published and 9.5 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Guide* published during the period of study.

**Information sources used in story (Majority Members) appearing as main sources) during the period of study**

|                                     | <b>Daily Graphic</b> | <b>Daily Guide</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| January                             | 2                    | 0                  |
| February                            | 1                    | 0                  |
| March                               | 2                    | 0                  |
| April                               | 0                    | 0                  |
| May                                 | 0                    | 0                  |
| June                                | 3                    | 1                  |
| July                                | 1                    | 0                  |
| August                              | 0                    | 0                  |
| September                           | 3                    | 1                  |
| October                             | 3                    | 1                  |
| November                            | 0                    | 0                  |
| December                            | 0                    | 2                  |
| <b>Total Cumulative</b>             | <b>15</b>            | <b>5</b>           |
| <b>Total Number of Stories</b>      | <b>48</b>            | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>% of total number of stories</b> | <b>33.3%</b>         | <b>11.2%</b>       |

During the study period, the *Daily Graphic* published fifteen stories which featured members of parliament from the majority as the main source of information whereas the *Daily Guide* published five. In percentage terms, the *Daily Graphics'* story constitutes 33.3 per cent of its total coverage and 11.9 per cent of the *Daily Guide's* coverage.

**Information sources used in story (Minority Members) appearing as main sources) during the period of study**

|                                     | <b>Daily Graphic</b> | <b>Daily Guide</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| January                             | 1                    | 3                  |
| February                            | 4                    | 2                  |
| March                               | 1                    | 1                  |
| April                               | 5                    | 1                  |
| May                                 | 3                    | 2                  |
| June                                | 1                    | 5                  |
| July                                | 3                    | 4                  |
| August                              | 0                    | 3                  |
| September                           | 1                    | 3                  |
| October                             | 0                    | 3                  |
| November                            | 1                    | 2                  |
| December                            | 2                    | 0                  |
| <b>Total Cumulative</b>             | <b>22</b>            | <b>29</b>          |
| <b>Total number of stories</b>      | <b>48</b>            | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>% of total number of stories</b> | <b>45.8%</b>         | <b>69%</b>         |

Table shows that the *Daily Graphic* published a total number of forty-eight stories out of the total number of twenty-two where minority members of parliament featured as the main sources of information. In terms of percentages, this translates as 45.8 per cent of the total number of

stories the *Daily Graphic* published during the period of study. The *Daily Guide* published twenty-nine stories during the study period where minority members of parliament featured as main sources of news. This translates as 69 percent of the total number of stories published by the Daily Guide.

**Information sources used in story (Ministers) appearing as main sources during the period of study**

|                                     | <b>Daily Graphic</b> | <b>Daily Guide</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| January                             | 0                    | 0                  |
| February                            | 1                    | 2                  |
| March                               | 0                    | 1                  |
| April                               | 0                    | 0                  |
| May                                 | 0                    | 0                  |
| June                                | 0                    | 0                  |
| July                                | 0                    | 0                  |
| August                              | 0                    | 0                  |
| September                           | 0                    | 0                  |
| October                             | 1                    | 0                  |
| November                            | 0                    | 1                  |
| December                            | 0                    | 0                  |
| <b>Total Cumulative</b>             | <b>2</b>             | <b>4</b>           |
| <b>Total number of stories</b>      | <b>48</b>            | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>% of total number of stories</b> | <b>4.1%</b>          | <b>9.5%</b>        |

The *Daily Guide* published more stories on ministers than the *Daily Graphic*. It accounted for 9.5 percent and 4.1 percent respectively. The *Daily Guide* during the study period published four stories whilst the *Daily Graphic* had two stories.

**Information sources used in story (Committee Leaders) appearing as main sources during the period of study**

|                                     | <b>Daily Graphic</b> | <b>Daily Guide</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| January                             | 1                    | 1                  |
| February                            | 3                    | 0                  |
| March                               | 0                    | 1                  |
| April                               | 2                    | 0                  |
| May                                 | 2                    | 0                  |
| June                                | 1                    | 2                  |
| July                                | 2                    | 2                  |
| August                              | 0                    | 0                  |
| September                           | 1                    | 1                  |
| October                             | 0                    | 1                  |
| November                            | 0                    | 1                  |
| December                            | 2                    | 0                  |
| <b>Total Cumulative</b>             | <b>14</b>            | <b>9</b>           |
| <b>Total number of stories</b>      | <b>48</b>            | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>% of total number of stories</b> | <b>29.1%</b>         | <b>21.4%</b>       |

Table shows that in the study, the *Daily Graphic* carried fourteen reports which featured the leadership of committees in parliament whereas the *Daily Guide* carried nine reports as the main source of information. This means that chairpersons of the various committees of parliament

accounted for 29.1 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Graphic* published and 21.4 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Guide* published during the period of study.

**Information sources used in story (Parliament as an institution) appearing as main sources during the period of study**

|                                     | <b>Daily Graphic</b> | <b>Daily Guide</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| January                             | 0                    | 0                  |
| February                            | 0                    | 0                  |
| March                               | 0                    | 0                  |
| April                               | 0                    | 0                  |
| May                                 | 0                    | 0                  |
| June                                | 0                    | 0                  |
| July                                | 0                    | 0                  |
| August                              | 0                    | 0                  |
| September                           | 0                    | 0                  |
| October                             | 0                    | 0                  |
| November                            | 1                    | 2                  |
| December                            | 1                    | 1                  |
| <b>Total Cumulative</b>             | <b>2</b>             | <b>3</b>           |
| <b>Total number of stories</b>      | <b>48</b>            | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>% of total number of stories</b> | <b>4.2%</b>          | <b>7.1%</b>        |

The above table shows that during the study period, Parliament as a collective source of news featured in both papers. The story which both papers carried on dealt with Parliament's vetting

and confirmation of the appointment of two nominees of the president, Dr. Ekow Spio-Garbrah and Dr. Kwabena Donkor as ministers of trade and power respectively.

Though Parliament as a main source of news was not originally considered as one of categories for analysis, the fact that it did appear during the period of study meant that it had to be accommodated.

**Information sources used in story (Back Benchers) appearing as main sources during the period of study**

|                                     | Daily Graphic | Daily Guide  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| January                             | 1             | 1            |
| February                            | 0             | 2            |
| March                               | 1             | 0            |
| April                               | 2             | 0            |
| May                                 | 1             | 2            |
| June                                | 3             | 2            |
| July                                | 2             | 0            |
| August                              | 0             | 1            |
| September                           | 2             | 1            |
| October                             | 0             | 1            |
| November                            | 1             | 0            |
| December                            | 0             | 2            |
| <b>Total Cumulative</b>             | <b>13</b>     | <b>12</b>    |
| <b>Total number of stories</b>      | <b>48</b>     | <b>42</b>    |
| <b>% of total number of stories</b> | <b>27%</b>    | <b>28.6%</b> |

Table shows that during the study period, a total of twenty-five stories were published by the two newspapers where a back-bencher from the ruling and minority parties were the main source of

information, representing 27% and 28.6% per cent of the total number of stories the paper published by the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* respectively.

**Percentage of total number of information sources appearing as main sources used by both the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* during the period of study.**

|  | Daily Graphic | Daily Guide |
|--|---------------|-------------|
| Subject based on govt. ministries                                    | 11            | 14          |
| MP-Constituency related issues                                       | 21            | 22          |
| Bills  | 4             | 3           |
| Others (debates on estimates of expenditure, constitutional issues,) | 8             | 5           |
| Non-parliamentary issues   | 2             | 1           |
| Total  | 46            | 45          |
| % of Total no of subject appearing                                   | 100%          | 100%        |

Table shows that on the whole subjects based on the constituency of government ministries (eg. Finance, Agriculture, Lands and Health) constituted the second largest category of subjects reported by the media during the period of study. Of the 46 subjects that appeared in the *Daily Graphic*, 11 of these were subjects relating to government ministries. This constituted 23.9 per

cent of the total number of subjects appearing in the paper during the study period. Out of the 45 subjects that appeared in the *Daily Graphic*, 31.1 per cent of these related to government ministries and their constituencies.

In the *Daily Graphic*, MP-constituency-related issues constituted the largest majority of subjects published during the study period, making up 45.6 per cent of the total number of subjects reported by the paper. For the *Daily Guide*, MP-constituency related matters constituted 48.9 per cent whereas bills made up 6.7 per cent of subjects covered by the paper during the study period. Bills constituted 8.7 per cent of subjects reported by the *Daily Graphic* during the study period. Debates (such as constitutional matters, debates of estimates of expenditure, Motion of Thanks to the President's Address and other subjects falling outside the stipulated categories) constituted 11.1 per cent of the subjects covered by the *Daily Guide* and 17.4 per cent of subjects covered by the *Daily Graphic*. The *Daily Graphic* devoted 4.3 percent to non-parliamentary issues during the study period with the *Daily Guide* devoting 2.2 per cent of its focus on the subjects.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The content analysis revealed that news from Parliament as reported by the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* conforms to the description of a “parliamentary news item” by Negrine (1998:133) as

an item which was located in a parliamentary institution, for example a debate or an item which involved a parliamentary actor in a parliamentary institution, for example, a ministerial statement, or an item which involved a parliamentary actor in a non-parliamentary location (Ibid).

It showed that the news reports in question predominantly appertained to Parliament, were located in Parliament and dealt solely with the activities of parliamentary actors in their parliamentary roles, in this case, as primary sources of news. The study also revealed that whether newspapers are state owned or privately owned, coverage of Parliament focuses primarily on who said what, when, where and under what circumstances, suggesting a very close similarity in the way the two papers report parliamentary news items. Numerically speaking, the *Daily Graphic* published more reports from Parliament than the *Daily Guide* during the study period. However, an assessment of the stories showed whereas the *Daily Guide* compressed several parliamentary actors talking about seemingly unrelated issues from the legislative assembly into single stories, the *Daily Graphic* broke these down into separate stories.

On the basis of these findings, parliamentary coverage by the Ghanaian media can be said to be lacking in what Keefer (1993) describes as “empowering news” from the legislative assembly,

that is: policy information, information about the substance of an issue, including information defining and backgrounding the issue and information describing the competing proposals and operational information, information about the locus, timing and procedures from issue-related decisions that need to be made by policymaking bodies.

On account of the absence of laid down procedure for knowledge build up, it can be argued that the nature of newspaper coverage of Parliament is such that it does not provide readers with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. In spite of the apparent superficiality of newspaper coverage of Parliament in Ghana, most of the stories published by both papers were based on MP-Constituency related subjects. . It accounted for 48.9 per cent of the *Daily Guides'* coverage and 45.6 per cent of the *Daily Graphic's*. For the *Daily Graphic*, government ministries or ministers as brought before the House by Cabinet Ministers and the Majority Leader in his capacity as leader of the House accounted for 23.9 per cent of the paper's coverage against 31.1 per cent in the *Daily Guide*. Speaker-driven stories, where the Speaker was making rulings and providing information, also formed a significant part of the *Daily Graphic's* coverage of Parliament, accounting for 16.7 per cent of its coverage.

In terms of placement of stories, the *Daily Graphic* attached greater importance to news from Parliament than the *Daily Guide*. This conclusion is based on the fact that it had two front page stories it published during the study period and an editorial commentary whereas the *Daily Guide's* stories had one front page story and no editorial commentary on parliament.

The *Daily Guide* cited minority MPs as a main source of news from Parliament more than the *Daily Graphic*. In the same breath, the back-benchers from the minority parties cited as main sources of news in the *Daily Guide* is greater than in the *Daily Graphic*. It could also be said that

in terms of occurrence, non-parliamentary items (such as a former president's or a leading opposition member non-attendance of the ceremonial opening of Parliament) are more likely to make headlines in the *Daily Guide* than in the *Daily Graphic*.

On the basis of the items that get to make the headlines, it can be said that on the whole, newspaper coverage of Parliament is intrinsically linked to the procedures of the House, to rulings by the Speaker (and his Deputies), to submissions deriving from the constituency of government ministries as submitted by Cabinet Ministers as well as bills deriving from the said constituencies, to submissions made by MPs relating to their individual constituencies, to contributions made by Members on issues on the floor of the House. The nature of coverage, particular the focus on procedural matters or matters ingrained in the traditions of the House could explain why newspaper coverage of Parliament has been described as “episodic” (Djokotoe 2000), occurring only when Parliament is in session. In other words, when Parliament is not in formal session, there is no newspaper coverage. Interestingly, this has implications on the sociology of news production in the particular context of the Ghanaian media in the sense that it has a bearing on what journalists perceive news from Parliament to be and on how, in the words of Schudson (2000), journalists “make” news.

However, on the basis of the content analysis alone, it is not possible to tell whether the nature of newspaper coverage of Parliament is based on what Schudson (2000: 177) describes as “the political economy of news, which relates the outcome of news processes to the structure of the state, the locus of power, the economy, the economic foundation of the news organization” or on the “social organisation of news work, which tries to understand how the practice of journalism is constrained by occupational and organisational demands”.

Admittedly, the sample of which the content analysis is based may seem too small to provide a valid basis for drawing tangible and far-reaching conclusions on the state of newspaper coverage of Parliament in Ghana. As Wimmer and Dominick (1991) argue, “the larger the sample, the better” because “if too few dates are selected for analysis, the possibility of an unrepresentative sample is increased”. Deacon et.al, (1999) agree with this view and note that “the more limited the time period is, the more susceptible it is to distortion by one-off unforeseen events”.

However, the focus of this research was not the numerical incidence of newspaper coverage of Parliament but the nature of coverage, particularly the extent to which reportage of the legislature provides information, interpretation and debate on issues that affect citizens. Thus insofar as the content analysis helped quantify the salient and manifest features of newspaper content in order to provide a basis for making “broad inferences about the processes and politics of representation” (Deacon et.al.1999), the sample was adequate.

If the findings of the study are anything to go by, then newspaper coverage of Parliament in Ghana is too informationally deficient to provide newspaper readers with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. Though in terms of its content, in terms of the actors and the location of story, news from Parliament as reported by the two papers can be said to meet the criteria of “parliamentary news items” as defined by Negrine (1998), it is lacking in the kind of information that is empowering.

This is because irrespective of whether government or private, the primary focus of media coverage is personalities, not issues or principles. On the basis of the criterion of content, newspaper coverage of Parliament cannot be said to have the capacity to inform public opinion significantly.

It is therefore doubtful whether, in the particular case of Ghana, newspapers can play a public sphere role, contributing to the democratic process by informing citizens and helping them engage in public discourses. In short, the media in Ghana presumed informational and interpretative prerogative within the context of media and democracy is noticeably.

It can therefore be concluded that Dahlgren's (1995) assumption that the "health of democracy" is dependent on media that play a public sphere role does not apply to the Ghanaian media. For the Ghanaian media to be relevant to the public information and public opinion forming process within the context of media and democracy, it has to undergo significant changes. Only then can there be what Kuhn (1996) describes as "high-level deliberation" by the newspaper-reading Ghanaian public - that is, "reasoning and discussion about the merits of public policy". In the main, the strong case liberal theory makes about the role media play in the functioning of democracy crumbles under the sheer weight of the findings of this study about the Ghanaian media.

The study set out to investigate how the Ghanaian media reports Parliament and the extent to which it provide citizens with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. It sought to establish whether the nature of coverage by the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and the privately-owned *Daily Guide* was such that it informs public opinion. The study was based on the hypothesis that in a democracy, mass media inform citizens and help them engage in public discourses. The fact that Ghana returned to a multi-party democracy since 1993 provided the justification for investigating whether the media do indeed contribute to the democratic process by encouraging wide and inclusive debate about issues of social and political importance and giving guidance on the interpretation of information given to citizens.

The study established that though the media in Ghana does inform citizens about what is happening in the legislature, it falls far short of educating them on the meaning and significance of the facts deriving there from. An assessment of newspaper coverage from Parliament revealed that it does not provide context, background and/or interpretation to the facts.

The study also showed that media coverage is confined to summarised transcripts of submissions made by parliamentary actors on the floor of the House, an account of bills were presented in Parliament by whom, points of order raised and the Speaker's ruling on them. In other words, media content lacks the kind of policy, political and operational information contrived to inform public opinion, empower citizens and encourage wide and inclusive debate about issues of social, economic and political importance.

As Keefer (1993) argues, if information holding is a "prerequisite for participation in the policymaking process and if the public must depend on news coverage for most issue-related information, then the public's ability to participate will depend largely on the extent and nature of news coverage of the issue in question". On account of the informational deficiency of its content, the media in Ghana's public service role can be described as insignificant.

This is because the nature of coverage is such that it is not oriented towards issue-related information, but to personalities and to what they say and did on the floor of the House.

The personalisation of coverage moved media attention away from the main functions and activities of Parliament. In the process of personalising coverage, the papers took sides, the state-owned *Daily Graphic* siding with the Speaker and with ruling party Members in the House, the *Daily Guide* with the Opposition.

The study also revealed how the government and private media, using conventional principles of news writing, socially constructed news from Parliament, accentuating the bipolarity between the ruling party and the minority in the House, at the expense of empowering readers with issue-related policy, political and operational information.

This suggested that the political division between the ruling party and the minority parties in the House was of greater news value than Parliament's responsibility to make laws, approve proposals for taxation and public expenditure and to keep the work of government under scrutiny and review, evoking the observation by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) that the failure of the media to stimulate public debate could be because they have abrogated their public function and lapsed "into channels of personalisation, dramatisation, witch-huntery, soap operatics and sundry trivialities".

The study revealed that newspaper coverage of Parliament in the private media does not differ qualitatively from coverage in the private media, contrary to Ansah's (1991) argument that the independent media in Africa play a central role in mediating between views and opinions and generally sustaining the democratic process. It can be said, though, that the *Daily Guide* exists to counter-act the dominance of the state-owned *Daily Graphic*. However, the fact that together, the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* control the flow of information from Parliament, making subjective judgements about what should be published and what should be rejected reflects how the political economy of news ultimately shapes what the public receives as news and information from the media.

The study also revealed that what Schudson (2000) calls the social organisation of newswork affects the character of news (i.e the media's reliance on set events and how they regularise and routinise the coverage of such events).

For instance, the reportage in the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* reflected a journalistic adherence to the institutional routines of Parliament on debates, on bills submitted before the House, on points of order and rulings on these by the Speaker; in short on events which were directly located in Parliament and involved parliamentary actors within the precincts of the House. The lack of context, background and interpretation in the reports published by both the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* suggested that integration of such supplementary information into news from Parliament is not a characteristic feature of the editorial procedures of the two papers.

In spite of the superficiality of media coverage of an institution as important as Parliament, in spite of low newspaper circulation, research on media consumption and media effects in Ghana suggests a widespread belief in the power of newspapers to influence people's lives significantly, though the actual extent of this is not known.

For the media to play a public sphere role in a democracy, it will need to “re-invent” itself, as Glasser and Craft (1997) noted, only then can the public have a sound basis to engage with the news as citizens who, in the words of Sussman (1996) are “relatively well-informed about the policy debates taking place within political institutions (like Parliament) and are able to access the quality of representation of legislation in particular”

The “re-invention” of the Ghanaian media as a public sphere would need to start with an intervention in the social organisation of newswork that will make parliamentary reporting an

integrated newsroom function based on team reporting. As things stand, coverage of Parliament is the sole responsibility of the reporters assigned to cover Parliament when it is in session and these merely provides summarised transcripts of what transpires in the Legislature. An integrated approach to coverage would involve parliamentary correspondents and reporters, sub-editors and editors alike in pre-coverage preparation, issue analysis and contextualization, research, story development, and featurisation of parliamentary news to incorporate policy, political and operational information.

The approach being recommended is located in the trade-craft of newspaper journalism which makes the qualitative improvement of a report lacking in context and background a sub-editorial prerogative, one that requires newspaper sub-editors to supply the missing links in a story by making it less informationally deficient in order to make readers more aware of the issues embedded at the core of a story. It is also based on case studies and research into media coverage of the British, French, German and US legislative assemblies undertaken by Negrine (1998), Tunstall (1970) and Keefer (1993) which revealed that the media's decision to abandon news reports based on verbatim transcripts in favour of more detailed and in-depth coverage of the executive and the legislature. According to Tunstall (1970) the British media overhauled its coverage of Parliament to make it more informative and more relevant to the needs of the British public.

Pre-coverage preparation would involve inducting the editorial team that would need to be put in place to cover Parliament comprehensively into: the structure of Parliament, the extent of its mandate and its working procedures, the process of legislation (from the gestation of the idea as well as the political processes that motivate legislation and policy making, through the drafting by parliamentary draftsmen in the Attorney General Department and the mandatory reading

phases before it becomes law), the financial procedure as it pertains to how Parliament authorises government to spend national income), and how, through the standing and department related committees of Parliament, how the legislature keeps the work of government under scrutiny and review.

Pre-coverage preparation would also involve finding out which issues and bills are before the House (as laid out in the Order Paper - i.e. the agenda for parliamentary business), the contents of the various committee reports that have been submitted as well as the recommended actions Members have outlined and what is being done about their findings as well as their recommendations.

Such preparation would give a sense of purpose to coverage and give the editorial team a comprehensive idea of how Parliament works and what its mandate is.

Issue analysis and contextualisation would require the editorial team to go beyond the strictures of the House to analyse, interpret and contextualise the issues in Parliament with the view to giving readers a more detailed account of what is happening, why it is happening and what the implications of the outcomes of those happenings are likely to be in the short, medium and long term.

In the main, parliamentary correspondents would be required to report Parliament and to bring accounts of developments taking place therein. However, their work would be enhanced if sub-editors and editors used their time on the Desk to research supplementary information which could be woven into the fabric of news reports as interpretation and context. So, for instance, using this approach, a newspaper report of the annual Budget to Parliament by the Minister of Finance would go beyond a summarised transcript of the Budget Speech to investigate

government priorities on expenditure as outlined therein and what the implications of the Budget would be on the various sectors as well as on ordinary people.

Similarly, a parliamentary correspondent may report that a Broadcasting Bill has been presented before the House. However, the announcement about the tabling of the bill in the House would not qualify as empowering information until other members of the editorial team who are not present in Parliament when the bill was tabled can use supplementary resources to find out what difference the new piece of legislation will make once enacted, what developments have motivated it, how necessary is a broadcasting bill as a national concern, what form it takes and how offences deriving from the new legislation will be prosecuted, what arguments the supporters and detractors of the bill raise and why.

In the main, such an editorial strategy would also involve reporting, reviewing and analysing legislation (i.e. the law itself), the process, the contents of the law, its relevance, its contradictions and its weaknesses, the socio-political and cultural context as well as the background of legislation, the impact of legislation, the interpretation of legislation (as effected by judiciary which, to all intents and purposes is coterminous with the legislature, one makes law, the other interprets and applies the law), people's views about the law, its interpretation and its impact, the enforcement as well as the lack of enforcement and the absence of legislation and its implications.

This editorial mechanism would enable newspapers to go beyond routine parliamentary coverage to help readers understand enough about the law and legislation and consequently, to be more involved in the process of legislation.

The fact that “ignorance of the law is not a defence” in courts of law is another justification for an approach to reporting that aims at empowering readers with information which has utilitarian value. More importantly, such an approach to news and information would move newspapers way from the culture of event-oriented, speech-driven journalism to one that is issue driven.

The news feature is recommended as an editorial option for reporting news from Parliament because it is more suited for explaining, contextualising and backgrounding news and information than the Inverted Pyramid. As a method of news presentation, the Inverted Pyramid confines journalists to the strictures of reportage. Though it is useful for briefly giving readers a sense of what has happened, where, where, why and to whom it has happened, it does not provide an editorial framework for interpreting information and for creating a broad-based context for the news to be understood in.

If the news feature is recommended as an editorial option for reporting Parliament comprehensively, it is because the featurising of issues makes discussion and debate possible and can ultimately provide citizens with a broad range of information and interpretation and, in the main, inform public opinion.

### **Limitations of the study**

The study faced some challenges. The lack of much research done on the selection of news in Ghana posed a limitation to this study. Also, conducting a content analysis on a relatively smaller sample is another shortfall. Ideally, a larger sample size would have been preferred but due to time and resources limitation, a smaller sample which was manageable was used.

The other obvious limitation is that photographs which accompanied the news stories were not included yet they play a big role in the presentation of news text. However, the focus of this

study is news stories not pictures hence it would be important for future research to include pictures.

### **Recommendations**

Although this study answered the important questions the research wanted to address, others questions related to this subject remain unanswered. The role of photographs in the selection of the news was not explored. Probably a study that combines the position of the news stories, their length and the accompanying pictures would be useful in media content scholarship in Ghana.

### **Conclusion**

The study set out to investigate, through content analysis, how the Ghanaian media reports Parliament and the extent to which it provides citizens with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. It was undertaken against the background of the fact that Ghana returned to a multi-party democracy since 1993 and as in any democracy, the media is believed to play a public sphere role by informing citizens and helping them engage in public discourses.

Though the study revealed that the nature of newspaper coverage of Parliament is such that it does not provide citizens with a broad range of information and interpretation that can help them engage in public discourses, it has the capacity to do so, if the social organisation of newswork is transformed to make parliamentary reporting an integrated newsroom function driven by an editorial strategy that deliberately aims at informing public opinion. This way, the media in Ghana could begin to play a public sphere role in the country's fledgling democracy.

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## APENDIX

### HEADLINES OF THE STORIES CONTENT ANALYSED-DAILY GRAPHIC AND DAILY GUIDE NEWSPAPERS

| DATE   | DAILY GRAPHIC HEADLINES   | DAILY GUIDE HEADLINES                      |
|--------|---|--|
| JAN 08 | MP for Agona East fetes children  | Fireworks in parliament over merchant bank |
| JAN 14 | Newmont involve in galamsey?<br><br>Speakers wrath to descend on MPs<br><br>Parliament to acquire transcription machinery to aid production of hansard  |  |
| JAN 18 | Presidency clashes with minority leader over alleged use of public funds for 2012 congress  |  |
| JAN 23 |   | Annor Dompok donates to SMARTS             |
| JAN 31 |   | Parliament freezes GWCL's prepaid plan     |
| FEB 03 |   | MPs Adopt Tweaa                            |
| FEB 15 | Government takes steps to enforce judgement<br><br>Plant Breeders Bill will not promote GMO-Bagbin  |  |
| FEB 18 |   | Dome MP troubled over drug abuse           |
| FEB 19 | Minority attributes fall of cedi to bad economic management<br><br>Parliament bans use of tweaa in House<br><br>First Deputy Speaker retracts directives to roads and transport committee on Legon toll<br><br>President to present state of the nation address | Sherry Ayittey hot in parliament           |

|          |  |                                       |
|----------|--|---------------------------------------|
| FEB 28   | Minority calls on government to increase cocoa price   | Minister dodges MPs                   |
| MARCH 11 | Probe Bagbin's bribe claims  |                                       |
| MARCH 19 | MPs disagree over restrictions at Legon<br>Speaker urges media, parliament to expand democratic practice |                                       |
| MARCH 20 | MPs condemn sports hooliganism   |                                       |
| MARCH 29 |  | MPs face Afari-Gyan                   |
| APRIL 01 | Parliament worried about spate of gruesome murders<br>MP calls for guidance and counseling coordinators  |                                       |
| APRIL 02 | Economy in dire straits – Minority   |                                       |
| APRIL 07 | Present Petroleum exploration, production bill to parliament-ACEP<br>calls on parliament                 | Minority Leader calls for RTI Bill    |
| APRIL 10 | Aflao honours Osei Ameyaw  |                                       |
| APRIL 26 | Parliament bemoans failure of pre-tertiary institutions to abide by guidelines                           |                                       |
| MAY 05   |  | MP blames government for workers woes |
| MAY 06   | Minority against use of Heritage fund to   |                                       |

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
|         | bail economy<br><br>MP for Gomoa West to rehabilitate roads                               |   |
| MAY 22  |   | MPs mad at postponement   |
| MAY 30  |   | Parliament is rubber stamp  |
| MAY 31  | Obuasi West MP urges government to cut waste and corruption                               |   |
| JUNE 02 | MP for Agona East embarks on "Life First" project   | Parliament reconvenes June 10   |
| JUNE 10 |   | Parliament finally reconvenes today   |
| JUNE 18 | MPs on saga of missing babies at Okomfo Anokye<br><br>Agona East MP fetes BECE candidates | 100 MPs back Nana, says Ayorkor Botchew   |
| June 26 | Baptism of fire for deputy minister of local government                                   | Tarkwa MP visits flood areas<br><br>MP fights minister over teachers' salaries            |
| June 28 | Ghana still reeling from corruption-Bagbin restates in House                              | MPs stripped of Protocol Services<br><br>Brace up for more fuel shortages-MP              |
| July 07 | Agona East MP supports aged   |   |
| July 08 | Loan for SHS likely to end in private pocket-minority                                     | \$156 million World Bank loan is chop chop-Minority<br><br>Western MPs visit Gladys Asmah |
| July 16 | Loan deal for Ghana Armed Forces  | NDC approves \$300 million loan   |

|           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
|           | divide parliament   |   |
| July 17   | Putting economy on an even footing<br>Mid-year review, indication of more hardship                        | Terkper hot over statutory funds  |
| August 13 |   | MP cries foul over electoral register   |
| Sept. 01  | Government will address economic challenges   |   |
| Sept 09   |   | Government will address economic challenges   |
| Sept 11   | Lower Manya MP supports Yokwenor Community  | MPs common fund frozen  |
| Sept 20   | MP presents scholarship to 95 students  | Minority Leader okays Nana<br>MP mad at galamsey activities                                     |
| Oct 02    | Bagbin back as Majority Leader  | Bagbin back as Leader<br>Government goes for \$2.2 billion loan                                 |
| Oct 03    | Parliament approves Spio-Garbrah  | Bagbin collapses-rushed to hospital<br>Spio Garbrah shows arrogance<br>Asokwa MP fights malaria |
| Oct 04    | Parliament reviewing standing orders-<br>Burton Odro<br>Parliament approves loans for three road projects |   |
| Oct 07    | Committee on Bagbin bribery allegation  |   |

|        |   |  |
|--------|---|--|
|        | presents report   |  |
| Oct 08 | Minister to appear before Parliament on Ebola response centre |  |
| Oct 25 | MPs not happy with deplorable roads in Akyemmansa District    |  |
| Nov 03 |   | New chamber for MPs  |
| Nov 12 |   | Probe cost of Chinese chairs<br>Plant Breeders Bill suspended again            |
| Nov 13 |   | Speaker clashes with Majority  |
| Nov 21 |   | Speaker angry over dumsor<br>Minority set for demo against 17.5% petroleum tax |
| Dec 10 | Use of \$ 1 billion Eurobond-Tell us the truth-NPP            | MP goes to Antoa over NDC congress   |
| Dec 11 |   | MP stops NDC   |
| Dec 19 |   | Parliament approves Dr. Kwabena Donkor as Power Minister                       |