

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

**NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 2012 GENERAL ELECTIONS
A STUDY OF *THE GHANAIAN TIMES* AND *THE DAILY GRAPHIC***

BY

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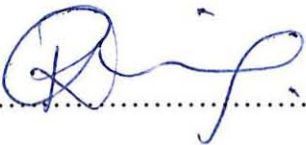


DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my original research, and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this institute or elsewhere. I am responsible for any shortcomings.

28th October, 2015

Date



David Etsey Agbenu

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby satisfy that the preparation of this dissertation was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of dissertation laid down by Ghana Institute of Journalism.

..... 29TH October 2015

Date

..... 

Dr. Etse Sikanku

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to Almighty God for showing me the way to seek further knowledge in my chosen profession at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. To Him is the Glory.

The research work is also dedicated to the memory of my late parents, Dr. E.K.M Agbenu, and Madam Victoria Akakpo-Agbenu , Ms Elizabeth Adusu, my dear wife and my Children, Kimathi Edem Agbenu and Madiba Kekleli Agbenu, for all the sacrifices they made to support me during my studies.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CPP: Convention People's Party

AFRC: Armed Forces Revolutionary Council

PNP: People's National Party

PNDC: Provisional National Defence Council

NDC: National Democratic Congress

NPP: New Patriotic Party

SPSS: Statistical Package the for Social Science

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ABSTRACT

Press freedom is a core aspiration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is widely seen as underpinning democratic freedoms such as the right to free speech and association. Media outlets are crucial to the exercise of freedom of expression because they provide the platform through which this right is effectively exercised. The public depend on the media to inform them of current events and this is more crucial the democratic process where it becomes outlets are channels through which citizens can communicate with each other and acting as a facilitator of informed debate between diverse social actors, encouraging the non-violent resolution of disputes. This study sought to find out whether the media, particularly the Ghanaian *Times* and the *Daily Graphic* newspapers provided adequate coverage during the 2012 general elections in Ghana. The study hinges on the Content Analysis theory as well Agenda Setting, Watchdog theories. The study was based on the assumption that media are more likely to give prominence to election stories concerning powerful politicians and government official instead of setting the agenda for public discourse. The findings derived from the study supported this assumption. A significant percentage of space that was devoted by the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic* newspapers contained stories about the political elite and government officials. This study, it is hoped will serve as guide to the media to be more responsive and provide adequate coverage for the satisfaction of all segments of the public.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In a democratic society, elections are mostly the conventional means of selecting citizens to become leaders in society. Presidential campaigns and elections determine who is selected as the head of state and to whom the majority of people would entrust guardianship of their sovereignty (Lindberg, 2006).

Few citizens personally attend political-campaign rallies. The media is central to presidential campaigns because of its communicative role of generating awareness and transmitting information. Benoit (2007), et al have conducted previous studies and acknowledge the dominant role of the mass media in the electoral process. In other words the media play a leading role in elections by serving as conduits of information. Besides, newspapers serve as a key source of issue knowledge for voters in presidential campaigns (Benoit, 2007).

Hollihan (2001) found that newspapers perform better at informing voters than television news, candidate advertising and radio because “for national political news coverage, the most thorough, comprehensive, and substantive information regarding political campaigns, political issues, and public policies is available to readers of comprehensive large city daily papers” (p. 79). Such significance needs investigation within the Ghanaian context. The media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without media. A free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast

a vote, but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debate and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself in order to make informed choices. Furthermore, media acts as a crucial watchdog to democratic elections, safeguarding the transparency of the process. Indeed, a democratic election with no media freedom, or stifled media freedom, would be a contradiction in terms.

Democratic Practice in Ghana Elections

In 1957, Ghana began its democratic journey with the Convention People's Party (CPP), headed by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah as the first Prime Minister of the country. It is on record that in 1960, after amendments of the constitution and on the country's attainment of sovereign status, he became the first President of the Republic of Ghana. By 1964, Ghana had become a one-party state, with his CPP as the only party that could contest elections. On 24 February 1966, Nkrumah was overthrown by the combined effort of the army and the police. The military regime of the National Liberation Council (NLC) headed by Lt. Gen. Ankrah, and later by Lt. Gen. Afrifa took over and ruled Ghana until 1969, when the democratic government headed by Dr. K.A. Busia of the Progress Party (PP) as Prime Minister came to power (ibid).

The PP government was however short-lived. In 1972, the military government of the National Redemption Council/ Supreme Military Council, headed by Gen. Acheampong and later by Gen. F. W. K. Akuffo, seized power. In June 1979, another military insurrection, this time led by junior army officers established another military regime of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), headed by Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings. The AFRC in

September 1979 handed over power to a democratically elected civilian government of the People's National Party (PNP), with Dr. Hilla Limann as President. This democratically elected government was also overthrown and another military regime named the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), and headed again by Flt. Lt. Rawlings, was formed on 31st December 1981 (Ninsin, 2001).

The government of the PNDC held onto power until 1992 when Ghana returned to constitutional rule. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) led by Mr. Rawlings was elected President of Ghana and steered the first constitutional government under the 4th Republic constitution which was inaugurated on 7th January 1993. The NDC retained power in 1996 elections for a second term in office. However, in the 2000 elections, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) led by Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor defeated the NDC Presidential candidate, Prof J.E.A Mills to take power. The NPP and its candidate were re-elected in 2004 election to retain power. The fifth successive democratic elections held in December 2008/January 2009 produced another President. Professor John Atta Mills of the NDC defeated Nana Akufo Addo of the NPP (Ghanaian Times, January 10, 2009).

The 7 December 2012 elections were the sixth Presidential and Parliamentary Elections since the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1992. When President Mills died suddenly on 24 July 2012, he was immediately succeeded by Vice-President John Mahama. The President's death was expected to significantly influence the elections. His candidacy had reportedly divided his own party and he was at odds with party founder and former President Jerry Rawlings, whose influence reportedly remained strong among sections of the party's

grassroots supporters. Rawlings had publicly and repeatedly predicted that with the late President at the helm, the ruling party would lose the 2012 elections

(Daily Guide, 14 March 2012).

There were some substantive policy differences between the two leading parties: the ruling NDC describes itself as social democratic and says it believes in the "egalitarian treatment of all persons". The opposition NPP pledged to "promote a vibrant, free-market economy". On its website, it states that its primary goal is to create a "property-owning democracy". The economy was touted as the key electoral battleground: both parties planned to use Ghana's new-found oil and other mineral wealth to kick-start an industrial transformation, improve state education, health services, infrastructure, and create jobs (Ghanaian Times, 18 June 2012).

One key area of divergence was education: the NPP proposed free High School education immediately; a policy that the NDC claimed was unrealistic, and whose alternative proposal called for the phasing-in of free Senior High School Education over a twenty year period. NPP candidates pointed to their party's management record – during its two terms in government, the economy more than doubled in size – whilst the NDC claimed that, after assuming office four years ago, it had presided over Ghana's elevation to a lower-middle income economy, with the economy registering a 14.4% growth rate in 2011. While some commentators viewed the elections as a two-horse race between the NDC and the NPP, smaller parties made their voices heard, articulated alternative policies and priorities, and in the context of the highly contested elections, potentially held the balance of power.

Agenda Setting, Media Representation and Electoral Coverage

Cohen (1963) commented that newspapers “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p. 13). While the news may not determine what the people should think, the news suggests which issue is salient and tells people that such an issue is something they should be thinking about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; see also Hetherington, 1996; Mendelsohn, 1996; Mondak, 1995).

The overall internal political situation in Ghana has remained largely peaceful. This is because the media fulfilled their roles, maintained a high level of professionalism, accuracy and impartiality in their coverage. Regulatory frameworks has help ensure high standards. Laws and regulation has guaranteed fundamental freedoms essential to democracy, including freedom of information and expression, as well as participation. Meanwhile, provisions such as requiring government media, funded out of public money, to give fair coverage and equitable access to opposition parties, help ensure appropriate media behaviour during elections.

The stability of a democratic order in any country is ultimately determined by the extent to which institutions such as the multiparty system, an independent judiciary, free media are able to function in a sustainable manner (Ninsin 2006).

A prime concern of media coverage of elections is the right of voters to full and accurate information, and their rights to participate in debates and dialogue on policy matters and

with politicians. Inherent to this task is the entitlement of parties and candidates to use the media as a platform for interaction with the public.

The contribution of the media in ensuring quality electoral process since 1992 cannot be overemphasized. The active presence of the media provided a constant stream of election coverage, which helped to generate a high degree of public interest in elections. By providing channels of discourse outside the state's control and expressing opposition views as well, the media has been largely responsible for keeping elections competitive (Gyimah-Boadi 1999).

The media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy. Discussion of the media's functions within electoral contexts, often focuses on their "watchdog" role: by unfettered scrutiny and discussion of the successes and failures of candidates, governments, and electoral management bodies, the media can inform the public of how effectively they have performed and help to hold them to account. Yet the media also have other roles in enabling full public participation in elections:

1. by educating voters on how to exercise their democratic rights;
2. by reporting on the development of an election campaign;
3. by providing a platform for the political parties and candidates to communicate their message to the electorate;
4. by providing a platform for the public to communicate their concerns, opinions, and needs, to the parties/candidates, the EMB, the government, and to other voters, and to interact on these issues;
5. by allowing the parties and candidates to debate with each other;

6. by reporting results and monitoring vote counting;
7. by scrutinizing the electoral process itself, including electoral management, in order to evaluate the fairness of the process, its efficiency, and its probity;
8. by providing information that, as far as possible, avoids inflammatory language, helping to prevent election-related violence.

The media are not the sole source of information for voters, but in a world dominated by mass communications, it is increasingly the media that determine the political agenda, even in less technologically developed countries.

This work will however argue along the lines and find out the argument that the media had not been able to meet its principle of fairness and provision of equal access to the media for all political parties and their candidates as part of important elements for leveling the political playing field.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are many stories which compete for space in the media every day. All the stories are judged by the media houses to be important for the society. These stories are remarkable happenings since they are unusual and as such qualify to make news.

Political coverage is never more trivial or evanescent than during an election. Where we might hope for enlightenment about the issues on which we will vote, we find gossip about the habits and style of political leaders, an obsession with statistically meaningless shifts in opinion polls and empty speculation about outcomes. Anyone would think that the media did not want us to understand the real choices confronting us.

While analysis of the issues dividing the political parties is often weak, coverage of those they have collectively overlooked is almost nonexistent. Political parties might claim to be at each other's throats, but they have often reached consensus about which issues are worthy of debate.

However, the media tends to cover a lot of political stories since it has easy access to the political class whose focus is to reach their constituents especially during an election year. The question therefore is who determines what stories get covered by the media and whether these stories are the only available news to the newspaper when there are equally competing news stories to cover. Besides, could it be that the coverage of political news is as a result of the editorial preferences of the newspapers? This study therefore seeks to find out whether the coverage of political news, particularly election coverage is done fairly, accurately and professionally by the media than other news stories.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

1. Examine the major issues of coverage of Ghana's 2012 general election in the Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic.
2. Finding out the Editorial consideration for the placement of stories of Ghana's 2012 election year.
3. Determine how much attention was dedicated to these issues raised and covered by the Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What were the major issues of coverage of Ghana's 2012 general elections in the Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic?
2. Finding out the editorial consideration for stories covered by the Ghanaian Times and the daily Graphic during Ghana's 2012 elections?
3. How much attention was dedicated to these the issues by the Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic during the 2012 elections in Ghana?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Traditionally, reporters working for *The Ghanaian Times* and *The Daily Graphic* are usually put on scheduled assignments and they have little control over what is put out in the newspapers each day. The final decision to give prominence or select a particular story for any page is then sole prerogative of the editorial board of the newspaper.

This study is significant since it will help determine the level of attention given to political news as compared to other social issues.

The study will assist the media to fulfill their roles, the media need to maintain a high level of professionalism, accuracy and impartiality in their coverage. A prime concern of media coverage of elections is the right of voters to full and accurate information, and their rights to participate in debates and dialogue on policy matters and with politicians. Inherent to this task is the entitlement of parties and candidates to use the media as a platform for interaction with the public, of which this study seek to address.

Furthermore, this study will help the media as well as civil society to become effective gate-keepers and play their role well as 'agenda setters' and not agenda followers, 'guard dogs'

or ‘lapdogs’ for politicians and the government. Arguably, the outcome of this study it is believed would add knowledge to the field.

1.5 SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to two newspapers, *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic* arguably the most widely read newspapers in the country (Temin and Smith, 2002)

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study is organised into five chapters.

Chapter one deals with the background of the study, the objectives, research questions, and statement of the problem, significance and structure of the study.

Chapter two reviews literature and discusses the theories relevant for this study.

Chapter three looks at the methodology used for the study in terms of methods, sampling and data collection instruments.

Chapter four is on data analysis and interprets the data gathered.

Chapter five deals with conclusion. It summarizes the research work, points out the limitations of the study and makes suggestions for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the field and contextualizes theories which have a bearing on the topic under investigation.

2.1 MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

The media as the fourth estate of the realm have a duty to hold African leaders accountable to the people for the political conflicts in the region. The symbiotic relationship between the media and society is such that every country creates its own media system that in turn provides the information network for the peace and development of the society.

Hence, the constitution of every democratic society empowers the media to hold the other three arms of government (the legislature, the executive and the judiciary) accountable to the people, and thereby sustain the interactive process between the government and the citizens. The leadership problem in some African countries today is traceable to the inability of the leaders to organise free and fair elections in the region.

Many crises that occur in Africa usually emanate from the elections held in the region. Notably, although African countries are sovereign nations, not all the countries in the region are able to conduct credible elections. However, every country evolves its own media system based on the political philosophy and ideology of the nation concerned, which explains why the media are able to play different roles in the development of society, depending on the nature of the political system guiding the operations of the media.

In a democratic society, the focus of the government would be to promote the fundamental human rights of the people while providing leadership for the growth and development of the society. Thus, the media systems in democratic countries are able to report on any issue as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of the people and those of the state. The sovereign power of every country resides in the state.

Therefore, in an authoritarian society, where the government seeks to preserve the political philosophy of the state even at expense of the rights and liberties of the citizens, the media would find it difficult to objectively report on the issues where the interests of the government are at variance with the hopes and expectations of the people.

Ghana is one of the African countries that are among the emerging democratic societies of the world. Therefore, the media have a duty to ensure that leaders entrench democratic principles and values in governance in Ghana. For example, Ghana is an emerging democratic society, but how soon the country joins the other African nations with global democracy will be determined by the ability of the government to conduct credible elections, where the people can elect competent and experienced individuals into government and parliament.

Nevertheless, the purpose of elections in every society is to enable the citizens to select a proportionate representative of the people, who would in turn represent the interests of the other citizens in the government and parliaments. Representative democracy is an improved version of an indirect rule system of government that enables the citizens of any country to elect a few people into public office to represent the interests of the other citizens in the government and parliaments. Democracy in this context is a mechanism

that enhances the efficiency of the public decision-making process in modern society. Nwabueze (1993) believed that: “representative government, after all is only resorted to as a substitute for direct democracy because of the impossibility, inconvenience and expenses in a large country in which every question touching upon its government is decided by the people at large.” (p.67) This is why it is important that politicians get regular feedback from the people on the effects of government policies on the living standards of the citizens in order to know when it would be necessary for the government to re-adjust its policy framework for development. This would help the government to accommodate the immediate needs of the people, but without compromising government’s ability to meet the future needs of the people.

Mazey (1996,) disclosed that in the French context: “Prominent campaign issues, public opinion polls and debates, together with the programmes put forward by candidates and their parties usually constitute important indicators of the current socio-political problems, public concerns and competitive policy agendas of the country.”(p123) This is because the French political leaders probably understood that the sovereignty of the state, upon which the government derived its legitimacy, belongs to the people, and democracy allows the citizens to meet at every interval to elect their leaders.

This is the beauty of democracy. Gordon (2006) believes that true democracy is people-oriented when he stated that: “I frequently feel that other people would be better off if, instead of doing as they wished, they followed my advice; but in a democracy, there is not much we can do about imposing our views upon the people.”(p.37) This statement does not imply that the public is stupid; it only means that governments sometimes find it difficult to differentiate between the honest remarks made by citizens from the distracting

comments of political opponents regarding a government programme of activity. In fact, there is nothing wrong in any government accepting public criticisms made in good faith, so long as they are constructive.

This is because most times members of the opposition parties in parliament actually complement the efforts of the government by making useful suggestions on better ways of implementing the government's policy agenda for development. Nevertheless, it is through credible elections that reliable governments can emerge that would formulate policies and programmes aimed at meeting the needs of the people.

Dalton (2002 cited in Stromback and Johansson,(2007), believes that: "voting is the one activity that binds the individual to the political system and legitimises the rest of the democratic process." (p.80).Unfortunately, some leaders in the African region and the Arab World still occupy political positions without the mandate of the people.

In order for the leaders to retain their positions in government, they harass and oppress the more vociferous groups in society, who challenge the legitimacy of their governments. The public media usually brand the members of these groups as dissidents in order to make them appear as deviants in the estimation of a reasonable public.

It is unfortunate that elections that are supposed to be a mere gateway to democracy are yet to be conducted without external supervision in many countries. For instance, in some African countries,if elections are free and fair, people are surprised. Hence, Smith (2009) observed that: "the peaceful conduct of Ghana's very close national elections in late 2008 was unusual in that it did not lead to any sustained questioning of the outcome. In contrast, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Kenya each have witnessed a degree of post-election violence in their recent elections."(p.868) The European Election Observation Mission

(EU EOM) confirmed that the 2008 Ghana Elections were held in line with the international and regional standards for conducting elections.

The presidential and parliamentary elections took place under an open, transparent and competitive atmosphere, where the parties and the candidates for the elections had equal opportunity to solicit for public support to win the elections notwithstanding their different political affiliations. The electoral commission, the judiciary and the security forces played an impartial role in ensuring that the elections were conducted with transparency and openness (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2008,p.4).

Apart from Ghana, the other African countries that have a good reputation for conducting free and fair elections are South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. A study of the democratisation process of eight countries in the East and South Africa (Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and South Africa) by Kalyango (2011,p.59-60) reveals that: As far as the procedural elements of democracy are concerned, the only exceptions are Tanzania and South Africa.

According to Professor Karikari, (Karikari, 2000) for most of Ghana's history the press has been a political instrument. He explains that until the 1930s the people who published newspapers were mostly the well-educated elite of lawyers and doctors.

“These people were also invariably the leaders in the nationalist movement agitating for independence from colonialism. Even when business entrepreneurs entered the industry, they were allied to the political movement, and their papers were no less partisan”, he says.

This is very much in conflict with the US perspective of Kovach and Rosenstiel that “journalism provides something unique to a culture” and therefore “any journalist that is asked to provide something other than that subverts democratic culture.” (Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T., 2001)

Arguably the media’s role in consolidating democracy and development becomes even more critical in a developing country like Ghana. Kovach and Rosenstiel point out that “journalism is so fundamental that societies that want to suppress freedom must first suppress the press.” (Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T., (2001)

“Whenever an editor lays out a page or website he/she is guessing at what readers want or need to know. However unconscious, every journalist operates by some theory of democracy”, they insist. (Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T., 2001)

The media in Ghana continues to play critical role in the consolidation of democracy and development. As part of the democratic culture, the 1992 Constitution assigns roles and responsibilities to institutions of state and the media is not left out in this.

According to Blay-Amihere,(Blay-Amihere,, 2011) for a constitution to devote whole chapter for the media means that journalists have a mandate to play their watchdog role effectively. Since 1993, the press has consistently exercised its constitutional mandate under Article 162(6) to “Uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people of Ghana.”

In the First Parliament of the Fourth Republic - which was virtually one-party dominated as a result of the opposition parties decision to boycott parliament after the 1992 general elections - the few private newspapers-the Free Press, Ghanaian Chronicle, Ghanaian

Voice, The Independent, The Guide, The Insight and Dispatch courageously and steadfastly filled the void and provided an alternative platform for public debate, according to Blay-Amihere and Karikari.

“There is more citizen participation in public discourse and debate. Ghanaians openly and publicly discuss issues without fear of being arrested by security agents (and where there have been aberrations in security agents arresting people for free speech public outrage has stopped such violations)”, Blay – Amihere points out,(Blay-Amihere, 2011)

Currently, Ghana has a diverse media sector with about 200 authorized FM stations, 12 private television stations and hundreds of newspapers. It is no longer a media monopoly of Graphic, Times, GBC and GNA. According to the NMC chairman, “journalists can no longer be arrested and detained for their editorial functions” and adds that “Ghana’s standing in the comity of nations is high as the country with the freest press in Africa. Good for our image, good for investor confidence.”

The watchdog role of the media has to some extent been fulfilled in the view of the Vice President Mahama. He says: “Our media has served us well as a nation. And we know there

can be no true democracy without a free and independent media.”

“Since 1992, the road to democracy and national development has not been without its challenges. Since independence, our ship of state has been buffeted by varying winds. There are winds that have allowed us to make significant progress as a nation and there are other times when the winds have not been that favourable. But without a doubt the winds of the 4th Republic have been very propitious and have

allowed us to make significant strides in building a country we can all be proud of,” he adds.

The Vice President and the NMC Chairman among others may have their reasons for commending the media for its role so far in the development of Ghana but there are others who still feel journalists and the entire media have not done enough to supervise the acceleration of national development. This court of public opinion suspects strongly that journalists are partly to blame for the country’s woes.

2.2 NEWS COVERAGE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNNS

Existing academic literature on news coverage of elections in Ghana seem to be scanty. While Temin and Smith (2002) used public opinion survey and historical approach to examine the role that the state- owned and private-owned media played in Ghana’s 2000 elections, they did not study the news content. Aubynn (2002) also relied on interviews and pronouncements of political parties during two election campaigns in the 1990s, and he concluded that personality cult of past icons as well as sloganeering rather than debates and policy discussions marked the campaigns.

Elsewhere researchers (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2003; Hallin, 1992; Patterson & McClure, 1976; Steele & Barnhurst, 1996) have done considerable study such as in television news coverage of political campaigns. An analysis of televised Ukrainian presidential debates revealed that policy was discussed more often than character. While the incumbent candidate acclaimed more and attacked less than the challenger,

the incumbents focused on past deeds more often to acclaim and less to attack than the challengers. Also, general goals and ideals were employed more often for acclaims than attacks (Benoit & Klyukovski, 2006).

In the United States, studies have dealt with newspaper coverage of presidential campaigns. Earlier, Klein and Maccoby (1954) investigated newspaper coverage of the 1952 presidential contest and found that 60 percent of stories concerned policy or issues, 16 percent devoted to candidate's personal qualities (character), and 15 percent was about scandals. Besides, in their study of television, newspaper and magazine coverage in 1968, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that horse race coverage (63%) was more frequent than substance (37%). Russonello and Wolf (1979) reported 56 percent of newspaper coverage focused on the horse race, 22 percent was about policy, and 17 percent dealt with the candidate's character.

However, Graber (1971) reported that more stories addressed personal qualities (66%) than issues (34%) in 1968. Though she employed counting mentions instead of stories, Graber found similar results in 1972. She noted more mentions of candidate's personal qualities (20,362) than of issues (11,187).

Examining newspaper coverage of 1976 presidential campaign, Russonello and Wolf (1979) noticed that the largest category of articles was horse race (47%). Candidate's personal qualities (25%) and issues (21%) followed, each with virtually half the attention that horse race received in the newspapers.

Robinson and Sheehan (1983) investigated news coverage of the 1980 United States' presidential campaign from January through October and found over double more space devoted to horse race than to issues. Stovall (1982) analyzed the same campaign and concluded that horse race made up 86% of newspaper coverage in 1980 and the remaining 14% about issues.

Sigelman and Bullock (1991) investigated presidential campaign coverage in five newspapers sampling every 20 years from 1888 to 1988. They found that candidate's character maintained a somewhat steady coverage of about 10 percent. While policy issues comprised about 25 percent coverage, campaign events accounted for about 40 percent of stories.

Comparing news coverage of election campaigns in Swedish and United States newspapers, Stromback and Dimitrova (2006) found that the United States papers emphasized horse race more than political strategy frames.

While many of the studies in this review found that policy discussions were more common than character, most of them indicate that horse race coverage was the most frequent topic of newspaper coverage of presidential campaigns. Benoit, Stein, and Hansen (2005) conducted a longitudinal study by investigating the *New York Times* coverage of presidential campaigns from 1952-2000, and they found that the most common topic of campaign coverage was horse race (40%), followed

by candidates' character (31%), and then discussion of candidates' policy positions (25%). However, some studies (Cohen & Tsfati, 2009; Dowdle, Adkins, & Steger, 2009; Mutz, 1995; Sonck & Loosveldt, 2008; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007) have documented problems associated with news coverage based on opinion polls and biased perceptions that horse race information has generated.

In the Ghanaian context, especially studying a state-owned newspaper, the "horse race" factor seems quite irrelevant because Articles 55 and 163 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana require the state-owned media to grant fair and equitable coverage of all political parties and candidates, as well as for divergent views and dissenting opinions. This constitutional obligation of the state-owned media was affirmed in *New Patriotic Party v. Ghana Broadcasting Corporation* (1993/94). Thus, the National Media Commission Act (1993) mandates the commission to "take measures to ensure that persons responsible for state-owned media afford fair opportunity and facilities for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions." Hence, this study substitutes "horse race" with "advocacy," which minimizes "biased" image of competitive viability but at the same time embraces other measures of candidates' comparative standing such as endorsements and campaign strategy.

Additionally, D'Alessio and Allen (2000) investigated whether candidates from one political party receive more coverage than candidates from the other political party. They found that newspapers, reporters and editors may have their ideological bias in the coverage of presidential campaigns, but such bias has insignificant influence on the

net coverage of candidates. However, the literature (Gan, Teo, & Detenber, 2005; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991) reports only negligible or no overall bias against certain political parties or candidates in news coverage of presidential campaigns.

2.3 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Election campaign provides the platform whereby political aspirants who are contesting for elective positions in government and parliament solicit the support of voters in their constituencies to win elections.

Contestants in elections usually carry out political campaigns in the places where they publicly declare their candidacy together with the programmes and manifestoes of their parties, which they intend to implement for the benefit of their people when they are elected into office. Therefore, a political constituency is simply a geographical area, which comprises of a group of the electorate with common goals and aspirations toward the peace and development of their community.

Nevertheless, the form and size of a constituency vary from one country to another depending on the political ideology of the country. During election campaigns, political candidates meet with the members of their constituencies to discuss the problems affecting the growth and development of their communities, and how the candidates intend to solve the problems when elected into office. According to Leighley (2004, p.200): Elected officials are expected to adopt policies that are consistent with voters'

preference. How closely officials' policy decisions mirror the preferences of citizens is a critical feature of democratic politics.

The more closely they do, the more representative the democracy, and the less likely that elected officials are enacting policies [at variance] to the wishes of the public. With this understanding, it is obvious that the public indirectly controls the activities of the parliaments, which is why the elected officials in the house should guide parliamentary proceedings and debates to meet the needs of the citizens and preserve the sanctity of the constitution in the interest of the state.

However, in the nature of modern politics, it is impossible for political candidates to reach all the voters in their constituencies and to solicit their support to win elections without the help of the media. Thurber, Nelson & Dulio (2000 cited in Swigger, 2012, p.367) noted that television advertisements have become ubiquitous features in American political campaign at every level of government, and one of the most expensive tools of a political campaign.

This is why the services of the media are very important in the conduct of elections. The news media are now the modern platforms from which party candidates disseminate information to voters and solicit their support to win elections. According to Kurfi (2010) "It is arguable that without access to the full range of information about their world, citizens cannot fulfil their roles, and democracy will wither." (p.295)

Nevertheless, the aims and objectives of the media are sometimes different from what politicians actually use the media for during the elections. Balkins (1999) agrees with this assumption. He said that politicians and the mass media do not necessarily regard the

public as an adversary. Rather, as politicians are seeking to shape and draw benefit from public opinion, so the mass media are seeking to entertain the public and maintain public attention and influence.(p.396)

Although both the government and private individuals can establish media organisations, the fact remains that the media are social institutions, which the operators use to deliver services in the interest of society. This is why both the public and the private media should reject any course whose aims and objectives are inimical to public interest. The role of the media in electioneering campaigns is to provide information on the registered parties- their programmes and candidates- that would enable the citizens to decide on the party and candidates that they may wish to vote for during the elections. Norris (1997) noted this in his study:

One of the primary functions of the media's coverage of the campaign is to increase information about the choices on offer, stimulating interest in public involvement in the process, watching politicians debate the major issues during the campaign may stimulate viewers to feel better informed, more aware of the choices on offer, and therefore better equipped to exercise their choice at the ballot box. The public relies on the media to provide adequate information on the electoral process that would enable the people to exercise their civic responsibility in the elections. (p.223-224)

What most enlightened voters usually consider before casting their votes for any candidate in an election is the public character of the individual concerned, his or her experience for the job, as well as the previous commitment demonstrated by the candidates toward the well-being of society.

Maisel (2007) noted that: “democratic regimes span a wide spectrum in terms of how freely those in power can be criticised by the press or by the opposition, the amount of information to which citizens have access in reaching their judgements, and the freedom that candidates have to express their views and that citizens have to vote.”(p.2)

This is why Ghanaian journalists should provide enough information on the political parties and their candidate during the elections through their editorials, news coverage and feature stories that would enable Ghanaian voters to make intelligent decisions on the candidates to vote for in the elections. Konkwo (2003) advised that the media should provide information that would enable the electorate to decide wisely on who to vote for in the elections, not on the basis of what the candidates can immediately provide for the people, but on the basis of public assessment of the capability of the candidates to perform in public office. (p.85)

Most politicians, who are in the habit of using the media for whatever reason, do so with the intention of retaining public support to maintain and advance their political career, because they are aware that most citizens usually gravitate toward the direction of the media position on public issues.

The Ghanaian journalists should endeavour to provide sufficient and balanced information on the personality profiles of political aspirants so that the public would be conversant with the history of each of the candidates concerned while deciding on the candidates to vote into public office or parliament.

The public often rely on the media for information on the ideologies and manifestoes of political parties, as well as on the competence of the candidates contesting for the elections (Egbuna,2012). Sometimes, the difference between a ‘winning’ politician

and a 'losing' politician is consequent upon the kind of information that journalists provide on political parties and their candidates, whereupon the electorate can decide on whom to vote for in the elections.(p.1)

If a credible media organisation decides to play the role of an advocate for a candidate by singing his or her praises during an election campaign, while serialising the shortcomings of the other candidates, citizens who rely on the media to make their judgments on public issues may well fall into the temptation of voting for the less qualified candidates. Taylor & Richey (2012) note that: “ [a]dvocates will try to convince others to either become active or-if active already-to increase their level of support, or even to change sides when they feel that there is a legitimate chance that their preferred candidate can win.” (p.414)

It was for this reason Mendelsohn (1998) maintained that: “we must examine the possibility that the media’s interpretation of elections is due to contextual factors other than a party’s ideology, and explain why some victors receive ideological mandates, while others receive personal mandates.”(p.239) The above statement is rather unfortunate as most citizens are aware that the media have a duty to accord legitimacy to issues of public concern and to act as status conferral to individuals in society.

Therefore, it would be inappropriate to blame members of the public for relying on the media to make intelligent remarks on public issues. Noelle Neumann (1979 cited in Folarin, 2002, p.78), confirmed that: “ideas, occurrence and persons exist in public awareness practically only if they are lent sufficient publicity by the mass media, and only in the shapes that the media ascribe to them.”

Hence, many politicians will stop at nothing than to secure a good public image in the eyes of the media, and ensure that their weaknesses are shielded from the prying eyes of the press. The media reports on the character and competence of the politicians have the potential to influence the perception and judgement of the public on the candidates contesting for elections.

Nevertheless, it is unethical for the media to side with one political party to the detriment of the other parties concerned.

Rather, they are supposed to give equal opportunity to all the candidates to relate to voters during the elections, irrespective of their party affiliations. This is because most citizens have confidence in whatever position they take on any issue that is of public interest only when they have access to all the information regarding the issue before taking a decision. “Put another way, if an individual is unable to differentiate between candidates during a campaign, it is unlikely that he or she will make a selection to support one candidate over another” (Krupnikov, 2012, p.390).

Therefore, it is important that the media provide adequate information on political candidates, which would enable the people to cast their votes for the more deserving candidates in the elections, while the media thereafter support the government to implement its policy agenda for development. Some Ghanaian newspapers usually do not provide the public with balanced and objective accounts of the integrity and competence of all the political candidates in the elections, which would otherwise enable the voters to cast their votes intelligently for deserving party members.

This is one of the dysfunctional implications of voters having to rely on the media to make judgments on the party and candidates to vote for in the elections. What journalists are

expected to do during the campaigns is to provide information on the parties and their candidates and allow the voters to decide on which candidates to vote for, depending on the knowledge and experience each of the candidates possesses in relation to the office he or she is aiming to occupy. Okpoko (2003, p76) emphasised this point when he stated that the mass media should provide adequate political education to enlighten the masses on the appropriate electoral procedures that would enable them to shun the evils of the “money bag” politicians, and to avoid the disadvantages of voting along the lines of ethnicity and religion.

Although there are many factors that could influence voters’ attitudes and choice of candidates in any election, the competence and integrity of political candidate are among the major variables that voters take into consideration while casting their votes for candidates during the elections.

However, the editorial policy of a media outfit often determines its stance on public issues. For example, a newspaper with an ideological mission will always struggle in the process of trying to take an objective position on public issues. This is because, most newspaper proprietors desire to see their ideological views on socio-economic and political issues reflected in the editorial content of the newspapers.

The newspapers that have an independent editorial policy are likely to take a more objective position in their news reports on public issues. Nevertheless, the newspaper owners could still covertly influence the editor and members of the editorial board on how they regard the stance of the newspaper on a given issue.

The Ghanaian mass media have the mixed ownership system comprising the government and the private proprietors, but with a preponderance of private dominance in the

newspaper industry. During campaigns, most newspaper owners use their media outfits to disseminate information on the programme and the agenda of their parties, and in the process, attack their political opponents in order to expose them to public contempt and ridicule.

This kind of journalism should be discouraged, as it is capable of creating conflicts in politics. Norris and Odugbemi (2008) observe that there are enormous contemporary challenges facing all democracies include expanding and deepening opportunities for inclusive public participation in civil society, ensuring the responsiveness, transparency, and accountability of government institutions, and strengthening the framework of fundamental freedoms and internationally accepted standards of human rights.

In this context, they asked, what are the roles of the media? Free press or media is commonly cherished as a core sector of civil society for multiple reasons. Societies with more timely and accurate information are empowered to make better choices (ibid). For governance, the two-way flow of information is the central conduit for connecting citizens and the state. Devoid of transparency about the performance of the government and the policies offered by parties and candidates contesting for elected office, and without alternative sources of information about this process, the act of casting a vote becomes meaningless and elected officials and parties cannot be held to account. (Dale, 1989).

According to Peters (2003) the media has been regarded as particularly important for promoting government transparency and accountability, especially by highlighting cases of corruption and misconduct. What this means is that elected leaders also require accurate

news about public concerns to be responsive to social needs and development challenges. (Besley and Burgess,2002). The media they noted (ibid), is also critical for human development.

Communication is seen as the lever facilitates trade, transmits ideas, and diffuses innovations, thus promoting growth (ibid). Clearly information can improve the delivery of public services, forewarn against natural disasters, spread education and knowledge, and reduce preventable health risks (ibid)

According to Van Belle, Rioux and Potter (2004), news helps inform the general public, donor agencies, and the international development community about severe challenges facing low-income states and the urgent humanitarian crisis arising from natural and man-made disasters. The global flow of information across national borders is also essential for international understanding and peace; lack of information and awareness about other communities, cultures, and viewpoints can fuel social intolerance, erode trust, and lead towards conflict.(Wolfsfeld, 2004).

As articulated by Wanta, Golan, and Lee el (2004), countries with both widespread media access and an independent media have been found to experience lower corruption, greater administrative efficiency, higher political stability and more effective rule of law, as well as better developmental outcomes, such as lower infant mortality rates and greater literacy.

According to Norris (2004) Information arises from direct personal contact with family, friends, and colleagues, in daily interactions within the local community, the workplace, and the neighborhood. For those with access, information today also flows increasingly from person-to-person electronic communications, via mobile cellular and fixed line telephony, emails and text messaging. With the growing diffusion of information and communication

technologies, however, information, especially about our own and other societies, also flows to us increasingly through the mass media (ibid).

This information is transmitted via diverse channels: terrestrial, cable and satellite television, national, regional and community radio stations, feature films and documentaries, DVDs and video games, books, newspapers and magazines, advertising bill-boards and commercials, the music industry and the audiovisual arts, as well as the digital world of the internet, websites, online YouTube videos, I-pod players, podcasts, wikis, and blogs. Among all these channels, the value of independent news media, functioning as a conduit for timely and accurate information, is widely acknowledged as vital for democracy and development

From the perspective of Norris and Odugbemi (2008), journalists and reporters see their primary role as being loyal to the rich and powerful, where their main function is to serve as the mouthpiece for established interests. In this regard, journalists become public relations channels for the uncritical transmission of official messages to the public. Fundamental freedoms of expression and publication are restricted by many autocracies. In this context, the news media cannot 'speak truth to power' and thereby strengthen accountable and transparent governance, nor can journalism provide a channel connecting citizens and the state (ibid).

In Ghana, fair and equal access to the media for all political parties and their candidates are important elements for leveling the political playing field. In order to help reduce the inequalities in media access and coverage for the parties and candidates, institutions of civil society groups have supported programs aimed at building the capacity of journalists as well

as to sensitize media practitioners to their democratic and professional responsibilities (Agyeman-Duah 2005).

Delving into the quality of media coverage of the elections under the 4th Republic, Frimpong (2007), notes that the relaxation of media censorship since 1992 has also paved the way for the emergence of independent newspapers as well as radio and television stations. The media contributed greatly to the quality of the electoral process in 1996.

The more active presence of the independent media, which provides a constant stream of election analysis, has helped to generate a high degree of public interest in elections (ibid).

By providing channels of discourse outside the state's control and expressing opposition views as well, the media has been largely responsible for keeping elections competitive since the country returned to democratic rule in 1992 (Gyimah-Boadi, 1999).

The independent print and electronic media have also made it possible for information unflattering to government or not sanctioned by state authorities to reach the public and therefore created a balance in media coverage. The role of the media in monitoring elections has been unique and innovative (ibid).

Gyimah-Boadi further observes that throughout Election Day FM stations are awashed with reports of the unfolding balloting process. They inform electoral officials on where to send additional voting materials to alleviate a shortage; the Police are notified of potential and actual trouble spots; suspicious characters and vehicles at polling stations are reported on air including their number plates; and ordinary citizens' call on to report whatever seems to be irregular at the polling stations.

In his view these pre-emptive actions have promoted orderliness at the polling stations and deterred many potential election fraudsters and riggers and have largely been responsible for

Bernard Cohen (1963) refined Lippmann's idea (of the role of man's communication in shaping the pictures in our heads) into the theory of agenda-setting even though he did not specifically use the term.

The theory explains how individuals came to regard some events and situations that they encountered through the media as more important than others. This is to say agenda-setting implies a relationship between the treatment of an issue or event in newspapers, television and radio news, and the belief about its importance on the part of individuals who make up news audiences.

An additional aspect of Agenda-Setting proven by McCombs and Shaw is that of object-attributes, wherein it is possible for the media to transfer articulated characteristics of a news "object" to the public as well. This concept gives the media an even greater lease on power in the setting of the public agenda. Because they not only delineate about what the public thinks but also arguably about how the public thinks of news objects, the power of the media is increased exponentially.

An aspect of the theory crucial to explaining what issues are deemed valuable and important to the public is the idea of a "time lag". The time lag is a quintessential component of Agenda-Setting because there must be a given length of time for the agenda to be transferred from the media (who are its' creators) to the public (who are its' consumers).

An operational definition of the time lag as it relates to Agenda-Setting theory is, "The optimal time that an issue must be covered in the media before the public considers it as

the high level of transparency and low level of irregularities recorded in the balloting process (ibid).

In spite of all these laudable efforts by the media on Election Day, the question still remain to be asked whether the media has been playing its agenda- setting and gate- keeping roles effectively to ensure equal opportunities and the level playing field for all the players in the political game.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the Agenda- Setting and Gate-keeping theories since the media is expected to set the agenda for the public and also determine the selection and placement of news stories which often is at the discretion of the editors.

2.4.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting theory in the past has held that the media agenda deem important and is identical to the public agenda, or what the public deems important. This effect is represented by issue salience, which is the concept that claims that the public views as important what the media views as important. Essentially, the stories that the media covers most often are the items at the top of both the media and public agendas. The media's ability to transfer attributes of news "objects" has also been proven, where an "object" can be anything from a candidate to an issue.

Agenda -Setting is a theory propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), although earlier researchers had certainly had an idea of searching for the correlation between public opinion and media content which has a bearing on this theory.

important," Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009, p.155). Through this definition, it is shown that there must be a time lag for a given agenda to be properly absorbed.

However, a time lag is a component that is arguably nonexistent in new media. This is because "...the emergence of 'Web 2.0' technologies...enables the production and mass circulation of *user-generated content*..." (Gane & Beer, 2008, p.98). They go on to state that, "This development is accompanied by a new form of interactive culture in which users act at the same time as producers, for they participate in the construction of online spaces while at the same time consuming the content generated by others" (Gane & Beer, 2008, p.98). This idea demonstrates that in a world increasingly dominated by new media, the essential time lag needed for Agenda- Setting to be operational no longer exists.

Cohen captured the crux of the argument in the formulation, which has been reworked again and again when he suggested that; the press may not be successful much of the time in, telling its readers what to think but stunningly successful and telling its readers what to think about.

The media therefore, determined during a political campaign what issues people would discuss among themselves. In other words, media developed its own agenda concerning what issues was news and how much prominence and space were given to them.

The agenda-setting theory has multiple components in the way it functions. First, it sets the media agenda - issues discussed in the media (newspapers, television and radio). Secondly is the public agenda which are issues discussed and personally relevant to members of the public.

The third function of agenda setting is the policy agenda. These are issues that policy makers consider important (legislators) in formulating or drafting of policies. Then the final function is of corporate agenda relating to issues that big business and corporation consider important. These four agendas are interrelated

The underlying basic assumptions of agenda-setting theory include:

1. The press and the media do not reflect reality; that is the media filters and shapes the message for the people; and
2. The media concentrates on a few issues and subjects which teaches the public to perceive those issues as more important than others.

None the less, agenda setting is limited. Media users may not be ideal as the theory assumes. People may not be well-informed, deeply engaged in public affairs, thoughtful and sceptical. Instead, they may pay only casual and intermittent attention to public affairs and remain ignorant of the details.

2.4.2 Gate-keeping theory

The next theory for this research is gate-keeping. In human communication, particularly in journalism, gate-keeping is the process through which ideas and information are filtered for publication. Thus it is the internal decision making process of relaying or withholding information from the media to the masses. The theory was first postulated by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1947. He used the term "gate-keeping", to describe a wife or mother as the person who decides which foods end up on the family's dinner table. The gatekeeper is the person who decides what shall pass through each gate. Although Lewin

applied it originally to the food chain, he then added that the gating process can include a news item winding through communication channels in a group.

Gate-keeping occurs at all levels of the media structure from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed, or even covered.

The gate-keeper decides which information will go forward, and which one will not. In other words, a gate-keeper in a social system decides which commodity – materials, goods, and information – may enter the system. It is important to note that, gatekeepers are able to control the public's knowledge of the actual events by letting some stories pass through the system while keeping others out.

In the view of Bittner (1996), defines 'gatekeepers' as any individual of group directly involved in the relay or transfer of information from one individual to another. The information from one individual to the other is passed through a mass medium. The functions of the 'gatekeeper' are:

1. to relay information to receivers;
2. to limit the information received by editing this information before it is disseminated to the receivers;
3. to expand the amount of information received by giving additional facts or view; and
4. to interpret the information.

Bitter also states the gatekeeper can be an individual such as a film producer or network censor who deletes scenes from television shows or a film director or newspaper executive who determines the topic for an editorial. He also identified the factors that affect

'gatekeeper' decisions as economics, legal, deadlines, personal, professional ethics, competition, news value and news whole.

The gatekeeper's choices are a complex web of influences, preferences, motives and common values. Gate-keeping is inevitable and in some circumstances it can be useful.

This theory therefore is related to the mass media and organizations. For the purpose of this study, the mass media's focus is on the organizational structure of newsrooms and events. For instance if an editor decides alone what to put out in a newspaper, the public (readers) only are informed of what they see.

Therefore, the idea is that if the gatekeeper's selections are biased, the readers' understanding might also be tainted. However, gate-keeping can also be dangerous, since it can lead to an abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass. Nevertheless, gate keeping is often a routine, guided by some set of standard questions.

In every democratic society, the creation of a level playing field and unbiased media will ensure that all citizens participate fully in the democratic process. However the absence of a vibrant media, the democratic process is likely to be derailed. The failure of the media to play its role sufficiently well, has led to some democratic regimes collapsing in some countries.

2.4.3 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Fair: Presentation of the news to satisfy all sides involved in the story

Space: The area provided for the publication of a story on a page

Prominence: This is the importance given to political news in terms of page placement.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the methods deployed to collect, collate and analysis data. A quantitative content analysis was used which revealed interesting findings. In addition, the limitations for the study as well as the challenges that were faced during the data collection period would also be explained.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study applied the qualitative method of doing research. Berg defines qualitative research as having to do with “what, where, how and when of things. In effect it deals with meanings and essence of things bringing out the ‘definitions, characteristics, symbols and description of things” (Berg, 2007). In other words, the main aim of doing a qualitative research could be to explore, describe or explain the meaning of things.

Its intention is to come out with the meaning behind an action which would otherwise not have been possible should one conduct a quantitative research. Similarly, Creswell (2003) defines qualitative research as the kind of research which draws from the social constructivism paradigm. In other words, it says that human beings generate meanings about the world as they interact with the world. In effect, qualitative research has to do with undertaking in-depth studies of human phenomena and understanding them from the perspectives of the individuals concern (Tagoe, 2001).

It concerns itself with focus group discussions, unstructured interviews and the use of language based techniques like discourse analysis as methods for collecting data (Brannon,

1992 in Tagoe, 2001). Conversely, a quantitative research may involve the use of experiments and surveys with the main intent of making generalisations from the samples used. It employs the use of closed ended questions with the aim of establishing basis of some theories. A quantitative research is scientific in nature because it employs the use of numbers and its concern with quantity.

It employs the use of surveys and experiments as methods of gathering data (Creswell, 2003; Berg, 2007). For example, one who decides to find out about the voter turn outs in Ghana for the past four years would be better off with a quantitative research than a qualitative research.

3.2 POPULATION

A quantitative content analysis was applied in this study. The main focus for was to determine political story placement, and page placement of political stories in the Ghanaian Times and Daily Graphic newspapers..

The population of the study includes 576 editions of the Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic for the year 2012. The *Ghanaian Times* and *The Daily Graphic* are both state-owned and are published by the *New Times Corporation* and *Graphic Communication Group* respectively. The two are the leading newspapers in Ghana and are published 6 times a week (Monday through Saturday)

They both cover and publish straight news stories, feature articles, editorials, letters, foreign news, political news, educational page as well as regional and business pages. *The*

Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic were chosen because they are known to be much more accurate than many other newspapers in the country. They are both popular newspapers among Ghanaians. The period for the study is 12 months (January-December, 2012). The sample size was randomly selected out of 576 editions.

3.3.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis was defined by Krippendorff (1980) as ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to context’.

Kerlinger cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2000) defines content analysis as ‘a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables’.

To Wimmer and Dominick (ibid), content analysis has become popular in the study of symbols and messages contained in the mass media over the past decade. They summarised

5 uses of content analysis as:

1. describing communication content;
2. testing assumption of message characteristics;
3. comparing media content to the ‘real world’;
4. assessing the image of particular groups of society; and
5. establishing a starting point for media effects.

The method is broadly used to examine the characteristics of messages, how they have been placed and the prominence attached to them.

Hence content analysis is the most appropriate research methodology for this study because it involves the examination of election stories as published in the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic*.

The investigation of this news through this systematic process gives insights into the prominence given to election issues and other social issues and the attitude of those who produce these messages.

Content analysis makes easy for identification and examination of how election news and social issues are presented in the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic* newspapers. It also makes it possible to measure the importance the newspaper attaches to election stories through its internal process.

3.3.2 Personal Interview

Personal Interview is to identify the various factors that influence the editorial board in the selection and placement and the general treatment of election news and other social stories in the newspaper. The interview technique used in this study enabled the researcher to find out the reasons why the editorial board selected elections stories and why they gave it prominence and not the other social stories.

It was also used to inquire if the newspaper has any specialized desk for election coverage and other social stories and whether it had reporters specifically assigned to these stories.

The interview questions consisted of mainly open-ended items. This made it possible to obtain the information on the selection, placement and treatment of election and other social news by the newspapers.

3.3.3 Sampling Method and size

A critical look at the *Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic* newspapers showed that elections related stories throughout the year were consistently reported in the newspapers. Based on this, a sample for the period was drawn randomly out of the total of 576 editions, using every other fourth day edition of the newspaper in a week in each month of the year.

Under this a four week table was constructed for each month. Out of this, each day of the week (Monday to Saturday) was randomly selected. Thus one six-day week was constructed for each month. This yielded a sample size of 84 each for edition dates for the newspapers representing a total number of 288 each. These were examined under the following units of analysis.

3.3.4 Story placement, and Page placement

Placements of stories were determined by its importance. Similarly page placement depended on where stories were placed in the paper i.e. front, centre spread or back page of the newspaper. The stories are placed on the pages for various reasons including commercial considerations and its impact on the country. The page placement plays a major role in how prominent a story is to the reader. Each of the variables influence the positioning of the story.

3.3.5 Data Collection Instrument

A coding sheet was developed for assessing the nature of newspaper coverage of election stories as compared to business, education and health. The data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) and Microsoft office excel.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the findings of content analysis and personal interviews that were employed in this study. As showed in the methodology a total of 84 issues each in the *Ghanaian Times* and *Daily Graphic* newspapers were sampled out of 288 editions of each of the newspapers.

The main source of data was a primary data which was collected from the newspapers published in 2012. The data collected took into consideration the number of election stories published on the front, inside and the back pages. For the sake of clarity, the front page represents the stories that were carried on the front page of the two newspapers. The inside pages are classified as all those pages from pages 2 to the last inside page. The back page is the last page of the newspapers.

4.2 Analysis and Interpretation

For the purposes of this study, the researcher applies an interpretation of the data by treating the two newspapers separately. The analysis starts with the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper.

As indicated in the table “A” below election news appeared almost every day and throughout the year in every issue of the two daily newspapers during the election year under study. More importantly, the data revealed that election stories form part of the daily news that the two newspapers put on the newsstand.

The Ghanaian Times

The table indicates the distribution of newspaper editions that contained election news in the *Ghanaian Times* during the year under review. It captures a representative sample of election stories that were published month by month in 2012. In all, 84 issues of each of the two newspapers were sampled in fulfillment of the requirement of this study.

Analyzing the table reveals that most of the election stories, 282 in all, were published by the *Ghanaian Times* with 47 on the front page and 184 and 51 in the inside and back pages respectively during the year under study. Almost all the stories were written either by *Ghanaian Times* reporter or it is taken from the *Ghana News Agency*, a wire service that distributes news to media houses.

It was observed from the data that if the story is about a high profile politician, it found its way onto the front page of the newspaper. Many of the stories were written about outspoken politician who were either criticizing the government or a government official criticizing an opposition figure. For example, Nana Akuffo Addo, the presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party, often got front page of the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic* anytime he mounted the platform and criticized the government.

Similarly, the presidential candidate of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC), often attracted front page coverage in both the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic* on his campaign tours across the country.

The data further revealed that stories about the then NPP government and the then opposition NDC dominated the political pages of the two major newspapers. A critical look at the placement of the stories on the pages of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper reveal that the

page planning is done in a manner that will balance up the placement of the stories to satisfy the major political parties.

For instance, the research also tried to find out what were the major issues covered during Ghana's 2012 general elections in the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic*? It came out clearly that the two newspapers devoted their pages to policy alternative articulated by the two large political parties.

Policy issues such as free senior high school dominated the NPP's coverage while the NDC countered with progressive and gradual implementation of the free senior high school policy and both parties got extensive coverage for the in the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic*.

Curiously however, the smaller political parties also got some space but that is incomparable to that which was given to the major political parties. Besides, activities of the Electoral Commission also found some space on the pages of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper.

Below is the distribution table of stories carried by the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper during the year under review:

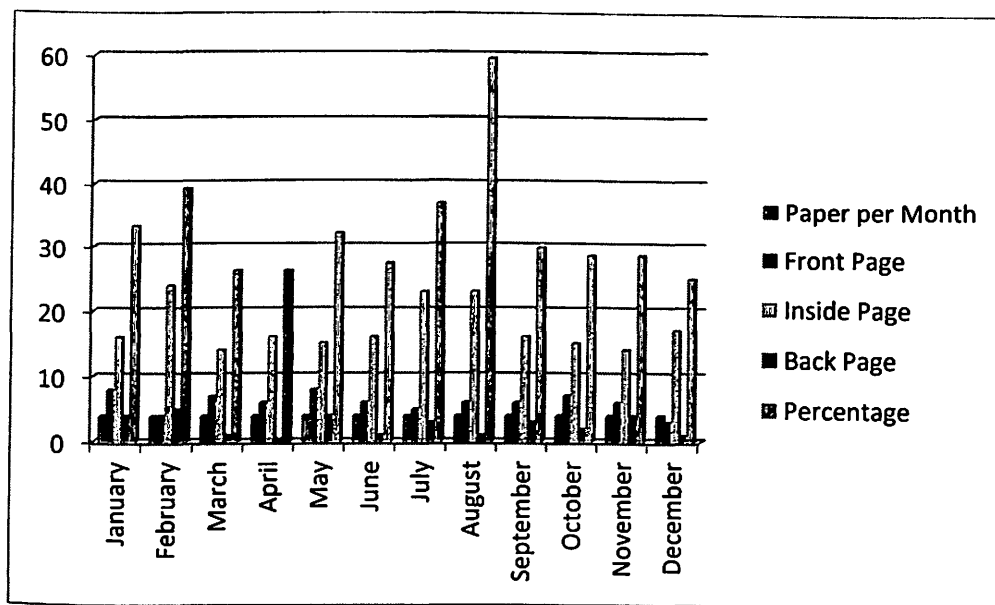
Table A: The *Ghanaian Times*

| Months | Newspapers per Month | Inside stories related to politics | to | Inside Stories related to politics | Political stories on the back page | Percentage(%) of coverage of political stories |
|-----------|----------------------|------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| January | 4 | 8 | | 16 | 4 | 33.33 |
| February | 4 | 4 | | 24 | 5 | 39.28 |
| March | 4 | 7 | | 14 | 1 | 26.19 |
| April | 4 | 6 | | 16 | 0 | 26.19 |
| May | 4 | 8 | | 15 | 4 | 32.14 |
| June | 4 | 6 | | 16 | 1 | 27.38 |
| July | 4 | 5 | | 23 | 3 | 36.90 |
| August | 4 | 26 | | 23 | 1 | 59.52 |
| September | 4 | 6 | | 16 | 3 | 29.76 |
| October | 4 | 7 | | 15 | 2 | 28.57 |
| November | 4 | 6 | | 14 | 4 | 28.57 |
| December | 4 | 3 | | 17 | 1 | 25 |
| Total | 84 | 92 | | 209 | 29 | |

Table "A"

Critically analyzing the stories covered by the *Ghanaian Times* shows that the total number of election stories carried in January was 30(35.71%). It was realized that in February, 21 (25%) stories appeared while in March, election stories appeared 26 (42.85%) times. In April and May, 19 (22.61%) and 23(27.38%) stories were found to have been published respectively. In June, it was recognised that election stories appeared 22 (26.19%) times with July recording 16(19.04%) publications. In August and September, figures recorded

were 16 (19.0%) and 14 (16.66%) respectively while October and November recorded 14 (16.66%) and 28 (33.33%) publications respectively. In December, election stories published were 33 (39.28%). See Graph below.



Graph showing publication of election news by the *Ghanaian Times* each month in 2012

Daily Graphic

In analyzing the 84 issues used for this study, it was found out that a total of 20 were published on the front page while the inside and the back pages had 46 and 18 stories published. In much the same way as the *Ghanaian Times*, the *Daily Graphic* newspaper devoted majority of its space to the two dominant parties. The data revealed that reporters of the paper who are on the political desk are the major source of electoral news that was published by the *Daily Graphic* newspaper.

Table B: Daily Graphic

| Months | Newspapers per Month | Inside stories related to politics | Inside Stories related to politics | Political stories on the back page | Percentage(%) of coverage of political stories |
|-----------|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| January | 4 | 7 | 15 | 8 | 35.71 |
| February | 4 | 3 | 14 | 4 | 25 |
| March | 4 | 8 | 18 | 0 | 42.85 |
| April | 4 | 4 | 24 | 8 | 42.85 |
| May | 4 | 6 | 13 | 0 | 22.61 |
| June | 4 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 27.38 |
| July | 4 | 4 | 10 | 8 | 26.19 |
| August | 4 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 19.04 |
| September | 4 | 1 | 9 | 4 | 16.66 |
| October | 4 | 2 | 12 | 0 | 16.66 |
| November | 4 | 2 | 22 | 4 | 33.33 |
| December | 4 | 3 | 24 | 6 | 39.28 |
| Total | 84 | 47 | 184 | 51 | |

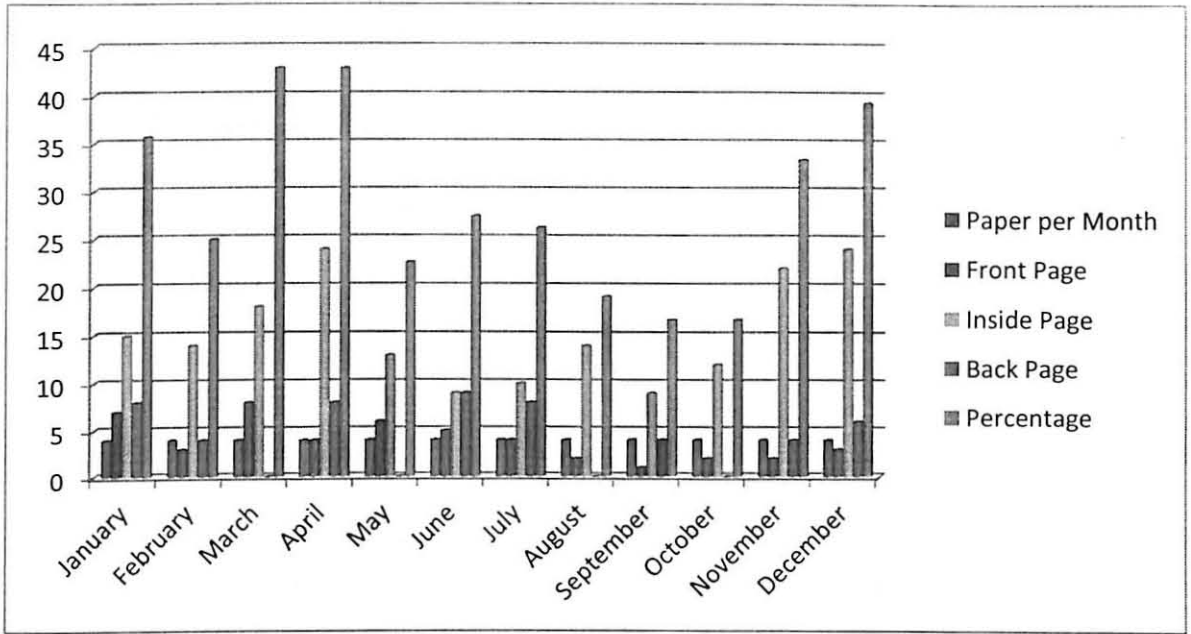
Table “B” shows the publication pattern in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper in 2012

The data also found out that many of the stories were about prominent politician, government people, the Electoral Commission and the minority parties. It was found out that few investigative pieces were written by the reporters and few political articles were published. These were however far between in dwelling mainly on the political elite.

The publication of news about the then NPP government and the then opposition NDC follow the same pattern as was published in the *Ghanaian Times*. But while the *Ghanaian Times* relied heavily on the Ghana News Agency for majority of its election news, the Daily Graphic depended on its political desk to supply election news that was published. The placement of stories followed similar pattern as in the *Ghanaian Times*. A careful scrutiny of the page planning reveals that the stories are placed in a manner that will balance up the placement of the stories to satisfy the major political parties.

In comparison to the *Ghanaian Times*, the *Daily Graphic* as captured by the study published 28 (33.33%) election stories in January. In February and March, 33 (39.28%) and 22(39.28%) stories were published respectively. The data also showed that in April, 22(26.19%) stories were carried while in May, 27(32.14%) stories were published.

The newspaper in June, July and August published 23 (27.38%), 31(36.90%), and 50(59.52%) stories each. In the months of September, October, November and December 25(29.76%), 24(28.57%), 24(28.57%), and 21(25%) stories were published respectively in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper. See Graph on next page;



1. A Graph showing the publication of election news in the Daily Graphic of 2012

Interviews

From the interview with four members, two each from the editorial teams of each of the two newspapers, data gathered showed that there is special desk for political reporting that also covers election stories. In addition, the editorial boards also discuss at their meetings stories that are on politics in general and decide on where to place such stories. Some of these stories that deserve prominence are placed on the front page and those that deserve less prominence are either pushed to the inside or back pages.

The editorial board depends on reporters to go out and bring the stories and in the case of the political desk; reporters are assigned by the Desk Editors. Even though those stories are meant for the political pages, they could well pass for the front page if the Editorial Board so decides. As part of the data collection process, four members of the Editorial board, two each from the *Ghanaian Times* and *Daily Graphic* were interviewed.

They were asked the same questions. Some of the very relevant questions asked included what factors the Editorial boards consider before publishing political stories? Neequaye who is the Acting Editor of the *Ghanaian Times* said:

“In publishing a political, the editorial boards at its conference look at the nature of the story and the personality involved. This then informs us as to which page the story should be placed. Depending on its importance, the story is given prominence, i.e. front page. Those that are not too important but are newsworthy are then placed conspicuously in the inside pages or the back pages”.

According to him the editorial conference is where all the decisions are taken in respect to the placement of stories in the newspaper. The determination of the placement of the story is guided principally by the fact that the story is of public interest. Neequaye affirmed that other political stories of less importance, but considered newsworthy are then sent to the inside pages or to the back pages.

Neequaye said some of the political stories are also placed on the front page because of economic reasons. Below are some of the relevant questions and answers by some other respondents from both newspapers.

According to the Acting Editor, the editorial board is not influenced in any way to choose one story above the other. “We choose our own story line and follow it. We are not under any control or influence to publish any story.”

To a question as to how the team decided on political stories when there are other equally important stories? I

The respondent said deciding on political stories or any other stories as to which one will be given prominence, the national or public interest is considered first and foremost, The various sectional heads who form the editorial board often decide at the editorial meeting which story would best sell besides taking into account the interest of the readers.

To another question as to what type of political story will normally be put on a front page or given a banner headline?

The respondent said political stories that are of national character and which are in the interest of the public will normally be put on the front page or given a banner headline if they are of national and public interests.

Once the political news reports are selected at the editorial meeting of the *Ghanaian Times*, the Chief Sub editor, McCauley, sifts through the stories and selects those that he finds useful to be used. While a variety of the stories come through the reporters on the newspaper, many others come through the wire service like the Ghana News Agency. This however presents options to the chief sub to pick the best stories for publication in the day's edition of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper.

The first criteria used in selecting a story are how current the story is. "We pick out those (stories) that are important to us. We look at the trend locally – what is important what is interesting." After the stories deemed most important are selected, they then go through an editing process. Sometimes, a story is rejected out rightly. Other times, portions of articles are edited.

For example, some of the language might be slightly altered or the framing of the article might be edited. For instance, if an article uses insulting language with regard to a political leader, the *Ghanaian Times* will attempt to edit that language out. Because, Macauley explained, it is in the Ghanaian culture, no matter what the circumstance, for Ghanaians to respect their leaders and elders.

Additionally, McCauley said, the *Ghanaian Times* attempts to rid articles of sensationalism of the facts, though this is sometimes difficult. Sometimes, stories exaggerate the facts: “Few people attend a political rally and we are led to believe that hundreds or thousands of people have attended a political rally.” While some alterations may be necessary, care is taken not to distort the facts in order not to mislead our readers.

According to Ransford Tetteh, Editor of the *Daily Graphic*, processing and selecting articles at the *Daily Graphic* resembles the process used at the *Ghanaian Times*. Relevance is the primary concern when selecting, election news stories to include in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper. A number of articles come through the *Graphic* newsroom each day. They must compete for selection.

Tetteh explains, “A newspaper should be like a mirror. It should reflect what is happening in the society, so our newspaper attempts to select political stories in general and election stories in particular that adequately reflect what is happening in the country during the run up to the election in 2012.

Once the election news stories are selected, the stories are then edited. According to Tetteh, just as it is done at the *Ghanaian Times*, the *Graphic* also goes through the motion of selecting the news stories and editing in an attempt to report just the substance matter.

Sometimes, Tetteh explains, unnecessary descriptive language is used simply to enrich a story:

Reporting a clash between two parties does not give you license to say the supporters are violent or use words that will inflame passions. At the end of the day you are harming the country because of the impression that you leave with the story.

Also during the editing process, ethnic, religious and other social factors are considered in order not to offend the sensibilities of our people. Ghana is not an island on its own and therefore anything we publish we must look around us and be sure that we are not hurting the feelings of not only our citizens but all those who live in it with us in this country.

Admittedly, our source of political news comes mainly from our own reporters who are assigned on the political desk.

While we use other sources like the *Ghana News Agency*, we have a policy of generating our own news for very obvious reasons. Kwesi Inkoom, a sub editor of the *Daily Graphic* said. "What we do here is not different from what happens at the *Ghanaian Times*, the processing and selection of articles is much the same. When preparing to put out any given issue of the *Daily Graphic* newspaper, there are always more articles to choose from than can be included in the edition of the day's edition".

During the selection process, the issues that we assume will be of public concern are the ones that we choose. "So one of the chief objectives in the selection process is that the stories reflect our house style and is of public concern", said Inkoom.

After selection, the stories, are edited before they are published in the newspaper. For example, articles may be rewritten to suit the house style. Articles may also be edited for language. A sensitive word or diction that is considered "too strong" is omitted from the

story stories. "There are words that we do not allow at all in our newspaper... For example, abusive words or stories that will offend others are completely discarded"

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussions of Findings

This study was interested in finding out how the Ghanaian Times and the Daily Graphic covered political stories especially election stories in 2012. To do this, the study sought to find out the factors that account for the high reportage of political news by the media as against reportage several other equally important news stories.

Based on this, the objectives of the study were constructed to, (a) Find out whether political news is highly covered than the other social news;

(b) Assess the placements or rankings of political stories as compared to other news stories;

1. Find out the editorial considerations in the selection and placement of these stories.

The data gathered during the study showed that indeed political stories are given high coverage than all other news. This is evident on the front and the inside pages of the newspapers that accommodate most of the political stories.

In explaining this, the front page of a newspaper is largely regarded as the window. For this reason it attracts buyers to the newspaper since that is always show cased on the newsstands.

In addition, the back cover of the paper is also another vital page since buyers can easily turn the newspapers on the news stand to have a look at what is there. Therefore, many front page stories are selected for it and often continued in the inside pages of the newspaper.

This is what accounts for the increase in political stories on the inside pages.

The result of the study confirmed that the editorial team indeed gives the public news that is of public interest and that will sell the paper. As such the team gave prominence to political stories. .

Additionally, the interviews revealed that political as well as election stories are a major source of content for the two newspapers. Again the papers do receive letters from the public and they are published since it enables the public to express their views on the issues because they will want to have a say just like the phone-ins of the radio and TV stations.

However, in publishing the letters the newspapers edit it to make it understandable and relevant to the news item. Furthermore, if the letters are not clear, they are kept, so at a later date they can work on it.

Political stories are not difficult to obtain because politicians are always looking for the opportunity to get their information out to the electorate. Compared to the other stories, the media needed to make much more effort to get political stories that will set the agenda for political discourse instead of the politicians and powerful people setting the agenda for the country.

The content analytical studies have further indicated that news, information and events leading up to the election in 2008, were mainly from urban centres and especially news concerning the political leadership and other the elite, occupy disproportionately more space in the two major newspapers.

It was also found out that the two national dailies - the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times* - gave significantly less space to news items and information about rural politics and its social classes.

Finally, the selection and placement of these stories are done in a way that the lead story (the most important story of the day) is given a banner headline with other equally important stories placed on the front page with small headlines.

These results therefore support the earlier assumption that, newspapers are not playing their effective role to set the agenda for policy and political discussion.

5.2 Conclusion

Freedom and independence of the media is guaranteed by the 1992 Constitution. This guarantee provides for media to operate without interference and censorship. As a result, Ghana has a vibrant and diverse media with several newspapers, radio and television stations as well as online news agencies.

It is for this reason that this research will advocate that as 'watch-dogs', the media must strengthen its role, do more in living up to its responsibility to help guard the public interest by ensuring the accountability of powerful decision-makers and by highlighting cases of malfeasance, maladministration, and corruption. This would help in strengthening the transparency and effectiveness of governance. Additionally, as 'agenda-setters', the news media must also do more to raise awareness of pervasive social problems and help to inform governing officials about social needs.

5.3 Limitations

The study had encountered some difficulties. The first is that out of 288 issues that represent the population for the study, one-fourth representing 84 were sampled. A bigger sample could have provided a deeper insight. However, this has not affected the outcome.

Out of the over eight members of the editorial board only four were available the researcher believes more balanced responses could have been elicited from them about what informed their choice of stories.

The study was unable to compare the amount of space provided for election stories to other news forms in order to determine whether more or less space is being provided election stories. The study could also not compare election coverage in one year to another due to the scope of the study.

5.4 Recommendations for future study

Based on the findings, it is highly recommended that in any future research, this study could be improved by taking a larger sample size from other newspapers including privately owned ones. Furthermore, the study should be able to determine the amount of space provided to election stories as against other news forms.

Mechanisms should be put in place to strengthen adherence to the Code of Conduct for Political Parties during elections.

The National Media Commission working with editors and the Ghana Journalists Association and other relevant bodies should ensure greater adherence of journalists and

media houses to the guidelines for reporting elections Editors should ensure that the content of materials they publish is in good taste.

The Electoral Commission should improve the management and updating of its website, particularly during posting of results. State-owned media should develop and publish more detailed guidelines on how they intend to ensure that their reporting meets the benchmarks of the electoral regulations, regarding balanced and equitable coverage of various political parties.

Safety of journalists who report and cover the elections should be guaranteed and protected, and where attacks occur, they should be investigated and action taken.

A number of bodies, such as the Ghana Journalists Association, the National Communications Authority, the National Commission on Civic Education, the Media Foundation for West Africa and the National Peace Council, should organised a series of workshops and training programmes for journalists on how to effectively and responsibly cover the election.

Again in future, the scope of the research should be expanded to include the comparison of the coverage in one year to the other.

Further, the follow up study should be able to determine the reach of the two newspapers to determine whether they are serving majority of the people of Ghana.

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