THE PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF GHANA'S LEGISLATURE

Wilberforce S. Dzisah[1]

Abstract

The paper researched print media coverage of Ghana's Parliament using the content analytic category to determine whether the media serve as the tribunes of the larger society. Two Ghanaian newspapers, the state-owned Daily Graphic and the privately-owned Daily Guide were used for the study. A total of Seventy-Two (72) editions of both newspapers were selected, and the coding process produced Ninety (90) news items for analyses. While it has been established that the media as the 'Fourth Power' within the State are essential in performing its informational function, it also emerged that in their coverage of Parliament, the media, represented in this study by the two most circulated newspapers in Ghana were not too effective in their educational function. The media have fallen short of providing the required political and operational debates to engage the citizenry. In this paper, while the findings are significant in alerting the media to the malaise, it also emphasises the need to urge them to review their strategies in order to activate citizens to become aware of the wider and more inclusive debates. This can help engender critical public opinion formation and also promote active citizens to appreciate social, economic and political importance of Parliament and its role in the development of Ghana.

Keywords: media, democracy, information, education

Introduction

Since the return of the country to constitutional rule in 1993, the expectation of Ghanaians was that the media would contribute to the

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[1] Wilberforce S. Dzisah is the Rector of the Ghana Institute of Journalism. He holds a Ph.D. in Communications and Media from the University of Westminster. He is also a product of Cardiff University (University of Wales) and the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

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

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

The health of a democracy is dependent on the media to inform citizens about what is happening around them, educate them on the meaning and significance of the facts, provide a platform for political discourse, and facilitate the formation of public opinion (Curran, 2000). They imply the existence of a realm of social life where the exchange of information and views on questions of common concern (specifically those of political concern) can take place so that public opinion can be formed. The media do play a very significant role in shaping public opinion and in stimulating public discourses on issues that affect citizens.

It appears that the Ghanaian Parliament, which over the years, has provided ordinary Ghanaians and organised political parties an opportunity to represent the interests of their constituents, make input into legislation and effectively participate in the democratic governance process, remains a closed book to many. One result is the inability of the

public to fully grasp the enormous responsibility that the constitution has imposed on parliament.

The traditional media – television, radio and newspaper – remain the primary means by which most citizens are able to understand and be engaged with the work of parliament. The expectation is that the media will enlighten the public as to parliament's work: why something is happening and what it means. This expectation is, however, too often unfulfilled, with the consequence that many remain in the dark about what much of our legislation actually means to their lives. The main criticism aimed at the media a few years after the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic, is that their coverage of parliament is very low and usually focuses on splits, sensations and personalities.

The objective of this study is to investigate how the Ghanaian media report Parliament in Ghana's Fourth Republic and the extent to which they provide citizens with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. This study focuses specifically on newspapers; thus, terms such *mass media*, *press* and *newspapers* may occur interchangeably. The investigation should help show whether the nature of parliamentary coverage by the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and privately-owned *Daily Guide* are such that it leads to the formation of undiluted public opinion. The study is premised on the hypothesis that in a democracy, mass media inform citizens and help them engage in public discourse. The following are the specific research questions for the study: What news from Parliament do the media focus on?; How is this news represented in the media?; and Does newspaper coverage of Parliament provide vital political communication and interpretation to citizens?

This paper is structured as follows: in the next sections, brief backgrounds of key institutions that frame the study are provided, after which a literature review, which underpins the paper is clearly articulated, while the research approach and the findings/results are subsequently given. These are followed by discussion of the findings/results, limitations and a conclusion.

Study Institutions

Daily Graphic

The *Daily Graphic* as a state-owned daily newspaper was introduced on the news stand on October 2, 1950 as one of a chain of newspapers owned by private interest, the *Daily Mirror Group* of London. According to Hasty and Dzisah (2005, 2008). It was sold to the Government of Ghana which eventually took over in 1965 (Dzisah 2008). The *Daily Graphic* has the largest nationwide readership and leads the newspaper industry with a daily circulation of over one hundred thousand (100,000) copies.

The Daily Guide

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

Parliament of Ghana

The evolution of the Parliament of Ghana dates back to the pre-independence era. However, this paper's focus is on the Parliament under the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution after the return to what can be described as the longest and stable democratic order since 1966. The Fourth Republican Parliament commenced on January 7, 1993. The interventions in democratic rule by the military after independence resulted in transitions referred to as Republics. Thus, the current Republic is the Fourth and the only one that has journeyed about twenty (20) years with five (5) Parliaments without any military interruption.

Literature Review

Scholarly research into the area of media and parliament is quite broad. Sussman (1996) observes that in a democracy, representative bodies have come under increasing pressure to either connect more directly with citizens or risk becoming marginalised. Sussman (Ibid) reported that it has increasingly become commonplace to talk of crisis in parliamentary representation in the United Kingdom as a result of an increasing gulf between the Parliament, its members, and the British public. Citizens know less about MPs and the Parliament than was the case in the past. Only 42% of the public can correctly name their MPs, a 10% decrease from early 1990s (Ibid).

The "health of democracy" is inextricably linked to the "health of the systems of communication" - systems which have certain significant functions: surveillance and reporting of the socio-political environment, highlighting issues and developments likely to impinge on the welfare of citizens; agenda setting and identifying the key issues of the day; dialogue across a diverse range of views and mechanisms for holding public officials accountable in their exercise of power (McNair 2007 p. 21, Blumler and Gurevitch 1995 p. 97).

Dahlgren (1995) argues that the concept of the public sphere in the dialectic of the enlightenment is ambiguous to begin with: modern democracy is no longer seen as a system expressing the will of the people, but rather one which offers consumers a series of choices. He diagnoses "a growing loss of power by centralised political systems; changes in social structure are bringing about new forms of political culture" (Ibid. p.2). Dahlgren leaves no doubt about the relevance of the discussion around the public sphere for journalism.

Scholars like Sussman (1996), Page (1996) and McQuail (2005) state that citizen participation in politics is fundamental to democracy and that citizens require access to the political process in order to gain information and play a participatory role in decision making. Keane (1994), notes that the media in a democracy is implicated in the constitution of citizenship in very distinct ways. He argues that the only way people can exercise their full rights as citizens is if they have access

to information, advice, analysis, interpretation and debate on areas that involve public political choices (Ibid).

For Habermas, when active participants in political life met, discussed, formed political projects and kept a check on government by way of informed and influential opinion, they constituted a public sphere (McQuail 2005). Scholars like Schudson (1998) and Glasser and Craft (1997), in a response described as "discontent of the contemporary public sphere" suggest that journalism will need to re-invent itself in order to enhance democracy. Glasser and Craft (Ibid) call for a shift away from a journalism of information" to a "journalism of conversation", essentially because the public needs not only information but also the call for engagement invites discussion and debate.

In spite of the differences in the idea media scholars have about public sphere, there seems to be agreement that on the whole, media must provide a basis for public discussion and for public engagement in matters of political and social concern. Ronning (1994) argues that expectations about the role of the African media in the democratic process became a major preoccupation for scholars in the early 1990s when many countries on the continent were catching the contagion of democratization.

In spite of the weaknesses and challenges of the African media (Nyamnjoh, 2005), there are scholars who believe that the media did indeed play a significant role in the current democratisation process in Africa. Nyamnjoh (Ibid) concedes that the democratisation process brought with it multi-partyism as well as media pluralism; however, research on media and elections in Southern Africa suggest that the media have not performed this role properly.

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

structure, size and composition, legislative assemblies differ from country to country and from one political experience to another.

Negrine (1999), in a study of three legislative assemblies, the British House of Commons, the French Assemblee Nationale and the German Bundestag describes the peculiarities of each of these institutions and the roles they play within their respective political systems. The British Parliament is an example of a "speech" parliament (as contrasted with a "work" parliament) where great importance is attached to debate and discussion. It is adversarial and confrontational, with the governing party (the majority in the House) on one side of the chamber and the opposition on the other, especially during Prime Minister's Question Time.

In France, by contrast, power is divided between the President and the Prime Minister, who leads the majority party in Parliament and the Assemblee Nationale. Other important differences include the fact that ministers need not be Members of Parliament or that committees play a significant part in the scrutiny of a government's legislative programme. These characteristics give the French Parliament its particular role - the role, according to John Frears (1990), of an institution that is "inadequate as an arena for political debate and as a check on the executive" (Ibid. p. 24). He adds that "the constitutional and procedural constraints can be summarised thus: complete executive supremacy in the legislative process, severely limited opportunities for general debates criticising the government, virtually no opportunities for scrutinising executive acts and making the executive give account of them" (Ibid).

In the German Parliament (the Bundestag), power lies more with parliamentary groups within it than with individuals. Furthermore, a lot of work goes on in parliamentary committees, thereby altering the nature of plenary sessions. Plenary sessions are infrequent, numbering only about 60 a year (compared to about 170 in France and Britain) and MPs spend most of their time in party and committee meetings. Unlike their counterparts in the British and French parliament, German

parliamentarians need permission from their groups to submit a question to the legislative assembly.

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

Keefer (1993) notes that,

> Logic dictates that if information-holding is a prerequisite for participation in the policymaking process and if the public must depend on news coverage for most issue-related information, then the public's ability to participate will depend largely on the extent and nature of news coverage of the issue in question. (Ibid., p. 4l2).

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

Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) describe the situation where the media does not provide people with the kind of information they need to participate in governance and decision-making as a "crisis of civic and political communication", with the media degenerating into "channels of personalities, dramatisation, witch-huntery, soap operatics and sundry trivialities" (Ibid. p. 1). Many journalists argue that journalism is all about pursuing the truth and reporting it. The professional ethos of journalism, or so notes Fowler (1991) is that journalists collect facts, report these objectively and the media present them fairly and without

bias "in a language which is designed to be unambiguous, undistorting and agreeable to readers".

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

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

Schudson (2000) acknowledges Keane's words and admits that indeed most journalists believe this "democratic function" is contingent on the realisation of press freedom as a principle safeguarded from any possible impediment associated with power and privilege (Ibid). He also acknowledges this view is steeped in liberal pluralism where through the unearthing of lies, deceit and scandal, the media provide a system of checks and balances to counteract power and privilege.

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

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

making. Ideological news values belong to the realm of moral-political discourse in society.

Hall argues that this double articulation, this interplay of the formal and the ideological values of news "binds the inner discourse of the newspaper to the ideological universe of the society." So while journalists may argue that they merely report what is happening in the real world, Hall asserts that these events enter the domain of ideology as soon as they become visible to the news-making process.

This, Schudson (2000) notes, is how journalists "make" or "manufacture" the news, acting as "gate-keepers" and making subjective judgements about what should be published and what should be rejected. In this regard, he is cautious not to suggest that journalists "fabricate" the news. Schudson (2000) notes that a cultural account of news helps explain generalised images and stereotypes in the news media that transcend structures of ownership or patterns of work relations. McQuail (1994) points out that though liberal theory assumes that ownership can be effectively separated from control of editorial decisions, there is sufficient evidence to show that commercial imperatives, particularly the profit motive, does influence editorial content. As McNair (2007) notes, the contents of the media always reflect the interests of those who finance them. According to McNair (1998), the study of the concrete manifestations of journalism reveal typologies such as news reports and feature articles with distinct rhetorical styles which are occupational1y founded and organisationally entrenched.

Research Method
This study adopted a mixed methods approach to assess a general newspaper content of parliamentary coverage in two Ghanaian national dailies. The research covered a 12-month period and used content analysis as the main research technique. This method was chosen because it provided a practical methodological basis for finding out how the Ghanaian newspaper press reports Parliament and the extent to which it provides information, interpretation and debate on issues that affect citizens and should therefore concern them. A period of twelve months between January and December 2014 was chosen as the basis for the

study. It was chosen to represent the extent of parliamentary coverage in the Ghanaian press. Seventy two (72) editions of both the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* papers were reviewed for news on Parliament of Ghana.

Parliament sits from Tuesday to Friday during the period that the institution is in session. Because of the days of sitting, newspaper reports about activities in Parliament normally run only from Wednesdays to Saturdays in both newspapers. A composite week was constructed to get a representative sample. Riffe, and Lacy (1993, cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2011) demonstrated that a composite week sampling technique was superior to both a random sample and a consecutive day sample when dealing with newspaper content. For example, a study might use a sample of one Monday (drawn at random from the number of possible Mondays in the month), one Tuesday (drawn from the available Tuesdays), and so on, until all weekdays have been included (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

Content Analysis
Content analysis has been defined by Walizer and Wienir (1978, cited in Wimmer and Dominic, 2011) as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information. Krippendorf (2004, cited in Wimmer and Dominic, 2011) defines it as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context. These definitions point out the focus and objectiveness of the findings because the procedures followed in a study must be clearly spelt out.

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

occurring over a period of time" (such as a the process of passing a legislative bill).

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

➢ Subject categories based on government ministries (given that some of the issues that are presented before the House are brought by cabinet ministers. Furthermore, most of the standing parliamentary committees are formed around the constituency of government ministries and their areas of operation. In this regard, subjects like agriculture, social welfare, defence and security, land and natural resources are suggested.

➢ Member of Parliament-constituency-related stories, where MPs make statements and contributions of relevance to their constituencies, using the plenary of the House;

➢ Bills (that is, proposed laws tabled before Parliament for discussion and possible enactment or amendment);

➢ Points of order (that is, official objection raised by Members of Parliament regarding what they consider to be an infringement of parliamentary procedures)

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

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

➢ Back-bencher (both the majority and minority)

➢ Minority parties

➢ Speakers of the House

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

➢ front page placement/main headline story

➢ editorial page placement

➢ inside pages.

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

Findings/Results
The overall content of news reports from Parliament published in the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* of selected dates from 1st January to 31st December 2014 is presented and discussed.

Table 1: **Total number of stories published in the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* newspapers during the period of study**

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

Table 1 shows that in the six days chosen to represent the twelve months of parliamentary sitting in the Year 2014, a total number of 90 news reports were published by the two newspapers. The *Daily Graphic*

published forty eight (48) stories, which represents 53.3 per cent of the total; the *Daily Guide* published 42 stories, which translates as 46.7 per cent of the total. On the basis of these figures, it can be concluded that the *Daily Graphic* devoted more editorial space to parliamentary news than the *Daily Guide* during the study period.

Table 2: **Information sources used in story (Speaker or Deputy Speaker appearing as main sources) during the period of study**

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

Table 2 shows that in the study, the *Daily Graphic* carried eight reports which featured the Speaker of Parliament (or his Deputy) whereas the *Daily Guide* carried four reports as the main source of information. This means that Speaker-driven accounted for 16.7 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Graphic* published and 9.5 per cent of the

total number of stories the *Daily Guide* published during the period of study.

Table 3: **Information sources used in story (Majority Members) appearing as main sources) during the period of study**

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

During the study period, the *Daily Graphic* published fifteen stories which featured members of parliament from the majority as the main source of information whereas the *Daily Guide* published five. In percentage terms, the *Daily Graphics'* story constitutes 33.3 per cent of its total coverage and 11.9 per cent of the *Daily Guide's* coverage. This information is captured in Table 3.

Table 4: **Information sources used in story (Minority Members) appearing as main sources) during the period of study**

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

Table 4 shows that the *Daily Graphic* published a total number of forty-eight stories out of the total number of twenty-two where minority members of parliament featured as the main sources of information. In terms of percentages, this translates as 45.8 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Graphic* published during the period of study. The *Daily Guide* published twenty-nine stories during the study period where minority members of parliament featured as main sources of news. This translates as 69 percent of the total number of stories published by the *Daily Guide*.

Table 5:   Information sources used in story (Ministers) appearing as main sources during the period of study

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

Information in Table 5 indicates that the *Daily Guide* published more stories on ministers than the *Daily Graphic*. It accounted for 9.5 percent and 4.1 percent respectively. The *Daily Guide* during the study period published four stories whilst the *Daily Graphic* had two stories.

Table 6: **Information sources used in story (Committee Leaders) appearing as main sources during the period of study**

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

Table 6 shows that in the study, the *Daily Graphic* carried fourteen reports which featured the leadership of committees in Parliament whereas the *Daily Guide* carried nine reports as the main source of information. This means that chairpersons of the various committees of parliament accounted for 29.1 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Graphic* published and 21.4 per cent of the total number of stories the *Daily Guide* published during the period of study.

Table 7: **Information sources used in story (Parliament as an institution) appearing as main sources during the period of study**

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

The above, Table 7, shows that during the study period, Parliament as a collective source of news featured in both papers. The story which both papers carried on dealt with Parliament's vetting and confirmation of the appointment of two nominees of the president, Dr. Ekow Spio-Garbrah and Dr. Kwabena Donkor as ministers of trade and power, respectively. Though Parliament as a main source of news was not originally considered as one of categories for analysis, the fact that it did appear during the period of study meant that it had to be accommodated.

Table 8: **Information sources used in story (Back Benchers) appearing as main sources during the period of study**

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

Table 8 shows that during the study period, a total of twenty-five stories were published by the two newspapers where a back-bencher from the ruling and minority parties was the main source of information, representing 27% and 28.6% per cent of the total number of stories the paper published by the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide,* respectively.

Table 9: **Percentage of total number of information sources appearing as main sources used by both the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* during the period of study.**

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

Table 9 shows that on the whole subjects based on the constituency of government ministries (e.g. Finance, Agriculture, Lands and Health) constituted the second largest category of subjects reported by the media during the period of study. Of the 46 subjects that appeared in the *Daily Graphic,* 11 of these were subjects relating to government ministries. This constituted 23.9 per cent of the total number of subjects appearing in the paper during the study period. Out of the 45 subjects that appeared in the *Daily Graphic*, 31.1 per cent of these related to government ministries and their constituencies.

In the *Daily Graphic*, MP-constituency-related issues constituted the largest majority of subjects published during the study period, making up 45.6 per cent of the total number of subjects reported by the paper. For the *Daily Guide*, MP-constituency related matters constituted

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

Discussion and Conclusion
The content analysis revealed that news from Parliament as reported by the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* conforms to the description of a "parliamentary news item" by Negrine (1998, p.133) as

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

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

On the basis of these findings, parliamentary coverage by the Ghanaian media can be said to be lacking in what Keefer (1993) describes as "empowering news" from the legislative assembly. 'Empowering news', as conceptualised by Keefer, refers to policy information, about the substance of an issue, including information defining and backgrounding the issue and information describing the competing proposals and operational information, information about the locus, timing and procedures from issue-related decisions that need to be made by policymaking bodies.

In terms of placement of stories, the *Daily Graphic* attached greater importance to news from Parliament than the *Daily Guide*. This conclusion is based on the fact that it had two front page stories published during the study period and an editorial commentary whereas the *Daily Guide's* stories had one front page story and no editorial commentary on parliament. This finding clearly indicates the dearth of coverage of parliamentary proceedings in the newspapers as well as the little importance the newspapers attached to Parliamentary issues. The dearth of coverage of Ghana's Parliament in particular may be highly attributable to over concentration of the Ghanaian press on issues that border on political spectacle of the executive arm of government. It must also be noted that there appears to be a lack of media expertise in the coverage of Ghana's Parliament.

The *Daily Guide* cited minority MPs as a main source of news from Parliament more than the *Daily Graphic*. In the same breath, the back-benchers from the minority parties cited as main sources of news in the *Daily Guide* is greater than in the *Daily Graphic*. It could also be said that in terms of occurrence, non-parliamentary items (such as a former president's or a leading opposition member's non-attendance of the ceremonial opening of Parliament) are more likely to make headlines in the *Daily Guide* than in the *Daily Graphic*.

On the basis of the items that get to make the headlines, it can be said that on the whole, newspaper coverage of Parliament is intrinsically linked to the procedures of the House, to rulings by the Speaker (and his Deputies), to submissions deriving from the constituency of government

ministries as submitted by Cabinet Ministers as well as bills deriving from the said constituencies, to submissions made by MPs relating to their individual constituencies, to contributions made by Members on issues on the floor of the House.

The nature of coverage, particular the focus on procedural matters or matters ingrained in the traditions of the House could explain why newspaper coverage of Parliament has been described as "episodic" (Djokotoe, 2000), occurring only when Parliament is in session. In other words, when Parliament is not in a formal session, there is no newspaper coverage. Interestingly, this has implications on the sociology of news production in the particular context of the Ghanaian media in the sense that it has a bearing on what journalists perceive news from Parliament to be and on how, in the words of Schudson (2000), journalists "make" news.

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

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

It is therefore doubtful whether, in the particular case of Ghana, newspapers can play a public sphere role, contributing to the democratic process by informing citizens and helping them engage in public

discourses. In short, that the media in Ghana presumed informational and interpretative prerogative within the context of media and democracy is noticeably.

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

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

For the media to play a public sphere role in a democracy, it will need to "re-invent" itself, as Glasser and Craft (1997) noted, only then can the public have a sound basis to engage with the news as citizens who, in the words of Sussman (1996) are "relatively well-informed about the policy debates taking place within political institutions (like Parliament) and are able to access the quality of representation of legislation in particular." The "re-invention" of the Ghanaian media as a public sphere would need to start with an intervention in the social organisation of newswork that will make parliamentary reporting an integrated newsroom function based on team reporting.

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate, through content analysis, how the Ghanaian newspapers report Parliament and the extent to which they

provide citizens with a broad range of information, interpretation and debate on national issues. It was undertaken against the background of the fact that Ghana returned to a multi-party democracy since 1993 and as in any democracy, the media is believed to play a public sphere role by informing citizens and helping them engage in public discourses.

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

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