

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**WHAT MAKES THE NEWS? AN ANALYSIS OF THE FRONT PAGE STORIES
OF THE *GHANAIAN TIMES* NEWSPAPER**

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



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**A thesis in the Department of Communication and Media Studies,
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**of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
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in the University of Education, Winneba**

JULY, 2020

DECLARATION

STUDENT’S DECLARATION

I, Kwaku Baah-Acheamfour, declare that this Thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....

SUPERVISOR’S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: **GIFTY APPIAH-ADJEI (PHD)**

SIGNATURE.....

DATE:

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my lovely family; to my sweet parents Oppong Baah and Cecilia Boateng as well as, my lovely siblings Rueben, Beatrice, Isaac, Yaw Oppong, Kofi Baah and Portia not forgetting my good friends Evelyn Abakah and Abbass whose collective efforts ensured that I got to where I am today.



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I am again indebted to Messrs Benjamin Aboagye, Evelyn Abakah for helping me in coding the data. To them, the honour of this work must go. If there are any flaws and weaknesses, however, I accept full responsibility.

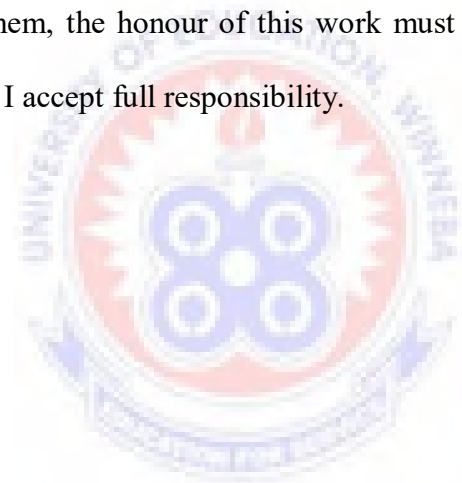


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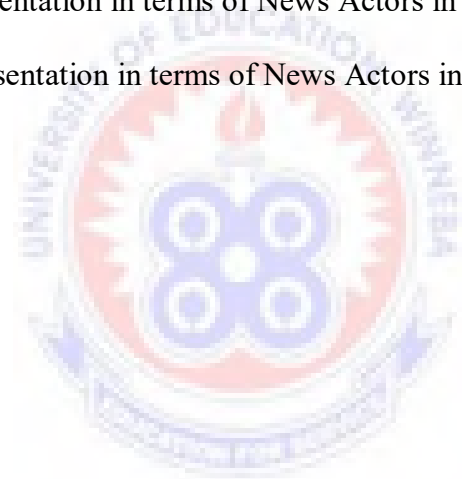
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
UEW	University of Education, Winneba
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences



ABSTRACT

This study examined the news stories *Ghanaian Times* newspaper published on its front pages from 2015 to 2019. The study aimed at establishing the dominant news types, the news actors and the setting of the front page stories. The variables were based on the fact that the *Ghanaian Times*, as a state-owned media with a constitutional obligation of offering equal facilities and opportunities to all to express divergent views and opinions, will do just that. The gatekeeping theory and framing theories undergirded the study. To achieve the objectives of the study, qualitative content analysis was used to gather data for the study. Also, an interview was used to gather additional data to validate findings from the content analysis. Thematic analysis was used in handling the data especially in coming up with the themes and corresponding frames with regard to the focus of the study. Results showed a skewed coverage for political news, the elite and urban settings. The newspaper, in the exercise of their gatekeeping function, ended up with unfavourable coverage towards rural folks, the masses and even other non-political news. This may be because coverage on political issues and the elites boost sales and the newspaper depends on sales to cover its operational cost. As a result, the newspaper failed to uphold its constitutional obligation.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

The persistent devotion of media contents to political stories and the elite is as topical today as it was years ago when some aggrieved media consumers and experts called for a shift in terms of the pattern or nature of stories given prominence each day (Sevenans, 2015; Bonsu, 2017). The Ghanaian print media, for instance, have been variously accused of neglecting social and economic issues which affect the masses with the majority of its stories devoted to politics especially on their premium front pages (Sakyi, 2010). Karikari (2017) indicates that there is indeed a gaping absence of coverage of issues concerning the conditions and interests of the poor, the working class, and thereby the majority of the labouring masses. Karikari (2017) adds that there are even social groups whose votes count but whose voices are not heard at the corridors of power due to unfair media reportage. Amihere (2010) posits that the unfair representation in terms of reportage is dangerous for governance and development especially when the media is a significant source of information for policymakers in Ghana. Thus, the need for a departure from such a trend of publication is necessary not only in ensuring balance and fairness but also in breaking the monotony in terms of what gets published. It will also help in ensuring that the voiceless and underprivileged are also represented on the premium front pages to attract the attention of policymakers leading to the redress of their challenges.

Newspapers serve a critical function in presenting a selection of the day's events to their communities, and each day's news presents a set of perspectives of the most important happenings to their publics (Kim & Chung, 2017). Even though every part of the

newspaper is important, the most important location to find such representations of society's most critical events is arguably the newspaper's front page (McQuail, 2010). The front page highlights the day's most critical and important stories especially from the perspective of the editors and the organization that owns the newspaper (Singer, 2001). Kikuke (2004) indicates that what gets published largely depends on news values with editors, organizational policies and interest playing crucial roles in the gatekeeping process. Thus, a myriad of factors and decisions determine the stories published which also produce the frames for such newspaper front pages especially for publication of certain story types. Different fields of study have developed research on news leading to various, possibly contradictory, findings (Baidoo, 2011). If any scholar approached the literature on news value in terms of what makes news, there would likely be completely different answers (Architti, 2010). News values would differ from field to field be it political communications, international communications or news sociology (Architti, 2010). Generally, what makes the news involves a complex process of gathering, producing, publishing (Journalistic Policy Guide, Standards and Practices 2008) through a selection of particular stories over other competing ones for publication (Reese & Ballinger, 2011). In mass media communication, "there is the tendency to understand news as a result of the struggle between political actors and journalists" (Archetti, 2010, p.567), but, what is usually published goes beyond that. Therefore, studying the content of newspapers to establish patterns that help in explaining what makes news in the Ghanaian print media is important. In the scheme of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper and other media publications, not only are politicians essential to the news production process because they are a constant source of news (Banette, 2006), especially from what is usually observed from the front

pages of the newspapers, but they also make active attempts at imposing their ‘spin’ on the news (Osborne & Walters, 2004).

Globally, modern social movements and political activists, to an important extent, rely on the media to reach constituencies, policymakers and the broad masses of their followers (Koopman, 2004). At this point, the front page of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper which is perceived to be the flagship and topmost (Journalistic Policy Guide, Standards and Practices 2008) among the print media in Ghana becomes very crucial for the flow of information to readers and media watch institutions. The *Ghanaian Times* newspaper is recognized among the most dependable print media resource for information in Ghana (Amihere, 2010). This could account for the reason why *Ghanaian Times* newspaper together with the *Daily Graphic* has become a generic symbol and standard for the print media industry in Ghana. They are used extensively for communications research purposes as well as a tool for the highly aggressive and competitive newspaper review programmes on radio and television stations across the country (Nyarko, 2016).

In Ghana today, political parties, movement activities, opinion leaders and policymakers depend, to a considerable degree, on the mass media for information during newspaper reviews on issues that concern them and also learn about the reaction of others to their issues (Baidoo, 2011). The information could be obtained at the newspaper stands, radio or television stations especially during newspaper reviews and analysis in the mornings, afternoons and evenings on issues that concern them (Baidoo, 2011). Such people also learn about others’ reactions to their information from the news media. In other words, what is published as news on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper is a crucial source of strategic information on which movement activists, political activists and others base their decisions, thereby, serving as a sounding board for their planning purposes. Thus,

the front-page coverage of the *Ghanaian Times* also provides the critical information input for the next round of interactions among media analysts, politicians and policymakers.

Several editors and reporters take crucial decisions in terms of what must constitute news for a given day especially considering the national context within which they operate (Archetti, 2010). One of such decisions is the news actors and setting of stories with many pushing for masses and rural stories to be given prominence as coverage is said to be concentrated on urban centres and the elite (Baidoo, 2011). This is important especially in the state-owned print media where access must be granted all irrespective of one's status or geographical location (Baidoo, 2011). The reality shows that news coverage appears to be mostly differentiated at the level of the single media organization, suggesting that, indeed, news tends to be shaped by media professionals (Archetti, 2010). This also proves that the constraints affecting journalists' decisions of 'what is news' and who should be allowed to express an opinion within the news text come from far beyond the newsroom (Archetti, 2010).

In the context of this study, it seeks to establish whether the editors of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper are upholding the norms of the journalistic practise by applying news values doctrine such as accuracy, fairness, objectivity and balance in the determination of newsworthiness for its front page or they are being hoodwinked to kowtow to the instinct of officialdom.

1.0.1 Print Media and focus on Political Stories

The media in Ghana is accused of over-focusing on political stories ahead of other categories of stories even when such stories are of public interest. The view is supported by Baidoo (2011) and Gogovi (2017) who posit that the state-owned media give more

coverage to political stories ahead social and economic issues which tend to affect the generality of Ghanaians especially the masses. The trend of focusing coverage more on political news might not have started recently as Peake (2007) posits that political actors are indeed the preferred news actors for front-page stories and that the preference is largely due to economic rather than sociological reasons. To Peak (2007) newspapers give more coverage to certain political stories because it is the kind of news that the readership of the paper prefer since these stories reflect their political ideologies and idiosyncrasies. Therefore, using this strategy of reportage rather leads to the maximization of profit of these newspapers. It is evident, according to Barrett & Barrington (2005), that the political leanings of the newspaper affect the editorial decisions of the newspaper subtly. This connotes that newspaper editors are biased towards a political party or government they support or are affiliated to, or share a political ideology with, in their reportage of news stories involving that political party or government. Again, the sociology of the newsroom leads newspapers to “develop an organizational political culture that influences the nature of the coverage” (Barrett & Barrington, 2005, p. 610).

Sutter (2001) stresses that the media’s goal is to maximize their profits and will not jeopardize it to gain accurate information. Thus, the media will take whatever means to save profits by citing government sources due to their accessibility even at the cost of objectivity in media reportage. Publishing of newspapers is a business, therefore, it is affected by market forces (Hamilton, 2004). When publishing is combined with market forces represented by the newspaper’s readership, a dominant political atmosphere affecting the trends in how reporters and editors decide to cover stories may result (Barrett & Peake, 2007). Employees of news organizations conform to observed behaviour and adopt the dominant values of the organization (Davis, 2001). Moreover, interactions

between publishers, editors and reporters involve power relations, and objectivity norms may lose out even without overt behaviour on the part of the more powerful actors (Sparrow, 1999). From this literature, it is observed that profits, power and control, ownership and ideology play a very dominant role in the managing of a newspaper. All these forces subtly play a role in the publishing of a news story. Newspaper reportage does not exist in a vacuum. The news stories that readers read go through a lot of scrutiny before publication. Therefore, certain trends in the reportage of stories become interesting for analysis and discussion.

Previous studies have underscored the increasing reliance and credibility of news values in the state media research (Uribe and Gunter, 2007; Murthy, Ramakrishna & Melkote, 2009; Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010; Alhaus and Tewksbury, 2002; Kinnunen, 2005; Brennan and Vandenberg, 2009; Wolfe, Boydston and Baumgartner, 2009). Moehler and Singh (2011) wanted to find out why citizens in post-authoritarian African democracies trusted government-owned broadcast media more than private broadcasters, given the public media's lack of independence and history of state propaganda. Analyzing an Afro Barometer data from sixteen countries, the results of the analysis indicates that low political sophistication, illiberal attitudes, support for incumbents are all associated with greater relative trust in government media. The study further reveals that that citizens prefer public broadcasters in polities with greater press freedom and lower corruption.

Whether or not the Ghanaian state-owned print media conforms to Moehler and Singhs (2011) findings will also be of concern to the current work especially factors that determine what gets published in the state-owned newspaper *Ghanaian Times* . This is so because the newspaper does not only enjoy huge circulation but also among the preferred newspapers by policymakers (Buadu-Ayebofoh, 1990; Amihere, 2010).

1.0.2 Media and Rural Reporting

The media have largely been accused of slighting rural areas in terms of what gets published especially on their premium front pages. According to Nwanko and Ochen (2012), the media have often ignored the rural areas by reporting on what is taking place in the urban areas thereby not highlighting the hardships faced by people in rural areas. Chester and Neelameghan (2000) have observed that most people in African countries reside in the rural areas where their needs are not adequately met necessitating that the media highlight their plight for the corresponding redress by authorities. Sibanda and Mafa (2015) indicate that newspaper reports of development trends in rural areas can intensify such efforts and spur the minds of those involved in decision making into more actions. Sibanda and Mafa (2015), however, state that unfortunately, media practitioners prefer to concentrate their coverage on urban dwellers and centres. Karikari (2017) also indicates that the media in Ghana prefers the urban stories to rural stories even when it makes more developmental sense to publish the rural stories compared to the other urban stories. In this regard, Trisha, Fatima and Choudhuri (2016) describes the coverage of rural news as lamentable. This because the bias is due to commercial underpinnings of news and that rural news is mostly highlighted at the time of natural disaster and political phenomenon of bigwigs visiting such areas. Amihere (2010) indicates that what makes such story selection practices unhealthy is the fact that policymakers rely heavily on newspapers for feedback on citizens to facilitate decision making concerning the people. This arguably means that communities that are cut off from media coverage stand a lower chance of getting their challenges addressed compared to those which enjoy huge media coverage. This is a disadvantage to rural settings which are not able to match the commercial benchmarks of the media thereby not

giving prominence in terms of what gets published. According to Rufus (2003), there is an obligation on the media in every society to be responsible to the people across all boundaries be it urban or rural and not a few or a particular stratum of society. McQuail (2010) also indicates that the media, apart from being free and independent should also see themselves as agents of public service, thereby, helping in addressing the concerns of all and not a section of society. In this regard, a state-owned print media like *Ghanaian Times* will arguably be committing a great offence if its content and space serve largely a skewed section of society thereby not performing the general public service function as indicated by McQuail (2010).

Sibanda and Mafa (2015) in emphasizing the repercussion of biased media representation of rural-urban news posit that the poor state of development in rural areas is attributable to the lack of media space given to issues concerning such areas. The scholars explain that officialdom is not made to know the true state of rural areas so that efforts are doubled to address such concerns. In agreement, Adepoju (1982) posit that living conditions in rural areas are relatively poor and non-farm employment opportunities are scarce (as cited in Sibanda & Mafa, 2015). Ogadigo (2009) adds that rural areas still lack basic social amenities such as roads, hospitals and schools and where they are lucky to have such amenities, they are not comparable to those in urban centres. Udoakah (1998) states that once the word, “rural” is mentioned in Africa, certain images are conjured in the minds of the people and that the images centre around acute underdevelopment and poverty which manifest themselves in the forms of bad roads, lack of water supply, poor housing, poor sanitation, lack of electricity, malnutrition and illiteracy.

To Ogadigo (2009), information plays a vital role in the development of any society and that the quantity and quality of information at the disposal of the citizenry (both the urban

and rural dwellers) to a large extent, determine the level of development. Also Aliede (2005) stresses the importance of affording rural centres adequate coverage so that their issues get addressed when he indicates that no society can survive today, if it is not properly informed about events that directly or indirectly affect it. These assertions are in line with the claim by Trisha, Fatima and Choudhuri (2017) that reporting about the rural settings serves as a barometer for gauging achievements in the area of rural welfare since the majority of the people are found there and most people in power are not aware of rural conditions (Sibanda & Mafa, 2015). Atwood (1982) states that the media have to dig, discover and bring to the fore the social problems confronting the rural people. He adds that they are, more importantly, to present them in a way that draws the attention of those in authority to move them into action in guaranteeing decent livelihood in such areas. (Atwood, 1982 as cited in Sibanda & Mafa, 2015). The view is supported by Baidoo(2011) who posits that the media must help advance development in rural areas by highlighting activities of rural folks so that they get the necessary support. This is because the mass media are central instruments in determining the mental maps of the people with regards to the world beyond their immediate sensory experience (Atwood, 1999). National development can only be achieved in a society when the majority of people, including policymakers, can access to both quantitative and qualitative information (Sibanda & Mafa, 2015). Thus, if the state-owned *Ghanaian Times* offer fair coverage to rural stories, the coverage will not only give a picture of how well such areas are developing or otherwise but also will provide evidence to guide policymakers in fashioning out strategies to deal with the concerns of such areas. This is especially true since the *Ghanaian Times* is a great assessment tool for policymakers in Ghana (Buadu-Ayeboafoh, 1990; Amihere, 2010).

1.0.2 The Mass Media under the 1992 Constitution

The Constitution of Ghana indeed has provided enough protection for the state-owned media and its editors in the discharge of their duties. Thus, the media is granted autonomy in the discharge of their constitutional mandate of serving the people with news. Articles 162 and 163 of the 1992 Constitution spells out the environment and parameters that undergird the activities of the state media which includes the *Ghanaian Times*. Article 162 unequivocally guarantees freedom of expression and independence of the media and also expressly evokes duty and responsibility as well. While Article 162(1) states that the “freedom and independence of the press is guaranteed”, Article 162(4) indicates that editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions shall not be subject to control or interference for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications (1992 Constitution of Ghana, p.112) Thus, *Ghanaian Times* newspaper and its editors, as part of the mass media, are beneficiaries of the provision. Also, Article 162(5) places a responsibility on the mass media including the *Ghanaian Times* to hold government accountable to the people of Ghana.

Article 163, however, places a mandate on the state-owned media to satisfy all facets of society in terms of the allocation of media space. Thus, the state-owned media are enjoined to afford fair opportunities and facilities to people to present divergent views and dissenting opinions on all national issues. The thrust of this study is the extent to which this mandate relates to the news values, gatekeeping and selection mechanisms for the *Ghanaian Times* front-page issues.

From a communication and media research point of view, a lot is discussed about the news values as that helps structure the decisions of journalists and editors to assign newsworthiness to events or not (Myers, 2000).

While the 1992 Constitution provides unlimited access to journalists to gather and select stories, Myers (2000) points out geographical proximity, the prominence and prestige of the speaker, the level of conflict-related to the message, the relevance or the issue, possibility for dramatization and personalization, and the novelty of the story as the basis for selection of news stories.

Koopman (2004) indicates that social movement organizers and other public actors may know about these selection criteria, hence, they try to anticipate and manipulate the news hole by how they bring their messages across. Many politicians, social activists and elites in Ghana, to a large extent, organizes encounters, script leases and messages in an attempt to maximize the chances of drawing media attention (Baidoo, 2011). This is so particularly with *Ghanaian Times* front-page coverage, knowing the attraction and enormous visibility of the paper in the country (Baidoo, 2011). However, there are severe limitations to the degree to which actors can influence the amount of visibility that is allocated to their messages irrespective of the constitutional provisions. Speakers can generally manipulate only a small range of aspects of newsworthiness, and much depends on how news values such as objectivity, prominence or relevance, and balance among others have come to be defined in the public discourse (Baidoo, 2011).

The concept of objectivity significantly refers not to the absence of personal bias but rather to the journalistic method, a fact-based process of news gathering (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). As a result, statements by 'important' politicians tend to get covered to a large extent regardless of divergent and dissenting opinions; and views to be expressed and published provided they are expressed in a fair, objective and balanced manner (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001).

It would therefore be key to this current research to explore whether the freedom of the media is being upheld and even the extent to which ordinary people get coverage on the front pages of the Ghanaian Times newspaper per the provisions of article 162 and 163 of the 1992 republican Constitution of Ghana.

The issue of diversity of stories is also worth looking at in determining if the front pages are also skewed to serve the political class as posited by Kovach & Rosenstiel (2001) and even the gatekeeping practices exercised in terms of what published on the front pages.

1.1 Research Problem

The importance of the front pages of newspapers in shaping opinion and also offering divergent representation on issues cannot be overemphasized (Chung & Kim, 2017). It is not only the premium and most prized page but also a lot of people read the front page stories without necessarily reading the rest of the stories on the other pages (McQuail, 2010). This arguably suggests that a story stands being ignored or denied prominence and attention especially if it is buried in the rest of the pages. Also, the continuous publication of a particular type of story, for example, politics, at the detriment of social and economic issues would constitute not only a frame of politics in terms of the newspaper's identity but also what is of importance to the editors such that they would want the public to think about such issues. Nyarko (2016) indicates that the electronic media in Ghana does not only rely heavily on the print media for news especially from their front pages but also premise a lot of socio-political discussions on newspapers dubbed 'newspaper reviews'. Thus, the front page becomes a vital tool for advocacy with many policymakers relying on the media content to guide policy making (Amihere, 2010).

Researchers such as Antwi (1991), Baidoo (2011) and Gogovi (2017) have blamed the Ghanaian State-owned media for not only concentrating on the elites and urban centres for news but also dedicating the premium front pages to serve the political class thereby sidelining the masses and rural folks in having their issues heard and addressed. For instance, the state-owned media *Daily Graphic* is cited by scholars for doing little to promote development among the masses and rural folks as their reportage is heavily skewed against them (Antwi,1991; Baidoo, 2011; Gogovi, 2017). *Daily Graphic* newspaper is accused of flouting its constitutional obligation of fair representation as it is expected to offer equal opportunities and facilities to all to express divergent views and opinion on issues that concern them (Baidoo, 2011).

Such findings about the *Daily Graphic*, therefore, necessitate that the *Ghanaian Times* is also studied to establish if it is toeing the same line as the *Daily Graphic* in denying the masses and rural folks their constitutional right of being offered the necessary media space to have their issues heard and addressed. This is because the *Ghanaian Times* has a constitutional mandate to do this. The question that this study seeks to answer is whether the elites and political stories still dominate the front pages. Also, it aims to investigate whether seemingly low key events, especially in the rural areas, receive front-page coverage in the *Ghanaian Times* as the constitution of Ghana mandates and even which news values undergird such selection of stories?

1.2 Research Objectives

The study has objectives:

1. To investigate the news types published on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*.

2. To investigate the social class of the newsmakers found on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*.
3. To investigate the geographical representation of the stories found on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*.
4. To investigate the news values that influence what gets published on the front pages of the *Ghanaian Times*.

1.3 Research Questions

To be able to address the objectives, this study poses the following questions.

1. What are the types of news stories published on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*?
2. What is the geographical representation of the front-page stories of *Ghanaian Times*?
3. What is the social class of people covered in the front-page news stories of *Ghanaian Times*?
4. What news values or policies determine what gets published on the front-page of *Ghanaian Times*?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is important as it will help bring out the representative nature of the stories that the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper publishes on its front page especially when the front page is arguably the most important part of the newspaper. The results will help confirm or reject assertions by scholars and experts that the Ghanaian State-owned print media serves largely the political class. The pattern of stories in the five years will help arrive at that conclusion.

The front pages study is significant as research has shown that a lot of people form an opinion by merely looking at the front pages of the newspapers without necessarily going into the newspaper to read more on the stories or even other stories in the other sections of the newspaper. This means that a group stand being ignored in terms of courting attention to their plight for redress if they are not lucky to be featured on the front pages of the newspaper. This study will add to the need to ensure fair representation when it comes to front-page coverage so that all facets of society including the masses and rural folks are covered so as to have the concerns captured and and given the necessary attention by policy makers.

Also, the *Ghanaian Times* is among the few print media organisations with wider coverage of news as they employ many reporters, stringers, regional correspondents, international correspondents, good columnists, essayists and sports writers than any print media outlet in the country (Journalistic Policy, Standards and Practices, 2008). It follows, therefore, that the newspaper is not only popular, but a daily newspaper with far greater volumes for politico-socio-economic news, advertisements, financial information and other news items. The study, therefore, finds significance in being able to conclude as to what constitutes news by the *Ghanaian Times* and how representative or reflective this is vis-à-vis the constitutional mandate of the paper to reflect divergent views and representation as a state-owned media as captured by Article 163 of the 1992 Constitution. In doing so, the study will add to the existing literature as to what news values mean for a privileged newspaper like the *Ghanaian Times* in a developing country like Ghana.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study takes a look at the stories that found space on the front pages of the Ghanaian state-owned print media and the themes that get generated per the stories selected by the editors of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper. It also assess the news actors, and setting of the stories selected for the front page. The study covers the period 2015-2019 and it is to ensure representativeness through the systematic gathering of data while again ensuring currency in terms of the data as the year 2019 gives the current themes associated with the newspaper. Interview with editor of the newspaper was conducted to guide the interpretation of data especially in determining the news value decisions.

1.6 Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction and discusses the following: background to the study, organization of the study, statement of the problem, the objectives of the study and research question. It ends with the significance of the study. Chapter two deals with the review of related literature on what makes news, news values as well as the theoretical framework. Chapter three contains the methodology. It covers the study area, research paradigm, research design, target population, sampling technique, sources of data, data collection procedure and the data analysis technique. Chapter four was devoted to data analysis, interpretation, presentation and discussion of the main findings. Chapter five concentrates on the summary and conclusion of the results of the study, recommendations and limitations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This section of the research discusses the empirical studies and theoretical framework that guide the study. The chapter reviews studies from parts of the world that are related to the study as well as the theoretical underpinnings.

2.0 Review of Empirical Studies

This section focuses on the news values and impact on news selection on the front page, significance of newspapers and front page as well as other empirical studies on coverage patterns on the front page.

2.1 News values

Several events occur from day to day but only some of these eventually become news stories (Gogovi, 2017). News values are rules that guide media outlets such as newspapers, radio and television, in determining how much importance or attention to give a story and are basic to understanding the choices editors are faced with when deciding whether a story is newsworthy or not (Spencer-Thomas, 2005). News values play a key role in story selections as not all stories can get space in the newspaper (Kisuke, 2004).

Harcup and O'Neil (2016) came up with a list of news values by examining international news stories to find out the factors they had in common that placed them at the top of news agenda in the world. The authors suggested that events become news to the extent that they are defined by the some event properties namely frequency, absolute intensity or intensity

increase, meaningfulness, cultural proximity, unexpectedness, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons and something negative. The concept of news values is, therefore, important as it helps to determine which information would fit the available spaces of a newspaper (Kisuke, 2004).

According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996), news values, however, are not the only values that influence what finally becomes a news item. Other important factors are format considerations, audience interest, resources, source considerations and the need for a mix of different kinds of news. The concept of news values is relevant to the study as it helps in the understanding of the diverse factors that may have influenced the selection of the front page news stories from 2014-2019 in the *Ghanaian Times*.

2.1.1 Influence of News Values on News Selection

Research by Kisuke (2004) on the role of news values in the selection of news and sources in contemporary Third World newspaper, indicates that elite sources are preferred when it comes to front-page stories. Kisuke (2004) did a case study on the *Daily Nation* newspaper in Nairobi, Kenya by using content analysis to analyze the characteristics of news sources on the front page. As part of her conclusion, she stated that though news values have acquired universal currency, different contexts may explain why news values vary from one society to another.

Kisuke (2004) however limited findings of her study to just the concept of news values. An application of the other theories and a comparison between the two newspapers with different background would have given a broader and richer perspective on what is made to appear on the front pages. This study sought to fill that gap by applying gatekeeping and

framing to establish a broader picture of what stories make it to the front pages of the state-owned print media.

Chaudhary (2010) also analyzed the United States of America based *Washington Post* and *Daily Times* of Nigeria for a period of one constructed week in November 1998. Content of the newspapers were examined based on whether the slant was negative, positive or neutral. A total of 1,858 stories were analyzed in six issues each of the *Washington Post* and the *Daily Times*. The findings suggested that the newspapers in the developing nations also tended to cover the developed countries of the West in a more negative than positive manner. An analysis of the front-page stories of the *Ghanaian Times* will help validate the claims of Chaudhry and Dayal (2018) if indeed the media in the developing countries are not guilty of framing their front pages with negative stories thereby, painting a catastrophic image about their own country and by extension the developing world.

It has been indicated by Baidoo (2011) that the elites, especially the political class dominate the front pages and content because they have the economic power to influence sales. He adds that newspapers also tend to have an unfavourable coverage of the rural settings as compared to urban centres because the rural areas are not deemed as patrons of the newspapers specifically in terms of sales compared to the urban centres, hence, focusing more on the urban centres. He stresses that when the rural areas are even lucky to feature on the front pages, the stories are mostly negative and crisis-related as developmental issues in such areas are mostly overlooked. The current work seeks to find out if the Ghanaian State-owned print media is not also guilty in focusing more on urban centres as against rural settings that crave for media space to highlight their activities - especially their challenges for redress. Indeed, the concept of news values is important to this current work as it helps to assess the criteria adopted by the editors of the *Ghanaian Times*

newspaper in selecting stories for the premium front pages and the effect that such selection criteria tend to generate in terms of the newspaper's outlook which becomes the dominant frame or frames associated with the newspaper.

2.2 Organizational Influence on Media Content

The front page of a newspaper, as it is the introduction to the publication, is essentially an extension of the core values of the newspaper's staff (Kim & Chung, 2017). As such, there are organizational factors that may influence the content of the news. Many have pointed to the construction of news, or the internal and external forces that may guide news selection (Barret & Barrington, 2005, Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). Studies of news organizations and the routines tied to organizational life point to the manufacturing of news for efficiency and profitability (Lowrey, 1999). Media sociologists, such as Tuchman (1973), Gans (2004), and Schudson (2012), suggest that news is a manufactured product; news organizations follow routines for efficiency; external forces impact the news product; journalists suppress personal values and embrace professional values to serve organizational routines; and routines largely determine news content and subsequently the way the world is portrayed to the public (Lowrey, 1999). Thus, the process for selecting what makes the news - especially the front page of a newspaper - is a critical question to consider. For example, organizational politics, such as conflict (both vertical and horizontal) may have an impact on how stories are selected and what makes the front page (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

Sigal (1973) notes that section editors seek to place their share of stories on the front page to increase the prestige of their relative division. He discovered that, over time, bureaucratic conflicts led to a pattern of front-page stories that balanced out and

accommodated the number of stories from various news desks. Likewise, having one's work published on the front page is considered an indication of a journalists' success at a news organization (Breed, 1955). Further, these individuals are more likely to have editorial control over their work and develop a greater degree of power within their newsrooms (Breed, 1955).

Another possible organizational influence might be the recent transitions that many daily newspapers have adopted amid a significant downturn in the print newspaper industry. Newspapers have been forced to take various cost-saving measures, including massive layoffs of seasoned reporters, editors, and photojournalists. Such practices may lead to more newspapers turning to wire services for content (Anderson, 2013; Picard, 2014). Similarly, in terms of page design, many newspapers have given up individual operations and have adopted so-called design hubs, where page designs are provided from centralized offices to individual newspapers (Cavendish, 2013). Thus, the specific ways in which individual newspapers produce and package their front page might vary across newspapers, as the front pages are outcomes of a complicated process within organizations.

2.3 Newspapers and Concept of Front Page

Newspapers serve a critical function in presenting a selection of the day's events to their communities, and each day's news presents a set of perspectives of the most important happenings to their publics (Utt & Pasternack, 2003). Perhaps the most important location to find such representations of society's most critical events is a newspaper's front page. The first page of the newspaper is what grabs a reader's attention, hence, editors devote much energy in determining which story elements should be placed on the most prized

page of their publication (McQuail, 2010; Singer, 2001). When designing the front page, a complex process is at play. For example, story selection is critical (Reisner, 1992). The most important stories should be featured prominently to entice impulsive buyers. However, stories are not the only features that are presented on the front page. Other design elements, such as headlines and photos, are also taken into consideration - along with typographic decisions and graphic features - to highlight each story.

Much of these design decisions may reflect a newspaper organization's values regarding what is considered to be the key news items of the day worthy of being presented to its audiences (Lowrey, 1999; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). For example, story elements featured on the front page of *The New York Times* are considered to be the most critical pieces by that particular news organization. Thus, it is important to examine how newspapers present information on their front pages, which serve a particularly important function in informing the public.

2.3.1 Relevance of Front Page

Newspapers serve an important function in a democratic society as they provide shared collective experiences, common symbolic anchors, and representations of society to its publics (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). They present a display of codes - linguistic, typographic, and graphic - to provide readers with information of the world (Carter, 2000). The front page of the newspaper is the most important page of the publication and highlights the day's most critical stories (Reisner, 1992). It is generally considered to function as a way to "attract readers, inform them and set the reader's agenda" (Pasternack & Utt, 1986, p. 29). This is significant in that the front page visually suggests to the

audience what a newspaper organization considers to be the most important stories of the day (Reisner, 1992). Thus, news audiences tend to focus more on front-page stories rather than on stories published elsewhere in the paper (Min-Mid Publications, 1984).

In terms of front-page content, news values such as timeliness, prominence, proximity, magnitude, conflict, impact, and oddity are important front-page attributes for an analysis conducted in 1989 (Bridges, 1989) and a replication of this study (Bridges & Bridges, 1997). Both studies found that hard news dominated the front pages, and little had changed over several years. The authors conclude that there may be certain unwritten standards that guide attention to certain pressures/interests, or a mechanistic approach is at play when selecting the news (Bridges & Bridges, 1997).

2.6 Mass Media, News Coverage and Patterns

This section reviews studies related to the influence of news values on news selections and framing of news.

The print media in Ghana has arguably played an important role in the country's development especially in nurturing democracy in Ghana. The print media has undoubtedly become a vital tool for information and communication in the Ghanaian society as it still aids in generating content for the electronic media (Hayford, 2014). There is, however, the skewing of stories either in terms of settings or news actors which ultimately influence what the people must know, thereby, hindering access to multiple and divergent information to aid decision making (Bennett, 2006).

Nyarko (2016) in his work, *Newspaper Reviews Shows in the Broadcast Media Space*, which is an exploratory qualitative study, posits that the electronic media in Ghana depends largely depends on the print media not only for news bulletins but also as the basis for their

discussion segments. Nyarko (2016) goes on to indicate that the media landscape in Ghana is inundated with socio-political discussions which are significantly centred on contents of newspapers especially the premium front pages.

O'Donnell (2013) in his studies on *Visual Persuasion via the media*, which employ both qualitative and quantitative methods, posits that many people in the world - especially the United States of America and Africa - rely on newspapers (mostly front pages) as a major source of information on happenings around them. He explains that with the creation of the printing press and the ability to distribute news and information on a mass scale, the media through their gatekeeping function and adoption of frames have been used as a tool to promote not only the reports of the day, but the way the public should view them (O'Donnell, 2013).

Gogovi (2017) who employed the same method to study how the Ghanaian print media covered the election year of 2016 by conducting a content analysis of the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* newspapers posits that what constituted the front pages of the newspapers are political, social, business, cultural, corruption and crime related issues. She further adds that of the 425 stories sampled, political issues formed one-third(1/3) of the issues that the print media framed the country with per their reportage. Also, the stories which are mostly negative in nature centre more on urban settings than rural settings.

Her work is a vindication of findings by Baidoo (2011) in his quantitative content analysis of front-page story patterns that print media in Ghana including the state-owned media in exercising their gatekeeping function tend to focus their attention on happenings in urban areas than the rural areas. By so doing , the state-owned media downplay their obligation of providing fair representation to all to express divergent views on issues. This helps the

researcher with insights to understand the current frames of *Ghanaian Times* newspaper, the geographical representation and whether the stories are even positive or negative.

The preference for urban stories was also emphasized by Chaudhry and Dayal (2018) in their work '*Coverage of Rural News in National Dailies of Delhi*' which was a quantitative content analysis of two state-owned newspapers namely '*The Hindu*' and '*Dainik Jagran*' in India. Of the 120 stories sampled purposively, 90 % of the total stories were centred in urban areas while rural settings accounted for less than 10% that were mostly centred on the negative activities such as crime in the said rural areas. This work is also important to the current work in establishing the dominant setting as well as the tone of stories.

Another factor worth considering in the news process is the values that determine what gets published especially at the front page (Kim, 2015). In his work entitled *What Shapes the News*, which was a qualitative content analysis coupled with interviews with editors, Archetti (2010) indicates that the news product of each organization is the unique output patterns of the social interactions among media professionals and the rest of society. This, however, is translated into multiple focuses within the field, depending on which level of analysis is addressed: the individual, the organization, or the society (Archetti, 2010). He concludes that ultimately economic and political factors end up determining what gets published.

His position is key in the analysis of the current research, especially in determining the factors that underpin what gets published at the front pages of the country's second most prestigious newspaper, *Ghanaian Times*, especially from the perspective of the gatekeepers who are the editors. The issue of news factors is also critical especially in defining the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper concerning content.

News values, arguably, can be split into commercial ones that appeal to a broad target audience and quality ones that are inherent characteristics of a story's importance (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016). Popular newspapers are strongly event and market-driven (Strömbäck, Karlsson & Hopmann, 2012) and aim to reach an as large as possible audience; therefore, they may particularly concentrate on the commercial news values. Being confronted with more pressure in their daily work from audience figures, competition with other outlets, and profit motives than journalists from other outlets (Skovsgaard, 2014), tabloid and popular newspaper journalists follow more closely what the audience is interested in than broadsheet journalists (Allern, 2002). They consequently, make different journalistic decisions (Sparks & Tulloch, 2000).

To create a product that is of interest to a broad audience, popular press journalists are encouraged to personify the news (Allern, 2002): personalized coverage makes news more interesting and comprehensible for audiences not very much interested in the news (Bird, 1998), which typically are the people served by popular news media. More frequently than other outlet types, popular newspapers may, therefore, employ exemplars that give a human face to (otherwise) abstract issues (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010; Strömbäck et al, 2012), making personalization a typical tabloid news factor (Turner, 1999). In their search for profit, popular newspapers arguably *also* focus more strongly on negativity than other outlet types. As a 'burglar alarm' (Zaller, 2003, p 122), popular news media alert their inattentive audiences on issues that are going *wrong* 'in excited and noisy tones'. Negativity has been demonstrated to trigger audience attention (Soroka, 2006), which is thus apt for (tabloid) journalists' motive of profit-making and explains the relative absence of negativity in the news of public broadcasters (Stromback & Esser 2014), which have a less strong incentive to follow commercial motives. Popular newspapers would,

therefore, focus relatively more on personification and negativity, which leads to the question of money and power influencing content.

The posits of scholars such as (Soroka, 2006) and Stromback and Esser (2014) on economic factors influencing content helps to address one of the fundamental questions of this study which is whether the stories which find space in the premium front pages are unduly influenced by economic factors. This is so especially when the paper enjoys government subvention and, therefore, not in a hurry to sell in making profit to offset their costs. Again, it brings to the fore if the paper favours the elites who arguably possess economic muscles to influence what should get published even if such stories paint a catastrophic image of the country or if it marginalizes the voices of the masses who may have more compelling stories worth space in the newspaper, especially at the premium front pages. The devotion of more media space at the premium front pages to the elites and urban-centred stories points to the marginalization of the rural folks and their issues which is against Section 5 of Media Policy Guide, 2008 which frowns on the unfair allocation of media space and in this case, the premium front page.

2.6.1 Political Party Ideology and Influence on the coverage of News Stories by State-owned Newspapers.

The phenomenon that political administrations and ideologies could influence the reportage of newspapers was demonstrated in a study by Peake (2007). Peake (2007) did a comparative study of the coverage of the Bush administration on the front pages of 100 United States of America newspapers for five months. The study showed a slant to the coverage of President Bush. This result is partly explained by the political bias of the

newspaper and its audience towards President Bush. Newspapers that endorsed Bush's re-election tended to write more favourable headlines, while newspapers in states where Democrats were strong politically tended to write less favourable headlines. These biases were so because newspapers are businesses, therefore, are affected by market forces (Hamilton, 2004).

The foregoing discussion points to the fact that types of news stories covered could be influenced by political administrations and ideologies. Thus, there is a tendency for news stories to be skewed in favour of the party in power by the newspapers. Bias of newspapers might stem from the editors, owners, and journalists, or bias might arise from the newspaper's audience and advertisers (Sutter, 2001). Media firms may slant their news stories toward the beliefs of their consumers to satisfy them and maximize profit (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006). Whether the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper skews reportage to favour the political class or government or not is of concern to this research. This is because the newspaper has a constitutional obligation to afford equal opportunities and access to all Ghanaians to express their opinions on issues affecting them (Article 163 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

A theory is defined as a set of systematic generalizations which are based on empirical observation (Severin & Tankard, 2001). It is useful in guiding research studies and for planning, implementing and evaluating interventions (Trifiletti, Gielen, Sleet, & Hopkins, 2005). Theories also help to explain what one plans doing and what can be achieved. With regards to this study, the primary purpose is to assess the kind of stories covered on the front pages of the state-owned print media as well as the newsmakers vis-à-vis the frames

formed per the gatekeeping functions exercised by the editors. The theories underpinning the study allow the researcher to assess the front page story selection process of the editors, the frames that the pattern of stories used produce and whether the frames are positive or negative.

2.3 Framing Theory

Framing defines how issues are constructed or structured in news stories. Communication scholars such as Wallington (2010), Cissel (2012), Chu (2015) among others have used frames as a method of communicating how much and in what manner the mass media report information for audience consumption.

Framing is based on the assumption that the nature of coverage of issues in news reports can affect how it is understood by audiences (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Frame, in the context of news media, is a central idea for media content. By selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration, the frame suggests what the issue is and determines its context. Framing can have a significant effect on how the media's audience interprets an issue (Jeffres, 1997). Entman (1993) indicates that framing essentially involves selection and salience aimed at some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in communicating a text. Entman (1993) adds that the selection and communication is done in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. According to Tuchman (1978), the news aims to tell us what we want to know, need to know, and should know. Framing is the act of emphasizing certain aspects of a story to allow for interpretation and context, thus making an event or a story more understandable for the audience (Mcquail, 2005). Simply put, it is the act of defining issues typically by the

influential for public consumption, and publishing these definitions through the use of mass media (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006).

Framing as an analytical research tool was first raised by Goffman in 1974 (as cited in Cissel, 2012). According to Goffman (1974), people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework. This, according to Botan and Hazelton (2006), makes Goffman the founder of frame analysis. Goffman (1974) postulates that individuals are capable users of these frameworks on a day to day basis, whether they are aware of them or not. Framing may be considered as a “schema of interpretation” that enable individuals to find, perceive, identify and make occurrences or life experiences (Cissel, 2008:36).

The definition was later reviewed by Entman(1993) to entail a specification of framing as a way of communicating text or message which is supposed to promote certain facets of a ‘perceived reality’ and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation. Scheufelu and Tewksbury (2007) acknowledged Entman (1993) as offering a more detailed explanation of how media provides audiences with schemes for interpreting events.

Giltin (1980) defines frames as the principles of selections, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters. Gitlin(1980) also adds that frames are, “insistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual”(Gitlin,1980, p.64). Dearing and Rogers (1996) argue that framing is, “the subtle selection of certain aspects of an issue by the

media to make them more important and emphasize a particular cause of some problems” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p.9).

Framing provides an audience with a scheme to interpret news events (Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) and Pickle (2002) assert that the contents of news stories include hidden indirect questions for which frames provide answers. Frames provide answers to the implied questions by performing four functions: defining and diagnosing a problem; identifying a source or cause; providing a judgment; and justifying a solution for the problem (Entman, 1999). Through Framing, the mass media actively define the frames of reference through which audiences engage in public issues (Tuchman, 1978 as cited in Iddi, 2018).

Tuchman (1978) describes news as a window whose frame limits the perception of reality, by limiting the perception of different realities and focusing on a specific piece of it. As a result of these processes, some aspects of the reality perceived through the news will be more prominent than others (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015). The window comparison offers the example of how the news frame can include, exclude and twist specific pieces of information depending on what information is placed within the view or outside of the metaphorical window (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015).

Framing allows for a variety of positions and does not give the whole picture of an event as emphasized by Gross (2006). He adds that frames will, by giving prominence to certain aspects of an event or policy, direct audience member’s judgments about the event or issue in predictable ways, to expectable conclusion.

According to Severin and Tankard (2001), framing of news stories are suggested by particular devices such as headlines, subheads, photographs, photo captions, leads, pull quotes, selection of quotes, nut graphs, and logos. This, therefore, confirms Corolel (2004),

assertion that it is difficult to find a piece of journalism that offers no interpretation of the facts it contains. Corolel (2004) continues that it is tempting to say that there could be no reporting without framing of the factual description, since the stories could not be written without suggesting a storyline.

This is also in line with ideas by Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997) who posit that “frames act like plots or storylines, lending coherence to otherwise discrete pieces of information” (p. 568). Therefore, framing aids journalists to organize stories and the public to understand events and issues. Framing has powerful influences on audiences as it affects their recognition and understanding of social problems and political issues (Entman, 1993).

Framing as a theory, implies communication with emphasis on certain parts of the issue and intentionally downplaying others (Chu, 2015). This position by Chu (2015) is relevant to this study as the research is interested in finding out the key or dominant issues that were emphasized on the front pages of the Ghanaian state-owned print media.

Frames are, therefore, interpretive devices that all people use when making sense of the world around them. They help in tackling the job of processing complex and often bulky information about the social world into a much simpler form, by only concentrating attention on certain features that may be more important (Entman, 1993). According to Entman (2004), framing is part of our everyday lives and it is present anytime a message is coded. It is suitable to explain differences in media coverage across different countries (Chu, 2015) and also refers to how mass media arrange and come out with issues and events in terms of patterns and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion (Tankard, 2001). Framing is important in media content studies and according to Chong and Druckman (2007), the media can influence people, for instance, the voting procedures through the framing of news.

Thus, the theory is key in analyzing the various themes and frames in the most important page, which is the front pages of the nation's premium newspaper. This helps in establishing what the *Ghanaian Times* thinks is the most important events worth communicating to its audience, therefore, entrenching or shaping opinions in the Ghanaian society.

2.4 Framing of News

News articles in newspapers communicate ideas, knowledge and define what is news for the public (Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark, & Viswanath, 2010). Wallington et al. (2010) also avows that the news media's role is not just in amplifying issues, but also in defining issues for the public. The author goes on to indicate that the media aids in expanding agenda-setting from merely drawing attention to a topic to articulating points of view regarding that topic when news articles in newspapers are being read or messages are communicated to the reader. Vreese (2005) states that communication is not static, but rather a dynamic process that involves frame building (how frames emerge) and frame-setting (the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions).

Firstly, framing in news serves as a packaging process, which involves selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient, while leaving other aspects out of the package (Kimet, 2014). This is important to understand as both frame-building and frame setting in the news may affect learning, interpretation, and evaluation of issues and events (Vreese, 2005). Vreese (2005) referred to frame-building as factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames. This includes internal factors such as editorial policy, news values while external factors include social movements and interaction between journalists and elites. He also refers to frame-setting as the interaction between media

frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions. Vreese(2005) highlights that this is important as researchers continue to explore the extent to which and under what circumstances audiences reflect and mirror frames made available to them. Framing can help people support policies (Coleman, Thorson, & Wilkins, 2011). This aligns with Vreese's (2005) suggestion that a person's views on certain issues may be altered based on their exposure to certain frames. Thus, framing of news can shape processes such as political socialization, decision making and collective actions of individuals and groups of people.

In the context of this study, the stories and specific themes that the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper will formulate at the front pages will constitute the basic frames of importance from the perspective of the editors to the public. This will not only shape the opinions of the public but also become a measure of policy formulation due to the papers overwhelming significance as the second premium newspaper in Ghana.

2.5.5. Limitation of Framing Theory

Druckman (2001) identifies one inherent limit to framing and that is a perceived source of credibility. Perceived source credibility appears to be the major prerequisite for successful framing. This is because framing effects may occur not because journalists or media persons seek to manipulate audiences. Rather, media audiences look up to credible news persons and journalists for guidance in understanding major news events. In doing so, the audience choose frames to follow in a systematic and sensible way. Far from being a sign of freewheeling manipulation, framing effects may be evidence of media audiences' seeking guidance from credible news sources or media outlets. In addressing this limitation, the current study includes an interview with the editor of the newspaper to throw

more light on the news values considered in the story selection process. The interview goes a long way to provide a better appreciation of the frames generated on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper per the story types selected.

2.5 Gatekeeping Theory; History and Significance

Gatekeeping in its traditional form is defined by Shoemaker (1991: p.1) as the process “by which billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day”. The gatekeeping theory is one of the oldest in the field of mass communication research (Shoemaker 2001) and it is a “the process by which a vast array of potential news messages are winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are transmitted by the news media” (Shoemaker, 2001:p1). Each of these news messages must pass through several gatekeepers, such as reporters and news editors, before making it to publication. Thus, a story’s success is subject to the decisions of its many gatekeepers who operate at different levels in the process. This “hierarchy of influences” explains “how news gets constructed – by individuals – within a social and occupational setting” (Reese 2001:15). Shoemaker’s hierarchy was emphasised in this work because it speaks to the focus of gatekeeping.

Also important to the levels of influence in terms of news construction that is organisational influence (Kim & Chung, 2017). Gatekeeping in this sense is the keystone of this research, which examines its influence on the contemporary news creation, framing and circulation process in Ghana. The term ‘gatekeeping’ first appeared in the social psychologist Kurt Lewin’s unfinished manuscript of 1947, “Frontiers in Group Dynamics: II. Channels of Group Life; Social Planning and Action Research”, in the journal *Human Relations* (Shoemaker, 1991). Lewin likens the term to how social forces could change a

community's food habits, using the term 'gatekeeper' to illustrate those who controlled the 'gates' through such actions as shopping for food and preparing meals (Shoemaker et al, 2001). In addition to the gatekeepers themselves, Lewin held that items have "forces" which either facilitate or constrain their passage through the process (Lewin 1950). These forces (newsworthiness, trustworthiness, and so on) can be positive or negative and may vary in intensity (Shoemaker 2001). David White, who learned about Lewin's theory through working as his research assistant at the University of Iowa, was the first researcher to transfer it to a communication research project (Shoemaker, 1991). White conducted a study in which he asked the wire editor of a small town newspaper, whom he called Mr Gates, to keep all the wire copy from press agencies such as the Associated Press, United Press and international wire service agencies, for one week in February 1949. Mr Gates gave a written justification of why he did not run 90% of the wire stories he received in the newspaper. This helped White to compare and analyze the stories used with all the news items that the wire agencies had sent throughout the week (Shoemaker, 1991). White (1950) analyzed the selections of Mr Gates to identify the impact of various factors on these choices, thus demonstrating the influence of gatekeeping on the process of news selection (Dimitrova, 2003).

In an analysis of White's study, Reese and Billinger (2001) state that the experiment focused on individual gatekeepers' traits and judgments and that the proper operation of each gatekeeper would yield unbiased news, putting more power on the gatekeeper than a story's "forces".

Another study by Breed (1950) concluded that a publisher's news policy sets the agenda for which stories would get printed, and social forces created by "the more or less consistent orientations shown by a paper" serve as gatekeepers in their right (Breed,

1950:p.25). Subsequent studies showed that a journalist's self-perception as the gatekeeper is deeply ingrained (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Singer 1998) illustrating the notion that news is what the gatekeepers say it is (Reese, 2001).

The gatekeeper's role in traditional media has continually been compared to White's 1950 experiment to show its effectiveness and ease (Petrow, 1982). For example, in Bleske's (1991) study, he found that the newspaper stories that the gatekeeper of 1989 (called Ms Gates) worked on was triple the size of that of White's gatekeeper (called Mr Gates) with less control over news content. Thus, the role, authority of the gatekeeper and even news values evolve with time (Bleske 1991). For example, since 1949, three main news values - human interest, international politics, and national politics of news - have consistently accounted for 63-65 per cent of the input from the three wire services (Bleske,1991).

Traditionally, researchers have understood that news judgment and selection has been based on professional, organizational, technological, and cultural influences (McCombs,1976). These influences either stem from the individual or routine forces (Shoemaker 2001). Individual forces are characterized, in their most basic form, as personal views while routine forces include the roles of media workers and media routines, media organizations, external pressures, and ideologies (Shoemaker 1996). For example, in White's 1950 study, he found that the news editors preferred stories "slanted to conform to [their] editorial policies" (White 1950, p. 28).

However, routine forces can be positive as well. In Shoemaker's (2001) study, for example, she found that the newspaper routine of determining newsworthiness predicted the amount of coverage Congressional bills received from U.S. newspapers. Across studies of newspapers, traditional news values (currency, objectivity, human interest and so on) tend to be mentioned frequently as reasons for selecting or rejecting news releases (Abbott,

1980). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that the factors affecting the decisions of gatekeepers include news values, government, culture, personal judgment, politics, ethics and beliefs.

Harcup and O'Neill (2001) conducted an empirical study which showed that news stories must generally satisfy one or more of the following requirements: making reference to the power elite or celebrity, conveying entertainment, surprise, bad news or good news, having magnitude or relevance, following up an existing story, or referring to newspapers themselves.

All of these contributions indicate that the application of news values is part of the gatekeeping process. Thus, it is worth noting that the paying of attention to the material before publishing and putting it to the test is in line with gatekeeping assumptions. Singer (2006) discusses the need for contemporary gatekeeping to revisit its conceptual basis to take account of the new challenges facing the process in the digital age.

According to Ifeoma and Okafor (2016), gatekeeping, which is an enduring concept of mass communication, has been traditionally used to regulate the news flow in the media and set news agenda for the public. They indicate that not all stories make it as news no matter their importance and that news stories undergo a systematic selection process that is biased and driven by a combination of factors -news norms, societal values/pressures and organizational factors. Ifeoma and Okafor (2016) add that the gatekeeping concept exposes the often complex hierarchal influence and domination of news media by a select few- the gatekeepers.

According to Soroka (2001), the basic idea of gatekeeping is to cut down and transform billion of messages into hundreds that reach a given person on a given day (Soroka, 2001).

Thus, a story's success is subject to the decisions of its many gatekeepers who operate at different levels in the process. The gatekeeping starts with the reporter who files the report out of the many stories available to him/her, the sub-editors who process the story to the editorial conference and finally the editor or editor-in-chief who takes the final decision on the story for publishing.

This "hierarchy of influences" explains "how news gets constructed – by individuals – within a social and occupational setting" (Reese 2001:44). The concept of gatekeeping, therefore, exerts enormous influence in the voices heard and the faces seen in the news media. How these processes of selection (and exclusion) of issues take place and are decided on, and what elements influence them, are questions that have been taken up in this study within the context of state-owned print media in Ghana. Thus, through the gatekeeping functions and choices exercised by the editors, what finally makes it through their gates of criteria as news to be fed the public? This is against the backdrop that the media policy in Ghana which places operations of the media under public trust also emphasizes the need for equal representation to all in terms of the front-page coverage. Thus, both elitist and rural folks must have a fair share of representation on the front pages of newspapers especially state-owned media like the *Ghanaian Times*.

2.7 Conclusion

The chapter focused on the review of related literature on the study. It first highlighted the empirical studies and proceeded to look at the theoretical framework which was gatekeeping and framing. The review of the empirical studies was intended to build the necessary ground for this study and to demonstrate the relevance of the research questions that the study will be seeking answers to. From the literature, it became evident that news

goes through various gatekeeping processes before it is finally published. Also, every media outlet has its set criteria for determining what constitutes news for the day (Shoemaker, 1991). Again, issues of bias are also common and the bias might stem from the editors, owners, and journalists or might arise from the newspaper's audience and advertisers (Sutter, 2001). Media firms may slant their reports towards the beliefs of their consumers to satisfy their audience and maximize profit (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006). The political atmosphere (Barrett & Barrington, 2005) may provide part of the equation: the political leanings of editors and owners slant coverage of politics. The market, however, may condition or constrain bias that occurs as a result of the political atmosphere (Sutter, 2001) or may provide direct economic incentives for slanted news (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006).



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology that was employed for the execution of this study. It discusses the research approach, research design applied, the sample size and sampling techniques. It also presents and discusses the data collection instruments, data collection processes and data analysis methods applied in analysing the data collected.

3.1 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was used for this study. Qualitative approach is one of the three types of approaches in research namely; qualitative, quantitative and mixed method (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research, which is interpretative (Creswell, 2013), is concerned with investigating the situated form, content and lived experiences of social actors in words without subjecting them to mathematical or formal transformation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This study investigates the content of front pages of Ghanaian *Times* without subjecting them to mathematical transformations. Using the qualitative approach, this study highlights the “meaningful relations to be interpreted” from the stories at the front pages of the newspaper (Kvale, 1996, p.11).

Qualitative research approach relies on text and image data, has unique steps in data analysis, and draws on diverse designs (Creswell, 2013). The definition is in line with the objective of this work as the research is aimed at analysing the content of newspapers to find out what made news at the premium front pages of the *Ghanaian Times* to determine

the pattern of publication over the years. The pattern arguably brings to the fore the stories and themes which are of interest in the newspapers, thereby, becoming its dominant frame. According to Lincoln and Guba(1985), the qualitative approach is conducting a research in its natural sense. In view of the definition by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher engaged in a content analysis of newspapers which were in their natural or original states without any bias or a likelihood of external influences.

3.2 Research Design

The design used for this work is content analysis. Content analysis primarily focuses on the “characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Hseih & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Walizer and Wiener (1978) also define content analysis as a systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded data. In the case of this work, the focus was on content found on the front pages of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper.

Over the past decades, a lot of researchers have used content analysis to study several phenomena, including media content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Content analysis designs express “analytic approaches ranging from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses (Rosengren, 1981 as cited in Hseih & Shannon, 2005, p.1277).

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), there are three approaches to the content analysis design. These are conventional, directed and summative content analysis. The conventional content analysis design is used in a study that seeks to describe a phenomenon. The authors add that with this design, the researcher allows the “categories and the names for categories to flow out of data” rather than use a “preconceived categories” (Kondracki & Wellman,

2002 as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1279). This implies that this design focusses on the latent analysis of the content. For the directed content analysis design, the processes are structured, therefore, the codes and content categories are pre-determined base on existing theory or prior research and the researcher considers the frequency of usage of a keyword in the content. This suggests a manifest content analysis. The summative design is a combination of conventional and directed designs because the authors posit that it entails both word counts (manifest content analysis) and process of interpretation (latent content analysis).

From the foregoing, it can be argued that the conventional design is in line with the qualitative approach to research while directed and summative designs are in sync with quantitative and mixed-method paradigms respectively. This study specifically employs conventional content analysis design because it aims to interpret the content at the front pages of *Ghanaian Times*. Also, the codes for the study are derived from the data and the research approach is qualitative.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Sampling is the method of choosing an appropriate sample, or a demonstrative part of a population for defining parameters or characteristics of the whole population (Tuckman, 1999). According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), qualitative researchers implement sampling to direct their selection, observations and characteristics of respondents to consider. Therefore, qualitative studies often adopt a purposive sampling strategy. This research made use of the purposive sampling method because it involves the choice of subjects who possess the information the researcher needed: front-page news stories as well as the editor of *Ghanaian Times*.

For the qualitative content analysis, the selection of the print media for the study was made with the knowledge of the Ghanaian media landscape. According to Ofori-Birikorang (2009), print media is not regarded as a key information source in Africa due to high illiterate populace, but then he argues that that Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs), opinion leaders, and public policymakers lean towards the print media instead of television or radio broadcasts for trustworthy information. This is because they resort to them as evidential documents to push their agenda. Also for research purposes, newspapers are practical and applicable and are more readily available than other forms of media. Besides, archival retrieval of newspaper stories is more accessible than any other media (Valeda, 2002). Hasty (2005) and Ofori-Birikorang(2009) also assert that among the constituents of the mass media landscape, newspapers command central role in the social discourses of the ordinary Ghanaian due to the spread of radio and television stations that have heightened the general public interest in newspaper content in Ghana. Thus each morning, most radio and television outlets do newspaper highlights by reading the major headlines of newspapers especially the front pages to their audience. In such circumstances, the audience does follow up on any of the news stories to have easier access to the hard copy of the newspapers.

The *Ghanaian Times* newspaper was also purposively selected from the lists of Ghanaian newspapers for this study. The selection was because available studies on what makes news examine the *Daily Graphic* newspaper, necessitating that the *Ghanaian Times* is also explored to see if the trend of story selection and publication is the same or otherwise. The newspaper also enjoys some level of government subvention, therefore, not under any pressure to sell and engaging in sensationalism (Mawugbe, 2006). Again the newspaper, like *Daily Graphic*, has wider coverage, readership, high circulation rate and it is published

on a daily basis (Amehere, 2010). It also widely covers all issues (social, political, economic and cultural) that frame the crescendos of national political economy (Ofori-Birikorang, 2009). The purposive selection also stems from the fact that *Ghanaian Times* is also a state-owned print media with a constitutional mandate of fair representation to all irrespective of status or geographical location.

Purposive sampling was also used in selecting the various editions of the paper for the analysis. The objective was to ensure balance and representativeness in terms of the data. This required that all the years selected for the research had equal representation to be able to establish the pattern in terms of the publication over five years. In line with that, the two-week construction technique which requires the selection of fourteen (14) editions of the newspaper to represent a year of publication for analysis was adopted (Stempel (1987) as cited in Lacy & Fico, 1998). The five (5) years period is purposively chosen to achieve balance and representativeness in the data. Thus, every year had stories selected to form part of the sample. The sampling technique helps to draw logical conclusions as to the trend and pattern of stories over a long and reasonable period and the frames generated by the consistent publication of certain story types. The reasonable period of 5years, which is from 2015-2019, helps bring to the fore the editorial and gatekeeping decisions taken by the editors in selecting news for a given day of the five (5) years period of study. The trend or pattern of publication cannot easily be described as accidental but forming part of entrenched rules for selecting stories by the editors. Through this sampling strategy, the boundaries of the content to be analysed is specified, therefore, the universe for the qualitative content analysis is defined (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

For the interview, the editor of the newspaper was also purposively selected as aside his experience on the news values and culture of the organization, he also has the final say in terms of what gets published on a given day.

3.4 Sample Size

The population for this study was all the front-page stories that were published within the period of study. From this population, a sample was drawn for the study. According to Creswell (2013), the type of design employed in a study determines the sample size. Qualitative research uses a small sample size because it aims at rich and detailed description/explanation on an issue under investigation (Creswell, 2014). Also, the sample size for a study is determined by the scope of the study, the complexity of research questions and the availability of needed resources and data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Based on Stemple's (1989) two weeks construction technique, 210 news stories from 70 editions of the newspaper were drawn to constitute the sample size for the study. Thus, using the months in a year, the 14 editions from the composite week for 2015 were selected from 12th January to 21st December while that of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 were selected from 4th January to 31st December, 2nd January to 30th December, 8th January to 31st December and 7th January to 31st December respectively. Also, the sample size for the interview was one participant.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

This study employed qualitative content analysis and interview as methods of data collection. The two methods were employed because the use of multiple data sources in research enhances the credibility of data and findings. The methods helped in gathering

appropriate data that could help in analysing the phenomenon under study. Thus, the data from the interview helped the researcher to put into proper perspective the data gathered from the contents of the newspaper especially as to why certain stories are selected.

3.5.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

According to Hseih and Shannon (2005), “qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 1278). It is a research method for the interpretation of the content of text through a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. Content analysis has been described as a good methodological process for studying themes and representation in a content (Golding, et al, 1999). According to Krippendorff (2004), qualitative content analysis is mostly used in media studies to analyse units of news articles such as headlines, photos and paragraphs in the context of framing theory. To Stone, Denphy, Smith and Ogilvie (2006), content analysis is a research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specific characteristics within a text. The researcher, to analyse themes which finally culminate into news frames with regards to the front-page news stories of *Ghanaian Times*, had to analyse the content of the entire news stories on the front pages.

Content analysis is a systematic coding and categorizing approach used for exploring large amounts of textual information to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships, and the structures and discourses of communication (Grbrich, 2007). The researcher, in this case, sought to examine the trend and issues at the front pages of the *Ghanaian Times* which ultimately culminated into the frames, themes

and story types that the editors wanted to be associated with the newspaper for the period of study. Research that qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning to the text (Lindkvist, 1981; Mctavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990; Berson, 2016). Text data are either in verbal, print, or electronic form and could have been gotten from narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, or print media articles, books, or manuals (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Therefore, since the researcher intended to analyse newspapers content specifically the front pages, this method was a more preferred option. According to Weber (1990), qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting of words to examine the language content to reduce amounts of words to a reasonable size. The goal of content analysis is “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p.314). Denzin and Lincoln (2000), have also noted that content analysis concerns itself with the character of the data available, as in their meanings which are impossible to be measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency.

The use of content analysis in the analysis of media texts is useful because it has been observed that;

First ...the link between the external object of reference and the reference to it in the text will be reasonably clear and unambiguous. Secondly ... the frequency of occurrence of chosen references will validly express the predominant 'meaning' of the text in an objective way (Hoynes & Croteau 1997: 326 as cited in Teng'o, 2008).

The above assertion by Croteau and Hoynes (1997) is indeed applicable to this research as the newspaper's continuous publication of certain stories on a particular subject or a setting

over time culminate into a definite frame or theme as to how the front pages of the newspapers should be viewed. Another positive aspect of content analysis is that it can be an inexpensive method of analyzing large amounts of data (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005). The choice of this method was based on the understanding that it is comprehensive, objective devoid of idiosyncrasies, therefore, falls in line with the objective of this work as it seeks to avoid biases in the handling of data.

Based on the research design, this study adapted Wimmer and Dominick's (2011) steps in content analysis, which are formulating of research questions, defining the universe, selecting the sample, selecting of a unit of analysis, constructing content categories, establishing the quantification system, training of coders, analysis of content/news stories, coding of content, and data analysis and interpretation.

3.5.1.1 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2003), is the smallest element of content analysis and it is the basic unit of the text to be classified during content analysis. Weber (1990) also avers that one of the important decisions any researcher must make is to define the coding unit. According to Tankard (2001), the means of identifying and measuring news frames are: headlines, leads, subheads, photographs, photo captions, source selection, quotes, statistics and charts, concluding statements, quote selection, pull quotes, logos and photographs. It, therefore, means assigning a code to a text of any size, as long as the text represents a single theme or issue of relevance to the research questions. With regards to the present work, the entire news story was the unit of analysis so each story was read and the dominant theme, story category and setting coded. This was a departure from some previous works which used only the headline as a unit of analysis.

The researcher noticed that a lot of the stories had headlines which did not capture the core message of the story and, therefore, it would have been misleading to have relied on only the headlines.

3.5.1.2 Coding Protocol

Effective content analysis requires that all sampled units are placed in a category or theme. The number of themes or categories depends on the nature of the text and the judgment of the coders. Thus, coders have to identify a relationship among the different elements before they are grouped under one category. Content analysis requires that the researcher breaks down the text into smaller categories or themes for examination. Lindelof and Taylor (2002) are of the opinion that the first systematic effort at data analysis usually comes with the creation of categories and a coding scheme. To them, categorization is the process of classifying the meaning of a unit of data with respect to themes.

The coding protocol defines the study in general and the coding rules that apply to content in particular (Riffe, Lacy & Fico; 1998). In this study, the researcher prepared a coding protocol (attached as Appendix A) that set down the rules that guided the process of deriving codes from the front-page stories in *Ghanaian Times*. The coding protocol ensured that the procedure for deriving codes from the news stories were carried out in the same way. The coding protocol also guided the coder in the process of generating codes on news flow and news framing from the content of front-page news stories of the newspaper. For instance, a guide on coding protocol asks a question like “What is the story type?”. Therefore, upon engaging with the news stories, the coder is expected to derive from the story whether it is a straight news or feature then code it as such.

Krippendorff (2004) believes that categories must be mutually exclusive so that a word, a paragraph or a theme belongs to only one category. Thus, an unambiguous and complete coding protocol plays a crucial role in eliminating individual differences among coders. Therefore, the coding protocol was designed with this assertion as a guide.

3.5.1.3 Subject of the study

The newspaper that constituted the subject of this study was the *Ghanaian Times*. The newspaper was established in 1957 by the first President of Ghana, the late Dr Kwame Nkrumah. It was initially known as the *Guinea Press Limited* and served as a printing house for the Convention People's Party (CPP). The objective for the eventual set up of the *Ghanaian Times* by Dr Kwame Nkrumah was for the paper to run parallel in breaking the monopolistic dominance of the then British-owned *Daily Graphic*.

After Dr Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown by the military coup in 1966, *Guinea Press* was taken over as a state property by the National Liberation Council Decree 130 of 1968. By an instrument of Incorporation-Act 363, 1971, *Guinea Press* was changed to the *New Times Corporation*. The Act also repealed the National Newspapers (Guinea Press Limited – Interim Reconstitution Decree) which acquired it as state property. That Act was given further recognition by the provision of Provisional National Defence Council Law 42 (Daniel, 2012).

The paper is published six times a week (Monday-Saturday) and it is recognized as a dependable print media source for information in Ghana (Amihere, 2010). The paper was selected for this study due to its large circulation rate of 35,000 -75,000 daily as well as its high reputation of being relied on by policymakers in the country (Amihere, 2010). Also, it is a state-owned print media with a constitutional mandate to provide fair opportunities

and facilities to the public to express divergent views and opinions on issues affecting them (Article 163 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana) aside having a great number of correspondents in all the regions to report on issues happening across the country (Baidoo,2011).

Finally, the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper is the least explored in terms of the two state-owned tabloids thus *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* as to their coverage of what makes news. This current study purposely wants to explore its content so that it could be established if the coverage pattern is similar to what other scholars who explored the other state-owned print media *Daily Graphic* also found out in terms of the front page content.

3.5.2 Interviews

Interview was another method of data collection employed by the researcher in this study to validate data from. Interviews, according to Wimmer & Dominick (2011, p. 139) “provide detailed background about the reasons respondents give specific answers”. This is because it allows a researcher to gather “elaborate data concerning respondents’ opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings” on an issue under investigation (p. 139). It seeks to describe the meaning of central themes in the world of the subjects (Kvale, 1996). McNamara (1999) posits that indeed interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences and that the interviewer can pursue in-in-depth information around the topic. In the current work, the subject was the editor who has the final say as to what gets published in a given day. He understands the news values and decisions which informs the story selection, thereby, making his explanation key in placing the data in the right perspective in terms of the interpretation and analysis.

Interviewing is a professional conversation (Kvale, 2007) with the goal of getting a participant to talk about their experiences and perspectives, and to capture their language and concepts, in relation to a topic that has been determined (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Braun and Clarke (2014) suggest that the interview could be face-to-face or via telephone or by any virtual means. Braun and Clarke (2014), however, conclude that face-to-face interview is the best way of interviews as it gives the interviewer the chance to make further observations which could support his interpretation of data or in asking further questions. Novick (2008) also describes face-to-face contact between the researchers as the ideal way to collect interview data as it is the gold standard.

The current research adopted the face-to-face interview approach in eliciting responses from the editor as the researcher could not risk the challenges that technology presents in terms of poor voice quality, network or internet lapses or even loss of the interview data when the technology fails. With the aid of tape recorder, the current researcher was able to record the conversation and was again able to ask follow up questions based on some cues he picked from the posture of the editor. This would not have been possible with telephone interviews or questionnaires for instance.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) have indicated that interviews generate the best results and responses when the questions are well structured with the help of an interview guide to keep the interview in focus. To achieve the objective of getting to know about the story selection processes and news values that influenced the publications, the researcher prepared an interview guide concerning the research topic to guide the questions to be posed to the editor. The interview data helped to validate the data generated from the front page contents of the newspapers so as have a comprehensive analysis of the content data. The interview guide is attached as Appendix C.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

This section presents details of how the methods selected were used to collect data for this study. The main process of data collection was qualitative content analysis and the interview was used to probe for data to validate the data collected from the newspaper contents.

3.6.1 Qualitative content analysis

The news stories for this research were manually searched from the library of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper. Hard copies of newspaper editions within the period of study and the selected composite weeks for each year were drawn from the universe. The researcher and two coders then engaged the text independently by doing multiple readings of the sampled news story to gain a general understanding. The researcher and the coders again conducted a close reading of the text in a more detailed manner to identify the discursive strategies that lay within the text (Betrand & Hughes, 2005; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During this stage, the coders identified the recurring issues or topics in the text to derive a code by assigning names and labels to them. Through this procedure, data was collected as the coders made notes through their engagement with the text. After coding, the coders compared the codes derived from the sample to agree on a common categorization of the codes generated from the stories independently. These codes were then put into themes/categories and quantified into charts and tables. Using the coding protocol and the procedure, the coders generated codes on story type, news topics, news direction/tone, main actors of the story and story setting. Also, codes on rural and urban distribution of stories, settings of the stories and regional distribution of stories were generated from the

text. The interwoven codes were subsumed. Data gathered from the content were then subjected to thematic analysis.

3.6.1.1 Coding categorisation and procedure

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) are of the opinion that the first systematic effort at data analysis usually comes with the creation of categories and a coding scheme. To them, categorization is the process of classifying the meaning of a unit of data with respect to themes. Krippendorff (2004) is of the opinion that categories must be mutually exclusive so that a word, a paragraph or a theme belongs in one and only one category.

The coding protocol indeed defines the study in general and the coding rules applied to content in particular (Riffe, Lacy & Fico; 1998). In line with the views of the scholars, the researcher prepared a coding protocol that set down the rules that guided the process of defining and measuring news flow in the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper. In line with the conventional approach, these were the themes generated from and agreed upon by the coders after the comparison:

Political stories: activities and stories related to political parties and their agents, governance, elections and district assemblies, electoral commission, and others.

Economic stories: news stories about trade and commerce, industry and employment, investment and banking, government expenditure and public finance, loans and economic aid, business and financial information, labour affairs, trade unionism.

Social stories: Stories about social welfare, health, transportation, law enforcement, pension and insurance, social security, activities of humanitarian and philanthropic organizations, civic affairs, accidents, disasters, urban and rural development, formal and informal education, others.

Cultural stories: media content on sports, festivals, languages, drama, music, arts and entertainment, chieftaincy affairs, sculpture and arts exhibition, others

Miscellaneous: Stories that do not fit into the categories above.

Positive News: stories with issues reflecting development in social, political, cultural, social and economic fronts, news reflecting social cohesion and co-operation, unity, peace and harmony between individuals, groups and organizations.

Negative News: stories of conflicts, land and chieftaincy disputes, violence, drought, famine, disasters, disunity, crimes, offences and malpractices, corruption, calamities, floods, accidents, fire outbreaks, energy crisis, electoral violence, others.

Neutral Stories: Stories that do not fit into any of the categories. They are also not caused by Ghanaian actors.

Elites: Top political and government or state functionaries, members of parliament, top brass in the military, political, business, commerce, industry, academics including university lecturers, senior traditional rulers, labour leaders, religious leaders, others.

Ordinary People: Civil servants, petty traders, students, peasants, unemployed

Mixed: News about two or more of the groups above

Urban: national, regional, peri-urban and district capitals and towns with a population of 50,000 inhabitants and above.

Rural: All other towns and villages that do not come under urban

Not Clear: Where it is impossible to discern from the news story whether the setting is rural or urban.

Regional Distribution of News: The ten regions of Ghana before the creation of new regions in 2019. Thus Ashanti, Brong, Ahafo, Central, Eastern, Western, Greater-Accra,

Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Volta Region. The new regions were placed under their old regions for easy interpretation.

3.6.2 Interview

For the interview, an introductory letter that outlined the purpose of the study and the need for an interview with the editor of the newspaper on the issue under investigation was sent to the editor of the organisation. Upon a favourable feedback from the editor, a face-to-face interview was scheduled on 20th November, 2019 at 1. O'clock pm. The interview guide, that contained open-ended questions on the issue under investigation, was designed (see Appendix C). The researcher interviewed the editor on the scheduled date and time at his office at Ghanaian Times Corporation. During the interview, the interview guide as well as follow-up questions were also used when necessary. The interview was recorded on a tape recorder and it lasted for 35minutes 24seconds. The recorded interview was later transcribed and cleaned for analysis. The transcribed and cleaned interview data was subjected to member checking. Thus, the editor had the opportunity to go through the transcribed interview before it was used to support the analysis.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Study

Validity and reliability are very important issues in every qualitative research (Babbie, 2007). Validity refers to a study's effectiveness in measuring what it sets out to measure (Babbie, 2007). Validity is indeed important in research. It emphasizes the correct procedures applied to find answers to research questions as well as the quality of a measurement procedure that provides accuracy. Validity of research instrument is concerned with the meaningfulness of research components (Drost, 2005). This is essential

because researchers are concerned with whether they are measuring what they intended to measure (Drost, 2005). Keyton (2001) states that instead of focusing on what is found, most researchers focus on the reliability and validity of the techniques or process used in collecting and analyzing data.

This study placed a premium on face validity, which examines whether a particular measure of a concept makes sense 'on its face' (Teng'o, 2008). The researcher also ensured concurrent validity by correlating the data gathered from the selected newspapers with the findings of previous studies on what makes news on the front pages. Also, in ensuring reliability, two persons were trained to code the data for analysis and there was 86% agreement.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data gathered for this study was thematically analysed. This method of analysis helped the researcher to classify data generated from the news stories under relevant themes to interpret the various aspects of the research topic and answer the research questions. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), the first systematic effort at data analysis usually comes with the creation of categories. To them, categorisation is the process of classifying the meaning of a unit of data with respect to themes. Through thematic analysis, the data collected for this study was analysed and contents were categorized into themes. The aim was to find out the important themes or categories within a body of content and be able to offer a comprehensive description of the social reality created by those themes/ categories. The data obtained for this study were coded into news frames or themes and their subcategories analysed manually. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a researcher can incorporate the use of diagrams such as pie, bar or a line graph into the study to present

a clearer graphical view of content analysed in qualitative content analysis. This study, therefore, applied tables and pie/bar charts to present data on the coverage given to the category of stories, settings and news actors using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). It is important to note that the tables and charts were used to enhance data interpretation, therefore, they are more of qualitative value.

3.9 Ethical Issues

Before collecting data from the media house, the researcher was introduced to the management of the selected print media organisation about the intended purpose of the study. The editor of the newspaper even granted an interview to the researcher on the research work which was used to support the findings. The data obtained for the study were collected from the hard copies of the newspaper. In this regard, there was no breach of privacy or laws. The findings are a true representation of the newspaper.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology employed to assess story selection and type in the Ghanaian state-owned print media in Ghana. The approach to the study was qualitative and the research design was content analysis. In line with the research approach and design, qualitative content analysis was employed as a data collection method. However, the interview was used to gather data to validate data from the qualitative content analysis.

In a nutshell, the chapter focused on the research approach, research design, sampling technique and size, data collection method, data collection process, method of data analysis and ethical issues.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study which focused on what made the news on the front pages of *Ghanaian Times* between the period 2015 and 2019. It presents and discusses findings on the kind of stories, main actors, direction of news and geographic representation of news on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*. Thus, the gatekeeping practices adopted, determinants of news selection, diversity of news and the reasons for the selection of particular stories.

The following research questions guided the analysis:

1. What are the types of news stories published on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*?
2. What is the geographical representation of the front-page stories of *Ghanaian Times*?
3. What is the social class of people are covered in the front-page news stories of *Ghanaian Times*?
4. What news values or policies determine what gets published on the front-page of *Ghanaian Times*?

4.1 RQ1: What are the types of news stories published on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*?

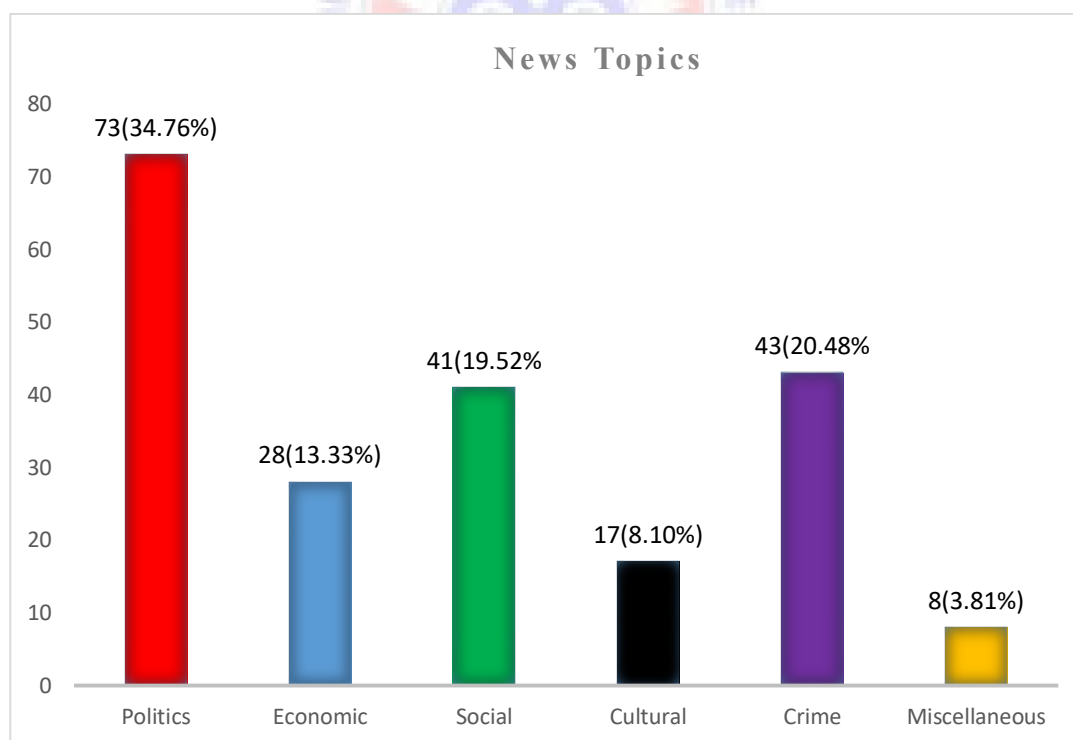
To analyse the type of news stories on the front pages of *Ghanaian Times*, attention was given to the types of issues covered, the types of tones as well as the types of stories used in presenting the issues covered. These helped to determine the nature of stories at the front-page of the newspaper. This research question finds significance in bringing to the

fore not only the type of issues which dominated the front pages but also the frames that those publications generated and the various presentation styles the editors used so far as the exercise of their gatekeeping functions and the front-page stories of *Ghanaian Times* is concerned.

4.1.1 Type of Issues Covered on the Front page of *Ghanaian Times*

With many media consumers and experts bemoaning over the devotion of front pages to political stories (Baidoo, 2011), the results help to find out if the trend is still the same or significant progress has been made in bridging the gap in terms of what makes news on the front pages. Findings on the types of issues covered are presented in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Types of Issues Covered based on News Topics



Analysis of the 210 news stories at the front page of the newspaper within the period of study, as seen in figure 1, revealed that 73 out of the total number of stories, representing

34.78%, covered issues on politics; 43 of the stories, representing 20.48%, were on crime issues; and 41 stories, representing 19.52% focused on social issues.

Also, 28 stories, which represent 13.33%, reported on economic issues, with 17 stories, which represent 8.10%, and 8 stories, representing 3.81%, concentrating on cultural issues and miscellaneous respectively.

From the findings, the type of issues that made it through the editor's gate to the front page of the newspaper centred on political activities, crime-related issues, social issues, economic matters, cultural issues and miscellaneous as depicted by figure 1 above. It became obvious that the national daily, *Ghanaian Times*, covered a wide range of topics. There was, however, a disproportionate representation of the issues as some issues were given more coverage than others. For instance, political stories accounted for 2 out of every 5 stories published thereby making the reportage skewed in terms of numbers. Another area that attracted coverage, though not much attention, was miscellaneous or bizarre issues. It was noted that 8 stories which the country had no control of mainly centred on accident cases, natural disasters were also given front-page prominence.

It was discovered from the interview data that political interference, influence, vibrant political activism, and pressure from government functionaries who would want governmental stories often featured on the front-page account for the domination of political issues at the front page of the newspaper. To this effect, the editor notes that, "aside from the vibrant political activism in the country, government functionaries also want certain government stories to be featured. The newspaper is for the state and so we cannot depart from our responsibility to government" (Interview data).

The results from the content analysis find expression in the interview data which revealed that though there is the domination of political issues at the front page of the paper, it is

doing its best to shed off the political tag and to reshape its outlook by giving more space to non-political stories. The results indeed show that *Ghanaian Times* is indeed on course in its agenda of reducing its political front page content thereby redefining its outlook. Thus, it can be argued that apart from political activities, a wide range of issues were also covered at the front-page.

The results also confirm earlier works by Baidoo (2011) and Gogovi (2017) which suggest that the primary focus of the reportage by state-owned print media in Ghana is to satisfy the political class as politics dominates what gets published on the front pages. Thus, the Ghanaian State-owned print media see the political class and politics worth serving than the social and economic challenges confronting the citizenry. Instead of highlighting the challenges of the masses for onward address by the political class who control the national purse and resources, the political class rather dictates what the masses must hear and feed on. Therefore, the issues framed at the front page of the newspaper in terms of patterns and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion of issues (Tankard, 2001) made political issues (aspects of the reality perceived) more prominent than others (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015).

The refreshing news, with regard to the current results, is that the *Ghanaian Times* seems to be closing the gap in terms of the percentage of space given to political news as seen in the earlier works by Baidoo (2011) and Gogovi (2017) on news determinants on the front pages of the Ghanaian print- media, *Daily Graphic*. While 40.69% out of 204 stories sampled by Baidoo (2011) and 40.9% out of 425 stories as sampled by Gogovi (2017) were devoted to politics, the current study saw a reduction in the number of stories devoted to politics thereby kicking against the assertion that the Ghanaian state-owned media have increasingly been used as a propaganda tool for the political class (Hayford, 2014). In fact,

of the total 210 stories published, 86 (40.95%) of stories which were devoted to social, economic and cultural news is more than the 73 (34.76%) stories devoted to politics alone throughout the 5years period of study. In the case of Baidoo (2011), the aggregate of social, economic and cultural stories which affect the masses especially was 26.01% of the total of 204 stories published while that of Gogovi (2017) was 32.2% of 425 stories published. The leap in number arguably shows that the trend is gradually changing against political news.

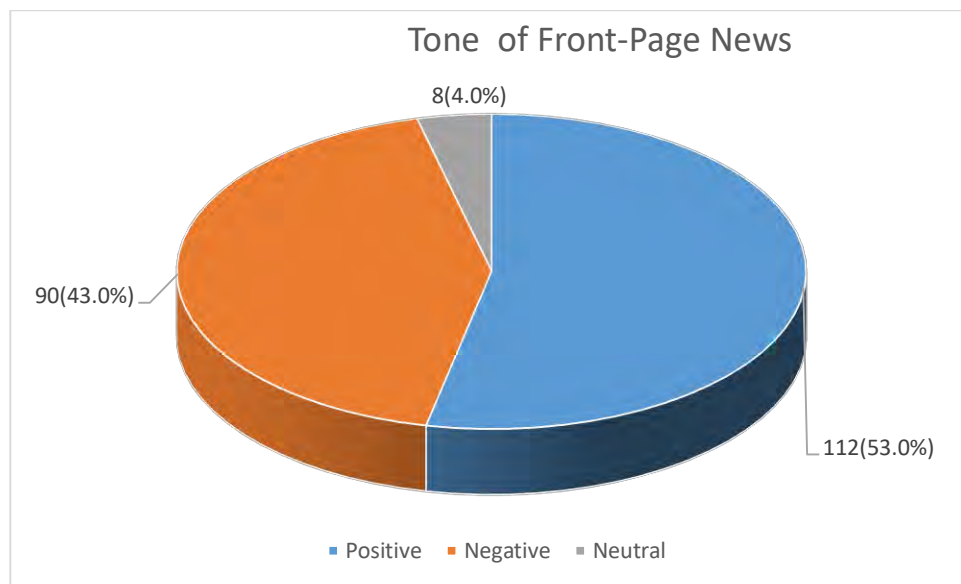
According to Kim and Chung (2016), political interference for front-page coverage of political issues is due to the fact that a lot of people read the headlines on the front pages alone for information without necessarily reading the entire news story, especially. This justifies the pressure from government functionaries to secure front-page coverage for political stories to project the actions and achievements of the government to the readerships who may not read the entire news story. This, therefore, arguably means that stories which find themselves in the other pages risk not being read or getting the necessary attention.

4.1.2 Tone of the Issues Covered by *Ghanaian Times*

Another aspect to the analysis on the type of news stories at the front-page of *Ghanaian Times* was the tone. This was to help determine the direction of the front-page news. The analysis was aimed at finding a particular image or frame associated with the front page of the newspaper. It was to find out whether the front page was skewed to provide a rosy picture about the country, hence, the editors allowing only positive stories through their gates or they allowing all news to pass be it negative or positive so far as it is deemed current and worth letting the people know. Thus, the editorial policies of the newspaper

were brought to bear at this stage of the analysis. The outcome of this analysis is presented in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Tone of Issues Covered at the Front-page of *Ghanaian Times*



The data in figure 3 showed that majority of the stories, which is 112 of the total 210 stories (53.0%), presented issues covered at the front page of the newspaper in positive tone while 90 stories (43%) and 8 stories (4%) were presented in negative and neutral tones respectively.

The findings indicated that the editors focused on positive happenings in the country and saw such stories as worth more publishing space than negative stories that also found space on the premium front pages. Ninety (90) stories of the total story number reported on issues that mostly painted a catastrophic image about the country so they were placed under the negative news category while 8(4%) of the total number of stories were neutral. Even though the positive stories were more, there was a narrow gap between the positive and negative stories. This showed that both positive and negative stories virtually had equal

chances of being selected by the editors for publication so far as it was current, compelling and met the human interest criteria which constitute the cardinal editorial bench of a front-page story for a given day (O'Neil, 2011). For instance, crime-related stories were the second most dominant stories in terms of the total stories that made it through the 'gates' of the editors. Out of the 210 stories, crime-related stories accounted for 43(20.48%) next to politics which recorded the highest frequency with 73 representing (34.76%). In terms of the significance of negative stories such as crime-related stories, negativity trigger audience attention (Soroka, 2006) and so aside such negative stories enlightening society of ills happening around, negative stories also boost sales of the newspaper (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014).

In probing for an explanation of the above findings from the front pages of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper, the editor noted that Ghanaians deserve to know whatever is happening around them be it positive or negative in terms of the country's image. Hence, the need to provide an avenue for both negative and positive news to find expression at the premium front pages. Thus, the newspaper does not focus its reportage on positive news alone but also focuses on debilitating acts like corruption that cripples development in every society. He stresses that "it is not only about developmental issues. We want to expose as much as possible wrongdoing in society. If that's what one will mean to be negative about the country's image and reputation, so be it. I have no regret" (interview data).

The implication is that the newspaper has no hidden agenda and policy in the exercise of its gatekeeping function to frame or paint a rosy picture of the country. The newspaper only exists to provide the public with current and accurate information for them to hinge their decisions on. Thus, by so doing, the editors support the assertion by Bernette (2006) that editors through the exercise of their gatekeeping function must use their contents to

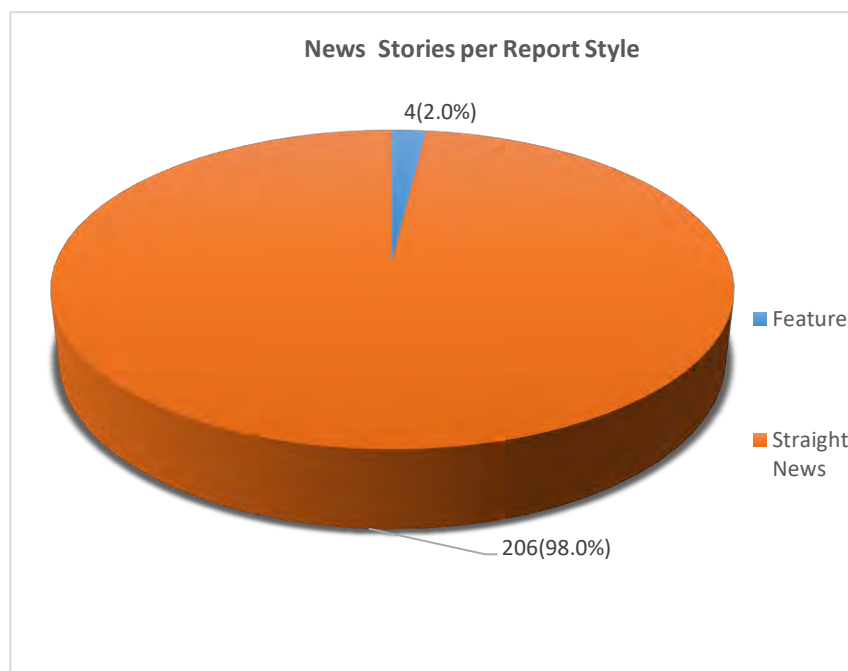
inform and educate the public on happenings around them without slanting the reportage. Thus, even though the gatekeeping theory allows them to exercise discretion in selecting stories for publication, the stories should serve society well by keeping them abreast with what is happening around them.

4.1.3 Type of Stories at the front-page of the *Ghanaian Times* Newspaper

The richness, as well as the objectivity of information or otherwise in a news story, depends on the story format used. Therefore, the type of stories used in presenting the issues covered within the period of study at the front page of the newspaper was also analysed. Figure 3 below presents findings from the analysis:



Figure 3: Types of Stories Styles Used in Covering Issues at Front-page of *Ghanaian Times*



It emerged from the data gathered in figure 3 that 206 news stories (representing 85.5% of the stories) were straight hard news stories while the remaining 4 news stories (representing 15% of the stories) were feature lead stories in their presentation. This was an indication that the *Ghanaian Times* preferred hard news stories which reflected information from external news actors than staff writers putting across their opinions on issues that they felt strongly about. Thus, per the exercise of their gatekeeping function, the editors of *Ghanaian Times* framed their front page as a page for the people and not for the staff because citizens were allowed a lion's share of the space in the premium front pages for their issues to be communicated to the rest of the world.

To this finding, the editor of the newspaper explained that it was a strategic move in order not to court unnecessary controversy for the paper as it could have dire consequences on the editorial team, especially from the board of directors of the organization, aside

adversely affecting sales. In this light, the editor claims that, “I guard the front pages jealously so it sells. Stories are carefully selected to avoid problems with the public, board of directors and other stakeholders. We take ourselves from the story and let the people tell their own story” (Interview data).

Findings for research question one affirm an assertion by Allern (2002) that front-page news is generally a product of either economic, political or ownership factors and decisions, therefore, interpretative journalism which could give more insight on issues so that the public are better placed to make informed decisions are rather avoided just to please superiors. Thus, in sticking to the straight news module, the editors were able to keep the objectivity maxim which relies on verifiable facts and not interpretative activities for its front-page coverage. However, the public is arguably denied the opportunity of weighing all aspects of the story in arriving at conclusions for themselves. This limits the scope of the richness of information on the front page. Literature shows that a lot of people only read the front pages for stories (Neisner, 1992, Kim & Chung, 2017; Gogovi, 2017), therefore, newspaper reviews in the country, with regard to the electronic media, mostly focuses on the front-page stories (Nyarko, 2016). This means that those who read only front-page stories of the newspaper or those who mostly rely on the electronic media for newspaper stories will miss the insightful interpretative angles to the emerging stories which are mostly borne out of deep research.

4.2 Q2. What is the geographic representation of the news stories on the front pages of the *Ghanaian Times*?

To establish the geographical representation of the front-page stories, the study focused on the specific and regional settings as well as the rural-urban dimensions of the settings of

the news stories presented at the front pages of the newspaper. The rationale for this question was to examine whether the state-owned print media afforded the rural areas the platform for their concerns to be heard and addressed. This is necessary because it helped to establish if the state-owned newspaper was adhering to the statutory obligation of offering fair representation and equal access to all in expressing a divergent opinion on issues of national importance as demanded by the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana. Also, it helped to explore the attempts being made by the newspaper in bridging the information and development gap between the urban and rural centres, especially when evidence exists that the private press in their quest for profit ignores rural stories which do not drive the sale of the newspapers (Baidoo, 2011).

4.2.1 Specific Settings of News Stories at the Front-pages of *Ghanaian Times*

The specific centres a story is sourced from helps in painting a clearer picture as to the dominant setting that the editors prefer in sourcing stories. It also helps in determining whether the editors are skewing reportage to in favour of certain settings thereby flouting the constitutional obligation of providing fair access to all irrespective of one's setting. The outcome of the analysis is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Specific Settings of News Stories at the Front-pages (Field data).

Geography	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Com
Accra	160	76.19	76.19
Kumasi	13	6.19	82.38
Ho	4	1.90	84.29
Asante Bekwai	1	0.48	84.76
Dadieso	1	0.48	85.24
Nakpali	1	0.48	85.71
Akim Oda	1	0.48	86.19
Nyinasin	1	0.48	86.67
Abompei	1	0.48	87.14
Cape Coast	3	1.45	88.57
Nkoranza	1	0.48	89.05
Obuasi	2	0.95	90.00
Dehia	1	0.48	90.48
Lawra	1	0.48	90.95
Tarkoradi	5	2.38	93.33
Kobina Ansah	1	0.48	93.81
Tema	5	2.38	96.19
Koforidua	1	0.48	96.67
Sunyani	1	0.48	97.14
Gyabenkrom	1	0.48	97.62
Bawku	1	0.48	98.10
Sangurli	1	0.48	98.57
Yendi	1	0.48	99.05
Korasua No1	1	0.48	99.52
Epoano	1	0.48	100.0
TOTAL	210	100	100

The results in table 1 show that within the period of study, 160 news stories (76.19%) of the total 210 stories were on issues from Accra, 13 stories (6.19%) reported on issues from

Kumasi and 5 stories (2.38%) each focused on issues from Takoradi and Tema respectively. Also, 4 of the stories (1.90%) concentrated on issues from Ho, 3 stories (1.45%) were on issues that occurred in Cape-Coast, 2 stories (0.95%) from Obuasi with the remaining 18 different settings recording a story (0.48%) each.

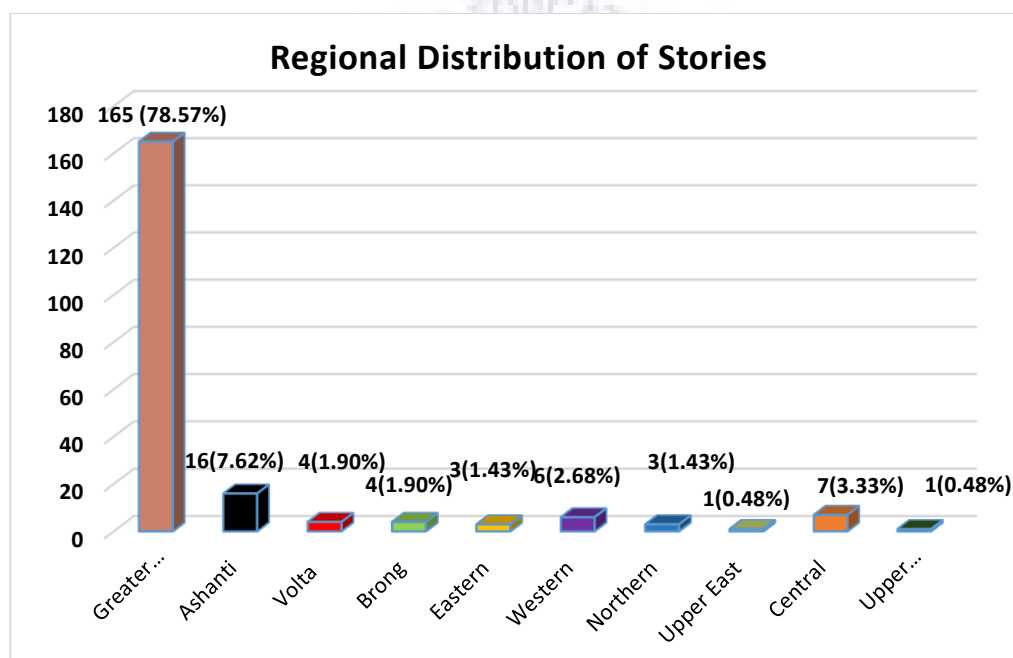
The capital city of Ghana, Accra, was the preferred location for stories followed by Kumasi, Takoradi, Tema, Ho and Cape-Coast. The remaining regional capitals like Tamale, Bolgatanga, Wa among others had no stories at the front pages within the sampled period. The result points to the fact that the editors of the *Ghanaian Times* in their quest to meet their commercial targets are unable to meet their statutory obligation of offering fair representation to all to express a divergent opinion on issues. The paper has arguably been framed as an ‘Accra newspaper’ as stories from that area dominates the front page. The issue of diversity as exemplified by the representation of the settings with regards to the premium front page is downplayed in the exercise of the gatekeeping function by the editors and that is obviously in bad taste and an affront to democratic participation in terms of access to the media.

This was affirmed by the editor in an interview when he indicated that, “yes, the paper has become an urban newspaper even though that isn’t the ideal thing that we should have. We enjoy no subventions from government and so must sell to cover costs and places like Accra help with sales” (Interview data). Profit is indeed key in terms of what gets published in many newspapers (Strömbäck et al, 2012; Skovsgaard, 2014) and arguably *Ghanaian Times* is part of such newspapers motivated by profit or economic considerations per the data analysed.

4.2.2 Regional Representation of Front-page Stories in the Newspaper

Data on specific settings of the front-page stories were further categorised into regional representations to paint a clearer picture. Though Ghana has 16 regions currently, the previously known 10 regions were used in this analysis because of the period of study. Thus, until December 2018, Ghana had 10 regions and since the period of study is from 2015 to 2019, the researcher decided to stick to the 10 previously known regions in this analysis. The findings are presented in figure 4.

Figure 4: Regional Representation of Stories



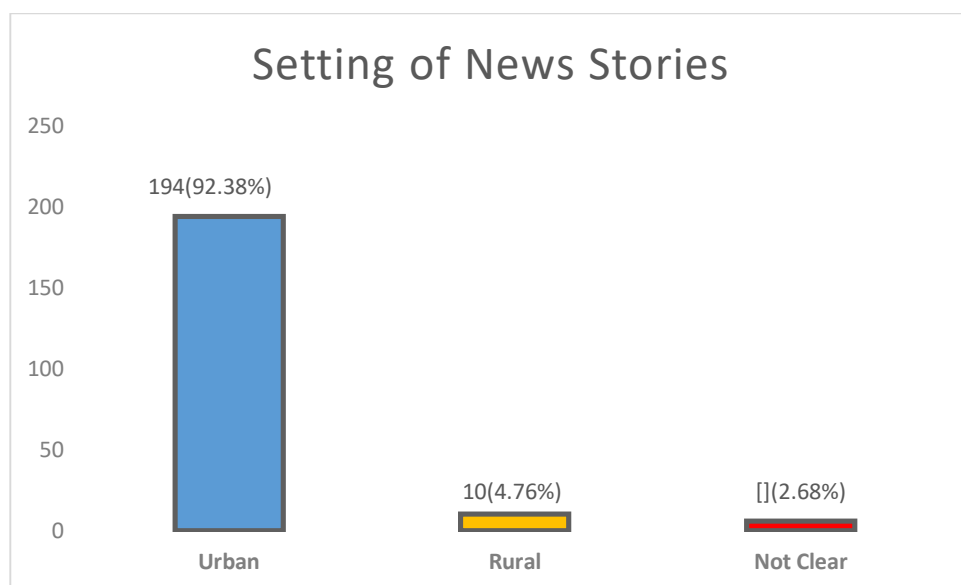
From the results in figure 4, 165 (78.57%) of the total 210 stories were dedicated to issues from the Greater Accra Region. This was followed by the Ashanti Region with 16 stories which accounted for 7.62% of the total stories published within the sampled period. Central and Western Regions had 7 and 6 stories and this accounted for 3.33% and 2.68% of the

total stories respectively. Regions like the Upper East and Upper West Regions received the least coverage with 1 story each (which is 0.48%) of the total number of stories published.

The results do not give a good picture about the work of the editors in terms of regional representation on the premium front pages especially in fulfilment of the constitutional obligation of affording all persons fair opportunities and access in expressing divergent views on issues affecting them. It is clear that the newspaper's preferred destination for stories is the Greater Accra Region. It could be concluded that the editors, in the exercise of their gatekeeping function, have framed the state-owned newspaper, *Ghanaian Times*, as Greater Accra newspaper instead of a paper for all persons across the regions. The editor affirms the results by saying that, 'we get the majority of our front-page stories from Greater Accra and Ashanti Region and that is where the newspaper sells most in helping to meet our operational costs'' (interview data).

4.2.3 Rural-Urban Dimensions to Settings of Front-page Stories in Ghanaian Times

Related to the setting of the story, is the rural-urban dimension. When front-page news stories concentrate on issues at the urban centres or cities than rural centres, it is an indication of giving prominence to urban issues over rural issues. This study, therefore, sought to examine the relative levels of coverage of rural and urban news as presented in figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Rural-Urban Dimensions to Setting of Stories

Results from the data in figure 5 revealed that urban-oriented stories dominated the front page of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper because it accounted for 194 (92.38%) out of the total 210 stories examined. A paltry 10 (4.76%) was dedicated to rural stories while 6 (2.68%) fell into the unclear category.

The findings revealed that the rural-urban dichotomy is heavily skewed in favour of the urban issues at the expense of the pressing developmental issues in the rural areas. The disparity also supports the assertion by Chaudhry and Dayal (2018) that editors of newspapers prefer urban news to that of rural areas due to economic reasons. Although the paper had more resources and had won more laurels than many of its competitors in the print media (Baidoo, 2011), the front-page coverage from 2015-2019 did not reflect the diversity in terms of the newspaper's superior advantage.

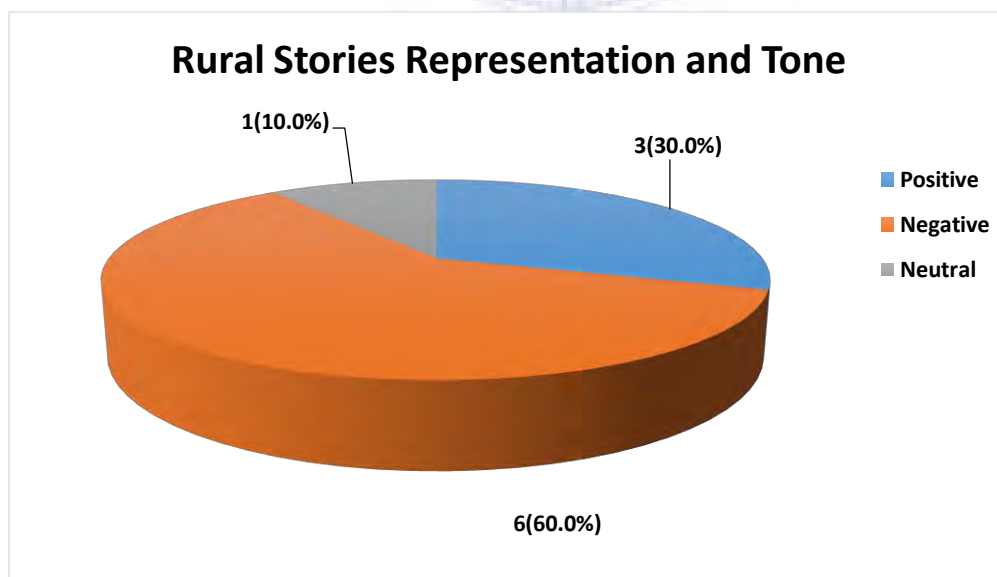
The blatant neglect is corroborated in the interview data. The editor of the *Ghanaian Times* posits that the rural stories do not sell compared to the urban stories making it difficult to

devote the premium pages to such stories. He claims that, “rural stories don’t sell compared to urban stories and the newspaper too must survive. It’s also completely impossible to give everybody and setting the same prominence as it’s not every news that sells and that is a fact about life” (interview data). In justifying further the decision for urban stories ahead of rural stories, the editor stated, “you cannot have a small community having a funfair and you will want to equate it to an activity in an entire district as interest and sales will differ based on those involved” (Interview data).

4.2.4 Rural Representation and Tone of News Stories at the Front-pages

It has been asserted that the positives of rural settings are mostly ignored unless their issues reach a calamitous level and become the issue of national concern (Baidoo, 2011; Chaudhry & Dayal, 2018). By extension, this study analysed the tone of stories on rural issues to affirm or refute this assertion. The outcome of the analysis is presented in figure 6.

Figure 6: Rural story Representation and Tone of story



The results in figure 6 showed that out of the 10 stories that covered rural issues within the period of study, 6 of the stories (60%) had a negative tone, 3 stories (30%) had a positive tone and one story (10%) was in a neutral tone.

The result is a confirmation of the assertion by Baidoo (2011) and Chaudhry and Dayal, (2018) that rural stories that get space at the front pages of newspapers mostly have a negative tone. Majority of the rural stories (60%) focused on negative happenings in the rural areas especially crime-related stories at the expense of development-related stories such as farming or health. Also, two (2) out of the three (3) positive stories centred on presidential visits to the rural areas in the Western Region at a time when the missing Tarkoradi Girls - who were deemed either kidnapped or killed by unknown persons per media reportage - has gained national attention.

The editors, playing by the dictates of the gatekeeping theory chose to focus more on the negatives of the rural areas compared to their positives such as vibrant economic activities (Chaudhry & Dayal, 2018), thereby, painting a fatalistic frame and image about the rural areas as if the setting is not worth living in.

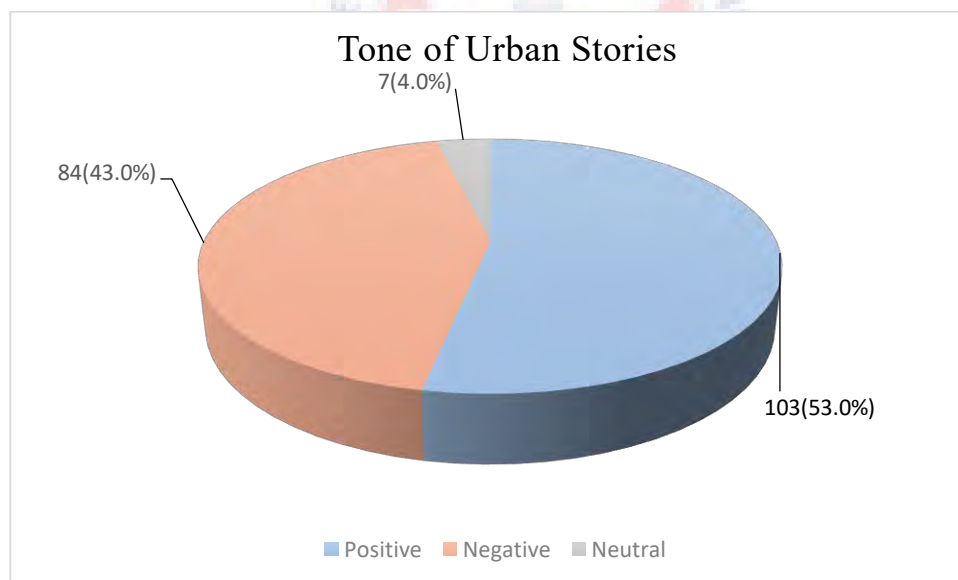
This negative picture about the rural areas - created by the editors using the selected news stories - is poor as it will arguably cause other people to think twice in associating with people in such areas as they are likely to have lingering questions about such areas and people. This feeds into an assertion by Pickle et al (2002) that contents of news stories not only include hidden indirect questions for which frames provide answers but also frames provide implied answers to implied questions. Vreese (2005) adds that frames end up being construed to mean reality. Thus, the stories from the rural areas with negative tones could be construed to mean the reality in such areas in terms of security and general livelihood,

therefore, causing people to arguably shun such places. This is an unhealthy representation, hence, negative frame about the rural areas.

4.2.5 Urban Representation and Tone of News Stories at the Front-pages

The tone of stories from urban settings were also analysed to give more credence to the assertion by Baidoo (2011) and Chaudhry and Dayal, (2018). Based on the assertion, it is congruent that urban stories have domination when it comes to positive tones. Thus, if negative issues from the rural setting attract front-page prominence then a change in this trend in the urban setting will support the assertion. The results are presented in figure 7.

Figure 7: Urban Representation and Tone of Stories



From the figure7 above, it could be observed that 103 stories (53.0%) portrayed the urban centres in a positive light as a place worth living while 84 stories (43.0%) focused on negative happenings in the urban centres. Seven stories (4.0%) also had neutral tones.

Stories with negative tone focused on the negative aspect of politics, governance and crime-related subjects. The political stories were laden with insults and attacks which did not portray a good image of the political class, governance and activism in the country. The 10% gap even though huge and significant in terms of the positive and negative stories means that the country must do more in improving livelihood and activism in the urban areas. Per the decision of the newspaper's editors to fairly open their gates to both positive and negative news, it means that they were open in telling the real stories about the urban centres. The editor of the *Ghanaian Times* amply puts this by saying that, "the people deserve to know all that is happening around them in their communities and country as a whole" (Interview data). The decision is arguably important in terms of getting Ghanaians informed and educated using their front pages.

The findings from the analysis of research question two revealed a high sense of urbanization in the coverage. The skewed geographical representation means that the issues from urban centres were given more prominence than rural issues. This points to the fact that many of the activities considered newsworthy in the exercise of the gatekeeping function of the editors indeed took place in the urban centres, hence, the preponderance of urban stories. Also, sales dictated which area gets featured on the premium front page of the Ghanaian state-owned print media *Ghanaian Times*. This contradicts the assertion by Mawugbe (2006) that the newspaper enjoys some level of government subvention, therefore, not under any pressure to sell and engaging in sensationalism because commercial interest is given priority public interest. It arguably makes it unfair in terms of meeting the Article 163 constitutional mandate of offering fair representation and equal access to all in expressing a divergent opinion on issues of national importance (1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana). The paper could have made strenuous efforts to report

on the many unreported cases in the rural areas for its front page (just as earlier findings showed its effort to change the trend of domination of political issues at front-pages). The fact that some stories made it to the front pages means that more of such could have been given prominence if the editors wanted to close the gap between the urban stories and rural stories. The results again confirm assertion Sibandu and Mafa (2015) that media practitioners prefer to concentrate their coverage on urban dwellers and centres.

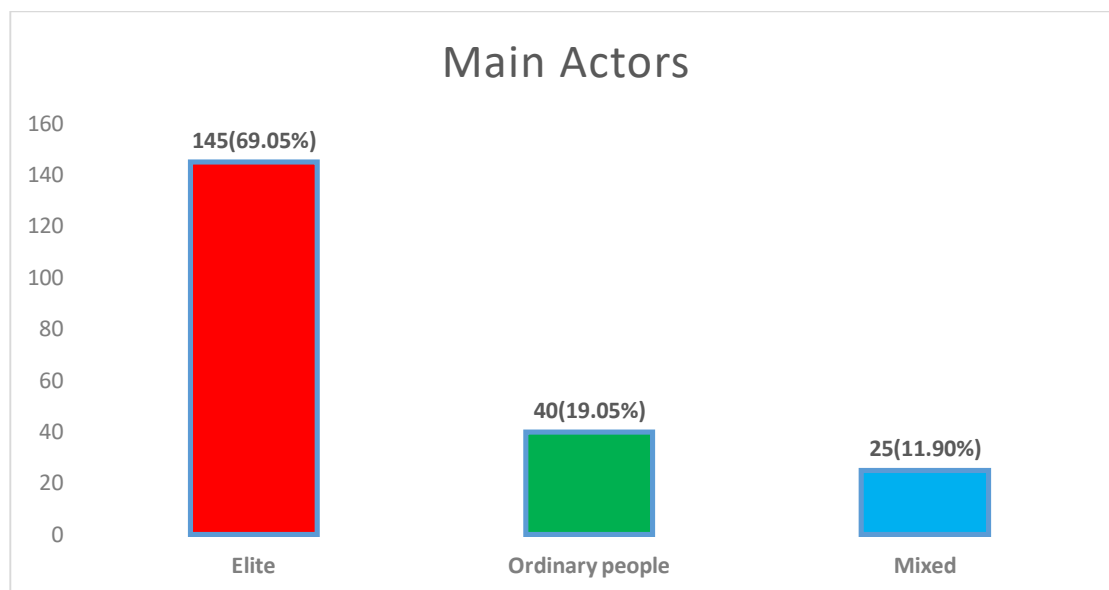
The editors in highlighting the challenges of rural areas could also throw more light on the positive activities in the rural areas like farming so the audience appreciates the contribution of the rural populace to national development, thereby, being given their due (Baidoo, 2011). Sibanda & Mafa (2015) indicate that indeed newspapers reports of development trends in rural areas can intensify such efforts and spur the minds of those involved in decision making into more actions. Thus the gatekeeping theory being used by editors to regulate news flow in the media and even to set news agenda for the public as emphasised by Ifeoma and Okafor(2016) is at play as it has not only been used to subjugate the rural settings in terms of coverage but a new agenda arguably has been set by the editors to the effect that the preferred place for news is urban centres where the elite who have the commercial appeal operate to drive sale of the newspaper at the detriment of rural development. The rural areas end up with negative frames as not being attractive compared to the urban centres all because of the unhealthy gatekeeping decisions taking by the editors which even flout their constitutional obligation of fair representation to all.

4.3 RQ3: What is the social class of people featured in the front-page news stories of the *Ghanaian Times*?

Closely related the issue of settings is the people in it. As such, this question does not only seek to study the main actors in the stories at the front-page but also, the aspect of urban-rural setting to the actors in the story. Literature has shown that the media in Ghana focus more on the elites than the masses (Gogovi, 2017). Also, Baidoo (2011) and Chaudhry and Dayal, (2018) posit that the positive issues of rural settings are mostly ignored until the elite visit such places. This arguably means that issues about the masses are hardly captured especially on the premium front pages. However, the state-owned newspaper should not be a facility for a few but all in expressing a divergent opinion. This is because the *Ghanaian Times* as a state-owned media should be helping in addressing the unfair representation of people who are in the news - especially when the paper is constitutionally mandated to offer fair representation to all. Therefore, the rationale for this research question was to establish if the *Ghanaian Times* was following the *Daily Graphic* example as indicated by Gogovi (2017) or otherwise. Therefore, the study explores the newsmakers found on the front pages especially in establishing diversity.

4.3.1 Main Actors in the Front-page Stories of the *Ghanaian Times* Newspaper.

This aspect of the study evaluated the category of people the '*Ghanaian Times*' found worthy as sources for stories. Even though a lot of policies and theories have been propounded to address main actor syndrome (Baidoo, 2011), the elites and political appendages still dominate the news (Hayford, 2014; Gogovi, 2017). The results of the analysis are presented in figure 8.

Figure 8: Main Actors in the Front-page News Stories of the Newspaper

The findings in figure 8 showed that elite-oriented or elite-driven news dominated with 145(69.05%) while the masses as news sources accounted for 40 (19.05%) of the total stories. The mixed actors as news sources constituted 25 (11.90%) of the total 210 stories sampled.

This showed a clear preference for the elite in society as news makers. Contrary to persistent advice in the media, journalism schools and training workshops that the news should open up more to ordinary persons, *Ghanaian Times* still had a huge preference for elite-centred news. It was discovered that members of the executive arm of government and the prominent in society captured the attention of the paper's gatekeepers. For instance, the 2nd October 2018 edition of the newspaper had the headline 'Veep launches National Cyber Security Campaign' The Vice President of the Republic, Dr Mahamadu Bawumia, was the main source and newsmaker and he is an elite. This and other instances of such

nature point to the framing of the paper as the paper of the elite especially with regards to the front pages.

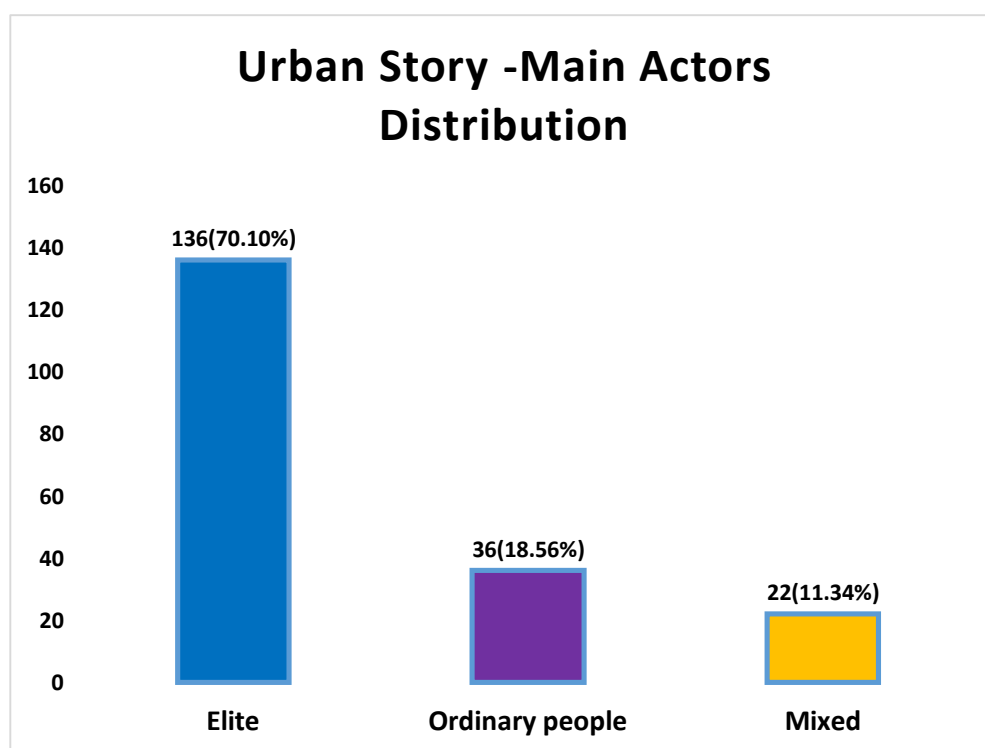
The data from the interview explained the above results as a reflection of the newspaper's quest to sell in order to cover their administrative and operational costs. The newspaper, the editor explained, is under pressure to sell to be in business, therefore, it must appeal to persons who have the financial power to drive sales. Hence, concentrating more on the elites, mostly politicians, business owners, celebrities, traditional leaders among others, who are newsmakers and more newsworthy with a corresponding commercial appeal to drive sales in order to keep the newspaper in business. The editor states that "the elite are key to the survival of the newspaper. If we do not sell the newspaper, we do not get paid and the elite who are influential are key in achieving the objective. News about them indeed sells" (Interview data).

The editor of the *Ghanaian Times* suggests that the newspaper enjoys no subvention from the government and must sell to survive. This implies that sales once again determine what gets onto the front page whether relevant to the needs of society or not and that is worrisome. The newspaper becomes the preserve of the rich and influential especially the premium front pages. This is clearly in line with Karikari's (2017) that the elites, especially the political class, dominate news stories necessitating that effort is made to balance coverage to reflect views and opinions of the masses whose concerns must be heard and addressed.

4.3.2 Representation of News Makers in Urban Stories

The main actors in stories from urban settings are also analysed to find out the level of coverage given to both the elite and masses in the urban centres, especially in determining if the masses in the urban centres were fairly represented in terms of what got published on the front pages. The results are captured below in figure 7.

Figure 9: Urban Story Representation in terms of News Actors in the News Stories



The results, as depicted by figure 9, indicated that of the 194 stories covered in the urban centres, 136 (70.10%) news stories focused on the elites while 36 (18.56%) news stories focused on the masses with 22 (11.4%) news stories for mixed actors: that is both elites and ordinary people.

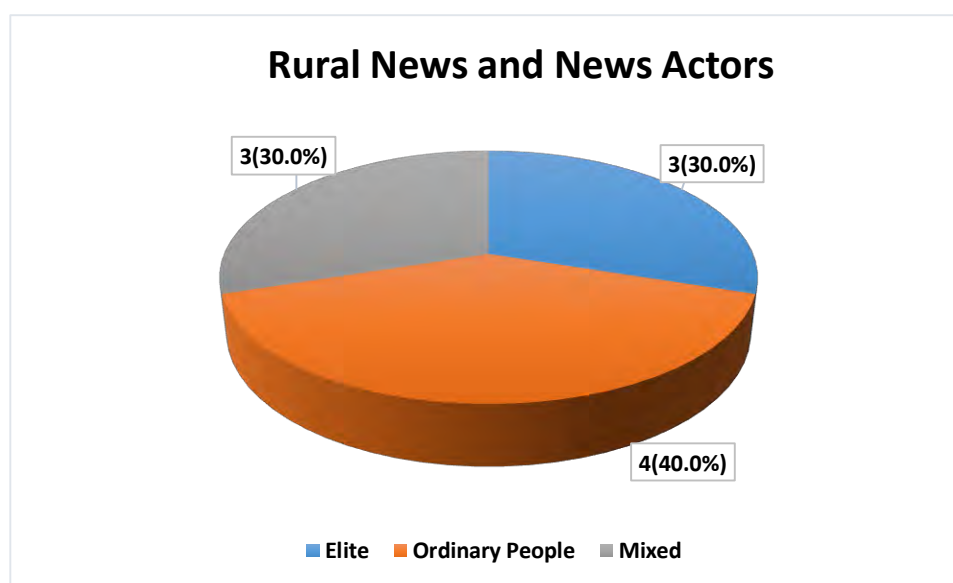
The findings showed a skewed coverage in favour of the elites than ordinary people. This is in line with the assertion by the editor of the *Ghanaian Times* that the newspaper does not only record its highest sales in the urban centres but also the elite who mostly operate in the urban centres are the biggest news makers and drivers of sales of the newspapers compared to the masses. Thus, the *Ghanaian Times* appears oblivious of the growing dynamics offered by new media and still sticks to the traditional focus of the news on elite and urban sources or issues. The finding suggests that the old traditional method of selecting stories for publication has not changed as not only is the newspaper framed as the newspaper for the elites but also an urban-centred newspaper with little attachment and representation to the masses who are even lucky to stay in such urban centres. Innovative ways like vox populi, social media platforms among others could be used to interact with the masses to find out their perspective on issues so they could be considered in terms of news stories. Reporters could even be dispatched on special assignments to some rural settings to monitor activities in such areas and again interact with the people so that their concerns are also captured and highlighted for officialdom to address. This will invariably help in improving rural folks' participation in the governance process and discourse as well as improving livelihood in such areas.

The masses at urban settings were assigned only 36 out of the 194 stories published during 5 years. The elites had a lion's share of 136 story spaces and that arguably is unfair and amounts to misrepresentation in terms of the apportioning of the premium front page spaces. It also an affront to the constitutional mandate of the state-owned media in affording all Ghanaians fair opportunities and facilities for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions (Article 163 of the 1992 Republican Constitution).

4.3.2 Representation of News Makers in Rural Stories

Assertions by Baidoo (2011) and Chaudhry and Dayal (2018) point to the fact that the positives of rural settings are often ignored and that rural stories mostly get attention when the elite visit such places. This informed the analysis of news makers in rural stories as seen in figure 10 below:

Figure 10: Rural Story Representation in terms of News Actors in the News Stories



Findings in figure 10 revealed that of the 10 stories dedicated to issues from rural settings, 3 (30%) of them focused on the Elite while 4 stories (40%) were also on the ordinary people. Three of the stories had mixed actors and were mainly centred on chieftaincy matters specifically petty squabbles. The three (3) stories on the elite had 2 of them centring on the presidential visits to the rural areas with the rural folks being assured of their share of the national cake. The other story centred on a Minister of State. The Minister of State was also sensitizing people at Gyabenkrom in the Western Region against activities of

kidnappers who were operating in the region. Four other stories focused on the ordinary persons, mostly illegal miners and other persons engaged in other crimes such as murder and rape, who had been arrested.

Three (3) of the stories which were also negative had mixed actors and they focused on chieftaincy issues, specifically succession problems leading to communal clashes in rural areas like Kobina Ansah in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District of the Central Region as well as Nakpali in the Northern Region of Ghana. Another chief was forced to abdicate the stool on the accusation of not doing enough in advancing development at Epoano, a village in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abirem (KEEA) Municipality of the Central Region. This was after the village folks had staged a demonstration against him.

The analysis showed that even in rural areas, the distribution was fairly even with no preference to give more coverage to the ordinary people in that setting compared to the elite having a lion's share of coverage in the urban areas as seen in figure 9.

Based on the analysis and findings for research question three (3), it is discovered that the elites are deemed the best and most preferred source of news for the premium front pages compared to the masses who are arguably disadvantaged in terms of media space and coverage. This is indeed worrisome especially when many people rely on newspapers as the major source of information around them (O'Donnell, 2013) and also the fact that *Ghanaian Times* is widely utilized and relied upon by policymakers in Ghana (Journalistic Policy Guide, Standards and Practices 2008; Amihere, 2010). Thus, a person or community stands the biggest chance of catching the attention of policymakers in addressing their concerns if their issues find space in the newspaper especially the prestigious front pages. This also arguably means that the masses risk losing out in having their concerns captured

and addressed by policymakers if their issues do not find space in the newspaper - especially the premium front pages.

This will indeed be a recipe for disaster for the country if all shades of people ought to have their issues articulated and redressed through the medium of the print media. It is upon this score that the state-owned media is constitutionally mandated per Article 163 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana to help bridge the gap by offering fair opportunities and equal access to all Ghanaians to express a divergent opinion which is part of the country's developmental and democratic process. Thus, per the dictates of the gatekeeping theory, as the editors exercise their discretion in selecting certain stories vis-à-vis their constitutional mandate of fair representation, the editors should not be seen to be skewing coverage to suit the elites, thereby, feeding into the framing doctrine and painting a picture of the newspaper as elitist or preserve of the elites. The frame should rather be that of a newspaper by all and for all Ghanaians irrespective of status or setting. The elitist frame will arguably affect development in the rural areas as the rural folks will not have platform to have their concerns heard and addressed especially when the newspaper is relied on for policy making in Ghana (Amihere, 2010).

4.4 RQ4: What news values or policies determine what gets published on the front pages of the *Ghanaian Times*?

This research question was posed against the backdrop that the newspaper as a state-owned media has a constitutional mandate in reflecting divergent opinion in terms of what gets published. The question is whether the Article 163 constitutional mandate of affording fair opportunities and facilities for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinion has been met by the editors. Also, the Journalistic Policy Guide, Standards and Practices,

(2008) enjoins editors to ensure fair coverage including on the premium front pages. This is to ensure that the masses are equally represented with their issues head and addressed by authorities.

4.4.1 News Values and reflection on Coverage

Kisuke(2004) indicates that newspapers do not operate in a vacuum and that news values play a key role in story selection as not all stories could get to the front page. Harcup and O’Neil (2016) indicate two dimensions of news values namely; commercial appeal to a target audience and those that reflect the inherent characteristics of a good story such as balance, fairness, objectivity, among other story elements. Harcup and O’Neill (2016) explain that the commercial appeal factors focus on the nature of the story, news actors, and setting which will boost the revenue of the newspaper. This segment of the study, therefore, evaluates how the two dimensions of news values reflected in what got published on the front pages.

The results from the content analysis of the newspaper brought to the fore some interesting perspectives as to the news values that determine what gets published on the front pages vis-à-vis posit by Harcup and O’Neill (2016).

Analysis of the 210 news stories at the front page of the newspaper within the period of study as seen in figure 1 revealed that 73 out of the total number of stories, representing 34.78%, covered issues on politics; 43 of the stories, representing 20.48%, were on crime issues; and 41 stories, representing 19.52% focused on social issues. Also, 28 stories, which represent 13.33%, reported on economic issues, with 17 stories, which represent 8.10%, and 8 stories, representing 3.81%, concentrating on cultural issues and miscellaneous

respectively. So, in terms of news values, the newspaper places premium firstly on political news, followed by crime-related stories, social news, economic and lastly cultural issues. Also, the newspaper and its editors have a high preference for elitist as source of news compared to the masses. The findings as seen in figure 8 showed that elite-oriented or elite-driven news dominated with 145(69.05%) while the masses as news sources accounted for 40 (19.05%) of the total stories. The mixed actors as news sources constituted 25 (11.90%) of the total 210 stories sampled. The results reflect assertion by Kisuke (2004) that media in the third world of which Ghana is part in terms of their news values in selecting stories prefer the elite as news actors.

Again, in terms of settings, the newspaper and its editors prefer urban news and centres for news than news from rural areas. Results from the data in figure 5 revealed that urban-oriented stories dominated the front page of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper because it accounted for 194 (92.38%) out of the total 210 stories examined. A paltry 10 (4.76%) was dedicated to rural stories while 6 (2.68%) fell into the unclear category.

Interview with the editor also validated the news values relating to the nature of news, news actors and setting. The editor explained that commerce or sales is a major driving force as to what gets published. The newspaper enjoys no government subvention and it is therefore in a hurry to sell to be able to meet production cost including paying of staff. The newspaper, therefore, has to be strategic in selecting stories that will sell hence focusing on influential persons (largely political class) who drive sales. There is also the focus on urban centres and news as against stories from rural settings where the newspapers are hardly bought. He also indicated that its status as a state-owned media also calls for the newspaper to support the government of the day in getting its message across to the public. In line with that mandate, the newspaper becomes amenable to a certain level of political

and government interference as government functions make certain overtures in getting government message published especially at the premium pages where it will have maximum attention. In all, the commercial dimension of news values with the objective of news stories appealing to a large audience as suggested by Harcup and O'Neill (2016) per the research data was highly considered in terms of story selection for the front pages. The preference was indeed on the elites, urban centres and political which brought in the needed revenue through newspaper's sale or circulation.

Lastly, the interview data coupled with the data from the content analysis of the newspaper's front page together showed that journalistic standards were adhered to in terms of selected for publication specifically the writing of the story. The interview data showed that the stories were well written, not sensationalism, did not insult the sensibilities of Ghanaians and had the human interest element in the stories. This was supported by the newspaper data. For example, not a single of the stories sampled had vulgar obscene or promoted nudity which the Ghanaian culture frowns on. The editor on the reasons for that added that, "the newspaper is a state property and can't be used for acts against the moral fibre and culture of the people. We uphold high journalistic standards in executing our mandate"

Another observation was that Article 163 played little or no role in terms of what got published on the front pages of the Ghanaian State-owned print media *Ghanaian Times* within the period of study. What determines what makes news on the front pages, based on data from the content analysis and the interview, is commerce or sales. Thus, according to the editor the newspaper must sell to cover its operational costs. He indicated that the newspaper does not place much premium on the representation of any form in choosing stories when it comes to front-page stories and that the focus is on stories that will make

good sales while not insulting the sensibilities of the readers. The editor states that ‘it is very difficult to ensure all levels of representativeness as it is not all stories that sell. We try to do that but I must say it is not easy to do so’ he stated. Thus, profit is the underlying factor as to what gets published each day. This arguably explains why the elites mostly the political class dominate the front page of the newspaper. Thus, they have the financial muscles and influence to drive sales mostly covers the front pages. The elites are good drivers of sale (Kasuke, 2004). It also explains why the masses mostly found in the rural areas hardly get covered on the prestigious front pages as they do not have the clout to drive sales. For instance, out of the 210 stories sampled, only 10(4.76%) of them were sourced from rural areas with 194(92.38%) centred on urban areas. Also, 145(69.05%) of the total 210 stories were focused on the elites while 40 (19.05%) focused on the masses with 25(11.90%) falling into the mixed category. The percentages clearly show that the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper does not afford fair representation and equal facilities to all to express a divergent opinion on issues that concerns them. The findings are indeed in line with posits by scholars (Hamilton , 2004; Architti, 2010; Stromback et all, 2012) that the ultimate determinant of news for the front page of the newspaper was commerce which is sale of the newspapers. The elite who are influential are indeed the drivers of sale.

4.5 Summary of Chapter

The chapter looked at the news topics, the tone of story, the news actors and the various settings that stories were sourced from. It also evaluated the news values that guided the story selection including the fulfilment of the newspaper’s constitutional mandate of ensuring representativeness by offering opportunities and facilities to all to express divergent views and opinions on issues that concerns them.

The findings showed that not only do political stories dominate the front pages of the newspaper but also the elite and urban centres are the preferred for stories. Political stories accounted for 34.78% of the total 210 stories sampled with the elite also accounting for 145(69.05%) of the stories.

Rural Settings also recorded only 10 (4.76%) of the total stories on the premium front pages while urban centres accounted for 194(92.38%). Again, the Greater Accra Region and the regional capital Accra were the most preferred places for front-page stories as for instance 165(76.19%) of the 210 stories centred on Accra with the Upper East and Upper West Regions emerging as the least preferred areas for front page news as they recorded a story each on the front page during the sampled period.

Finally, newspaper data coupled with interview data also pointed to the fact that the editor's shirk their constitutional mandate of ensuring representativeness in favour of commercial values ostensibly to sell more newspapers to cover their operational cost since they enjoy no subvention from government.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the research and conclusion as well as gives insight and directions for future research. Recommendations are made and outlined for improving future research on what makes news on the front pages of newspapers in Ghana.

5.1 Summary

This study was undertaken to study the determinants of news at the front pages of the *Ghanaian Times* by examining the types of issues covered, the tone of stories and the story types at the front pages of the newspaper. It also investigated the geographical representation of as well as the social class of the news makers in the front-page stories of the *Ghanaian Times*. To ensure the realisation of the research objectives, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the types of news stories published on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times*?
2. What is the geographical representation of the front-page stories of *Ghanaian Times*?
3. What is the social class of people covered in the front-page news stories of *Ghanaian Times*?
4. What news values or policies determine what gets published on the front-page of *Ghanaian Times*?

Relevant literature which underpins the study was analysed under the following headings: news values, newspapers and front page relevance, news coverage and pattern, framing and gatekeeping theories. Apart from exposing the researcher to the gap in literature, it also

familiarised the researcher with what has been studied in this area of study. This enabled the researcher to ensure that the literature reviewed was in sync with the thrust of the study. The study employed the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) and used the content analysis design (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). This afforded the researcher the opportunity to study what made news at the premium front pages of the *Ghanaian Times* in order to determine the pattern of publication over the years. Purposive sampling was used to sample the newspaper, the period of study and the participant for this study while the composite two weeks sampling strategy by Stempel (1989) was used to sample the news stories within the period of study. Data for the study was gathered through qualitative content analysis and interview. For the content analysis, a news story was the unit of analysis and codes were derived from the news stories sampled within the period of study. Interview with the editor of the newspaper was to probe for explanations to affirm or refute findings from the qualitative content analysis. Data for the study was thematically analysed (Bowen, 2009).

5.2 Summary of main findings

Analysis of data showed that the political stories dominated the front-page stories of *Ghanaian Times* within the period of study. It also came to the fore that the rural settings were the least considered in terms of stories selected for the front page. The preference of the newspaper, so far as front-page stories were concerned, was news from urban settings. The elites, mostly the political class, were the dominant group that were considered as newsmakers for the front pages.

- Out of the 210 stories sampled, the editors of the *Ghanaian Times* in the exercise of their gatekeeping function framed the front page as the political page. Seventy-three

(73) stories, representing 34.78% focused on politics; with the rest of the story types sharing the remaining 137(65.22%) of stories. In terms of the remaining categories of issues covered, 20.48 % of the stories were on crime issues; and 19.52% focused on social issues. Also, 13.33%, reported on economic issues, with 8.10%, and 3.81% of stories concentrating on cultural issues and miscellaneous respectively. So, the editors found political stories more compelling and appealing for the front pages than any other type of stories. The interview data also revealed that there was domination of political issues at the front page of the paper but the newspaper was doing its best to shed off the political tag and to reshape its outlook by giving more space to non-political stories.

- In terms of the tone, majority of the stories had positive tone but a significant number were also in a negative tone. The data showed that the editors in the exercise of their gatekeeping function did not plan to paint a rosy picture about the country thereby publishing positive stories alone but allowed negative acts happening in the country to be reported so that society and authorities address them and not allow such negative acts to cripple the country's development. These negative stories were on crime-related acts such as corruption, rape, armed robbery and so on. These are arguably things that no country would want to sweep under the carpet no matter how it will affect its image in the global world. Countries would indeed want to face it head-on and even stump it out of society. The editors were right in their decision to open their gates to both positive and negative stories.
- The results also pointed to the urban centres as the preferred setting for news as out of the 210 stories sampled, only 10 of the stories were from the rural areas. Thus, that urban-oriented stories dominated the front page of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper

with 92.38% of the total stories and a paltry 4.76% was dedicated to rural stories while 2.68% of the stories fell into the unclear category. The results clearly show that the *Ghanaian Times* was not supportive of calls by media consumers and experts for the media to be used to bridge the development gap between the rural areas and urban centres. The expectation had been that since *Ghanaian Times* is relied upon for policymaking in Ghana (Amihere, 2010; Asamoah, 2014), the newspaper should have given more coverage to rural issues in order to highlight the problems of the rural folks to policymakers so that their problems get addressed thereby improving livelihood in rural areas. The editor of the *Ghanaian Times* posits that the rural stories do not sell compared to the urban stories making it difficult to devote the premium pages to such stories.

- Another discovery from the data, in terms of geographical representation of the front-page stories, was the unfair distribution of stories in terms of regional representation or rural-urban representation (especially when the newspaper's constitutional mandate of offering fair opportunities to all to express a divergent opinion). The newspaper aside focusing more on urban stories also favoured Accra as the best place for news and coverage especially as 160(76.19%) stories out of the sampled 210 news stories focused on Accra with Kumasi emerging as the second preferred place for stories with 13(6.19%). In terms of the regions, it is worth noting that Greater Accra had 165 stories selected for the front page while the Upper East and West Region had only 1(0.48%) each of stories published on the front page of the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper within the sampled period of 2015-2019 which is arguably not encouraging.

- Another area worthy of note is the news makers that the stories centred on. The results showed that the elites were the preferred in terms of news actors or makers for front-page news. The elites-oriented or elite-driven news dominated with 69.05% of the total stories while the masses as news sources accounted for 19.05% of the stories. The mixed actors as news sources constituted 11.90% of the total 210 stories sampled. The disparity between the elite and the masses in terms of coverage indeed leaves much to be desired especially as the newspaper has a constitutional mandate to offer fair opportunities and facilities to all to express divergent opinion and views on matters that affect them. From the interview, the editor explained the newspaper was under pressure to sell in order to be in business because it did not enjoy subvention from government, therefore, the need to appeal to persons who have the financial power to drive sales. Hence, the newspaper concentrated more on the elites mostly politicians, business owners, celebrities, traditional leaders among others who are newsmakers and more newsworthy with a corresponding commercial appeal to drive sales in order to keep the newspaper in business.
- Finally, the attempt was made to capture all facets of society on the front page even though the attempt was not enough in ensuring fair representation per the research results which was hugely skewed towards the elite, urban centres and political stories.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings of the study lead to some conclusions being drawn.

Firstly, in terms of the nature of news stories covered by the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper, politics emerged as the most preferred. Politics accounted for 34.78% of the total 210 stories sampled. Also 206(98.0%) of the stories were straight news compared to features

which accounted for 4(2.0%) of the stories. Also, the tone of stories was generally positive with 112(53.0%) of the total number of stories.

Also, in terms of geographical coverage, the focus was on urban centres as only 10(4.76%) stories . Urban stories accounted for 194(92.38%).

Again, in terms of the news makers the data showed an obvious preference for the elite who accounted for 145(69.05%) of the stories with the masses having 40(19.05%) of representation.

Finally, in terms of the news values that determine what gets published on the front pages it data pointed to commercial consideration as the ultimate determinant of what makes news on the front page of the newspaper. The editor attributes that to the absence of government subvention to support their operations. Thus, editors strategically selects stories that will sell even if its constitutional obligation of fair representation is flouted and indeed the obligation was flouted per data analysed.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The study was restricted to the front-page stories of the *Ghanaian Times* and so conclusions arrived at are to be seen in that context and are generalizable so far as the limitations are accounted for.

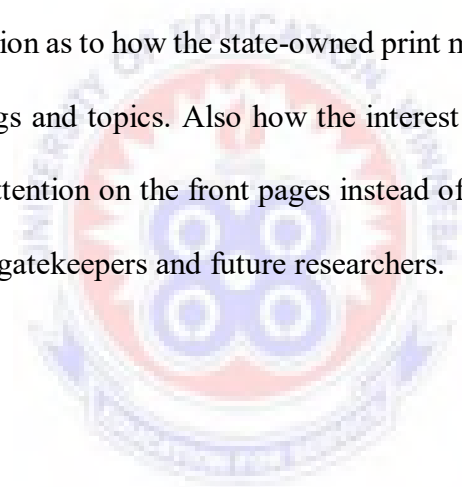
5.5 Recommendation

The editor attributed story preferences to monetary considerations, specifically, being able to sell more of the newspapers each day to be able to cover their operational costs. This research recommends that government must resume the provision of subvention to the news organization to ease the financial pressure on them. Paying of the staff must also be

borne by the government. If the financial burden is taken off the shoulders of the news organization, *Ghanaian Times* will then have no excuse in skewing representation on the front pages to favour a particular group of people. The editors could then even be penalized if they go against their mandate of offering fair and equal opportunities to all Ghanaians to express divergent views and opinions on issues which concern them.

5.6 Suggestion for Future Research

Future research could add another state-owned newspaper in comparing how the two newspapers cover news on the front pages within the same time frame. This will help have a more holistic evaluation as to how the state-owned print media cover the country in terms of newsmakers, settings and topics. Also how the interest of the ordinary rural folks and masses could attract attention on the front pages instead of the usually bourgeoisie-driven stories should occupy gatekeepers and future researchers.



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APPENDIX A

Appendix A1 : Types of Issues Covered based on News Topics

Nature of News	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Politics	73	34.76
Economic	28	13.33
Social	41	19.52
Cultural	17	8.10
Crime	43	20.48
Miscellaneous	8	3.81

Appendix A2: Tone of issues Covered

Tone of News	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	112	53.0
Negative	90	43.0
Neutral	8	4.0

Appendix A3: Story Types based on Reporting Style

Style of Story	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Straight News	206	98.0
Features	4	2.0

Appendix A4: Setting of Stories

Setting	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Urban	194	92.38
Rural	10	4.76
Not Clear	6	2.68

Appendix A5: Rural Story Representation and Tone

Tone	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	3	30.0
Negative	6	60.0
Neutral	1	10.0

Appendix A6: Urban News Representation and Tone

Tone	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	103	53.0
Negative	84	43.0
Neutral	7	4.0

Appendix A7: Main Actors in the Front Page News

News Makers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Elite	145	69.05
Ordinary People	40	19.05
Mixed	25	11.90

Appendix A8: Urban Story Representation in terms of News Actors

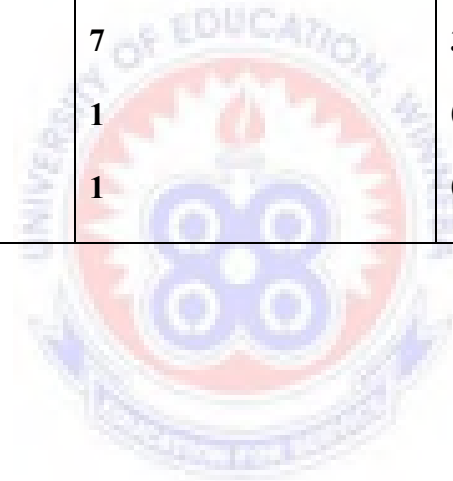
News Makers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Elite	136	70.10
Ordinary People	36	18.56
Mixed	22	11.34

Appendix A9: Rural News and News Makers

News Makers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Elite	3	30.0
Ordinary People	4	40.0
Mixed	3	30.0

Appendix 10: Regional Representation of Stories

Regions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Greater Accra	165	78.57
Ashanti	6	7.62
Volta	4	1.90
Brong Ahafo	4	1.90
Eastern	3	1.43
Western	6	2.68
Northern	3	1.43
Central	7	3.33
Upper East	1	0.48
Upper West	1	0.48



Appendix 11: Specific Settings of News Stories at the Front Pages

Geography	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Com
Accra	160	76.19	76.19
Kumasi	13	6.19	82.38
Ho	4	1.90	84.29
Asante Bekwai	1	0.48	84.76
Dadieso	1	0.48	85.24
Nakpali	1	0.48	85.71
Akim Oda	1	0.48	86.19
Nyinasin	1	0.48	86.67
Abompei	1	0.48	87.14
Cape Coast	3	1.45	88.57
Nkoranza	1	0.48	89.05
Obuasi	2	0.95	90.00
Dehia	1	0.48	90.48
Lawra	1	0.48	90.95
Tarkoradi	5	2.38	93.33
Kobina Ansa	1	0.48	93.81
Tema	5	2.38	96.19
Koforidua	1	0.48	96.67
Sunyani	1	0.48	97.14
Gyabenkrom	1	0.48	97.62
Bawku	1	0.48	98.10
Sangurli	1	0.48	98.57
Yendi	1	0.48	99.05
Korasua No1	1	0.48	99.52
Epoano	1	0.48	100.0
TOTAL	210	100	100

APPENDIX B

CODING GUIDE

1. Nature of News per Reporting Style

1. Straight news

2. Feature

2. Nature of News per Topics

1. Political

2. Economic

3. Social

4. Cultural

5. Crime

6. Miscellaneous

3. Direction of News

1. Positive.

2. Negative

3. Neutral

4. Main Actors

1. Elite

2. Ordinary People

3. Mixed

5. Setting

1. Urban

2. Rural

3. Not Clear



APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUESTIONS FOR IN DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH THE EDITOR OF *GHANAIAN TIMES*

1. What makes news in a given day?
2. What are the news values and criteria for selecting such stories?
3. What is the dominant and most preferred story type for the *Ghanaian Times*?
4. Any reasons for such choice?
5. What are the sources of your stories in terms of news actors?
6. What is the status of the news makers?
7. Does the newspaper place premium on a particular type of news makers and why?
8. What are the sources of story in terms of settings?
9. Does the newspaper have a preference for a particular setting for news? If yes/no why?
10. Does the newspaper have a policy to assist rural development by devoting more coverage to it?
11. Does the newspaper have a policy of ensuring representativeness in terms of what gets published?
12. Does it ensure regional balance on the front page particularly?
13. Are there any external influences in terms of what gets published?
14. Does the newspaper factor its constitutional obligation of providing equal opportunities to all in expressing divergent views per Article 163?
15. What role does the editor play in terms of what gets published?