Promoting a New Health Policy in the Ghanaian Media: Newspaper Framing of the National Health Insurance Scheme from 2005-2007

A dissertation presented to

the faculty of

the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Andrews Ofori-Birikorang

August 2009

© 2009 Andrews Ofori-Birikorang. All Rights Reserved.
This dissertation titled
Promoting a New Health Policy in the Ghanaian Media: Newspaper Framing of the National Health Insurance Scheme from 2005-2007

by
ANDREWS OFORI-BIRIKORANG

has been approved for
the School of Media Arts and Studies
and the Scripps College of Communication by

Steve Howard
Professor of Media Arts and Studies

Gregory J. Shepherd
Dean, Scripps College of Communication
ABSTRACT

OFORI-BIRIKORANG, ANDREWS, Ph.D., August 2009, Mass Communication

Promoting a New Health Policy in the Ghanaian Media: Newspaper Framing of the National Health Insurance Scheme from 2005-2007 (278 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Steve Howard

This research examined the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in Ghana to understand the frames and representations used by the local newspapers to promote the policy. The study also examined the major themes that were embedded in the NHIS news stories and the extent to which they promoted official perspectives. Again, it investigated the culture and ideology that guided media professionals in the representation of the NHIS.

Framing analysis was used as a major theoretical tool for the study, particularly news frame. The inquiry also explored the relationship between framing and ideology as connected concepts that are rarely interrogated in media studies, especially, in the construction of new stories. It was also guided by the social constructivism theory that conceptualizes news making as a direct reflection of the social realities of individuals and groups. All these theories became interconnected during the construction news stories on the NHIS.

The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods for the data collection and analysis. Four major local newspapers with the highest circulation, including the Daily Graphic, the Ghanaian Times, Chronicle and the Daily Guide, were selected for the study. In addition, interviews were conducted with media professionals, composed
of three journalists and three public relations officials, to complement the analyses of the stories from the newspapers.

The major findings of this research showed that: 1) news stories were dominantly framed around the core issues of NHIS implying that newspapers showed a more responsible coverage of the health policy; however, most of the news stories were not accorded the front page prominence normally given to many other social issues; 2) while the media embarked on a sustained effort to present the NHIS as a mainstream event, they, nevertheless, relied heavily on government sources for information supporting the assertion that, the media see official rhetoric as the most important input for news making; it also implied that newspapers in Ghana still give government officials and politicians larger voice on public discourse; 3) finally, the research showed that the responsible coverage accorded the NHIS can be attributed to new positive attitudes that are emerging in newsrooms toward health reporting.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Steve Howard

Professor of Media Arts and Studies
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Six years ago I embarked on another phase of an academic journey to seek higher education in the hope of improving my personal life, the lives of my family, and many others scattered around the globe, people who I choose to call my ‘neighbors’. I have always shared the strong belief that higher education holds the intellectual key that could open doors of opportunity for many individuals around the world, to enjoy descent lives. She/ he who is fortunate enough to have access to this key, eventually becomes a channel through whom the dreams of many to acquire this form of better life can be realized. I see myself, now, as that channel of empowerment for me and several others. In reaching this point of academic achievement, I must humbly say that I could not have made it without a strong support system which I had the privilege of enjoying throughout the six-year period. As this phase of the journey draws to a close, I must acknowledge those to whom I am greatly indebted:

To my mother who, though never had any formal education, yet realized in her early years of motherhood that education, higher education in particular, was the only potent weapon worthy of acquisition by families trying to extricate themselves from the vicious web of poverty and ignorance. Am happy she has lived to see the efforts and admonitions she put in to make sure that I reached this level of education, come to fruition. What I have accomplished is first to you, my wonderful mum.

To my father, who taught and blessed me with a personality that has created in me a passion for knowledge, wisdom, patience, selflessness, and service to one’s community in exchange for personal and social harmony.
To my wonderful and loving family, my wife Hannah Serwah Bonsu, who had to endure the frustrations of living away from her husband on another continent for six years, and like a single mum, was entrusted with the difficult job of raising those sweet daughters of ours. Thanks for running around, shuttling between Kumasi and Accra to gather most of the newspapers materials needed for this project. Your labor was never in vain. To my daughters Ama Boatemaa and Ohemaa Dufie, who bore the disappointment of growing up almost into teen years, always looking forward to the coming home of an absentee father, your future is brighter even now than before. I am thankful to you mother, and daughters. Your prayers, love, patience, support, and courage have carried me this far.

To my sweet sister Anastasia Williams (nee Abena Asantewaa), thanks for the sisterly love, the wonderful support, thoughtfulness, and being there for me all the time. To my uncle, Nana (Dr.) Kwaku Owusu-Kwarteng thanks for leading the way and asking me to follow. Your important role in my life in Athens, Ohio is highly appreciated.

To my most wonderful and supportive friends, especially, Basetsana Maposa, Kwaku Agyemang-Badu, Rosemary Mburu, Ernest Waititu, and Jonathan Twum Twumasi, you individually and collectively provided unyielding support for me at every stage of this journey. All of you were away in the last year of this dissertation, but you remained closer than I could imagine. You stood with me when the going got tough; your prayers strengthened me; your words of encouragement still echo in my ears; and, you redefined friendship by adding meaning and value to it. Basetsana and Ernest, this work is also a product of the rich intellectual dialogue we have always
had on issues pertaining to the continent. Thanks for believing in me and filling me with so much sense of optimism.

To my dissertation advisor, Professor W. Stephen Howard, I owe you tons of gratitude. I have reached this level because you believed in me, you invested your time, energy, and resources in me, and you mentored me in an incredibly brotherly fashion. Your guidance sustained me, your assistantships supported me, and your words pushed me on. Your tireless efforts, despite your busy schedule, in reading, editing and critiquing this work are humbly acknowledged. You inspired me to greater heights where I now direct my next efforts.

To one of my academic mentors and friend, Dr. Diane Ciekawy, thanks for pushing me on and on, and telling me early in this phase of my academic life, “you can be way up there if you choose to“. I am so grateful that I took your advice, and hope, I made the choice that can send me “way up there”.

To my committee members, Dr. Benjamin Bates, Dr. Francis Godwyll, and Dr. Rafael Obregon whose support, advice, guidance and suggestions in various form, before and during the period of writing this dissertation, were remarkably magnificent. Your collective insight in the area of research, immensely, benefitted me.

To my research participants and interviewees, Ms Lucy Adomah-Yeaboah, Mr. Clement Atagra, Mr. Sam Okaitey, Alhaji, Mohammad Muniru, Mr Ibrahim Wriedu, and Mr. Benjamin Kufuor, my warmest appreciations go to you. This work was greatly shaped by the rich and insightful data you provided. I am profoundly grateful to you.
Finally, to God Almighty through whom all things are possible, your son has come to the end of another academic passage and your grace and blessings were bestowed on him in abundance during the whole period. Glory Be to Your Name!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background to the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health cost recovery discourse in Ghana</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHIS- a historical perspective</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Health Mutual Insurance</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Private Mutual Health Insurance</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Private Commercial Health Insurance</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the problem</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of study</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The media and policy dissemination</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The social construction of news</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and the concept of framing</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Frame</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News framing as cultural appropriation</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News framing and ideology</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of ideology on news framing ................................................................. 51
Health news coverage in Africa ................................................................. 52
The media in Ghana ............................................................................ 58
    Newspapers .............................................................................. 58
    Radio .................................................................................. 63
    Television .......................................................................... 65
Summary .......................................................................................... 66
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 69
    Research design ...................................................................... 71
    Why the Print Media .............................................................. 74
    Choice of Newspapers .......................................................... 76
    The Ghanaian Times .............................................................. 78
    The Daily Graphic ............................................................... 80
    The Chronicle ..................................................................... 82
    The Daily Guide ................................................................. 83
    Unit of Analysis .................................................................. 84
    Period of Study ................................................................. 85
    Data collection ................................................................... 86
    Coding instruments .......................................................... 91
    Location of article .............................................................. 93
    Frames and categories ...................................................... 93
    Sources ............................................................................. 97
    Interviews ......................................................................... 98
Summary ..................................................................................................................... 101

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION I .......................................................... 104

Communicating NHIS through Multi-perspective Frames ....................................... 104

Framing NHIS as Community and Development ..................................................... 113

Framing NHIS as corruption ....................................................................................... 118

Framing NHIS as Social Apathy ................................................................................ 122

Framing NHIS as core NHIS issues ........................................................................... 129

Framing the NHIS as Health issue .......................................................................... 136

Framing NHIS as Business ......................................................................................... 139

Core NHIS issues news frame .................................................................................... 145

Business news frame ................................................................................................... 147

Health news frame ...................................................................................................... 148

Politics news frame ..................................................................................................... 148

Social apathy news frame ........................................................................................... 150

Corruption news frame ............................................................................................... 151

Community and development news frame ............................................................... 153

The multi-perspective news frame narrative ............................................................... 154

Government/ Political Sources ................................................................................... 160

National Health Insurance/ Health Officials ............................................................... 161

NGOs and Interest Groups .......................................................................................... 162

Wire Agency/ Ghana News Agency (GNA) ............................................................... 163

Other sources .............................................................................................................. 163

Summary ..................................................................................................................... 164
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION II Journalists as Advocates of Public Health Policies ............................................................................................................ 167
  Transforming NHIS coverage into mainstream health news ......................... 168
  Communicating NHIS as informative health messages .................................... 175
  NHIS as specialized field for media coverage .................................................. 181
  Communication gap between policy makers and the media ............................. 188
Summary ..................................................................................................................... 201
CHAPTER 6: EMERGING TREND IN THE COVERAGE OF HEALTH NEWS IN AFRICA .......................................................................................................................... 204
  Significance of study and Implications for future research .............................. 211
  Framing analysis .................................................................................................. 211
  Framing and ideology ......................................................................................... 213
  Media representations on health issues in Africa .............................................. 214
  Diversifying coverage on health issues in Africa .............................................. 216
Limitations of the study and implications for future research ............................ 218
  Recommendations for African journalists on coverage of health issues .......... 223
  The urgency of communicating health issues to a wider African public ........... 227
Summary ..................................................................................................................... 230
Conclusions ............................................................................................................... 233
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 236
APPENDIX A: CODING INSTRUMENT .................................................................... 256
APPENDIX B: CODING PROTOCOL ......................................................................... 260
Table 1. Frequency Distribution of NHIS news Frames used by the Four Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007 ................................................................. 107

Table 2. Cumulative Frequency Distribution of NHIS News Frames used by the Four Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007 ............................................ 145

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Location of NHIS News Stories for the 4 Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007 ................................................................. 156

Table 4. Distribution of Sources Cited for the Four Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007 ......................................................................................... 159
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Bar graph of the cumulative frequency distribution of the seven news frames used for the coverage of NHIS by four newspapers for the period January 2005-December 2007. .............................................................................................................. 155

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of location of news stories in each of the four newspapers from January 2005-December 2007................................................................. 158

Figure 3. Bar graph pictorial representation of the various news sources used by all the four newspapers to report on the NHIS for the period January 2005-December 2007. . 164
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From March 1957 when Ghana attained independence to January 1993 when the country proceeded on the path to a new democratization process, the newspaper industry in Ghana has gone through a lot of upheavals. According to Ansu Kyeremeh and Karikari (1998), about 39 newspapers had filled the newsstands ever since the In many African countries the mass media have become the primary source through which citizens negotiate their understanding of socio-political events. In this direction, the media in Africa have become one of the most effective straits through which most individuals are provided with the capacity to make informed choices on national and community oriented issues. Some writers have indicated how the mass media in Africa have been appropriated as an information tool by citizens to initiate debate on government policies and actions (Agbese, 2006; Yusuf, 1999). Through this engagement both the media in Africa and their audiences adopt a distinct approach of accessing available information to push for social change. The demographic patterns of most African countries suggest that access to the media as a major source of information, for national consciousness promotion, and modernization have accelerated development in several communities (Hughes & Malila, 1999). Even for the vast majority of the populations who remain marginalized, starkly illiterate, or are located in the remote regions of the continent, the media have become an accessible communication medium. The mass media have been the source of information for many Africans- with radio being the dominant mode, whilst television and the print media became urbanized media commodities.
Over the years, however, African media have not adequately addressed issues in a manner that allows the citizens to make informed choices about concerns that affect their lives. This is because the media faced several constraints (Asante, 1996; Bourgault, 1995). First, urbanized elites and politicians appropriated the media as tools to define policy information, and dissemination agenda. Secondly, because they had been seen as agents in the construction of national consciousness and nationhood, mechanisms were instituted to incorporate them as a cog in the hegemonic state apparatus. Thirdly, the African media faced a huge task in the presentation of news stories to audiences as the languages for broadcast and the print media were mainly those European languages used by the colonial masters. The majority of the population in several African countries could communicate in only their mother tongue. Fourthly, the African media style of reportage has been generally reactive with major coverage of all socio-political issues being event or official centered (Bourgault, 1995; Hasty, 2005; International Women’s Media Foundation, 2004; Pratt et al, 2002) with the majority of the issues lacking in-depth investigative journalistic practice. In several media outlets, even when the media had represented issues adequately, they failed to present them in long-term planned processes and totally lacked audience participation that would necessitate feedback on the issues (Pratt, Ha, & Pratt, 2002). Whilst coverage of many socio-political issues achieved minimal level of success in creating any degree of public awareness, the inadequacy of these reports on public health became very pronounced because of the complexities and complication that surround health issues in the African environment. African media practitioners were not able to strongly articulate health issues to the vast majority of the population, especially those living in rural communities.
However, since the end of the cold war major changes have occurred within Africa’s mass media systems and organizations. While several independent and private electronic media outlets have sprung up in several countries, press freedom and constitutional protection for the right to free expression have become reality in the continent. New technologies including satellite, and internet, small media deployment, fax machines, portable videos and cameras, digital and online news, have all affected media practices and impacted profoundly on the mass media structure in the African continent (Agbese, 2006; Blankson, 2000; Bourgault, 1995). These profound changes have not only affected the operations of the media, they have also affected the contents of their news stories. One such area where the news media contents have become very important to the continent is health.

In the past decade, African media have tried to give coverage to the myriad of health problems that have plagued the continent. These health issues range from HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, reproductive health, child morbidity, and the ebola virus to the avian flu. Until recently, African media had not been fully resourced to provide adequate information to deal with the health problems that posed major health challenges to their citizens. However, with the proliferation of media outlets, including radio, newspapers, and the internet in several parts of the continent, most African countries and their governments have began to embrace and engage the media as integral partners in dealing and discussing public health issues. African governments have realized that communication is the key to confronting the major health challenges, and national preparedness against health problems can only be achieved through an engagement of the mass media as strategic partners in health information distribution.
The media in Africa have the capacity to create public awareness and understanding for the creation of positive attitude towards health issues. However, according to the Global HIV Prevention Working Group (May 2003) only about 43% of the people at risk have been reached by mass media campaigns. In other cases such as TB and malaria the reach is likely to be similar. This situation demands that Africa media provide high quality, in-depth, culturally specific, responsible, and extensive coverage of public health issues to their population to help them manage their health issues. Is the African media living up to this demand of providing quality, educative and informative coverage of public health issues as way of improving health coverage, and the health of the people in Africa? This can only be accessed through research. This study is one such research that aims to assess coverage of a health-related issue and how it is represented in the media.

Background to the Study

In August 2003, the parliament of Ghana passed the National Health Insurance Act (Act 650) to introduce a new healthcare delivery mechanism to enable Ghana’s citizens to access basic health care services and medical treatment without the payment of fees at the point of delivery of service. The Act ushered in a new healthcare paradigm that would allow Ghana to achieve its healthcare delivery goal of ensuring “equitable access to healthcare for all residents in relation to need rather than socio-economic or socio-cultural status” (National Health Insurance Bill, 2003, Memorandum: p. 1). With this new policy came the provision of affordable health coverage for every Ghanaian resident so that seeking medical attention would not depend on one’s ability to pay (Singleton, 2006).
Health cost recovery discourse in Ghana

From the mid-70s to the early 80s, succeeding governments in Ghana were burdened with health care financing problems that incapacitated the country from accomplishing any considerable level of accessibility, affordability, and efficiency in the health delivery sector of the economy (Atim, 1999; Singleton 2006). In the mid 80s, under the guidance of the World Bank, per its capitalist agenda of introducing new methods of health care financing reforms in developing countries, many sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana, introduced into their economies new health policies that provided for cost recovery schemes as an instrument of health financing policy for the delivery of health services (Asenso–Okyere et al. 1998; Coclough, 1997; World Bank, 1987). The introduction of this new health policy instrument was claimed to be the panacea for the chronic health care financing problems that had engulfed various developing countries. The proponents of the health cost recovery scheme had projected that, with the new system’s potential benefits of revenue raising, improved access and equity, and greater efficiency, many developing countries would arrive at the healthcare delivery paradise for their citizenry (Coclough, 1997). Following the acceptance of this structure of improving health care delivery, cost recovery mechanisms were implemented through the payment of user fees for services delivered (usually before such service was delivered), regardless of the patron’s financial or social status.

In 1985, under the guidance of the World Bank, Ghana introduced its first major health cost recovery policy under the Hospital Fees Legislation (1985). This was replaced in 1992 with another new cost recovery instrument popularly known as ‘Cash and Carry’. With ‘Cash and Carry’ as a cost recovery mechanism, a direct out-of-pocket payment for
health care delivery was paid at the point of service by those seeking medical treatment. The policy requested patients to pay partly for consultation and diagnostic procedures, and fully for drugs supplied. However, contrary to the assumed potential of the new policy reinvigorating the health system through greater mobilization for better health care delivery, it rather served as a barrier to accessing health care, especially by the poor.

The implementation of the cash and carry policy, in some instances, led to an increase in self-medication because many people could not afford the out-of-pocket user fees demanded at the point of treatment (Asenso-Okyere, Anum, Osei Akoto, & Adokunu, 1998). Again, many citizens increasingly expressed concerns about “inequities inherent in this system known as ‘cash and carry” (National Health Insurance Bill, 2003: p. 1). The system also failed to be sustainable and was characterized by serious imbalances that cut out many people from health facilities on account of cost. The numerous problems that came to be associated with the cash and carry system led to the proposal of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) as an alternative health care financing policy.

Proponents of the new scheme believed that, even though the cash and carry system was quite defective and created social inequities for health care delivery, it could not be abandoned completely without instituting a suitable health recovery replacement for the health sector. The memorandum that accompanied the National Health Insurance Bill stated, “whilst recognizing that there is no perfect health care financing system, a social health insurance program that can cover all residents, if well implemented, is less regressive and more equitable in nature than the out-of-pocket-at-point of service payment mechanism” (National Health Insurance Bill, 2003: p.1)
The NHIS was therefore born out of the defects of the cash and carry system. Its ultimate aim was to right the wrongs that had characterized the old system. It was also seen as a more humane cost recovery method that will provide Ghanaian residents affordability and accessibility to health care delivery, and in addition create an efficient health care sector.

**NHIS- a historical perspective**

The NHIS began in line with the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy and derives its uniqueness as a health care financing system that offers accessible and affordable health care to residents in Ghana with emphasis on the poor and most vulnerable. The NHIS was established under Act 650 in 2003, and had as of December 2007, initiated 145 health schemes throughout Ghana. According to the Policy Framework for the Establishment of National Health Insurance Scheme, March 2002, as of 2003 about 80% of Ghanaian residents could not afford the needed health care because of the out-of-pocket payment required at the point of service use. Generally, payments for health care at the point of service consumption had countered efforts on the part of government to deliver good health care to its citizenry. Delay and inability to seek health care as a result of the financial burden had led to “non-compliance to treatment, and consequently premature death” (p.1). However as of December, 2007, the national average indicates that 38% of the Ghanaians had registered to become members of the NHIS. This figure falls under some regional averages that had recorded registration pattern far above the

---

1 Boateng, R. (2007, May 14). Speech by the Executive Secretary of the National Health Insurance Council to an open workshop for the media on the NHIS in Accra.
national average. For example, Brong Ahafo region of Ghana had achieved a registration rate of 61% whilst the Central and Ashanti regions of Ghana had achieved a registration rate of 44% each. The projection was that, by the end of the year 2008, almost 60% Ghanaian would have been registered as active members.

In 1992, the Nkoranza district in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana became the first community to institute health insurance as a system of providing individuals within their community the opportunity to access health services at an affordable cost. This health insurance scheme which later came to be known as the Community Insurance (CHI), was the initiative of St. Theresa’s Mission Hospital in Nkoranza and was geared toward providing health insurance for the community members as well as paving the way for the community members to enjoy improved health status. Soon, the Nkoranza CHI became a household name in Ghana, especially among health practitioners, and was later adopted by the government as the focus for a pilot study on the feasibility of establishing health insurance schemes in all the districts of the country (Agyepong & Agyei, 2008; Atim, Grey, & Apoya, 2001). Indeed, before the passage of the NHIS Act in 2003, about 67 district-wide informal and private health insurance scheme had already been established in the country by NGOs, communities, and churches. The establishment of the NHIS was preceded by these much acclaimed and popular community insurance schemes established by rural communities and NGOs to provide health care financial support to citizens who could not afford health services because of poverty. These pioneer health insurance schemes became the harbinger of the new NHIS.

Other health insurance schemes sprang up after the Nkoranza initiative opened the gates for the establishment of several district wide community insurance schemes in
other parts of the country. Following the successes chalked by these community and district level insurance schemes, the Ministry of Health in the mid 1990s, established a unit to create a national health insurance scheme that would act as an alternative to the then ‘Cash and Carry’ system (Agyepong & Agyei, 2008). In August 1995, a consulting company, Messrs J.S. Addo and Tri-Star actuarial and Management Group in USA, were engaged to conduct feasibility studies on the establishment of the nation-wide scheme (Arhin, 1995). With support from UNICEF, Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), the European Union (EU), and the Ministry of Health (MOH) and in collaboration with district assemblies, community leaders and members, some district-wide health insurance schemes were designed and implemented on pilot basis in some selected districts (Agyepong et al. 2006). These schemes, most of which later came to be known as Mutual Health Organizations (MHO), were continuously monitored by the donor agencies on their performance (Atim, & Madjiguene, 2000). Through a series of donor funded monitoring and evaluation reviews, many of the CHI survived whilst others suffered severe setbacks and collapsed. However, the interest in health insurance scheme had reached its high point especially among public health practitioners and organized labor. Its implementation at the national level became an agenda that could not be taken off the government’s policy table.

In July 2001, upon the assumption of power of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the Ministry of health inaugurated a committee to advise on the design and development of a NHIS to regulate the health insurance industry. Among its terms of reference, according to Agyepong et al (2008), was to “support and advice the MOH on the development of
appropriate health insurance legislation and the mobilization of extra resources to support national health insurance scheme” (p. 155).

In July 2003, a draft of the national health insurance bill was put before the parliament of Ghana under a certificate of urgency. The government, through a series of adverts and commercials in the media, solicited comments from the general public on the issues contained in the bill. However, general public discontent and dissatisfaction with the bill emerged from opposition political parties and organized labor. The Civil Servants Association, The Judicial Service, the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), Ghana Registered Nurses Association, and Trade Union Congress vehemently opposed and protested against the passage of the bill and requested that further consultation be done before its passage. As a result of these protests the passage of the bill was deferred to a month later. In August 2003, despite more protests and concerns from opposition political parties and organized labor against the new draft of the bill, parliament using its majority numbers from the ruling NPP passed the National Health Insurance Bill into law. The state of distrust and discontent, political exchanges and rancor that greeted the reintroduction of the bill and its subsequent passage was carried widely by media, especially the print media. It was obvious that despite the good intentions of the proponents of the bill, only a few individuals actually knew the contents. To the ordinary Ghanaian, what was important was the introduction of a new health system that would ease their financial burden. However, informed members of civil society who protested vehemently against the fast-tracking of the bill were more concerned about its fiscal sustainability than its legislative structure.
By October 2003, the stage had finally been set for the beginning of NHIS that commenced its tortuous journey from a community health insurance scheme in Nkoranza. On September 5, 2003 the National Health Insurance Act 650 received the presidential assent as

an act to secure the provision of the basic health care services to persons resident in the country through mutual and private health insurance schemes and to accredit and monitor health care providers operating under health insurance schemes; to establish a National Health Insurance Fund that will provide subsidy to licensed district mutual health insurance schemes; to impose a health insurance levy… (National Health Insurance Act, 2003 (Act 650)

In 2004, the National Health Insurance Regulations (L.I. 1809) were also promulgated to govern the NHIS. The NHIS was fashioned as a unique package. Its fundamental design hinged on about ten underlying values: “Principle of equity, risk equalization, cross subsidization, solidarity, quality care, efficiency in premium collection, community ownership, partnership, reinsurance, and sustainability”2.

The NHIS operates two major distinctive models of health insurance regimes. These include, first, a social type of health insurance scheme, and the commercial health insurance. The social type of health insurance is premised on the already existing CHI that focuses more on community participations and ownership. There are two sub-models

of this type of social insurance scheme that operates in the country: 1) the District Mutual Health Insurance Scheme; and, 2) the Private Mutual Health Insurance Scheme.

**District Health Mutual Insurance**

The District Mutual Health Insurance Scheme is an amalgamation of two basic concepts already in existence. These are the traditional social health insurance scheme which is operated by formal sectors of the economy whose operation is normally centered at the national or regional level, and the traditional mutual health insurance organizations operated by the informal sector exclusively at the district level. The DMHI as result of its fusion concept has membership from both the formal and informal sectors as contributors. It is a not-for-profit insurance scheme, and surpluses garnered at the end of each fiscal year are reinvested in the scheme to reduce the premium paid by members. Surpluses increase benefits package for members. The NHIS policy mandates that every district establishes a DHMI to reach the remotest parts of the country and allow local community members take ownership of the scheme. Such district level membership and local ownership is to ensure transparency and accountability of the insurance policy even at the grass root level. The DMHI is funded by contributions from members but receives partial sponsorship from the government in the form of risk-equalization and other forms of reinsurance for unforeseen events that may impact negatively on the scheme.

**The Private Mutual Health Insurance**

The Private Mutual Health Insurance is a type of scheme that is set up by members of the community, such as members belonging to a common occupation or faith-based group. Its social traits mean that it is also a not-for-profit scheme. However, its private nature excludes government from providing any form of subsidy.
The Private Commercial Health Insurance

The third tier is the Private Commercial Health Insurance which operates on the principle of market capitalization and is profit oriented. The payment package is determined by the premium paid and the calculated risks of members. Therefore the group or individuals who have higher risk pay higher premiums. Its market-based feature allows it to be listed as company that can have shareholders and roll out stocks to raise capital to shore up business and maximize profit. One unique thing about the PCHI is that members who belong to the DMHI can opt to join the PCHI as an add-on benefit package and supplementary insurance to what they already have.

The NHIS is compulsory for everyone living in the country and the policy framework indicates that it covers about 95% of diseases known to afflict Ghanaians. However, the level of contributions or premiums paid by members depends on whether members are categorized as belonging to the formal or the informal sector. Anyone who works in the formal sector makes an annual contribution of 2.5% of his or her Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) contributions to the scheme. On the other hand, members belonging to the informal sector contribute a minimum of 7 cedis 20 pesewas (the equivalence of about $7.20) per year into the scheme. To cater to the differential premium payment between the formal sector workers and the informal sector, the policy also categorizes the general population of Ghana and the prospective beneficiaries.

---

3 The Social security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) is the organization established by law and charged with the responsibility of social security administration in Ghana. All workers and employees in the formal sectors of the economy pay social security contributions of up to 17.5% of their income (12.5% from the employer and 5% from employee) into this SSNIT administered social security pension fund to provide income for them under the contingencies, of old age, invalidity, and death. Under this pension scheme if anyone falls under the contingencies, of old age and invalidity periodic monthly payments are made to the beneficiaries until their death. In case of death the dependents of the deceased become the beneficiaries.
contributors into six segments: core poor, very poor, middle income, and the rich. Thus the determination of how much premium each member pays is dependent on the individual’s sector category.

While the major objective of the NHIS is to provide affordable health care to all residents, the basic principle underlying the scheme is based on the statistical fact that about 70% of Ghanaians who are also target of the scheme work in the informal sector of the economy. This means that, for the scheme to be very successful and meet the basic insurance requirements of paying premium, a more innovative method of collecting premiums had to be factored into the scheme’s design. To include the informal as a category of prospective clients receives a more traditional, friendly method of contribution collections must be designed and implemented. Again, as noted by the Policy Framework, about 40% of the citizens live below the poverty line, making it even more difficult for them to pay any high premiums. To offset this hindrance, the Framework notes that “the necessary bodies must be created; awareness raising and consensus building will be carried out, the needed legislation passed and the enabling environment developed to ensure the realization of the policy goal of the government.”

The only way to meet this challenge is to call for a new campaign for registration of members that is innovative and culturally specific.

The need for an innovative idea to propel an adoption of the scheme was also strengthened by the principle of community subscriber ownership. This basic principle is

---

captured by the Framework as a fundamental element for the smooth operation and success of the scheme. In retrospect, all the pioneer CHI schemes had subsisted on the principle of vitality of community participation. However, it has been noted that not much success has been achieved in this arena, leading to the collapse of many other schemes that had been initiated in other communities on this principle. But this could not be allowed to derail the implementation of the scheme as community participation remained the only avenue to implement efficient and effective promotion and utilization of the scheme. Community participation promotes a sense of community ownership from the local level through the national level and will generate easy adoption and utilization of the scheme by all the prospective clients. One of the problems noted by the Framework is the fact that, “In the past community participation has eluded health care planning and delivery” (p. 7). Addressing such issues, the very bedrock of the health care delivery, remained major goal of the NHIS, and needed a more innovative vigorous and aggressive approach to be effective and sustainable. The media’s role in this important community participation advocacy became very important. This role is captured in detail in chapters four and five where the findings and analysis of the media’s role in communicating the NHIS policy is analyzed. As part of the review of literature, part of the next chapter discusses the general state of the media in Ghana.

Statement of the problem

The inequities in the cash and carry system generated discordant voices among politicians and civil society. Indeed between 1992 and 2000 political elements belonging to the opposition appropriated the infamous cash and carry system to castigate the government and used it as propaganda vehicle in seeking to take over the reins of
government. In support of the political elements of the opposition were members of civil society and organized labor, notably and among others, members of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), a conglomeration of unionized workers, Civil Servants Association, the Judicial Service, and Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), who believed that their very peculiar circumstance as employees of government with paltry remuneration made them more vulnerable to the cash and carry policy.

In other public spaces, such as public gatherings, markets places, bus stations, and hospitals where one could encounter other forms of civil society, diversified views were expressed on the cash and carry policy with majority of discussants calling for its removal. Whilst some form of engagement of the cost recovery policy came through the utilization of the rich social network asset provided by these vibrant public spaces, the most profound source of the health cost recovery discourse was proffered profusely and impressively through the mass media. Leading the pack of sources for this invigorating discourse were the print media and radio stations. These two major media outlets provided the forum for the ventilation of various grievances for and against the cost recovery policy.

Since independence, the Ghanaian media have been the main sphere through which intense social and political opinions are expressed and strengthened. Through tones of provocation and an engagement of the health cost recovery discourse, local newspapers and radio stations stimulated flows of information. Later, buoyant discussion that was generated among the general populace and in the corridors of power led to the demise of the cash and carry system, giving birth to the National Health Insurance Scheme. These media representations were generally viewed as a ‘Vox populi vox dei’
mechanism. For example, in an editorial on cash and carry, *The Statesman*, one of Ghana’s mainstream private newspapers described it as “the cruel cash and carry system that turned Ghana’s hospitals into typical death chambers that bore the mark of Adolf Hitler.”⁵ In another article that appeared in the *New Internationalist*, a medical officer in an interview on the cash and carry system stated, “The system is stinking and dehumanizing because patients who do not have the ability to pay for medical services are turned away from hospitals only for them to die at home. The poor, the disabled, and the accident victims are being asked to pay on the spot before receiving any medical attention. The system has no human face. Our health service is in confusion.”⁶

Whilst radio stations regularly became the locus for oppositional activism against the health cost recovery, and at same time called for the introduction of a more humane and equitable system of health care, newspapers became the most influential form of information circuit that provided the nexus for both the cash and carry and NHIS health cost recovery discourse in Ghana. Hasty (2005) provides an exuberant account of how, among the constituents of the mass media landscape, newspapers command a prime and central role in the social discourses of the ordinary Ghanaians. She states,

⁶ Kill or cure: Ghana is faith fully following IMF prescriptions but its health service has fallen sick as a result. *New Internationalist*, Jan – Feb 1997. Retrieved December 16, 2007 from: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JQP/is_287/ai_30411593
Top stories from the major newspapers are reported and analyzed on the morning show of many television and radio stations. People who buy newspapers often read the stories out to those around them punctuating the news with their own editorial comments, drawing their listeners into the collective exercise of interpretation. (p.1)

The underlying reason for the above phenomenon is not hard to determine. First, the mass media in most developed countries including Ghana are supposed to promote national development (Asante, 1996; Bougault, 1995; Singleton, 2006). For this reason, over the years a systemic kind of relationship has been developing between government and, especially, the state-owned or controlled media (Asante, 1996). For the general public the media not only represents the agenda setters for public policy but also construct their mediation of the relationship with government and public officials to the extent of providing legitimacy to the policy. Along this circuit of media-government relationship, one could also locate expressions of public sentiments with the media as the agents of such expressivities.

Over the last two decades the press in Ghana has emerged as the fulcrum for socio-political discourse, especially for civil societies and institutions to the extent that they, in contemporary times, function to empower ordinary people to have their voices heard as way of increasing and facilitating popular participation in governance (Singleton, 2006). It is this source of empowerment and facilitation of popular participation that attracted the people towards the media as a conduit for the expression of their disenchantment with the cash-and-carry system, and which later led to a call for its replacement with a more equitable system.
The mass media’s ability to communicate the emotions of the people against the cash and carry system through publication or airing of pathetic and emotionally charged related news stories was so overwhelming that its abolition became an agenda exclusively set in media houses. Indeed the consequent abolition of this recovery policy was a clear manifestation of the power of mass media orchestration and agenda-setting characteristic on public policy implementation and evaluation, modern governance, and socio-political discourse.

The vigor and tenacity with which the newspapers engaged the cash and carry policy in line with the dictates of civil society, and opposition politicians who had engaged the policy in a discursive challenge, demanded that, similar sense of vigor would lead them to provide a more copious diffusion and education of the NHIS. The logic was that NHIS was a welcomed relief to the general populace who greatly bore the brunt of the hardships inflicted on them by the cash and carry system, and whose aggregate views, gleaned from all the public spaces of social discourse, had been articulated by the mass media. Moreover, since the NHIS had been given a messianic status in the local media and political arenas, it is important that beyond, what it generally symbolized-freedom from the “out-of-pocket-at-point-of-service payment mechanism”, the people must of necessity understand what it means and what constituted its package. These include, among others, the fact that NHIS system is another form of cost recovery; that it involves some form of pre-payment; and that it involves the pooling together of resources to contribute to the financing of their health services; that there is a of probationary period before premium payment reaches maturity; that there are excluded health services, specific accreditation requirements for hospitals, and exemption from
payment of contributions on the basis of age (National health Insurance Regulations, 2004 [L.I. 1809]; National Health Insurance Act, 2003 [Act 650]). These factors being the case, but which many people lacked any degree of awareness of their existence in the policy document, it was incumbent on the media to communicate to the people in terms and language that promote the policy and help encourage public adoption of the new health policy.

The Ghana government campaign for introducing NHIS as a way of giving affordable health care policy to its citizens was mainly communicated through the mass media via government releases, political campaigns messages, newspaper and radio news stories, editorials, and commentaries. However, it must be noted that even though the majority of the people had pined for a more humane method of accessing health service they remained ignorant of the contents of the policy. While the government may not be a party to the call for the abolition of a specific government policy, it has an important role to play in the campaign for the adoption or implementation of a new policy that is supposed to replace the existing one (Seale, 2003). The mass media remains the most important channel through which groups of people and individuals could become informed on the contents of new government policies (Walsh-Chiders, 1994) such as the NHIS. It is also the surest way through which people could continue to become empowered to facilitate their popular participations in public health discourse or the adoption of any health policy.

Studies have shown that public awareness and campaigns have become crucial factors in disseminating information to the public to influence their attitudes towards the adoption of a health-related policy or the making of alternative choices (Alali & Jinadu,
2002; Singhal & Rogers, 2003). There is therefore the need for the African media to engage in “high quality, in-depth and diverse media coverage of public health in order to improve the health of the African people.” The issue then is whether the African media, in the face of these health challenges, have lived up to the expectation of providing informative and educative knowledge for the public to manage health issues that affect their lives. Contextually, how did the media in Ghana report on the NHIS? Did the Ghanaian media give thorough and investigative coverage that provided adequate information for their audiences/ readers to make informed choices on the NHIS? Did the media professionals who covered the stories have the needed health news reporting skills to report on NHIS? In their coverage of the NHIS stories, were they guided by any newsroom editorial policy on health reporting? Did the media follow any routine or journalistic ideology in the coverage of the NHIS issues? These questions are the central focus of this research.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine how the media framed the National Health Insurance Policy and resultant representations that accompanied it to promote public adoption of the scheme. It also examines how themes embedded in major news stories relating to NHIS were framed by the media to promote official/elite ideology in

the dissemination of such an important health policy. To achieve this purpose the study focuses on the following issues:

1) This research investigates the extent to which the media framed the narratives of National Health Insurance Scheme to promote adoption of the scheme by the public. With the onset of Ghana’s democratic process in 1992, the media have enjoyed a relative degree of freedom and independence unseen in Ghana’s social-political history (Agyemang Duah, 1996; Gyimah Boadi, 1998; Hasty, 2005), thus freeing them from governmental control in order to become the true mouth pieces of the greater number of people who seek information to push for positive social change. This study investigates the extent to which the media have taken the opportunity provided by the new media freedom and the NHIS policy initiative to provide adequate information to their audiences as useful tools for addressing health concerns.

2) The research also studies the frames of representation employed by the media, and analyzes the degree to which such representation reinforces the theoretical position established in the literature that the communication of health issues by the African media reproduces official discourse without any in-depth and objective analysis of the issues (Benefo, 2004; Hughes & Malila, 1996; Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988)

3) The study also addresses lack of sophistication in the representation of health policies and health issues in the continent by African media and uses the Ghana NHIS as a case study to help equip our media personnel with needed knowledge and skills.

3) The research, in addition, provides recommendations that will help equip the media with the necessary skills to improve the flow of health information to the general
public so that the goal of creating public awareness for health issues through such
coverage can be achieved.

4) Finally, the study will also investigate whether there has been any
transformation or improvement in the attitude of media professionals towards health
issues.

Significance of study

The overall goal of this study is to examine how news coverage of the NHIS
stories were represented or framed in the print media to promote the adoption of the
health policy. The study is significant to scholarly research for a number of reasons.
Framing analysis- This study makes a major contribution to framing (Goffman, 1974) as
a concept for the study of major health policy issues in Africa. Despite the existence of
government policy documents, Acts, and Instruments, the media in Ghana have been the
main channel through which the government disseminates and puts into the public
domain public policy initiatives that relate to health (Benefo, 2004; Domfeh 1999;
Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988). Therefore any analysis of government dissemination of
information and the frames through which such information diffusion is promoted by the
media will help in studying how the concept is utilized in a less vibrant media
environment such like Ghana.

Framing and ideology- The study explores the links between framing and ideology as
concepts that are rarely interrogated in the literature but at the same time have been given
new dimension through studies of media coverage of news stories (Akhavan-Majid &
Ramaprasad, 1998; 2000). In this context it contributes to the research on how
journalistic routine and sourcing of news from government and official domains leads to
a framing pattern that reinforces elite ideology and entrenches journalistic ideology in news construction.

*Media representation of health issues* - This study is also relevant as it extends the literature on the media coverage of health issues in Africa. Unlike other political and economic issues, coverage of health issues has for so long failed to rank high on local media agenda in several African countries (Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988) and it is imperative that part of the newly gained media freedom that is seen in several African countries is harnessed to address important health issues that affect many individuals and groups. The research is therefore significant because it investigates why and how the media represent health policy issues in a particular African environment.

Research shows that the media have central role to play in health issues advocacy and campaigns (Alali & Jinadu, 2002; Lynch & Condit, 2006; Singhal & Rogers, 2003; Yankah, 1974). In this particular research in Ghana, the study will determine whether in the case of the NHIS the media played its vibrant role of providing information from the government to the people to help address particular health concern. With the deteriorating health conditions of the greater number of Africa’s population, and especially with the upsurge in HIV/AIDS, health issues have become of paramount importance to many African governments, and affordability of health care has been at the center stage of political and social campaigns. Many health issues such as HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria are diseases that pose great challenges to Africa. Governments can only address such health issues first through comprehensive health policy plans through the adoption of a vibrant campaign and media messages that will be embraced by individuals and groups. Governments must therefore be able to discern whether the media is adequately resourced
to play its role of information dissemination to achieve government policy objectives and at the same time address the individual health needs.

*Diversifying research on health issues in Africa*: This inquiry also diversifies research on the health discourse in Africa. It adds to other studies on health issues that have in recent years generally focused on media coverage of HIV/AIDS. The rationale is that the scope of research on health concerns in the continent should be broadened to include major health policies and health related matters, especially on the issue of how the media reports on them. The study argues that some health issues such as the NHIS policy have become marginalized by the mainstream media and it is only through such studies that the media can be prompted to provide adequate coverage of health stories.

*Newspapers and health issues*: The investigation also contributes to the literature on the relationship between newspapers and coverage of health related issues. It broadens our understanding of how some local newspapers cover health stories in their local environments.

**Research Questions**

The following research equations guided the study:

RQ1: How did the media represent or frame the NHIS stories?

a) What were the dominant frames through which the NHIS stories were narrated?

What was the degree of prominence given to the NHIS stories in terms of the location of the stories?

What news sources did the newspapers use for the presentation of the NHIS news stories?
RQ2: What are the views of media professionals toward the representation of NHIS news stories in newspapers?

RQ3: Did the NHIS coverage function as stories resonating official discourse on health issues?

RQ4: Does the coverage of the NHIS stories indicate new trends in editorial policy on newspapers’ coverage of health issues in Africa?

Overview of Chapters

Here is an overview of how the various parts of this research have been organized.

Chapter one introduces the issues that form the scope of the project. It presents the background to the study from a contextual perspective with a review of the recent history of the health cost recovery discourse in Ghana. It also traces the history of the NHIS scheme from the initial establishment as a pilot scheme to its legislative adoption as an Act on national health policy and delineates the various schemes being operated by under the act. The chapter further provides the purpose for the research as a project that examines how the media framed the National Health Insurance Scheme in Ghana with particular focus on themes embedded in the narratives of the news stories disseminating the policy. It further poses the research questions that will guide the issues under investigation and acknowledges the significance of the inquiry to academic research under various theoretical frames.

Chapter two is a review of the current literature that relates to the research. It discusses the role of the media as advocates for dissemination of government and public policies as well as their strategic communicative role of providing the forum for
the public to debate public issues. The literature also provides the theoretical basis for the research. First, it draws on a central tenet of social theory that argues that news construction is part of the larger discourse on the construction of social reality. This is followed by an analysis of how the media constructs news through the concept of framing analysis. The analysis indicates how the discourse on framing projects news frames as a cultural appropriation. It then draws a relation between frames and ideology, and identifies the various types of ideology that define news framing.

Chapter three describes the methods and procedures that were employed to obtain and analyze data for the research. It indicates that the major methodology and research design utilized for the research is Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches for research. It also provides the rationale for the choice of the research design and the choice of the forms of data collected for the investigation. The chapter details the unit of analysis that is subjected to examination, the period of study, as well as all the steps and procedures that went into the actual data collection in the field. Finally, it outlines the coding instruments and protocol adopted for the study.

Chapter four presents the data findings and analysis that emerged from the examination of news articles on the NHIS. It discusses the issues that arise from these findings from the perspective of the first research question outlined in chapters one and three. It also analyzes the usefulness of the results in defining the various media frame patterns used by the Ghanaian media to represent the health policy.

Chapter five focuses on the interview aspect of the data as a sequel to chapter four. From the perspective of two more research questions, the chapter analyses and
assesses the importance of the responses gathered from informants to the health discourse in Ghana along various discursive themes. It also uses the results of interviews conducted with media professionals to analyze their role in the coverage of the NHIS news stories.

Chapter six draws on the findings, analyzes, and interpretations that were detailed in chapters four and five and provides an evaluative interrogation on the how new trends in the coverage of health news are emerging in some editorial news rooms in Africa. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the study, and the significance the major issues outlined for future research. The chapter, finally, provides recommendations to journalists for the coverage of health issues in Africa.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The media and policy dissemination

The mass media are the fulcrum between government policy agendas and the public (Collins et al., 2006; Soroka 2002). According to Collins et al. (2003) the major channel through which government policy enters the public domain is through the media. Through this channel people learn about government plans and initiatives, and public understanding of a policy can become dependent on the degree of coverage accorded that policy by the media (Collins et al. 2006; Davidson et al. 1999; Miller et al. 1998). Herman and Chomsky (1988) have noted that the “mass media serve as a system for communicating images to the general populace” (p. 16). Through this system of communication, the mass media are able to perform their role of providing information for individuals by encouraging people to adopt the cultural norms that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. The media have been cited as a significant force on groups and individuals that occupy the apex of political and economic power. The argument is that the media communicate directly to those who wield power and exert pressure on policy makers and, through that mechanism, stimulate public debate on policy issues (Wallack, 1994). Through this stimulation of debate, the media emphasize alternative definitions of problems and the varying policy approaches through which solution to those problems can be attained. Therefore the mass media serve as the source of information flow for public policy issues, and determine the ground upon which public opinion get shaped on those policy initiatives.

When the mass media engage in news production for public consumption, they by that function circulate knowledge which helps to influence people’s opinions about issues
The media emphasize issues by bringing them into the domain of public sphere. Van Dijk (1993) has stated that the media have always wielded some form of social power which has the potential of controlling the minds of readers or viewers. He continued that through news production the media provide knowledge to their audiences and such knowledge become crucial in the determination of discourse direction and understanding. The social power wielded by the media therefore allows them to control knowledge and for that matter discourse. He states, “The strategic control of knowledge is a crucial element in the control of discourse understanding and, therefore, of discourse access and the critical counter power of oppositional reading and understanding” (van Dijk, 1993: p.15)

The media have always been used to provoke debates on specific policy issues with the idea that such arenas can act as the space to fine-tune government policies. Media professionals have become very important instruments in the construction and dissemination of health policies and issues. They also influence public health policy development by putting health issues on their news agenda. Such news coverage of important health policies can legitimize the health problem so that greater percentage of the population will support efforts in finding solutions to the problem (Walt-Chiders, 1994). This view is supported by political science research that has documented that the media play a very significant role in shaping how issues come before policy makers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). In many social settings the mass media can shape public opinion on policy initiatives to the extent that the public, through the same medium can in turn influence the developmental processes of the policy issue (Collins et al. 2006; Iyengar, 1997; Soroka, 2002). In
varying situations and forms, citizens who are conscious about public policy issues draw on the media as the source of information and education so that they “will become more informed about the issues and events of the day” (Iyengar, 1997: p. 212). Research has also shown that mass media contents that come in the form of news stories on social issues are resources that the public could utilize to foster positive social change (Vargas & dePyssler, 1999).

The extent to which the public or the policy-conscious citizen can become well informed is intrinsically yoked to the accuracy and the quality of the news story. Several factors mediate between the release of a public policy and the final media representation that is put in the public domain (Kitzinger, 2003; Miller, Kitzinger, Williams & Beharell, 1998). Since different and competing media houses abound within particular media landscapes, differences in news reportage can generate different reactions and responses from public (Alasuutari, 1999). Based on political or ideological inclination, such as being conservative or liberal, media houses tend to report events in support of or in opposition to their identified ideological propensity. Furthermore, with the coverage of a particular news story being put into the public domain, the media always select a few salient issues from within the range of issues that are available in the real world situation (Gans, 1979; Nelkin, 1995). In other situations the nature of media ownership (government owned/ controlled, private-owned/controlled) determines the extent to which the media can become useful for information dissemination and developmental processes (Asante, 1996; Zieglar & Asante, 1992).
The social construction of news

One of the central tenets of social theory and research is the construction of *social reality*. According to social theorists, the construction of social reality is an outcome of the active involvement of individuals in interpersonal relationships (Fiske & Nauberg, 1990; Jussim, 1991). Through these complex interactions individuals become active participants in the social process and through such engagement construct their own social realities. One assumption of this constructivist perspective is that individual perception of reality does not only create social reality but also becomes a reflection of social reality (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Miller & Turnbull, 1986; Snyder, 1984). The constructivist perspective also acknowledges the fact that individual engagement in the social process may generate perceptions, biases, beliefs, and prejudices that in themselves may be factual, inaccurate or erroneous. However, these factors, according to social theorists (Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Jussim, 1991), do not by themselves negate the power of individuals to construct their own social realities.

The media are generally seen as important constituents in the determination of how events and conditions of individual group experiences are socially defined (Gamson & Modigliani 1999; Stallings 1990). This mode of seeing the media is in tandem with the social constructivist perspective that projects media conceptualization of news as a direct reflection (and perhaps creation) of social realities (Spencer, & Triche, 1994). This social constructivist perspective of news emanates from how the media makes such news, and their anticipation of how the audience receives the news. In this process, the media construct news based on their social knowledge, and generally, on the kind of social knowledge expected to be wielded by their audience. The active construction of news by
the media, and the consequential interpretations and negotiations of the resultant text is the outcome of individual complex social interactions (Neuman, Justy & Crigler, 1992; Rhee, 1997).

Several factors go into the news production processes to determine the newsworthiness of an event. The criteria include relevance; proximity; negativity; recency; timeliness; and, novelty (Lester, 1980; Turner, 1982; vanDijk, 1988, Fishman, 1980). Other writers have expanded the newsworthiness of an event to include frequency, threshold, intensity, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, predictability, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, and the deviant construct of the occurrence being reported (Galtrung & Ruge 1965; Hester, 1973; Ostgaard, 1965; Shoemaker, Chang & Brendlinger, 1986, 1987). Any criteria of news worthiness claims its relevance from the manner through which the story reinforces social reality and adequately shapes the opinions of individuals and groups on the particular subject. The processes involved in the production of news such as the use of news sources, selection of stories and the exclusion of others (Lester 1980), and the media specificity of providing definitions for events and conditions that resonate with subjects of the social milieu are deeply cast in a social constructivist mold (Short, 1984; Stallling 1990; Spencer, & Triche, 1994).

If news making is socially constructed because it is a product of the social milieu, then it is imperative that any form of news must bear resemblance to and indeed signify a strong reflection of the cultural images embedded in the local environment (Best, 1991). This must be construed to mean that news making by the media is a direct outcome of their sensitivity to local issues and concerns, their preference for traditions and normative predispositions that arise from their reporting practices, and a deference to the needs of
their consumers as socially captive cohorts in their joint duty of using the locally produced cultural images as their frameworks to define particular events and conditions.

A contextualization of this proposition means that these cultural frameworks then become tools or interpretive devices for media and their audiences/readers to define occurrences as particularized events of considerable significance (Douglas 1985; Fishman, 1980; van Dijk 1988). Through the use of these socially constructed frameworks as interpretive devices, events and occurrences achieve their newsworthiness and their social relevance. Flowing from this point of view is the inference that many news reports receive considerable attention because events described in the narrative or news contents assume the characteristics of the local cultural images that may have the consequential significance of being positive, negative, catastrophic, posing potential threat, celebratory, providing a solution, or explaining an event. Such an arena for the perception of news must of necessity provide the overall theme(s) through which every news narrative will be encoded and decoded.

It is contended that news reports or news stories provide interpretive frames through which we understand or explain events that happen around us. Basically, these frames are nothing more than the images through which phenomena are situated. News professionals organize their stories around basic cultural products or images. From the social constructivist perspective, news story is nothing more than defining events, their causes, and consequences through an organized basic frame embedded in the local culture.

The media, and news as a social product, feature prominently as part of our symbolic environment (Altheide, 2000). Our symbolic environment incorporates our
traditions and culture. The appropriation of some of our most adored and our most insidious cultural factors as necessary rudiments for news making defines our perception of certain issues and consequently determines the extent of our involvement in the shaping of social reality. In essence, social definitions of events, occurrences, actions, causes and consequences, have become the ever-continuous function of the media as newsmakers. Our definitions and perspective of reality, the way we shape culture and how culture shapes us, our communication formats, how we design and communicate policy issues, and how we stimulate an active reception of activities in our environment have become the most influential responsibilities of media (Altheide, 2000; Best 1995; Cerulo 1998; Crane, 1992; Ferrel & Sanders, 1995; Glaser, 1999; Gerber & Gross, 1976).

The factual conglomeration of events collected out of the local cultural arena and their subsequent presentation as news contents of meaningful substance acts as the bridge that connects members of the local environment to news stories and the media houses. News as a product of social construction then becomes a presentation of the way experiences are “framed and thematized as a feature of daily discourse” (Altheide, 2000: 288).

Media influences individuals through the production of texts. How a text is constructed, its embodiment, and the perspectives of the constructivist as an important agent of social change have become significant fields of inquiry in the attempt to understand why media and news texts wield so much influence on individuals and society. Media research on how individuals receive messages and the consequential effect on their social lives is a field that has also engaged culture and social change research advocates as they try to disentangle the complex relationships between message organizations, construction, and their delivery and reception (McQuail, 2005).
Arjrouch (1998) propounds another realm of theoretical positioning that ascribes the social construction of news to the personal perspective of the journalist. According to Ajrouch, in constructing news for public consumption media professionals also dwell on their personal perspectives and experiences. For journalists, personalization becomes important in deciding what event or social occurrence is newsworthy. Through ethnographic and narrative techniques for the research inquiry, Ajrouch focused on how personal experiences and narratives of journalist and their editors influenced the determination of news. The study was premised on the understanding that news is nothing but a social construction. Despite the fact that media houses and news professionals dwell a lot on the production of news as a phenomenon that must be based on credibility and an adherence to objectivity, the “study uncovers various instances where personal experiences directly influence the definition of news and the subsequent reporting of news” (p.349). The inclusion of personalization as a social construction element in news construction adds to the human reaction factor that is centered on emotional issues. The journalist aims to elicit some response from the audience and that response is in the form of human reaction largely fixated on emotion. By subjecting the construction of news to this concept of personalization journalists link their own human element in constructing news as a social reality to the human element of the decoder- the audience. This challenges the assumption of news stories as an equation of facts devoid of personal experiences and emotions. Personal attitudes, experiences and emotions go into the selection of what particular news is of ‘value’ and what is not. This alone puts news construction in the context of human relationships- an important factor of social constructivist perspective.
Media and the concept of framing

The diverse effects of news media on public opinion have been extensively documented in the literature (Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1983; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; McGuire, 1986; Mcombs & Shaw, 1972). However, the consequential or causal effect of the news media on intended audiences or policies is highly determined by the media’s ability to present the stories in a style that adequately informs, and thus strongly influences their intended audience to change a behavior, engage a certain policy in a debate, and adopt an issue for social change. In performing this function the media have been noted to consciously or unconsciously enact a pattern of reportage that involve active selection of some issues and making them more salient. This concept of selection and salience is known as framing.

Following the works of Domfeh (1999), Obeng-Quaidoo (1988), Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Pratt et al. (2002), Sanders (2000), Reta (2000), Smith & Wakefield (2005), Valeda (2002) nad Verdoolaege (2005), this research uses framing analysis as a theoretical tool in understanding how local newspapers in an African environment represented stories on the adoption of a health policy by individuals as way of mitigating their health problems. This theoretical position becomes very important for two reasons. Framing analysis 1) has the capability define issues at stake for the reported phenomenon, and 2) makes clear that the identification of the particular patterns of the representations within the informative narratives can potentially influence the way the phenomena are perceived by a large number of audience/readers (Valeda, 2002). In this case, the aim of the research is to investigate how the media selected from the reality of health insurance coverage, within the dominant media matrix of reporting issues, and from a
certain perspective that promotes a particular angle of “definition, causal interpretation, and moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993: 52). Even though this research is not interested in the origin of framing analysis, a brief narrative of its background will be relevant to the understanding of this research.

Framing as an analytical tool was introduced by Goffmann (1974). Goffman investigated how individuals in the society structure and make sense of their everyday experiences. His research led him to conclude that an individual’s experience and the consequential understanding of that lived experience produces a meaningful understanding only within the guidance of the socio-cultural norms. In other words, the dominant interpretation of a lived experience is largely imposed on the phenomenon by the norms of the society. However, he also indicated that multiple realities may exist within the dominant interpretation model and within any pre-defined situation. He asserts that, though social norms may create pre-defined frames of interpretations, individuals rely on their “schemata of interpretation” (21) to manage and negotiate their lived experiences and can do so in a manner that may differ from the collective consciousness. Events that happen may lead to different individual experiences which will, in turn, create multiple realities. However, the multiple realities created out of the primary framework of the individual “schemata of interpretation” still occur within the dominant socio-cultural frame. In this sense, because multiple realities are created, the meaning of an event may differ from one individual to the other in a fluid and multi-dimensional pattern.

The media as part of the social structure also present their news stories within the dominant interpretation social norms. However, while the individual may negotiate the
understanding of reality away from the established social framework, research has shown that the media, due to several constraints such as time and resources, tend to present their stories within the dominant social norms or established framework (Tuchman, 1997). According to Gitlin (1980), the media operate to maintain the status quo. This therefore leads them to a report on issues based on a manner that actively inculcates in the public a certain mindset about socio-cultural and economic relationships. When the media operates this way individuals become socialized to understand news stories in particular patterns that seem predictable, reasonable and commonsensical. The media will process and produce news stories or social issues within the existing dominant frame, and all issues, events, and stories that lack or fail to embody in their content any characteristics of the pre-defined frame of dominant interpretations will be marginalized (McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Valeda, 2002;).

Gitlin (1980) further elaborated on this concept of frame by observing that “Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (p. 6). This systematic institutionalization of meaning making based on the selection of dominant and established norms and frameworks of social significance by the media has led to the notion of media frame by scholars of framing analysis. Gitlin (1980) further defines media frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (p. 7). To this end frames reflect a regular mode of presentation of news events that upholds a dominant cultural matrix within which news media professionals present their stories (Bird & Dardenne, 1997; Norris, 1995: 2000).
Framing therefore mediates how issues are constructed in news stories. Political communication has used *frames* as the method of communicating how much and in what manner mass media sends out information for audience consumption (Rhee, 1997). Dearing and Rogers (1996) define “framing as 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” (p. 64). Framing is a construction of social reality by the mass media.

According to Entman (1993), whose definition of the concept has been cited in much media research, framing provides audience with a scheme to interpret news events. In a more detailed exposition of what a frame is, he states, “to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in communication text, in such way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Pickle et al. (2002), following Entman’s definition assert that the contents of news stories latently include implied questions for which frames provide answers. Frames provide answers to the implied questions by performing four functions:

1. They define and diagnose a problem;
2. They identify a source or cause;
3. They provide a judgment or evaluate the causal agents and their effects; and
4. They offer or justify what kind of solution should be provided for the problem.

Framing determines how news is constructed and what its objectives are. Frames become criteria for selecting news to the extent that the issue that is being framed should be timely, relevant, perceived as being in the public interest, and meets other important news reporting criteria. According to Fiske (1987), frames locate within their body the
idea of preferred meaning. The intended purpose of a frame is to control social meaning within the broader ambit of narratives of the dominant culture. In this sense, frames become “a way of organizing text narratives whereby particular dimensions of a phenomenon are highlighted while obscuring or deleting others to emphasize a specific storyline, a certain meaning, or range of meanings” (Valeda, 2002, p. 49).

Accordingly, the mass media actively define the frames of reference through which audiences engage of public issues (Tuchman, 1978). The assumption is that the manner of framing the news has a significant influence on how people come to understand social, cultural and political realities (Gamson, 1992), and such socio-cultural and political realities are “a version of the reality built from personal experience, interaction with peers, and interpreted selections from the mass media” (Neumann et al, 1992, p. 120).

Audiences’ understanding of news stories largely depend on their social knowledge. This interpretation posits framing as a concept that is grounded in a social constructivist model. This model presents two fronts to the constructivist approach to framing. The first model according to Scheufele (1999), is “by framing images of reality… in a predictable and patterned way” (see also McQuail, 1994, p. 331); that is, the mass media exert considerable effects on audiences through the construction of social reality. Second, the interaction between the mass media and audiences ensures that public opinion has significant impact on journalist and their presentation of news. Mass media news output that defines media discourse is affected by public opinion processes through which journalists “develop and crystallize meaning in public discourse” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p.2). Scheufele’s (1999) study reviewed the literature on framing
effects, and found support for earlier findings that two significant concepts of framing that emerge for the presentation and comprehension of news are media frames and individual frames.

Media Frame

The way the mass media frames a news story largely determines how people come to understand the story. Several definitions exist in the literature on the concept of media frame. Tuchman (1978) conceptualized media frame as news frame and indicated that “the news frame organizes everyday reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality… [and an] essential feature of news” (p. 193). People discern issues and events in the news because they have been framed by the media as recognizable concepts that make sense to readers. For Gamson and Modigliani (1987), media frames are “ a central organizing idea or story line that provides the meaning to an unfolding strips of events… the frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (p.143). Gitlin (1980) indicates that frames are mechanisms through which journalists or the mass media identify and classify news and “package it for efficient relay to audiences” (p.7). In other words, the media use frames as constructs to determine how information can become relevant to the audience. However the packaging may also be influenced by several socio-cultural and organization structures (Scheufele, 1999; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In all these diverse ways through which framing as a concept is captured, the ultimate result is that framing affects the way media (re)present events and issues and as well as how readers/viewers come to make sense of them.
News framing as cultural appropriation

The primary base through which journalists construct knowledge and package information for their audiences is through culture. According to Van Gorp (2007), “culture refers to an organized set of beliefs, codes, myths, stereotypes, values, norms, frames, and so forth that are shared in the collective memory of a group or society” (p. 62). The appropriation of culture provides the context through which the production and interpretation of news becomes meaningful to both the journalist and the audience (Hall, 1997; Van Gorp, 2007). Goffman (1981) clearly indicates a linkage between culture and frame when he states, “Frames are central part of culture and are institutionalized in several ways” (p.63). The relevance of the notion of culture as the vehicle for news production, interpretation and comprehension rests on the concept that news frames are embedded in a repertoire of cultural images and that a rendition of these frames in such cultural forms provides the intersecting points for news production and consumption. The use of such cultural images as frames of reference also hinges on the idea that news making and production assume that these cultural images are also loaded with latent structures of meaning that are comprehensible for journalists and audiences.

Consequently, when journalists construct their narratives from these perspectives they do so with the idea that audiences also hold similar frames of reference that facilitate news interpretation (Mcquail, 2005; Tuchman 1978; Van Gorp, 2007). One effect of the regular use of frames as products of the culture is that during their appropriation in the process of news construction and interpretation, they tend to attain normative and natural disposition (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). In other words, as a phenomenon that is deeply seeded in culture, frames may seem so normal that journalists
and audiences sometimes fail to realize or acknowledge their impact in the news production or interpretation processes.

The media employ frames as devices for the production of news texts packaged in cultural perspectives, and by that process reduce complex and dynamic events to a level that makes them real, sometimes factual, and comprehensible. The media, therefore, through the appropriation of particular frames of reference indicate how the communicative event should be interpreted. There is an interpretive advocacy on the part of the media from this angle: they want the audience to define and interpret message within their (media) frame of reference in order to arrive at a preferred meaning (van, Dijk, 2001). This line of news construction means that media personnel invoke particular range of frames for their stories so that audiences will construct their interpretations of the communicative event within the range of alternative frames provided by the media (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Reese, 2001; Potter, 1996).

This constructivist approach for news making is further supported by Van Gorp (2007) who, in reference to Scheufele (1999) states,

…the constructionist approach suggests that in the phase of frame building… media makers not only make use of frames but frames also influence the schema of the journalist when they have to represent an issue or an occurrence as a newsworthy event. There is an interaction between the journalist (un)conscious selection of a frame- out of the cultural stock of frames- as the result of the individual belief system and the influence of additional factors inside and outside the media organization. (p.67)

The thesis here is that frames are part of culture, and as such they get embedded in media content. However, frames are in plentiful and even though journalists employ a
particular range of frames to advocate a preferred interpretation, audiences can invoke alternative frames within the cultural stock of frames to project an alternative/oppositional interpretation of the news story or event.

News framing and ideology

Media framing of events as well as the production of news may involve ideological, political and economic factors. The media may sometimes frame events in a manner and design that indicate a confirmation, identification, or reinforcement of a particular ideology. This is normally the case if the media has to rely on institutional and organizational sources of information for their news production since such sources, because of the power they sometimes wield, may have their own agenda of pursuing a line that tilts towards an imposition of their authority on other members of the society (Fishman, 1980; Spencer & Tircher, 1994; Turner, 1982). Again, if the media are under the control of the state apparatus and for that reason rely heavily on politicians and public officials for sources of information, the media definition of such referent communicative events will tend to favor a preferred line of interpretation that imperatively reinforces the authority of those in power.

The adoption of persistent cultural framing pattern based on reliance on institutional and official sources of information will in the end, evoke a unique ideological positioning for the media to which news making process must conform, and through which audience interpretation and understanding of news stories must seek their relevance. However, the media may not even be aware of this point of ideological matrix through which they are framing events. This point is echoed by Hall (1982),
Just as the myth-teller may be unaware of the basic elements out of which his particular version of the story is generated, so broadcasters may not be aware of the fact that the frameworks and classifications they were drawing on reproduced the ideological inventories of their society… statements may be unconsciously drawing on the ideological frameworks and classifying schemes of a society and reproducing them-so that they appear ideologically ‘grammatical’-without those making them being aware of doing so (p.72).

In other words, as the media frame news through certain sustained patterns within the collective culture of the society, they unconsciously project and sustain certain ideologies above others towards preferred modes of news construction with its consequential preferred mode of interpretation.

Ideology

Several writers studying the discourse on ideology agree that the meaning of the concept has become contestable (Akhavan-Majid& Ramprasad, 2000; Cutler et al. 1977; Bennet, 1988, 2003; Richardson, 2005). Bennet (1988) says that, “… the precise way in which the concept of ideology is interpreted and handled [is]-a matter on which Marxists have been by no means united” (p. 49). However, this study is more interested in the reified position of the concept of ideology as a ground upon which some media systems operate and reproduce their ideas and messages. Again, the study is also interested in ideology and framing as concepts that have relational properties; one can determine and may (re)produce the other. More importantly, because of their (un)conscious appropriation by the media, both concepts have the capacity to create “definite forms of
social consciousness” (Bennet, 1982:47) – a phenomenon deciphered from Marx’s use of the concept of ideology.

From the foregoing, this study first dwells on the conceptual definition of ideology as defined by Bennet (1982) from a Marxist perspective. Bennet, indicates that the concept of ideology implies two things. First, he perceives ideology as concept that has to do with the “social determination of signifying systems,” and second, as a “distortion” or “misrecognition” (p. 47). The first is drawn upon Marx’s conception that ideology develops through the process of social interaction and that, at any given time, what a system signifies is defined within a given period and time according to the purview of a given social group. According to Marx, this group is normally the elite and the powerful that control the mental processes of production. Through this process they are able to produce, direct, and shape knowledge and represent ideas as consequential, natural, inevitable, and rational (Jones, 2001; Richardson, 2005). On the second notion of ideology as “distortion” (p. 47), Bennet (1982), provides a simple definition: “the meaning is present in the common-sense usage of the term which is usually applied to statements which are felt to be a motivated distortion of the truth” (p.48). He also notes that the notion of distortion does not of necessity imply falsehood, dishonesty or any act of deception. Rather the dominant relationship has had a deep seated effect on the consciousness of individuals to the extent that they are unable to interrogate the “categories” and “assumptions” of the existing social relationships because they have become intensely unconscious of it. Bennett pulls these two phases of the Marxist perspective on ideology together with a more elaborative tone:
Ideology, in this most distinctive sense, is thus concerned with the transmission of systems of signification across class lines. This is conceived not as an abstract process but as being effected, in a concrete way, via ‘the means of mental production’ controlled by the economically dominant class. The consciousness of those subjected to this relay of ideologies is thus distorted not abstractly but in a way conducive to the perpetuation of existing relationships of class domination. (p. 48-49)

From the above perspective, Bennet provides three areas under which ideology becomes important to the media. The first area is in the form of social control revealed through individual and corporate ownership over media houses. Through these forms of media ownership the operations of the media organizations are compromised to the benefit of the ruling class which in the end helps to enhance and sustain their hold as the dominant group.

Second, the systems of signification embedded in the cultural images and messages communicated by the media are made to function as social reality. The media, then, as products of the dominant social relationships, relay messages and by that performance define reality by representing the ideas of the dominant group as factual, rational and inevitable representation of social reality. Even though this act of system signification can result in distortion, it is lost upon the media because they are unconscious of the “conditions of their existence” (p. 49). Yet, on a formal level of analysis, any ideological representation of the messages will be solely attributed to them. In this sense the media becomes an ideological entity.

Third, in places where the media is state-owned, they actively engage in promoting the ideas of the ruling elite as knowledge that is good for the health of the
country and the citizenry. In this case the production and dissemination of information is historicized by the media to the point of imputing legitimacy to the dominant social relationships. The media in the process demonstrates that all aspects of social formation-politics, economics, health, and education- can only be construed as meaningful phenomena in relations to one another.

The other theorist whose definition of ideology informs this study is Stuart Hall, (1986). He defines ideology as,

the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation- which different classes and social groups deploy to make sense, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works (p. 29)

The above definition shows that ideology only makes sense from the perspective of social practice. The concept of “mental frameworks” constitutes ideas and social practices shared by the majority of the people in any society. The social practices in a given environment are the stock of knowledge of that society- the repertoire for social signification. Ideology just reproduces the stock of knowledge in that society. In a sense, because ideology is part of the social formation, it provides us with various sets of representations that constitute the framework through which individuals and the society interpret events. This perspective is also shared by Becker (1984) who provides a definition of the concept from the “framework” perspective. He states, “Ideology is an integrated set of frames of reference through which each of us sees the world and to which all of us adjust our actions” (p.69). Ideology in this capacity is conceived in relation to accreted social practices which contain the “frames of references” for our
perception of the world. Veron (as cited by Hall, 1982) definition of ideology is conceptually similar. According to him, “ideologies are structures…sets of rules which determine an organization and the functioning of images and concepts…ideology is a system of coding reality and not a set of determined coded message…” (p. 71).

Ideology, then, enables us to identify and make meaning of images and concepts that function in a text. Through their ideological imprint news stories achieve social reality because they are made to operate within a certain ideological discourse. We can identify the underlying structure of the news text through its ideological properties. Understanding a news story from the point of view of ideology means a news story consists of “elements, premises and assumptions” embedded in the cumulative histories, diverse discourses, and ”social formations” that together form a mass pool of culture from which the media draw on to construct their stories (Hall, 1982, p. 71).

Croteu and Hoynes (2003) state:

an ideology is basically a system of means that helps to explain the world, and that makes value judgment about that world. Ideology is related to worldview, belief system and values… it refers not only to the beliefs held about the world but also the basic ways in which the world is defined (p.160)

Ideology helps us to define events and understand them as cultural and social issues. For example, when we approach a media text our inclination for understanding the contents of that text is not just about the text itself but more importantly about all the broader events that lay outside it, all the cultural issues and images from which the text draws its production and interpretation and its ideological construction and orientation.
Therefore media text can be rationalized and understood in ideological contexts as communicative events that allow certain ideas to be communicated and others neglected.

Types of ideology on news framing

The literature on ideology in relation to news framing identifies three types of ideology that exert influence on how the media frame news stories. These include the dominant ideology, elite ideology, and journalistic ideology (Akhavan-Mahid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Becker, 1984; Murdock and Golding, 1977; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996)

*Dominant ideology* proclaims the ideas shared by the majority of the people in a society. Accordingly, members of the society, through various historicized discourses and social practices, legitimate some ideas within the society that they affirm as authoritative and credible, especially for communicative purposes. In several situations, what is acceptable are the beliefs, knowledge and opinions shared by majority of the people in the society and views that are inconsistent or incongruous with the adopted beliefs are either neglected or highly marginalized. The production and interpretation of any communicative event is implicitly defined by this mode of ideological portrait. For example, the dominant ideology governing news production and interpretation in Ghana is through the discourse and perspective of the public officials.

*Elite ideology* refers to the projection of the ideas of the ruling class, government, public officials and highly educated professional as the most authentic, authoritative and trustworthy ideas. *Elite ideology* and *dominant ideology* share common features except that the elite ideology is sometimes more forceful and powerful, and may generally prevail against the dominant ideology (Wang, 1991). For example, when it comes to
policy issues and political choices, the ideas of the elite mostly prevail against the dominant ideology.

*Journalistic ideology* includes the media routines that have become the established culture of news production in a society (Akhavan-Mahid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Murdock & Golding, 1977; Becker 1984). The ideas present in this type of ideology show that when it comes to news stories, particular ways of news sourcing, news priming, and headline presentation must always take precedent over others. For example, the journalistic ideology that prevails in Africa mostly emphasizes government and official discourse in news production. This mode of representation reinforces elite ideology as a pervasive system in several African societies (Asante, 1996; Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988). It asserts that government and official sources of information have a high degree of authenticity and credibility. Through such heavy reliance on official sources, the media create their own journalistic ideology and impose it on the audience. Again, reliance on official sources leads to an articulation of the ideas of the ruling elites, and legitimates the dominant ideology. In several societies where the media have become ‘the dominant means for social signification’ (Hall, 1988) an enactment of journalistic ideology presupposes an enactment and a reinforcement of elite ideology.

**Health news coverage in Africa**

The role of the mass media has become more significant in the era of the HIV/scourge, and the prevalence of diseases like TB and malaria on the African continent (Benefo, 2002; Kasule et al., 1997; Ndlovu Sihlangu, 1992; Pratt et al., 2002). Through campaigns and information distribution, the mass media in Africa have become the medium through which HIV/AIDS is being relentlessly fought. Several studies conducted
on health related issues in Africa indicate that the mass media play critical roles in helping to improve the knowledge about diseases and adopting safer preventive and curative practices (Benefo, 2002; Hughes & Malila, 1999; Kasule et al., 1997; Ndlovu & Sihlangu, 1992).

Hughes and Malila (1999) investigated the social construction of HIV/AIDS in the Africa media. The study used framing analysis n and identified the various cultural themes and categories employed by the media in the representation of HIV/AIDS. This study was premised on the fact that, despite decades of increased public campaigns in the media, there was not much evidence to suggest that the campaign had successfully effected change in attitudes towards the pandemic. They concluded that the model of rationality assumed by the media was not very effective because it was predicated on the proposition that audience and individuals’ assumed rationality of everyday-common-sense way of understanding issues and negotiating sexual conduct was the same. The rationale behind the media reportage was based on the assumption that their intended audiences were highly informed of the issues at stake. The media also assumed that the audience had a cognitive orientation to make informed judgments and healthy behavioral choices. The study concluded that if the media intend to give alternatives to turn knowledge into action they need to consider the everyday reasoning of the target groups, and understand their needs and interests.

The International Women’s Media Foundation (2004) funded a study in five countries from May to November 2003, on the media in Africa to assess how coverage of some major health issues and health policies were handled in some selected African
newspapers. The aim was to identify the problems that emerge in trying to address public health issues in the media.

Using content analysis, the study revealed several important findings that seem to indict African media’s health policy reportage. The report indicated that most of the health issues focused on personalities and government officials and not on issues analysis or education. It also indicated that editorial materials lack adequate information to engage media audiences, especially young people to develop positive attitudes towards health information and health polices. The research also indicated that many African journalists lacked training in the coverage of health issues. They also have limited time and resources, work in a politicized environment, and lack the capacity to scrutinize health policies, and health delivery systems. It was quite obvious from the study that most of the media in Africa had no newsroom policy on how to sustain coverage of public health issues and only a few journalists are dedicated towards health issues. The report finally provided a clear view of government-media complicit roles on health issues by indicating that there are huge communication and coordination gaps between the media and policymaking partners on public health issues.

On the local level several studies have extensively been done on the role and performance of the mass media in Ghana (Agyemang-Duah, 1996; Asante, 1996; Ansu-Kyeremeh et al, 1996; Blay Amihere, 1996; Bonah 1997; Gyimah Boadi, 1998; Hasty, 2005; 2006). Some of these studies have focused on the generality of the mass media [both broadcast and the print] and examined their socio-cultural and discursive performances in the political economy (Alhassan, 2005; Ansu-Kyeremeh et al, 1996; Gyimah Boadi, 1998; Heath, 1999). Other studies have drawn a line between broadcast
and print media, and researched their relative stake in national and political discourses. However, most of these studies have focused on the print media and their constructive role in political culture, and democratization processes in the country (Ansu-Kyeremeh et al, 1996; Blay Amihere, 1996; Graham, 1996; Temin & Smith, 2002; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Hasty, 2006). A few studies have engaged the mass media from a social issues perspective. Ansu Kyeremeh et al (1996) moved beyond the political arena by researching what motivates people to read newspapers.

Obeng-Quaidoo (1988) studied the socio-economic contexts within which journalists operate and the impact on their performance. The research used the barometer of the coverage of health issues to inquire about the media’s low coverage of other developmental issues in relation to political issues. In a conclusion iterative of other findings on health policy coverage by Africa media, he argues that prioritization of political issues in the media has led to the marginalization of health issues. He attributed this phenomenon to a colonial legacy that set up journalistic practice as a system “conceived in political milieu.” (p. 87). He also theorizes that the lack of specialization in the reportage of health issues had affected the approach journalist adopt toward the coverage of health related issues. He further indicates that when it comes to the issues of health, media representations of health issues had become a reproduction of official discourse lacking any sense of in-depth objective assessment.

Benefo (2004) also studied the Ghana media attitude towards health preventive and campaign messages in the country and concluded that the media’s response to such preventative campaign has been shaped by political exigencies more than by the logic of the active constituents of the health issue. The findings indicated that even though the
mass media exposure increased awareness of the issues involved in the campaign the message failed to bring their audience to adopt the preventative program because it failed to address their needs (Hughes & Manila, 1999).

Asante (1996) also studied how the Ghanaian media determined which developmental or non-development news forms the agenda for their news stories and the extent to which such media representations helped promote national development. The study, using content analysis, found that the media were intrinsically yoked to the policies and philosophies of the government in power. The media representations of issues covered were a reflection of the government policies and ideology. The result of the study also indicated a non-adversarial relationship between the media and government, which means that the two estates had developed a dependency relationship that specifically boosted the image of policy makers and political actors.

Nevertheless, since these studies were conducted, enormous political and institutional developments have occurred within the country and the media that have either led to an entrenchment of established forms of representations or led to the emergence of new ones (Alhassan, 2005; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Heath, 1999; Singleton, 2006). Some recent studies that have been done on the National Health Insurance Scheme as a health policy have focused on its social policy perspective rather than its media related design or outreach. Such studies on the NHIS have included the correlation between the enrolment level and economic status (Asante & Atkins, 2007), its implementation as a public social development issues (Agyepong & Agyei, 2008); and an analysis of its historical background (Singleton, 2006).
In all these studies, it is important to note that when it comes to health issues and health policy coverage by the African media the salient issues are that,

1) African media’s position towards health policy reportage is that of inadequacy and many of the reports fail to address the needs of their audience;

2) Africa media professionals’ lack of specialization in their reportage of health issues has affected the way journalists cover all health related issues;

3) Media representation of health issues is only a reproduction of official discourse. The coverage lacks any sense of in-depth objective assessment of issues and in most cases media activities have become intrinsically yoked to the policies and philosophies of the government in power; and,

4) There is no newsroom editorial policy on the coverage of health issues in Africa. Health stories are only given prominence or news coverage as and when they become politely expedient;

Whilst it is acknowledged that a few studies exist in the literature on the Ghanaian media representation of health issues, none of the studies has focused on the analysis and interpretations of media coverage of any actual health policy as a mechanism to assess its importance to health and social discourse. This study fills this gap in the literature by examining the representation of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) as a major public health policy and the associated media coverage of the major issues underlying the campaign for its adoption. It also extends the literature on the earlier studies that have been done on media representation of health issues in Africa (Asante, 1996; Benefo, 2004; Hughes & Manila, 1999; Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988) by referencing some of the
theories that underlie health issues representations and the extent to which such theories have become entrenched or deconstructed.

The media in Ghana

Newspapers

Newspapers have played a very important role in the socio-political development of Ghana. Although the establishment of newspapers in the country dates to the early nineteenth century when the first newspaper was established by the British colonial power to consolidate its control over its territories in British West Africa (Asante, 1996), it was not until the mid 40s and 50s when agitation for independence became rife that newspapers began to achieve their prominence in the country. During this period newspapers began to achieve their significance as the mouth piece of the people in their clamor for increased participation in local governance and their quest for independence. The mid-1930s to 50s marked the height of newspaper production before independence period in Ghana when seven private independent newspapers appeared on the stands in commercial quantities. It must be reiterated that the major contents of all the newspapers and the stories they carried during this era showed strong support for political self-determination. Some of the contents also dilated on economic and social issues in the country. At the time of independence, newspapers in circulation had increased to 13, including the *Daily Graphic* and the *Statesman*. It must also be remarked that most of the newspapers of this era were established by African intellectuals and elite and their audience were mostly the highly educated and concentrated in urban areas. This elite and urban legacy of the first newspapers continued to characterize newspaper production and circulation in the country for the greater part of the post-independence era.
The post-independence era, ironically, marked a downturn in newspaper production and circulation in Ghana. Most of the newspapers established during the era became government-owned or state-controlled, and a few others that tried to move against the tide of control were muffled from operating under strict press control laws. Again, most independent private newspapers faced draconian laws such as laws on libel and sedition. In other situations print media publishers had to submit application for license and approval before any newspapers or magazines could be published. These obstructions generally curtailed the practice of objective journalism in the country (Asante 1996; Rockson, 1990). The first reason is that Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana contended that if the newspapers were given too much freedom they would use their contents to the development agenda of the new Ghana. Like the state of the media and the press in most African countries, newspapers were supposed to spearhead the independent development agenda of the new independent African state (Agbese, 2006; Bourgault, 1995; Yusuf, 1999). They were expected to use the medium to help promote accelerated growth and national integration. In Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah shared and advocated for the same philosophy regarding the media. According to Udofia (as cited in Asante, 1996) Nkrumah “believed that the mass media should be completely under government control to assure their full utilization and commitment to the urgent aims of national integration and modernization” (Udofia, 1982: p.389). One major newspaper that was established during the immediate post independence era to push the development agenda of the state was the Ghanaian Times. First newspapers were published in the pre-independent era through the late 90s. This figure would remain the same till the dawn of the twenty-first century. Ghana’s
newspaper industry went through a lot of upheavals under the different military and political regimes. These upheavals included strictly enforced censorship, the promulgation of laws such as criminal libel, the incarceration of journalists whose editorials and opinions run contrary to the ideology of the political regime, and in some cases limiting access to print materials to publish newspapers. During this period, government continued to maintain its control over the two major newspapers in the country, namely the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*. These two newspapers, which today still boast of the largest circulation in the country, were made to pursue a journalistic ideology that was in tandem with the ideological and political pursuits of the government of the day. In effect journalists in these media houses were seen as politically partisan because they preached the ideologies and philosophies of the regime. Most of the stories in the two major newspapers for the period mentioned, focused their headlines and front pages on nation building and government functionaries and officials. Again, as stated earlier most of the circulation of the papers were limited to the urban areas of Ghana even though readership had broadened beyond the highly educated classes of the late 50s and 60s.

In the late 80s and early 90s when the country gradually started a democratization process in a liberal economy, newspaper production became buoyant again. More independent private newspapers were launched that competed with the two major state-owned newspapers, especially, in terms of contents. Headlines and front page stories in the major newspapers moved beyond official and governmental domination to include stories that were community centered. The fact that most of these stories that became headlines and front page stories came from some of the remote regions in the country
gave the newspaper narratives a new broad based perspective, even though most of them were still concentrated in the cities. In 1992, Ghana finally ushered in democratic governance that led to the fashioning of a constitution that liberalized the media environment within the context of democratic freedom. Since then, newspapers have increased in numbers and diversified their contents. Many of the newspapers still continue to act as the point for the mobilization of the people to promote socio-economic development and national integration. Others, especially, the private independent newspapers have become sites for free democratic expression, by ensuring transparency and accountability of government in line with democratic ideals. However, most of the newspapers have not diversified their contents. The majority of the newspapers focus on political news in relation to other socio-economic stories. The major language used by majority of the newspapers is English. While many newspapers have neglected local languages for publications, the numerous FM stations that have sprung up have used the local languages in their programs to reach a vast majority of their audience and in that bid chalked huge success in audience outreach.

The newspaper environment in Ghana is a dichotomous landscape with the state-owned newspapers and the private independent newspapers as ideological opposing occupants. Whilst the state-owned newspapers have been seen as the mouth piece of the government, the private press takes on a more adversarial role towards government functionaries and public officials. Historically, private independent newspapers have been excluded from of state sponsored patronage. Indeed, whilst state-owned journalists enjoy very cordial relationship with government officials, journalists from the private press are kept at arm’s length (Asante 1996; Hasty, 2005; Rockson, 1990). When it
comes to seeking information journalists from the state-owned press are highly privileged have easy access to government sources, information, documents, and resources. On the other hand the private press lack these important resources for their practice and are excluded from state resources, information, and sources. The private press developed their own ideological mode of operation embodied in their resort to more political stories, official scandals, and anonymous sources. This has led to a situation in some cases where their stories have become nothing more than personal attacks on government officials and other political heavyweights. Hasty (2005) describes the narrative style of the private press more vividly: “the private press has tended to emphasize personalities over policies, often preferring sensational and ad hominem stories at the expense of balanced reporting and policy analysis” (p. 94). They created their own alternative mode of news gathering and production that over the last ten years has come to symbolize their style.

According to the African Media Development Initiative country report on Ghana, the National Media Commission states that there are 106 newspapers in the country and these are made up of 11 dailies, 67 weeklies, 23 bi-weeklies and 5-tri weeklies (AMDI, 2006). There are four dailies that have the highest circulation in the country. Two of these dailies are the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times* both of which are government-owned. The *Daily Graphic* has a daily circulation of 200,000 whilst the *Ghanaian Times*, circulates 150,000 copies daily. The other two newspapers with high circulation are the *Daily Guide* and the *Ghanaian Chronicle* both of which are private independent
newspapers. Each has a daily circulation of about 40,000. Other major dailies that command some high readership include the Statesman, The Accra Daily Mail and Public Agenda.

Radio

The British colonial government introduced radio broadcasting into the country in 1935 to help promote its policies in the colonial territory. From that period up to the immediate post independence era, radio broadcasting remained a government monopoly. When the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation decree was passed in 1968, radio and television broadcasting became the monopoly of the state-owned GBC. This meant that for a long span in the media history of Ghana- from early independent era to the early 90s- no private radio stations were licensed or decreed to operate radio broadcast. However, the situation changed in 1996 when the airwaves were liberalized in line with democratic tenets and constitutional provisions of the fourth republic of Ghana.

Radio stations have always had immense impact on the development of nations across Africa, and Ghana is not an exception to this phenomenon. However, the diffusion of FM radios in the country in the last 10 years has created a new media template that has enabled a profound discussion of a broad array of socio-cultural, political and economic issues at every level of the social strata. The numerous FM stations have created diversity in public discourse to include other issues that hitherto would never have been on the media agenda. Most of the FM stations also operate in the local languages and have as such infused a lot of cultural diversity and free expression through the medium. Never has there been in the country such an immense display of the right to exhibit ones’ religious, political, and ideological expressions in a manner that is devoid of fear and
intimidation. Since the media landscape was deregulated in Ghana, radio has become the most common form of media outlet in Ghana. Until the coming of the 1992 fourth Republican Constitution, radio broadcast was the monopoly of the government. The only radio station that broadcast across the country was operated by Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) whose programs were received on the short wave bandwidth. GBC was also a government owned media outlet whose sole responsibility, like the state owned newspapers was to promote national integration, education and development. Though a few communities and districts could boast of community radio stations, they there under the control of local government offices which funded them through central government subventions and as such controlled their program contents. However, in 1996 licenses were granted to some private radio stations to operate. The period marked the beginning of real mass media liberalization in Ghana as radio stations inundated almost every part of the country. Since then many radio stations operating on FM frequencies have sprung up in several districts and communities. Even though most of the radio stations are concentrated in the urban centers and cities, the mere fact that they have a wider reach across the country is quite remarkable.

Currently there are 130 radio stations that have been licensed to broadcast and 96 of them are currently on air. GBC still continues to be the major nation-wide broadcaster even though its audience has dwindled. According to Gadzekpo (2005) the largest audiences that are highly concentrated in the urban centers belong to the private commercial FM stations. Again many, of these influential private commercial FM stations are concentrated in the regional capitals including Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi and Tamale. Currently, some of the most vibrant private commercial FM stations include
Peace FM (Accra), Joy FM (Accra), Fox FM (Kumasi), Sky Power FM (Takoradi), Space FM (Sunyani) and Diamond FM (Tamale).

*Television*

In 1965 television broadcast was inaugurated in Ghana by the National Assembly (Ayensu, 2003). In 1968, when GBC was formally established through a decree, it became the sole television broadcast station in the country. The government recognized television as a powerful and potent medium because of its theatrical effects on viewers and the inherent quality to project images that have an effective communicative impact on audiences. The government therefore through its control on GBC, also controlled its programs. Television program contents mainly featured news and civic education programming. Unlike radio, its effect was not felt throughout the country since GBC TV signals, until recently, were received only in certain locations and regions in the country. Secondly, for many individual and homes, the high cost of acquiring television sets made its acquisition a luxury. However with the media deregulation, television broadcast has changed dramatically both in terms of content and numbers.

As of 2007, Ghana had seven television stations (Africa Media Development Institute, 2006; CIA World Fact Book, 2008). Almost all stations provide free-to-air broadcast. GBC, which is still state-owned, is the only station whose signals cover the greater geographical areas of Ghana. However, like what has transpired in the newspaper and radio arena, GBC no more enjoys monopoly. New audience friendlier stations such as TV3, Metro TV, and TV Africa have captured a huge chunk of GBC’s TV market. However, Metro TV is jointly owned by GBC and a private agency. TV3 is also a joint ownership venture between TV3 in Malaysia and local entrepreneurs. TV3 and Metro
are very popular in the urban centers of Accra and Kumasi where almost every household owns a television set. Ever since deregulation of the media began, the growth of television broadcast has not been as rapid as that of radio and newspapers.

There are two major factors which account for this slow growth. First, television broadcast and operation involve huge investment capital, modern infrastructure and technological deployments to make it functionally viable. These resources are lacking in Ghana. Another drawback of television privatization is that because many people cannot easily access it due to the high cost of television sets, radio and newspaper still remain the most popular mass communicative media. Third, because television is not the main source of information for a greater number of the people, its capacity to be used as medium of influence on the people is limited (Ayensu, 2003; Gadzekpo, 2005). Nevertheless, the few stations that are on air have been able to provide newer, broader, and diverse contents that have had a positive appeal to Ghanaian audiences, especially the youth.

Summary

The literature on media reports on health issues in Africa show that African media tend to give less space to issues on health (Benefo, 2002; Domfeh, 1999: Hughes & Manila, 1999; Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988; Yankah, 1994). Furthermore, even where the media have provided coverage, the contents of such reports have lacked adequacy in terms of providing useful information for readers and audiences to make informed decisions. According to studies conducted (Domfeh, 1999; The International Women’s Media Foundation, 2004: Yankah, 1994) on Africa newspapers coverage of health issues on the continent, several inadequacies and limitations on the part of media performance
account for the poor news coverage of health issues. Among the major findings indentified in the literature are the following: 1) There is no newsroom or editorial policy in several media houses on how to sustain coverage of public health issues, and only a few journalists are dedicated towards health subject; 2) African journalists lack training on the coverage of health issues. They also have limited time and resources, work in politicized environment, and lack the capacity to scrutinize health policies and health delivery systems; and 3) In several African countries, there is a huge communication and coordination gap between the media and policymaking partners on public health issues, and this affects reporting on health issues.

The studies also described African media’s performance on health as flawed due to lack of specialization on the part of media professionals (Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988; Domfeh, 1999: Yankah, 1994). Again, the studies further reveal that in relation to political stories most media houses in Africa fail to prioritize health issues.

A careful observation of the literature indicates that the studies (Yankah, 1994; The International Women’s Media Foundation, 2004; Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988) analyzed only the manifest contents of the health stories and the latent themes embedded in text. There is a need to conduct inquiries beyond the manifest content of news stories. This also raises the issue of whether lack of specialization of health messages can be implied by just analyzing the manifest content of the news stories rather than latent content.

Secondly, whilst the study by Yankah (1994) indicates that the lack of specialization is due to lack of formal training in the area of health reporting in journalism, Obeng-Quaidoo (1988) asserts that the lack of specialization is due to the lack of self-motivation on the part of journalists. He opined that “specialization” is not
taught in any “African journalism school” (p 97). It takes a responsible journalist to “self-educate himself/herself” (p. 97) on issues that require special knowledge. The apparent inconsistency here arises because neither study asked the journalists about the challenges that they face in reporting health news and how they should be addressed.

The literature also discusses the media coverage of health issues from the perspective of media practitioners. None of the studies reported in the literature probed the part played by officials responsible for implementing health policy to ascertain their role in the coverage of health news in the newspapers. This is important especially when some of the studies have attributed the lack of adequate coverage to the communication gap that exists between the media professionals and the health policy making partners.

Finally, as stated earlier, ideology has become central to news production. The media may sometimes frame an issue to confirm, identify, or reinforce a particular ideology. In terms of journalistic ideology, media reports may just be following the established routines of news production in the society. It is important to assert through research whether health news coverage in Africa is the outcome of the strict adherence to journalistic ideology or other already stated inadequacies. This has not been addressed by the literature.

It is evident that there are some gaps and inconsistencies in the literature that have not been addressed by earlier studies. This study aims to fill these gaps and inconsistencies in the literature by studying how newspapers in Ghana framed the National Health Insurance Scheme.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were used to obtain and analyze the research data. The research investigates media attitude and representations on the adoption of a major public health policy in Ghana. To undertake this study it is important to iterate the research questions that were asked in chapter one and show how this study, using the data obtained from the field, intends to answer the questions. Four major research questions were asked:

RQ1: How did the media represent or frame the NHIS stories?
   a) What were the dominant frames through which the NHIS stories were narrated?
   b) What was the degree of prominence given to the NHIS stories in terms of the location of the stories?
   c) What news sources did the newspapers use for the presentation of the NHIS news stories?

RQ2: What are the views of media professionals toward the representation of NHIS news stories in newspapers?

RQ3: Did the NHIS coverage function as stories resonating official discourse on health issues?

RQ4: Does the coverage of the NHIS stories indicate new trends in editorial policy on newspapers’ coverage of health issues in Africa?

To address these questions, Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) of news stories from four major Ghanaian newspapers that focused on the National Health Insurance Scheme was conducted. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected
media practitioners from two state-owned media houses and public affairs managers from the offices Ministry of Health and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS).

Specifically, two major sources of data collection for the study were, 1) news stories on the National Health Insurance Scheme from four leading Ghanaian newspapers, and 2) interviews with: a) two leading journalists who have specialized in reporting on health issues, and a news editor from one of the media houses that covered the NHIS stories; b) a senior policy advisor on the NHIS at the Public Affairs section of the Ministry of Health; c) the Public Affairs manager at office of the National Health Insurance Scheme; and, d) a Public relations officer at the district operational level of the NHIS.

The first phase of data collection was conducted during an exploratory study from July- August 2006. During this period the researcher collected hardcopies of news stories from the libraries and archives of *Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times*. In undertaking this exploratory study, stories that appeared in the two leading newspapers from January 2004 to June 2006 were selected. The second phase of data collection was conducted in eight weeks from March to April 2008. At this latter phase, more news stories were obtained for the period of study that had been extended to span January 2005 to December 2007.

The coding instrument, coding protocol and operational definitions that provide explanation for the various issues, categories, themes, and frames that were used to analyze the data are provided in this chapter. Also included in this chapter is the interview schedule that was used for the two categories of media professionals. All the
research tools, including the tape recorder used in the interviews, the coding instruments and protocol and other procedures used in obtaining data are discussed.

**Research design**

The design for this study integrates a quantitative and qualitative approach (Altheide, 1996; Barbie, 1994; Creswell, 1994). The integration of the two methods of inquiry has been seen as an appropriate tool by several scholars (Blankson, 2000; Pickle, et al., 2002; Rudestam & Newton, 1992; Valeda, 2002). Content analysis using ethnographic approach was used for this study. The use of content analysis is based on an inductive and reflexive approach. The ethnographic approach was useful because this research utilizes and incorporates both numerical and narrative data analysis inquiry (Altheidei, 1996; Pickle et al., 2002).

Content analysis is an important tool in *framing* theory (Valeda, 2002) because framing is presentational and interpretative (Entman, 1993; Schneck-Hamlin, Procter, and Rumsey, 2000); it projects cognitive patterns of dominant event or object (Gitlin, 1980); and, it involves categorization of ideas into interpretive forms that are consonant with dominant meanings and culturally-based socially constructed ideas (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Norris, 1985; Valeda, 2000). These are concepts that are also applicable to this investigation. The news stories that are the subject of this study are subjected to presentational and interpretive analysis using *news frame* concept. Again, the study delineates the news stories into categories or themes to bring out the dominant but cognitive themes that are used by the media in their coverage. According to Kirppendorf (1980), content analysis is a useful tool when it comes to the examination of recorded communication texts, especially where the meaning of the messages is embedded in the
text itself. This assertion is particularly important for this study as the research is more interested in the embedded socially constructed meaning in the news stories and not just superficial content. For Holstsi (1969) where the description of the attributes of the contents can adequately answer the research question, content analysis is the appropriate tool. In this research the operational definitions that are central to the use of content analysis technique are triangulated with other methods to provide adequate answers and explanations for the research questions.

In any study on news stories, content analysis enables the researcher to code for definitions in order to identify particular frames. Asante (1996) used content analysis because he found it as useful method to investigate how the media in Ghana present information to the general public. Hsia (1988) provides another important definition of content analysis. He states: “Content analysis is simply the analysis of what is said, printed, broadcast or written… It not only examines contents but infers underlying intent, motivation, orientation, and effects implicit or manifest” (p. 318).

Based on the research questions, it is clear that this researcher is interested in the “underlying intent” of the NHIS news stories, the “motivation” behind the journalists’ desire to pursue such stories, the “orientation” of the stories, and the “orientation” of journalists and public officials toward the stories. Finally, the research is also interested in “implicit or manifest” meaning of the stories from the media professionals.

It is important to note that the most basic content analysis method as a research tool is the Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA). According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) in content analysis, the researcher creates categories in order to study the contents of the communicative text. This method is based on a positivistic approach towards
inquiry that aims at achieving objectivity. The major aim is to measure the meaning of communication messages by examining their frequency and degree of appearances of concepts in texts. These concepts then translate the appearances into meaningful symbols as the rationale for the content of that communicative event (Altheidi, 1996). QCA also assumes that audiences have common traits in their reception of the message because they receive such messages much the same way (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005). More importantly, QCA normally operates to confirm or nullify hypothesized relationships and does not usually gravitate towards the discovery of new meanings and patterns in the text. In inquiries on communication texts, QCA allows large amounts of data that are highly unstructured to be codified into thematic categories as manageable information that can be processed (Valeda, 2000).

In this inquiry, Ethnographic Content Analysis ECA as espoused by Altheide (1996) emerged as the best method of investigation. The method uses both qualitative and quantitative data. However, the major method of inquiry is based on the principle of qualitative data collection and analysis of document. Like ethnographic research, meaning derived from messages is seen in the style and nuances of the communication text itself. ECA sometimes involves the use of predetermined categories and variables that prevail in Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA). However, ethnographic methods enable other variables, patterns and themes to emerge throughout the investigation so that the researcher positions himself/herself towards “constant discovery and constant comparisons of relevant situations” (Altheidi, 1996 p.16). According to Altheidi:

ECA involves focusing on and collecting numerical and narrative data rather than following the positivist convention of QCA of forcing the former into predefined
categories of the latter… The emphasis is on simultaneously obtaining categorical and
unique data for every case studied …to develop analytical constructs appropriate to
several investigations (p.17)

The contention is that although the news items are counted and classified into
pre-determined categories, the emergence of new themes and categories become another
goal of the study. In addition to discovering new emergent patterns of categorization, a
good descriptive and analytical account of the narrative becomes important to the goal of
the study. The emphasis is on how to capture definitions and meanings of the narrative. It
relies more on the text, narrative, and descriptive symbols as embedded in the
communicative event. In using the ECA approach as to evaluate news stories, items can
be listed numerically in frequencies as in any quantitative study, but the numeracy and
frequencies only become relevant to supplement the analysis, interpretation, and
understanding of data collected from other sources, such as interviews.

Why the Print Media

The choice of newspapers as the media channel to be studied was based on
several factors. First, as indicated by Valeda (2002), the researcher acknowledges that
newspapers are of practical and substantive value in research on framing. Secondly, as
stated by Nelkin (1991), compared to television and radio, the print media are major
sources of health news for which policy makers and health care advocates and lobbyists
resort to as evidential documents to push their agenda. He also adds that “television
mainly conveys images often through fictionalized accounts” but policy makers and the
general population are more likely to be influenced by the print media than any other
form of media. In addition, Pratt et al. (2002) state that, even though print media have
not been taken as an important information source for health messages in Africa because of the high illiterate population (Njau & Radeny, 1995), key players such as NGOs, opinion leaders, and public policy makers tend to rely on the print media rather than television or radio broadcasts for credible information. Third, other researchers such as Iyenger (1991) and Zaller, (1992), assert that when the general population does not hold strong and stable opinion about the adoption of a health policy because they have no personal experiences with it, they are more likely to be influenced by the press in making decisions towards the acceptance and adoption of that policy. Fourth, as already stated, among the constituents of the mass media landscape, newspapers command central role in the social discourses of ordinary Ghanaians (Hasty 2005). Again, in a developing country like Ghana where television is a luxurious commodity, radio and newspapers are the major sources of news information for the public. Newspapers and radio are also more easily available than other forms of media (Valeda, 2002; Stempel, 1991).

Another important issue is the proliferation of radio stations that have facilitated general public interest in newspaper content in Ghana. Every morning, most radio television stations read the major headlines of newspapers to their audiences. They also discuss some of the salient issues with these listeners. In such situations audiences who desire to follow-up on any news story have a easier access to the hardcopy of the newspapers than to obtain radio transcripts. Archival retrieval of newspaper stories is more accessible than broadcast media. To the above, it must be added that the only news media in Ghana that have given adequate coverage to the National Health Insurance Scheme is the print media.
Choice of Newspapers

From the population of newspapers in Ghana data was collected from four newspapers that have national circulation and have adequately covered the NHIS stories. The newspaper sources include, *The Ghanaian Times*, the *Daily Graphic*, *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, and the *Daily Guide*. *The Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic* are state-owned newspapers with the largest circulation. *The Ghanaian Chronicle* and the *Daily Guide* are the largest circulating private-owned newspapers. In terms of orientation, historical background, and character, *The Ghanaian Times* and *The Daily Graphic* are seen as national newspapers whose readership cuts across the whole country (Asante, 1996; Blay Amihere, 1996). The two private newspapers also traverse the entire country.

The two state-owned newspapers are the leading newspapers in the country with a daily circulation of over 200,000 for *Daily Graphic* and 150,000 for *Ghanaian Times*. Again, they are the only newspapers that do extensively cover all social, political, and cultural issues that frame the dynamics of national political economy. If a news story that deals with a health or social issue is to make any impact on the general public, it is likely to appear in one or all of these newspapers. Again, because of their national orientation, these four newspapers are more likely to cover stories that originate from various parts of the country, especially when the stories are relevant to the local and national agenda.

According to Pratt et al. (2002), newspapers can also be selected based on their long-standing popularity in the publishing history of a country and the four newspapers, especially the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*, since independence, have

---

consistently published and become useful for research and longitudinal analyses (Asante, 1996; Boafo, 1985; Domfeh 1999; Rockson, 1990; Yankah, 1994).

The four newspapers are not compared with one another on the contents of news stories. Each newspaper is analyzed independently. However, comparisons are used in terms of the quantum of reportage on the table of analysis. As stated earlier, during the first phase of the exploratory study done in summer 2006, the researcher personally procured hard copies of some of the news stories from the library/archival sections of the media houses. The collection of data during the second phase was also facilitated by the network the researcher established during the exploratory study. In the case of the other two private media houses, *The Chronicle’s* and the *Daily Guide’s* collections of news stories proved elusive almost to the point of nearly excluding them from the study. Despite this setback, the problem of collecting copies of the stories from the two newspapers was later solved. The situation changed during a visit to the premises of *The Ghanaian Times* where after listening to my story, the librarian relieved me of the heavy burden of having to exclude *The Chronicle* and the *Daily Guide* from my investigations. He indicated to me that the *Ghanaian Times* house also kept copies of the news stories from the private media in the library. Furthermore, like their normal system of storing stories in hard copies according to topics or subjects, most of the stories for the other media houses had also been kept in folders and files according to themes, issues or subjects of coverage. This meant some stories from the *The Chronicle* and the *Daily Guide* on the NHIS had already been archived in that category, easing access to a host of data. The National Secretariat of the National Health Insurance Scheme also archived news stories that relate to their operations in the Public Affairs section. During the
interview with the Public Affairs officer I, again, indicated the same frustration encountered at the two private media houses. The officer in-charge responded that they kept copies of NHIS news stories in their library and gave me access to all the selected articles. Fortunately, most of the stories that were collected from this library had already been accessed from the library of *The Ghanaian Times*.

It must be noted that this investigation is also interested in which newspapers reported on the NHIS and how the reports were constructed. Since readers do not seek information from a single newspaper source, broadening the sample newspapers to include both state-owned and private-owned provided validity to the research. Each of the four newspapers has its own journalistic approach and narrative culture. They also have their individual ideological orientation that normally dictates their narrative and editorial style. The two state-owned newspapers are seen as mouth-pieces of the government so they regularly emphasize politics, governance, and policy directions of the state in their reports. On the other hand the private press “has tended to emphasize personalities over policy” (Hasty, 2005, p. 94).

The Ghanaian Times

The first newspaper in my study was established in 1958 by the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, to propagate his personal political agenda and the ideology of his Convention People’s Party (CPP). Originally known as the *Guinea Times*, the paper put its first publication on the stand on March 3, 1958. This initial production was published by the Guineas Press, a printing house established by the first president for his political party. As a paper born out of a political party in power, *The Ghanaian Times* became an ideological organ of the CPP government. Its editorial policy emerged to
protect and defend the CPP government and Nkrumah’s leadership (Asante, 1996; Yankah, 1994). In this regard, the newspaper imagined the state as the hub around which all development and material needs of the citizens should be directed. The paper professed a strong interest in the nation-state and articulated national integration, economic interest, and social development as needs that can only be bestowed by the state. After Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966, the Guinea Press was transferred to the new government as a state property, a condition that was reinforced in 1971 when, through an instrument of incorporation (Act 363, 1971), the New Times Corporation was established to take over the publication of the paper.

The *Ghanaian Times* is a government-subvented organization which implies the major portion of the paper’s budgetary needs, including the payment of salaries of all its journalists and staff as well as the provision of logistical support, come central government. This has allowed the government to have a certain level of control over the paper’s operations. Since its designation as a state-owned newspaper, *The Ghanaian Times* has not been able to shed its image of functioning as mouth-pieces of the ruling government. Instead of the usual adversarial relationship that normally exists between the media and the political authorities (Agbese 2006; Boafo 1985; Bourgault, 1995), the *Ghanaian Times* has continued to forge a healthy and dependable working relationship with all the different regimes of the country.

In addition to *The Ghanaian Times*, other newspapers published by the New Times Corporation include *The Spectator*, a weekly newspaper, *The Sporting Times*, a newspaper devoted to the coverage of sporting activities, and *The Evening News*, a daily afternoon newspaper. However, of the three newspapers *The Ghanaian Times* has come
to symbolize the newspaper production efforts of News Times Corporation. It is currently the second largest newspaper in circulation in Ghana with a daily circulation. Its core of 150,000 represents about 35% of the daily newspaper market share in the country.\textsuperscript{10}

\textit{The Ghanaian Times} is a 32-page paper. Its layout includes General News (pages 2, 11, 14 and 21), Editorial and op-ed (page 4), Africa News (page 5), World News (page 6-7) Feature-page (8-9), Politics-pages (12-13), Regional News (pages 22-25), Business (page 26) and, Sports (pages 28-32). The paper does not circulate on Sundays. All the other pages are devoted to advertisements. To ensure wider circulation and distribution of the newspaper, regional news editors are posted to all the regional capitals in the country. The aim is to ensure that news stories are effectively gathered from every corner of the country and circulation reaches the remotest parts of each region.

\textbf{The Daily Graphic}

This paper was one of the foremost newspapers established in 1953 in Ghana, then called Gold Coast, by the Mirror Group. It was headquartered in the United Kingdom. It was the first modern newspaper that appeared on the newsstands in Ghana and showed keen interest in the political and social issues in the country. However, Barton (1979), and Hachten (1971), (as cited in Asante 1996) indicate that in 1963 the paper was sold to the government and joined other newspapers as state-owned press. The editorial independence forged by the \textit{Daily Graphic}, especially before it was transferred to the state allowed it to gain wider readership across the country. Hasty (2005) says that “Although both papers [\textit{The Daily Graphic}, and \textit{The Ghanaian Times}] are dominated by

official rhetoric, Graphic is the obvious choice for the sophisticated task of transforming state rhetoric into cosmopolitan and seemingly neutral version of everyday reality” (p. 169).

Since its first publication, the Daily Graphic has gradually acquired reputation as a paper capable of asserting its independence from any form of control from the government. It has since become the most widely read newspaper in Ghana. The paper’s choice of independent and assertive editorial policies led to several instances of government interference. It has seen more changes at the editorial news desk than any other newspaper in Ghana. The desire to maintain editorial independence meant that it was sometimes critical of the government, a position that has generally being known to be an affront to African politicians and political leaders. Despite a few hiccups, it has continued to maintain its reputation as the most economically viable newspaper in the country.

The Daily Graphic is published six days in a week, with an average daily circulation of about 200,000. This represents about 45% of the daily newspaper circulation in Ghana. Most of the circulation market is in the regional capitals and other urban centers. Like The Ghanaian Times, the paper does not circulate on Sundays. The Daily Graphic has news editors and correspondents in all the regional capitals from where news stories from all over the country are sent to the headquarters in Accra for daily news production. It is a 48-page paper with a layout that include World News (page 2), Inside Africa (page 5), editorial and features/ op-ed articles (page 4), Education (page 11), Politics (pages15-19), Regional News (page 21), Metro News (page 29 -31), Business (page 33), Classified and Funeral Announcements (page 42-43), and Sports
The Chronicle

*The Chronicle* was established in 1990 as a private newspaper whose sole aim was to deconstruct the narratives of the state owned-media. *The Chronicle* began its publication as a weekly newspaper but has gradually commanded enough readership and audience over the last few years to become a daily. It is a 16-page paper that publishes five days a week (Monday through Friday) with political themes as the dominant headline stories. Its layout includes, Politics (pages 2-4, 8-9, 12 and 15), editorial and op-ed (page, 5), Regional News-(page 6), Business (page10) Foreign News (page 11), and Sports (page 14). All the other pages are devoted to advertisements. *The Chronicle* is one of the best selling private newspapers in the country with offices spread across all ten regions. According to AMDI’s (2006) country report on Ghana, the paper currently has a daily circulation of over 40,000. Even though it runs news stories on other social affairs, its popularity and prominence among the media landscape in Ghana is fixated on political innuendo and captivating headlines that normally appropriate oppositional grievances as the frame for its editorial agenda.
The Daily Guide

The *Daily Guide* was established in the mid-1990s as a private weekly newspaper with a political agenda. Its main stories, like that of *The Chronicle*, center on articulating the grievances of political oppositional groups. The paper specializes in political headlines, commentaries, and features discussing political scandals, whether in the form of factual reality or speculation. In recent years the *Daily Guide* has transformed into a credible newspaper whose coverage of news stories transcends politics. The AMDI (2004) report on Ghana cites the *Daily Guide* as the private daily newspaper with the second highest circulation in Ghana. The paper publishes from Monday through Saturday and has an average daily circulation of about 40,000. It has a weekend edition called the *Weekend Chronicle*. Readership is nationwide but centered more in the regional capitals and other urban centers. It has offices in all ten administrative regions with news correspondents regularly on the move to source stories. The paper that began as an 8-page weekly publication is now a 16-page daily that devotes some of its pages to cover news stories on Business, Entertainment, Sports, Science and Environment, Life & Styles, World News, and Features. With the exception of its editorial and op-ed features that appear regularly on page 4, the paper does not have any defined presentational layout. News stories appear on particular pages not because of thematic significance but rather for political significance and whether space can be created for the story. On average, about half of its entire pages are always devoted to politics.

All four newspapers have online versions of their news stories on the World Wide Web. However, for the academic researcher, retrieval of archival stories
from the archival sections of the entire selected newspapers yields poor or no good results. *The Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Guide* have no online archival section.

**Unit of Analysis**

The study investigated news stories, editorials, and features that were connected to the NHIS. In this regard the unit of analysis is the newspaper article. A news article is defined to include any news story, editorial, feature, or letter to the editor that narrate or discuss the NHIS. For the purposes of this study all such articles, features, editorials, and letters to the editor or news stories are referred simply referred to as *new stories*. Once a news story’s headline, notwithstanding its length, indicated a connection with the NHIS, it was selected as part of the study. The search for the stories were based on the keywords *National Health Insurance Scheme* or the acronym NHIS. Again, if a headline suggested any connectivity or bearing with the NHIS, all issues and themes embedded in that story were investigated. However, if a news story was just a descriptive narrative of a visual representation on NHIS issue such as a photograph in the newspaper, it was not sampled for study. All the searches were done manually by accessing the hard copies of the various newspapers.

The study investigated the entire universe of articles that appeared in the newspaper for the period of study. This sampling procedure was chosen for several reasons. First, news stories on health, unlike other issues such as politics and sports, are few and many of the health news stories only get coverage as and when editors deem it necessary. In most cases, as evidenced in the data collected for this study, health related news stories get published if they bear on another major issue such as politics. Second, even though data were collected from daily newspapers, the NHIS stories did not fall
within any pattern of publication from which systematic, purposive, cluster, or quota sampling could have been properly utilized. For example, there may be more stories in a particular day or week of publication and none for entire months. Third, the archives of two of the media houses could not be accessed directly either manually or electronically and the researcher had to rely on the other media houses to collect the data for those two media houses. As a result, the study used the availability sampling method (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, p. 199) and collected “the entire universe of articles” available for the period of study (Valeda, 2000, p. 147).

In all, 279 news articles were selected for the study. The breakdown is as follows: Daily Graphic, 103; The Ghanaian Times, 125; Daily Guide, 26; and The Ghanaian Chronicle, 25.

Period of Study

News stories taken from these newspapers were sampled from January 2005 to December 2007. First, the year 2005 was chosen as the base year because the research assumed that, by allowing almost 10 months to elapse between the period of official commencement of the policy (February, 2004) and the study period all the material, practical, and theoretical issues pertaining to NHIS would, by that timeline, have been unearthed for public discussions in the media. December 2007 was chosen as the cut-off point because the study assumed that three years into the launch of the NHIS all operational issues should, by then, have been addressed for smooth implementation and adoption of the scheme by the public. Second, it is also assumed that the media by then should have been sensitized enough on all issues relating to the scheme for easy reportage to promote public understanding. Third, the public, by the same time lapse, should have
had enough time to understand the dynamics of the scheme in order to adopt or access it. The time frame of three years (January 2005-December 2007) was chosen because, unlike other news stories on politics, sports, crime, entertainment, and education, news stories on health are rather scanty and do not feature frequently in the media (Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988). By expanding the time frame enough data was collected for the study.

Data collection

As indicated earlier, the researcher used ethnographic content analysis for the study because it is one method that can be used to explore the latent meanings of a document (Altheidi, 1996; Bertrand & Hughes, 2005) to elicit an understanding of how particular contents appear and function in that text (Hall, 1975, 1990). Again, textual analysis is an interpretative method that allows the researcher to take all aspects of the form and content of the text into meaning. With this analytical method the text is seen an exemplar of a phenomenon that lies within the circuit of culture. Although the text is the object of empirical study it must be seen a product of the “social milieu, it is itself laden with social and political-economic signs” (Roushanzamir & Raman, 1999, p. 703) and it is from this perspective that latent and discursive strategies embedded within the text emerge. In this instance both the deeper meaning and content of the news stories were examined.

Two major techniques of data collection were used. These were the collection of newspaper articles from selected newspapers and interviews with selected media professionals and public officials from the Ministry of Health and the Secretariat of the National Health Insurance Scheme. Following the works of Feldstein and Acosta-Alzuru (2003) and Gavrilos (2002), the study went through several steps for data collection.
From July -August 2006, I conducted an exploratory study in Ghana on the subject under inquiry. This was after I had undertaken extensive online searches from the various sites of most of the newspapers sampled for the study as well as from other academic databases including Lexis-Nexis. All such searches yielded very poor or no results.

While in Ghana I inquired from the two offices of the two major newspapers, the Daily Graphic and the Ghanaian Times, and also from two institutions of higher learning, University of Ghana, Accra, and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, whether some form of electronic versions of all the stories relating to the NHIS could be easily accessed for the study. The first visits were to offices of the two state-owned media houses.

During the preliminary inquiry at the premises of the Daily Graphic information gathered from the news editor indicated that such archival versions of news stories were only stored for up to four weeks. Any references to news stories for past records of longer periods could, nevertheless, be obtained in hard copy from their library. At the library, I accessed a wide collection of newspaper clippings that had been filed and archived under various subjects including politics, business, health, entertainment, sports and others. The archival materials relating to health were examined and it was discovered that, as of August 2006, enough data could be obtained to conduct the study on the NHIS from the Daily Graphic’s perspective. The researcher later visited the library and, for a fee, made photocopies of the sampled data (news stories) for the exploratory study.

The preliminary inquiry at The Ghanaian Times was similar to that of the Daily Graphic. Electronic archival version was not available. The investigator was directed to
the newspaper’s library where the archival section for the health issues seemed better organized than at the library of the *Daily Graphic*. At *The Ghanaian Times*, clippings of the news stories had been categorized into sub-topics. The NHIS stories were easily set apart in different folder from the other health stories. I used the opportunity to collect all the news stories that related to the NHIS from 2005 to August 2006. Photocopies of the sample stories were made for a fee.

Even though from what was gathered at the offices of the two national dailies, it was clear that I could get access to enough data for the study from the two premises, I nevertheless visited the libraries of the two tertiary institutions to find out whether more flexible and easily accessible form of data storage for the area of inquiry existed. Unfortunately, at the libraries of both institutions it was indicated that no electronic versions of the issues under investigations existed. Newspapers for the entire media house had been archived in a remarkably easily retrievable manner. However, they had been archived in single and bundled units according to the dates of publication and not according to subject categories as archived at the *Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times*. I reckoned that data collection from these fields would be quite exacting, strenuous, and time consuming. I was working within a time frame and these two fields did not present themselves as workable arenas for data collection. By the end of the exploratory study, I had identified the two media houses as the fields where data for the inquiry would be collected.

Having been assured that enough data could be collected from the two major media houses for the study, I continued the inquiry with the preliminary data collected and came to the conclusion that even though the two leading newspapers have the widest
readership and highest circulation, a comprehensive understanding of newspaper
coverage of the NHIS cannot be limited to only state-owned media. Another issue was
that limiting the study to the two state-owned media would not portray the diverse
viewpoints that discussed the NHIS from the private owned newspapers. The scope of
study was therefore widened to include the two other private-owned independent

From March 2008-April 2008, final data collection was undertaken from the four
media houses in Ghana. The period of study was set from January 2005 to December
2009. Hard copies of the news stories were collected. The exploratory study conducted
in 2006 facilitated easy collection of data from the libraries of the *Daily Graphic* and *The
Ghanaian Times*. The researcher encountered the same staff who were of immense
assistance during the exploratory study. However, data collection from the other two
media houses proved difficult. During the period of the field work in 2008, I could not
get access to the libraries of the private newspapers. However, some data from the two
houses were collected from the library of *The Ghanaian Times* and the National
Secretariat of the National Health Insurance Scheme. Since the data for the *Daily Guide*
and *The Ghanaian Chronicle* were obtained by “proxy” the researcher could not ascertain
the exhaustiveness of the news stories for the period under study since they did not
emanate from the archives of the media houses in question nor were they obtained
electronically. At the next stage of the research process, the categories were developed
and coding was done based on the established categories. The process of categorization
and coding follows.
First, I engaged the text by doing multiple readings of every news story sampled to gain a general understanding of the contents. Descriptive notes were taken at every stage. Second, the study conducted a close reading of the text in a more detailed manner to identify the “discursive strategies” (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005; Fedlstein & Acosta-Alzuru, 2003: p.159; Glasgow Media Group, 1980) that lay within. During this stage the researcher identified the recurrent issues or topics that come up in the coverage and the various themes that emerged were put into categories. Third, the researcher later categorized these issues on thematic basis by assigning names and labels to them. These categories were then quantified into frequency distribution tables from which analysis were made. As typical of ethnographic content analysis the study was not limited to the existence of established dominant thematic frames in the news story (Smith & Wakefield, 2005), nor did it wholly depend on the existence of predetermined categories identified in past research.

Fourth, in line with Sanders’ (2000) assertion that, “to understand the media employment of standardized…representations, the reader needs to engage in active interpretations,” I went over the stories taking cognizance of the thematic categories. Further, I engaged the texts to procure a deeper interpretation of the themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) by “looking for how they were related…, [and the] finer distinctions and or broader connections between them” (Gavrilos, 2003: 434). This led to deeper interpretations of each selected news stories to determine latent cultural meanings and significance embodied in the text. Through this process the researcher took the analysis of the news stories beyond its manifest meaning. The analysis was in-depth, more culturally situated, and profoundly contextual. Latent analysis of any text means that
meanings of symbols embodied in the communicative text remain open to interpretation because such interpretation depends on the individual researcher’s definition given to the text (Riffe et al., 1998). However, in doing this I was very reflexive regularly, my role in the research process. All readings, interpretations, and findings were noted in an analysis sheet. Last, the researcher conducted an analysis and interpretation of the stories conscious of how these could be done in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

Coding instruments

Any news story, editorial, and letters to the editor relating to the NHIS that appeared in the selected newspapers during the period of study -January 2005-December 2007- was included in the sample and coded according to the themes and categories developed for the coding scheme (see appendix 1). After close readings of at least a quarter of the sampled stories had been done, content categories were developed based on the interpretations, themes and possible frames that emerged in each article or news story (Pickle, Quinn, & Brown, 2002). Ethnographic qualitative analysis allows researchers to free themselves from predetermined measurable categories so that other themes and descriptions are allowed to emerge to define themselves (Altheidi, 1996). In this instance some categories like politics, community and development, business, and social apathy (disenchantment) were developed based on established categories (Asante 1996), whilst the other categories including corruption, core NHIS issues, and health emerged from the text after the close readings had been done. It must be noted that some of the themes and categories were intertwined. The coding for the categories were, therefore, not mutually exclusive. The construction of the data collection protocol provided both narrative and
numeric descriptions. The narrative part of the study allowed the researcher to incorporate new observations that emerged into the general framework of data finding and interpretation. This research also established categories guided by the literature review on how the media frames health stories. The preliminary studies conducted had shown that emergent frames used by the media to report on the NHIS included politics, social apathy, corruption, and logistical constraints. Apart from themes that emanated from the literature review, other thematic categories also emerged after the entire data had been collected and analyzed.

Two graduate students in sociology and African studies from Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, were trained as independent coders to code articles based on the generated coding scheme. The coding was based on the coding protocol established by the researcher (see appendix 2). The inter-coder reliability was 90%. It must be noted, however, that this research is dominantly qualitative and therefore no statistical measures were developed to test the significance of the results. Frequencies, percentages and tables generated were used to enhance the interpretations and analysis of the data collected. Their relevance was more of qualitative value and helped to ground the discussions and interpretations on the research. The coding protocol was designed to help categorize the data into themes and frames to facilitate the quantitative interpretations of the data. The each theme that was identified under a news frame in the news article was counted as a thematic space. A thematic space is operationally defined as a space in the NHIS news article such as a sentence(s), paragraph(s), or portion(s) of the article devoted to the discussion of a particular theme or categorized news frame. Each thematic space in a news article is isolated and counted as independent unit. In all, 778 cumulative thematic
spaces were isolated coded and analyzed. In doing coding and putting the various issues into categories, it must be clarifies that some of the themes overlapped and were as such not mutually exclusive. However, it must be noted that like all ethnographic content analyses, the emphasis of this project was more on the deeper polysemic meanings of the text and not on the manifest contents from which these thematic categories and spaces were developed. The most important research outcome is the study’s validity and not its reliability (Althheidi, 1996; Riffe et al. 1998; Valeda, 2000)

Location of article

The study investigated the location of the news stories as a determinant of its importance to the editorial board and the reading public. Stories of importance normally fill the front pages of newspapers while others are presented inside the paper. Front stories have a high level of significance both for editors and the general public. Here the quantitative aspect of the data becomes important in discussing how many stories on salient basis seemed important to news editors, and how often such stories were featured on the front page as part of the media agenda. The quantification of this aspect of the data was just labeled as “front page” and “inside”.

Frames and categories

The coverage of NHIS stories are supposed to be entirely on issues that relate to the policy and the general attitude of the public toward it. However, in the construction of the NHIS stories newspapers normally link the policy to other social issues to make the broader NHIS story relevant to the general public. The focus may be on the NHIS but other issues become salient or embedded in the story. These stories may have some cultural significance for the coverage and reading public. NHIS stories are meant to
generate discussion among the general public so newspapers normally evoke cultural parameters upon which such discussions can be moderated. These cultural parameters are also designated as frames. According to Altheidi (1996), “Frames are the focus, a parameter or boundary for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed” (1996, p. 31). For example, an issue like politics has become a very dominant frame for social issues.

The data obtained for this study were coded into 7 news frames and 26 sub-topic categories. All the 26 sub-topic categories have been grouped under the 7 different news frames. The following are the frames and their clustered sub-categories:

- Politics: politicization of NHIS, policy directives, political party issues
- Community & Development: Commission of projects, festivals & durbars
- Corruption: Abuse of NHIS, fraud, embezzlement, over reimbursement
- Social Apathy/Disenchantment: Poverty, poor patronage, ignorance, discrimination against NHIS card holders
- Core NHIS issues: payment of premium, registration of members, drug list, and disease coverage
- Health: Health care, provision of health facilities, lack of health professionals, hospitals attendance
- Business: inadequate logistics, mismanagement, lack of motivation for NHIS staff, huge payment of claims, court action, and poor patronage

Operational Definitions for News Frames:
All seven frames that emerged from the close reading were operationally defined to facilitate the coding process. The definitions are as follows:

Politics: These include news stories that are framed around politicians, policy makers and other NHIS issues that have political undertones. This means that the stories are reported from the point of view of a person who wields some form of political power or leadership in the society and therefore has an authoritative voice on social issues or the NHIS. Such a person may also be a public official who wields some authoritative voice in government and on public policy issues. The themes and expressions that define this frame include *politicalization of NHIS, policy directives from government*, and *political party issues* that are linked to NHIS.

Community & Development: These are news stories on NHIS that go beyond the NHIS policy to include other community development issues. The news stories are normally sourced from community gatherings and the NHIS subject becomes just a hub for community stories. The narratives center round community involvement and community leaders, including chiefs, municipal/district chief executives, and other local opinion leaders. Themes and expressions that define this frame include *commissioning of projects, festivals and durbars, district chief executives, chiefs etc.*

Corruption: News stories that frame the coverage on actual or perceived corrupt acts that have the tendency to undermine the scheme. Themes and expressions that describe this frame include *abuse of NHIS, fraud, embezzlement, over-reimbursement etc.*

Social Apathy: These include news stories that deal with issues of ignorance, apathy towards the policy, and disenchantment with the scheme and policy makers. The stories
are framed round social and public apathy toward the scheme to the extent that people
have generally failed to embrace the scheme. Such apathetic attitude includes failure to
register or total lack of knowledge about the scheme. Themes and expressions that
capture this category include poverty, poor patronage, ignorance, discrimination against
NHIS card holder etc.

Core NHIS issues: These are news stories that dwell extensively on the NHIS policy. The
stories include educational campaigns and NGOs or interest group activities that aim to
explain the policy. The stories become more educative because they are framed on issues
that pertain to the core elements and benefits under NHIS policy. Themes and
expressions that describe the core issues narratives include payment of premium,
registration of members, drug list, disease coverage, NGOs & interest groups, workshops
& conferences, reimbursement etc.

Health: These include news stories on the NHIS policy with advocacy on the general
health concerns in the country. The coverage generally aims at orienting people toward
improved health. Themes and expressions that describe this frame include health care,
provision of health facilities, lack of health professionals, hospital attendance etc.

Business: These include new stories that focus on the major challenges that confront the
scheme and the degree to which challenges such as issues of management impact the
scheme’s sustainability. Themes and expressions that capture this category include,
inadequate logistics, (mis)management, lack of motivation for NHIS staff, over-
reimbursement, and poor patronage.
Sources

The news articles were also coded for sources. Media personnel tend to source their stories from particular authorities as a way of lending legitimacy and credibility to their news stories (Croteau & Hoynes, 1992). In many cases what has developed into a journalistic norm is that stories sourced from the government, policy makers and politicians are seen as more legitimate and credible than news from independent and anonymous sources (Allan, 2005; Bourgault, 1995; Hasty, 2005; Tumbler, 1999). Again, in line with the review of literature in chapter 2 of this study, journalistic ideology sometimes emerges from the narrative pattern of the newspaper as do the sources from which the stories emanate. In this study, news articles were coded to account for sources cited. The quantitative provision for sources facilitated the discussion on the theoretical assumption that Ghanaian journalists reproduce official discourse in news stories. The following are the definitions and description of the sources cited in relation to the NHIS stories:

Government officials/politicians: Sources that come from the government or its agents. These sources have affiliations with the central government and, as such, they have the capacity to make pronouncements that have implications for the NHIS policy. Such sources include the office of the presidency, ministers of state, political institutions such as parliament and members of parliament, municipal and district chief executives, government appointees, and heads of government agencies.

NHIS officials/Health officials: These are sources that emanate from the offices of those charged with the day to management and operations of the scheme. They also include health professionals who provide services to the public under the NHIS policy.
Wire Services: These comprise news organizations that supply news to journalists and the media houses in the country. In this study, the only news agency that falls under this category is the Ghana News Agency (GNA).

Other: These sources include stories that are from individuals, NGOs, religious organizations and other interest groups who represent special interests. It also includes anonymous sources whose identity and affiliation remain unknown or is intentionally attributed to by the news story as ‘anonymous’.

Interviews

The interview part of the data collection is another qualitative aspect of the study. This part of the study was very important for several reasons. Sole reliance on the inductive and interpretive analysis of the stories might lead to a degree of subjectivity on the part of the researcher (Altheidi, 1996; Bertrand & Hughes 2005; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Indeed, with particular reference to Ghanaian journalists and coverage on health related issues, it is important that this research does not rely solely on the newspaper stories to give a subjective interpretive analysis of the data.

According to Lidlof & Taylor (2002) interviews help us “to understand the social actors experience and perspective” (p. 173). In this study, the social actors are the media practitioners who write the stories and the public officials who operate the NHIS. In order to generate a high level of validity for the investigation, in-depth interviews were conducted with some selected members of the media houses and other public affairs officials to complement the findings that were generated from the newspaper stories. This research benefitted immensely from these informants they provided unique knowledge that was complementary to the archival work. This complementary research methodology
is also referred to as “triangulation” (Babbie, 1994; Bertrand & Hughes, 2005; Creswell, 1994; Rudestam & Newton, 1992). Bertrand and Hughes (2005) define triangulation as “the use of more (usually three) different research approaches (of data gathering, or of analysis and interpretation) to the same question” (p. 239). The interviews complemented the content and textual analysis of the data obtained. All the interviews were done face-to-face and were in-depth. The interviewees are also experts in either reporting the news stories, or the operation of the scheme.

The interview portion was also necessitated by the fact that Ghanaian journalists have been cited in past studies as lacking adequate skills and capabilities to report on health related issues. It was therefore important to find out from the journalists the basis of such assumptions and whether there have been any departures from the established pattern of reportage. Obeng Quaidoo (1988) said that,

When we come to the specialized area of health reporting, we realize that not many Ghanaians journalists have acquired knowledge in such an area of reporting on the job. This form of generalist journalism has given rise to a situation where the Ghanaian journalist innocently follows the health personnel or the government official in the locale, and reports what the personnel or official says without the necessary background or in-depth analysis of the particular health issue…most of the health analyses centre on what some official has said, not what the journalist says or has discovered through painstaking research. (p. 88)

This discursive and historicized style of reporting news stories is further emphasized by Hasty (2006) who asserts that, “contemporary Ghanaian journalists perfect and reproduce the discourse of state officials” (p. 72). It was important to find
out from the journalists whether this assumption accounted for coverage of the NHIS stories. The interview also helped clarify the media’s representation and perception on the NHIS news stories. The interview gave an insight into the transformation that is taking place in newsrooms on an emerging editorial policy on coverage of health news. In-depth interviews also gave the researcher the opportunity to learn more about the experiences and perspectives of the social actors on the phenomenon under study, in this case the NHIS. The interviews provided a very rich source of data because the information provided is first hand, presumably accurate, and reveals the world of the participants, their emotions, and thoughts about the world around them (Agbese 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Patton, 1990). The in-depth, face-to-face, and interactive approach also allowed the interviewees to gain control of the discussion in a manner that allowed them to tell their own stories in an unhindered narrative. This approach elicited substantial and fully engaged responses that adequately threw more light on the news stories. All interviews were conducted personally by the researcher and tape-recorded.

In all, six in-depth and face-to-face interviews with the individuals were conducted. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes. The structure and approach of the interviews were guided by the following questions:

1. How are the interviewees connected with NHIS in the particular newspaper?

2. How does the news story assess the performance of the journalist/ editor/ media house?

3. What is the interviewee’s position on the issue that the NHIS is perceived as a reproduction of official discourse?
4. How would the interviewees assess the extent to which particular NHI stories are likely to generate enough interest on the part of the general public to adopt it?
5. How do the interviewees see the NHIS story in relation to other health stories?
6. What level of importance does the media house or the public office attach to the coverage and appearance of an NHIS story in a particular newspaper?
7. Is there an editorial policy on how newspapers covers health related issues in the country?
8. What will determine the probability that an NHIS story will be reported in the news media?
9. Why are most NHIS stories associated with politics, and developmental projects that may not necessarily be related to health?
10. What concerns and issues do interviewees foresee as the major problems in reporting NHIS stories?
11. What recommendations will interviewees give as a better way of communicating NHIS issues to the general public?

The interviews followed an approach that was more interactive even though there were interview guide questions. To ease free flow of responses from the interviewees each interviewee was sent the questions a week ahead of the interview schedule so that they could adequately prepare themselves to respond to the entire questionnaire and all other issues that emerged. All the interviews were conducted in English.

Summary

This chapter discussed the various procedures that were used by the researcher to collect the research data. It also details the role played by the researcher in gathering the
data and the degree of engagement with the collected data. Rationales were also provided to justify why a particular step became the best option that was utilized. The various steps that are outlined in this chapter included, the general research design, why the print media instead of radio or television broadcast was chosen for the study, the choice of newspapers from the population of newspapers in Ghana, a description of each of the four newspapers sampled for the study, the period of study, the data collection processes for the newspaper articles including the location of article, frame categories and operational definitions, sources cited, the coding instruments, and, lastly, the interview that was conducted to complement data obtained from other sources.

The chapter also indicated that this research used Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) as the major technique to collect data. The application of ECA incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. However, because of the ethnographic nature of the research the qualitative technique was more dominant and the quantitative aspect was in background. The research design, therefore, incorporated numeric and narrative forms of data. The dominant qualitative aspect meant that emphasis was put on the narrative part of the study rather than the numeric aspect.

This method of analysis is appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to go beyond the superficial content of news articles into the latent content to capture definitions and deeper meanings of the narrative, the very essence of this research. Newspapers are the best medium for research because, 1) newspapers have been identified by past studies as significant tools for research on framing; 2) they are easily accessible evidential documents for political agenda, and academic research; 3) policy makers and advocacy development programs depend more on the print media for credible
information than on the broadcast media; and 4) newspapers command a central position in the social and political discourse in Ghana.

In the next two chapters the findings presented. The findings are based on the news stories collected from the four newspapers and the six interviews conducted with media professionals and public officials who operate the NHIS.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION I

Communicating NHIS through Multi-perspective Frames

This chapter and the next presents the findings and discussion of data obtained from the four newspapers, and the in-depth-interviews conducted with media professionals. The findings and discussion are the outcome of investigations conducted into how the Ghanaian newspapers framed the National Health Insurance Scheme. The results are presented in two parts. The first part, presented in this chapter, shows the outcome of the data collected from newspapers and mainly involves quantitative descriptions and analysis of the results. The second part, presented in chapter five shows the findings and discussion obtained from in-depth interviews conducted, and how they relate to the latent content of analysis of the newspapers articles on the NHIS.

In chapters two and three, one of the major arguments was that news stories are presented through particular interpretive devices through which readers make sense of the events that happen around them. These interpretive devices are called frames. Flowing from the use of frames as a communication theory, a major research question and three related sub-questions emerged for the study. They are:

RQ1: How did the media represent or frame the NHIS stories?

a) What were the dominant frames through which the NHIS stories were narrated?

b) What was the degree of prominence given to the NHIS stories in terms of the location of the stories?

c) What news sources did the newspapers use for the presentation of the NHIS news stories?
This part of the presentation and discussion of the findings responds to the above research questions. The first part shows the various frames that emerged from the narratives of the four newspapers. The frames are laid out in the form of themes and are set out quantitatively as tables and graphs followed by a detailed discussion of the results. Also included in this section is an analysis of the degree of prominence given by editors and the newspapers houses to the NHIS stories. They are presented in the form of story “location” and “news sources”. All the data are presented as very simple quantitative statistical operations that involve frequency and percentage distributions of data spread over the various themes. The degree of prominence given to particular stories is also presented in very simple quantitative terms. All the findings and the analysis of this part of the presentations are based on percentage distributions. The data is also presented using tables and bar graphs. The graphs, especially, provide visual description of the findings and capture the differences between the various parts of the data in a more pictorial and graphic outlook.

First, I present the findings and discussions for all the seven news frame categories that emerged from the study. The findings and analysis of news frames for each newspaper are undertaken with reference to the tables and figures. In other words, each frame will be discussed for all the four newspapers to ascertain the degree of dominance of a particular frame and how it was used to communicate the NHIS stories by the newspapers. Second, the tables for the four newspapers are later collapsed into one table with cumulative results for the study period to provide comparisons of how each news frame is used by the newspapers to tell the NHIS stories. The results are presented in relation to the research questions.
RQ# 1: How did the media represent or frame the National Health Insurance Scheme

A close engagement and interpretation of the text in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework brought to the fore seven news frames categories as the vehicles upon which the NHIS stories were narrated. These news frame categories include *Politics, Community & Development, Corruption, Social Apathy, Core NHIS Issues, Health,* and *Business* as depicted in Table 1.

These seven issues provide the spring board for the NHIS narratives. They are borne out of the social milieu, which, by itself consists of multiple, overlapping, and interlocking with symbolic cultural signs. Such symbolic cultural signs manifest in the form of dominant social relations begotten by a complex interplay of traditional and postmodern political and economic structures. Whilst acknowledging that the local news newspapers are thorough-bred modern postcolonial institutions, they are yet to divest themselves of their recognition as the product of the colonial state, a trend that continually shapes the functional dynamics of their production processes and outcomes. Therefore any analysis of the representations of the NHIS stories must foreground these cultural and historical facts that have become the engine that turns the wheels of the local news media in Ghana.

As part of the finding and discussions, each news frame category that emerged for the study, as displayed in Table 1, is isolated and analyzed from its framing perspective.
Table 1. Frequency Distribution of NHIS news Frames used by the Four Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Frames</th>
<th>Graphic</th>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Chronicle</th>
<th>Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.2%)</td>
<td>(13.6%)</td>
<td>(10.5%)</td>
<td>(17.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com’nity &amp; Dev’t</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.9%)</td>
<td>(5.3%)</td>
<td>(4.1%)</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.9%)</td>
<td>(7.1%)</td>
<td>(8.1%)</td>
<td>(8.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social apathy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.1%)</td>
<td>(13.1%)</td>
<td>(13.5%)</td>
<td>(4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core NHIS Issues</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(37.1%)</td>
<td>(33.7%)</td>
<td>(31.1%)</td>
<td>(22.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(18.8%)</td>
<td>(11.8%)</td>
<td>(14.9%)</td>
<td>(5.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13.8%)</td>
<td>(15.4%)</td>
<td>(17.5%)</td>
<td>(31.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=276  N=338  N=74  N=90
**Framing NHIS as Politics**

The findings from Table 1 show that, even though the newspapers framed some of the NHIS stories around the issue of politics, contrary to assumptions (Asante, 1996; Domfeh 1999), politics as a news frame was not the major lens of portraying the NHIS story for the period of study. In order of ranking, politics ranked third and fifth on frequency distribution for each two group of newspapers. The highest ranking for politics as news frame was scored by *The Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Guide*. Out of the 338 thematic spaces that were used to discuss the NHIS, *The Ghanaian Times* wove only 46 of the spaces around politics representing 13.6% of all its total coverage of the NHIS. In the same vein the *Daily Guide* apportioned 16 out of its 90 thematic spaces to discuss NHIS representing 17.8% of its news frame space. On the other hand, the frame scored rather low on the ranking of the other two newspapers. Out of the 276 thematic spaces used in reporting NHIS, the *Daily Graphic* portrayed the policy 20 times through politics. It represents only 7.2% of its news frame space devoted to politics.

*The Chronicle*, like the *Daily Guide*, is private independent newspaper that has, since establishment, used politics as the major news frame to discuss major social and political issues. However, when it comes to the NHIS, the two newspapers’ representation of the policy through the politics news frame is rather tame. Out of the 74 thematic spaces devoted to discuss the NHIS by *The Chronicle*, only 8 of them, representing 10.5%, are laced with politics. Politics news frame utilization for NHIS narratives ranks fifth in frequency for both the *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Chronicle* for the entire period of study. This means that even though the NHIS as a policy has assumed some degree of importance for newspapers in Ghana, for the period under study,
it seems newsroom editors decided that the stories could not be adequately sold to the public on the wings of only political actors and policy makers.

It is important to reiterate the potency of the politics news frame as a major device that acts as the lever of news communication in several news media houses in Ghana. The news media in Ghana have historically been implements in the informational state apparatus. As tools in this information machinery of the state, the news new media have become partners in the orchestration and pursuit of the state agenda. The role of the news media in this partnership is to explain national and state policies as well as proclaim their positive effects on the citizens. However, the state apparatuses are represented by institutions whose symbolic recognition becomes manifest in elite citizens, power brokers, political actors, and government functionaries. For the local news media, this class of power holders represents objectified sites of meaning making through which news stories of national and state importance could be communicated to the audience. Any news story presented through such personalities gives such stories legitimacy and becomes the barometer through which important state policies or issues manifest as worthy of social discussion and public discourse (Hasty, 2005). It is this formula that structures the presentation of the NHIS stories through the politics news frame. Despite the fact that only a few of the stories were framed by all newspapers through politics, this narrative style has historically attained a major status as a cultural component of the newspaper reportage in Ghana.

In following this traditional reporting style, the newspapers framed the NHIS, partly, around politics, political actors, party functionaries, and elite policy makers to facilitate public discourse. Several of the stories sampled from all the newspapers for the
entire period of study framed the NHIS issue around politics by embodying in its contents or opening with an echo of the authoritative voice of political and governmental functionaries. Here are four illustrations from the newspapers:

The Minister of Health Major, Courage Quashigah, said with immediate effect any health service provider who discriminates against or renders poor services to any patient registered under the National Health Insurance Scheme would be punished. Without stating the specific punishment to be meted out, the Minister said such a person would be considered saboteur of the government avowed aim of providing quality health care to the people\(^{11}\)


The Kasena Nankana District Chie Executive (DCE) Mr Emmmanuel Chegeweh has warned that anybody caught undermining the success of the Kassena Nakana Mutual Insurance Scheme would be made to face the full rigors of the law.\(^{12}\)


The Member of Parliament (MP) for Anlo, Mr Kofi Humado has urged the people of Anlo to put aside their political difference and embrace the National Health Insurance scheme (NHIS) since it was a national program.\(^{13}\)

(2005, August 22) *Daily Graphic*, p. 4

---


A total of 109,211 members in both the formal and informal sectors of the Asante-Akim North District have registered under the National health Insurance Scheme.

The Asante-Akim North District Chief Executive, George Kwame Frimpong who disclosed this when he delivered his sessional address at the First Ordinary Meeting of the district assembly at Konongo said the total premium collected came up to 875,344 million cedis adding that the district has been a trail blazer in the implementation of the new paradigm shift in health delivery.14


This structure is just the characteristic opening style used by these leading newspapers for the coverage of several stories that deal with public policy agenda. Other authority/elite figure expressions around whom news stories are woven to convey the politics news frame include “the President”, “Member of Parliament”, “The Deputy Minister of Health”, “NHIS Director of Operations”, “The Chief Executive of NHIS”, “The District Chief Executive”, “The Municipal Chief Executive”, “the Director of Ghana Health Services”, “The Chief Executive of Korlebu Teaching Hospital” and many others. Once a NHIS story becomes embodied in the rhetorical figure of any of these elite/authorities of power, its effect on the reading public can be assured. The imperative is that if the NHIS is to become newsworthy there may need to be a focus on the pronouncement of a state official. It is through such frame that the public interpret the discourse. Indeed, by adopting this mechanism as the mode of representation for the

NHIS, stories the news media is echoing frame through which national symbolic cultural interpretations of news stories on policy issues functions. The evidence that a policy is good or bad, will have positive impact on the citizens, is of utmost national importance, needs collective effort, is acceptable to the general citizenry, and transcends regional ethnic gender or class barriers, is not seen in the narrative authority of journalists but rather in the performative rhetorical figure of political actors and public policy makers. For any story on the policy agenda to make inroads into the arena of public discourse “the authority of the journalist must be subordinated to the consensus of state officials” (Hasty, 2005: p.73).

By adopting and adapting to this news frame, the newspapers continue to assert that the power to influence the public on such policy issues lies not in the hands of media personnel but in the rhetorical frame of authoritative state officials and political actors. This has obviously become a symbolic cultural pattern of newspaper reportage on most public policies including the NHIS. In framing the NHIS stories around these personalities, the newspapers are able to legitimate the source of their stories. The notion is that, the reading public then becomes culturally caught in this notion of public authority propriety as the mechanism for public interpretation of new stories. NHIS news stories, like any other public policy new stories, can derive legitimacy, in the eyes of the reading public, from authoritative voices. News stories do not gain legitimacy through any discursive analysis of the policy by an expert voice, unless such voices have been co-opted into the state apparatus. It must be added that the low score of the politics news frame on the category table does not necessarily diminish its communicative impact on the reading public. Reading publics have also been incorporated into the culture of
ascertaining the significance of a story through the politics news frame. The few stories woven around politics could probably still gather more readers than the other frames because the politics news frame has long been seen as a significant interpretive device for both media personnel and readers.

Framing NHIS as Community and Development

The study shows that the community and development news frame did not rank as a major device of representation and interpretation for the NHIS news story. It ranked lowest in three of the newspapers and fourth for the Daily Guide newspaper. However, the newspapers still used it as a screen for the portrayal of NHIS stories. The Daily Guide used it most often. Again, as a paper that is geared towards political issues more than community issues, it nevertheless used community issues to represent the health policy. It devoted 10% of its space to community and development news frame to project the NHIS.

The next in magnitude is the Daily Graphic. It allocated 19 out its 276 thematic spaces on the NHIS as stories that can be read through the community and development news frame. In percentage terms, the Daily Graphic devotes 6.9% of its space to frame the health policy through the community and development themes. The Ghanaian Times utilized 18 out its 338 thematic spaces, or of 5.3% to discuss the stories around community and development issues. The Chronicle did not fully utilize the community and development news frame to portray the new health policy. It communicated the policy by allocating just 3 of its 74 categorized thematic spaces to this frame. This represents 4.1% of the entire space used to represent the NHIS in the newspaper.
The community and development news frame is based on the idea that community members would be inclined to read a newspaper if the issues embedded in the contents of a story impact their community or have the tendency to promote some form development in their locality. Community issues are important ingredients for the social construction of news. Weaving a story around issues that affect the individuals in a community is a major step towards achieving a communication goal. However, in this study, the results shows that most community and development issues, even if they just act as vehicles for the NHIS stories, normally take up large portions of the space devoted to representing the real story relegating the main policy to the headline and the lead paragraph. Symbolic signs of the NHIS news frame normally appear in a meta-narrative format with an article or story thematically traversing all aspects of community and development issues. An illustration of three of the newspapers cast in this representation mode is a clear attestation to this style of framing. In the following story with the headline, “Top Officials of NHIS implicated” (2007, November 19, *The Daily Guide*, p. 13), three different community issues that are not directly related to the NHIS spanned much of the column:

The DCE as well expressed concern about the operations of mining companies and small scale- miners whose activities he said had brought untold hardships to the inhabitants of the districts…Issues such as environmental degradation and pollution of water bodies arising out of the mining activities as well as the non existence of social responsibility agreement between the mining companies and the affected communities informed the assembly to intervene…
He announced that the West Akim District Development Company limited liability company had been established to control all business ventures by the assembly. The District assembly has tractor, graders, and ultra modern internet café and other profit making ventures which would be managed by the news company…

On projects undertaken by the assembly, the DCE said the assembly has built a Rural Technology facility at Bunsu which is fully equipped to National Technical Institute Certificate courses for artisan at subsidized cost…

It is pertinent to acknowledge how a leading headline on NHIS can deviate or have its narrative scope widened to include the fundamentals of community development issues. Indeed, the contents of the story incorporate a comprehensive district development public relations agenda by discussing, aside from the NHIS, environmental, business, education, and technology concerns.

Sometimes, the national local newspapers, especially the state-owned media, try to move away from the normative trend of stories and issues connected to political actors to a different form of appeal that is hinged on the cultural and social needs of the people. This pattern of reportage is normally seated in community activities and issues. In the attempt to communicate a social public policy like the NHIS the newspaper must draw on other culturally and symbolically acknowledged tools of communication to direct readers’ interest toward the story. Such issues, in the eyes of the public, legitimate the urgency to

read the story and in many cases help court readership. Another example from *The Chronicle*, has a meta-narrative approach on NHIS, and other community issues:

Member of Parliament for Bosomtwi Constituency, Mr. Simons Osei-Mensah, has paid GH 7,500 from his MP’s Common Fund as premium for 500 of his constituents to enable them access healthcare…

Under his health care program Mr. Osei Mensah had as well donated a refrigerator to each of the 10 healthcare facilities in the Bosomtwi Constituency, including the St. Michael Catholic Hospital at Jachie Pramso at the cost of GH 3,550.

The MP said he would use the first two years of his term to address key problems in the areas of roads and schools and the provision of toilet facilities with funds from HIPC. 16

In events, such as excerpted above, the NHIS stories must ride on the frame of community and development platform to achieve its communicative significance. The presentation of the stories in a community and development news frame also serves other purposes. In presenting the NHIS news stories, the newspapers cloak the health policy around other pertinent issues to supplement the rhetorical monotony of official and political voices. The NHIS may sometimes include in its thematic embodiment the commissioning of some local project like a school, market, clinic, or a long desired social facility, that is finally bestowed on the locality by the benevolent hands of the governing authority. The report can betide to an annual gathering of the local people drawn home by consideration of family ties, or communal festive gathering or occasion. As stated earlier,

embedded in some of these NHIS stories are other events that may not be connected to issues that arise out of the NHIS policy. However, they achieve their framing significance because they become the dragnet for expanding readership on the NHIS as a health policy. The story also allows an NHIS narrative to assume a community and development news frame approach.

Another illustration is taken from a news story with the headline “NHIS campaign at Akuapem North” (2006, July 26, Daily Graphic, p. 20) Apart from the lead story that deals with the core issue of registration, each paragraph has a different narrative theme:

The District Chief Executive also seized the opportunity to explain the government’s development agenda to the people, especially… Capitation Grant, free meals for school children, the provision of infrastructure and the forth coming District assembly elections…

At Tandakor, Abusuapanin Kwadwo Ego… appealed to the government to construct a bridge over a stream in the area to enable those living beyond the stream to have access to the health facility…

At Pontoase-Okotom, the Odikro… called for the construction of a bore hole to solve the perennial water shortage of the village. In response the DCE gave the assurance that the Assembly will soon provide them with a facility to eliminate the traces of buruli ulcer in the area…

At Abenta, the community… urged the government to construct a new school block to replace the dilapidated one currently being used by the pupils.17

Within these four paragraphs of a single NHIS story are narratives of the government development agenda and education, health, and other social needs such as the pleas for the construction of bore holes and bridges.

The prevalence of community and development news frame is culturally ingrained in the traditional function of the news media in Ghana. It is also the characteristic nature of newspapers that have embodied in their system such a discursive approach of promoting diverse discourse on public issues. The contention is that, rather than the vague rhetorical pronouncements of policy makers and government officials, other social issues beckon media attention. Whilst the NHIS becomes the springboard for these other narratives, social issues like those connected to rural areas get the chance of being put in the public sphere for government and public attention. These narrative deviations still have a productive function of providing a forum for individuals to read and know about the NHIS.

Framing NHIS as corruption

The results from Table 1 show that the corruption news frame as a form of representing the health policy for the period of study was not significant for all newspapers. The Daily Graphic used 19 out of its 276 thematic spaces to frame the new health policy with corruption. This represents 6.9% of the entire thematic spaces used for the newspaper. It is the same amount of space that is accorded the community and development news frame by the same newspaper. The Ghanaian Times ranks the corruption news frame in the sixth position and devotes 24 out of the 338 thematic news spaces. In percentage points, The Ghanaian Times allocated 7.1% of total thematic spaces to the news frame. The Chronicle allotted 6 out of it 74 thematic spaces to the corruption
news, representing 8.1% of total amount of news frame coverage for the paper. On the other hand, the *Daily Guide* used 8 out of 90 thematic spaces representing 8.9% of its total spaces to communicate the health policy. It is not surprising that *The Chronicle* and the *Daily Guide* are more likely than the other two newspapers to frame the NHIS stories through corruption.

Since 1992, when the new constitution of the fourth republic of Ghana liberalized free expression, corruption as a cancerous social ill and an act perpetrated by those in government has come to constitute some of the major headlines for newspapers with the private press as the front liners. In discussing the NHIS from the corruption perspective, every issue from procurement of logistics, fraudulent acts on reimbursement and embezzlement of premiums to extortion of fees from fully paid registered members of the scheme by medical professionals have appeared in all the newspapers. In adopting the theoretical position of defining frames as how journalists construct the contents of their stories, within the regular and familiar frame of reference, that ultimately draws the audience to similar perspective of journalist’s viewpoint (McQuail, 2005; Tuchman, 1978), journalists in Ghana identifying themselves as the watchdogs of public wealth and political accountability have, over the years routinely practiced of using some unique news frames to portray social issues. These routine practices, including the use of some very persistent news frames, have become part of the cultural practices of newspapers in Ghana. Corruption as news frame is part of these routine news coverage practices.

As stated earlier, the two private independent newspapers, *The Ghanaian Chronicle* and the *Daily Guide*, have taken upon it, themselves the task to incessantly wage a crusade against corruption in public places, especially in governance. The practice
available in these two media houses is a narrative style that indicates that any story attracts readers and encourages some form of intervention or helps curtail a potential corruptible act. Below are excerpts from sampled newspapers on how the media framed the policy around corruption. The first example is under the headline “Extortion Under NHIS, Doctors Face Probe” (2007, May 18, *Daily Graphic*, p. 1). The paper writes:

A number of doctors in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis are to be probed for allegations of extortion under the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). The action to be undertaken by the Western Regional Directorate of the Ghana Health Services (GHS) follows accusations by management of the scheme and NHIS card holders that the doctors illegally collected between 800,000 cedis and 2 million per person before treating patients who were covered by the scheme.18

A similar story on corruption on the NHIS appeared under the headline “Officials Accuse of sabotaging NHIS” (2005, April 4, *The Ghanaian Times*, p.12). Excerpts of the story run:

The newly created Tain District in the Brong Ahafo region is lagging behind in the implementation of the National health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) because the district coordinating director allegedly declined to release money for that purpose…The resolution also leveled other allegations against the coordinating director who it said had caused financial loss to the district”19…

The *Daily Guide*, September 19, 2007 (p.13), presents another corruption news frame for the NHIS:

---

Three top officials of the West Akim Mutual Insurance scheme have been sacked following their involvement in a huge scam that had the potential of collapsing the scheme in the district… The dismissal was ordered by the District Chief Executive (DCE) for West Akim, Mr. Kwabena Sintim Aboagye, after an alarm was raised by the new manager of the scheme…

*The Chronicle* (2007, September, 7, p.8) portrays the NHIS in another corruption frame under the headline “Scandal Rocks Adansi NHIS- Two officers Busted”,

Painstaking investigations conducted by The Ghanaian Chronicle have revealed fraudulent deals in the operations of the National health Insurance scheme in the Adansi South District of the Ashanti Region.

The paper can say authoritatively that as a result of these fraudulent activities two persons were recently picked by the New Edubiase Police for questioning.20

All the above excerpts are examples of corruption and corruptible practices endemic in the body politic of the public sector creeping into the implementation of the new policy. It is only by framing the NHIS in such terms for prompt intervention that enough confidence can be injected into the program. The journalistic significance of a narrative headline that connects a NHIS story with corruption is that it attracts readership, and through public outcry, courts some form of intervention.

As stated already, the news media in Ghana, especially the private press, have continuously used corruption as a form of illustrating the hypocrisy of political actors and public officials as part of their rhetorical position of making sure that public policy works

for the general good. In Ghana, corruption has become so pervasive in the body politic that it has assumed a three foci points of rationalization: 1) as a mechanism for being co-opted into the state apparatus; 2) as a mode of constructing social and material connections and opening access to authoritative voices and power wielding personalities; and 3) as a system of compelling obligation and duty (Hasty, 2005). As a consequence, the public perceives corruption as an ulcer that eats the good in any public policy and the newspapers have used corruption to measure the extent to which a policy will promote general good. As a result, news media coverage of several public policy issues tends to be framed in corruption themes. The phenomenon was not different when it came to the presentation of NHIS stories.

In this study it was discovered that even though corruption as an issue appeared on a minimal scale, the corruption news frame was significantly appropriated to narrate the NHIS news stories to encourage intervention, instill more confidence in the system, encourage the public to support and adopt the new policy. The findings also support the fact that corruption is another theme through which social issues can be sold to the general public by the media, and newspapers use corruption news frame as strategic representation through which the NHIS could be imagined.

Framing NHIS as Social Apathy

According to the findings recorded on Table 1, social apathy as a news frame ranks mid-level for three of the newspapers. The *Daily Graphic* uses 25 thematic spaces out of 276 to frame the issue. This accounts for 9.1% of the total spaces used by the newspaper for the policy during the period under study. *The Ghanaian Times* devotes 44 thematic spaces, which is the equivalent of 13.1% of its total coverage of 338 spaces, to
frame the policy around social apathy. *The Chronicle* also uses social apathy; it assigned 10 thematic spaces out of its 74 spaces to social apathy as the channel of communicating the health policy. This is equal to 13.5% of the spaces used by the newspaper to communicate the NHIS. *The Daily Guide* used the social news frame least. It allotted just 4 thematic spaces out of its 90 spaces to this news frame, representing 4.4% of the amount of coverage utilized for the story.

One method that the news media use to motivate people to read about issues is to frame it in such a way that the individual could identify and interpret the stories and events in relation to what they see and hear so that they could make sense of them (Gofman, 1974). In this direction, social apathy as theme is likely to generate wider readership because of its affective national character and the fact that it is an issue that hits at the very core of the policy. It comes in the form of social and political disenchantment. This phenomenon emerges in the form of individual citizens’ disillusionment and cynicism about a government policy because of its historicized feature of failure, ineffectiveness, and exclusion of the people for whom the policy is being advocated from the formulation and implementation stages.

The theme of social apathy has an intrinsic connection to the core NHIS policy issues and politics news frames. Issues of apathy revealed through the NHIS narratives indicate a total lack of understanding of what the policy is about and how it works for the benefit of the citizens. Furthermore, the social apathy news frame is an effective narrative weapon because it is arguably deeply seated decades of failure of government policies and lack of accountability in the public sector.
One of the most significant outcomes of the social apathy news frame is the fact that, just like corruption and health news frames, it is a news frame that emerged from the close reading and interpretation of the text. It is a new frame that has a lot of symbolic cultural significance for readers because it is borne out of the cultural practices of both the readers and the news makers. It is also significant because, for three of the newspapers, it scores higher in ranking than predetermined categories like politics and community and development news frames which have been asserted by past research (Asante, 1996) Framing the NHIS around social apathy shows newspapers’ commitment in bringing up the issue in the public domain. Sometimes the central point of apathy might be some disenchantment or lack of faith in some public policy. In such instance newspapers acknowledge the fact that apathy alone can lead to the demise of a new policy. They rightly contend that it is only by mobilizing the greater number of people to become participants in such a major social agenda that its success can be guaranteed. The issues that emerge from the social apathy frame connect with and affect every Ghanaian because they deal with themes that prevail in almost every community in the country. The newspapers capture the theme of social apathy through a variety of expressions. Most of them appear as headline stories that bother on hesitation, disenchantment or apathy itself. For example, headlines like “Kumasi residents are apathetic to NHIS”\(^\text{21}\); “NHIS- Urban dwellers in wait-and-see attitude?”\(^\text{22}\); “NHIS records poor patronage at

\(^{21}\) Kumasi residents are apathetic to NHIS. (2005, September 10 ). *The Ghanaian Times*, p. 3

Prang"23; “Apathy impedes NHIS take –off- as minister appeals for more doctors”24; and “Ho Municipal NHIS suffers setback”25 provide some insight into the contents of a story on NHIS. Others stories sampled go beyond the headline to measure the acceptability and popularity of the NHIS among the citizens on the yardstick of the apathy framework.

This study discovered three contexts of the social apathy phenomenon. In the first case the apathetic issue comes up as conscious exercise on the part of the citizens to avoid being participants of NHIS as this sub-theme exemplified in part of a story in the Daily Graphic (June 26, 2005):

The Executive Secretary of the National Heath Insurance Council (NHIC) , Dr. Samuel A. Akor has expressed the hope that as most District Mutual Insurance Schemes (DMHISs) in the rural district take off within the next few weeks, urban dwellers will realize the benefit and join…Dr. Akor reiterated his earlier statement that despite the extra effort made by the council to inform people in the urban areas about where they could go an register, in addition to the house to house registration, some people had failed to make any effort…26

26 Livestock for NHIS Premium? Rural folk can’t pay 72,000 cedis fee” (2005, June 26). Daily Graphic, p. 12
In other stories that border on the same premise of conscious effort to avoid the scheme, the general public is characterized as being “reluctant to patronize the scheme”, or “deliberately distancing themselves from the scheme”.

In the second context, inability to fully register for the scheme is constructed captures as lack of some form of knowledge that results in ignorance or the lack of some form of social power, a need that can be altered by an external resourced body. For example, in a story carried in the *Ghanaian Times* under the headline “Livestock for NHIS Premium? Rural folk can’t pay 72,000 cedis fee” (2005, June 26) *Daily Graphic*, p. 12, poverty as state of need that can be altered by external intervention is the underlying theme in this story. The authorial voice of this article, the Director-General of Ghana Health Services, advocates for a barter system of payment for health insurance premium. The story reads:

Most rural dwellers are unable to pay the minimum 72,000 cedis premium for the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Consequently, it has been proposed that a barter arrangement be made for them to pay with goods in lieu of cash as premium to ensure their registration for the scheme.

Prof. Agyemang Badu- Akosa, Director –General of Ghana Health Services said this…He observed that the excuse by such people with abundant livestock that they were poor and unable to register for the scheme, tended to lower the pride of Ghanaians.  

The state of need is also variously captured by some expressions in the news articles as “lack of in-depth knowledge,” “lack of confidence to complain,” “36.8% had not heard about the scheme”, and “lack of professional advice.”

The third context of the state of need structured on a feeling of exclusion by seen and unseen natural, social, and economic forces exact another strand in the social apathy frame. In the news story on the NHIS that appeared in the *Daily Graphic* under the headline “NGO pay insurance premium for flood victims”, an intervention by an NGO enables some victims of natural disaster to join the scheme:

Northern Ghana Aid (NOGAID) an NGO in partnership with two international NGOs has paid full health insurance premiums for 200 flood victims in 10 communities in the Arigu Traditional Area in the West Mamprusi District of the Northern Region.

The payment is part of the contribution by the NGO to helping flood victims in the most deprived areas where aid cannot reach.28

In the above story the individuals are left at the mercy of natural forces that put them under severe financial and economic need which can lead to their exclusion from the NHIS.

In another case similar to the context of economic exclusion, the *Daily Guide* captures an NHIS story framed around apathy as a consequent of poverty under the headline “Church Registers 500 With NHIS” (2007, October 1). The *Daily Guide*, p. 7,
Calvary Charismatic Center (CCC) a leading church in Kumasi has paid a whooping 15 million cedis as premium to the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) for 500 poor residents in the Kumasi metropolis...

The kind gesture formed part of the church’s vision and effort to lend a helping hand to the less endowed in the city… The beneficiaries were selected from communities in the metropolis who were identified as poor and could not afford to be part of the NHIS.29

Other social apathy news frame references used by the news articles for this group of citizens include headlines and expressions such as “People are still ignorant about the scheme,” “low response,” “the poor,” “socially excluded,” “only a handful,” “more people will not be able to access the scheme because of premium,” and “high dependency ratio.”

If most people are apathetic toward the scheme, then it is obvious that its effectiveness will be undermined. By framing the issue in this mode many citizens are able to identify with the issue and, by that form of identification, put pressure on policy makers to intervene. Again, because many individuals have rationalized their inability to join the scheme, they identify with the headlines and content of such stories and are easily attracted to read them. The attraction to such stories framed in the social apathy garb, obviously, helps to communicate the NHIS to the public, and of course provide an avenue for larger groups of people who for some reason would not be able to secure membership to seek interventions. The discussion of social apathy stories may start with the cultural connotation behind the story such as the “livestock for NHIS”, but ultimately

it would draw on the broader context of NHIS as health policy. Through that form of representation, the news frame may help in revealing the overall intended benefit of the policy to the many individuals not fully informed about it. It would eventually help address the issue of apathy by unraveling and dealing with why such a worthy social policy should be disregarded or ignored by the very people for whom it is meant to benefit.

Framing NHIS as core NHIS issues

The findings as displayed on Table I show that the core NHIS issues news frame ranked first on the categories of frames for three of the newspapers whilst the fourth paper ranked it as the second most dominant frame for communicating the health policy. The *Daily Graphic* used 103 thematic spaces out of its total 276 spaces to discuss the policy around core issues. This represents 37.1% of the quantum of space used to communicate the policy for the entire study period. *The Ghanaian Times* gave 114 thematic spaces out of its 338 spaces to frame the policy on the fundamentals of the NHIS. This is equivalent to 33.7% of the total space used to project the policy to the general public for the period of research. *The Chronicle* devoted 23 out of the 74 spaces representing 31.1% of its total space on NHIS, to the core NHIS issues. The *Daily Guide* used 20 out the 90 thematic spaces, the equivalent of 22.2% of spaces to feature NHIS news coverage by focusing on the central elements embodied in the scheme. This is another news frame that emanated from the close analysis and interpretation of the newspapers articles. The inquiry showed that of all the news frame categories upon which the study is premised, the newspapers devoted most of their stories to the core issues pertaining to the NHIS.
One of the basic tenets of the news media is its function as the surrogate between public opinion and public policy (Franklin, 1999). The news media, in acting out this function, are expected to play a more interpretive role rather than merely serving as information disseminators. Once a new policy like the NHIS is rolled into the public domain the media is expected to adequately interpret the underlying issues and the contexts so that the general public who are the ultimate beneficiaries of that policy can actively engage the discourse and make informed decision on the policy. It is this duty that the newspapers attempted to perform on the new health policy by framing more than a third of their coverage around the core issues of the NHIS.

The core NHIS issues are the fundamentals of the policy. They are the issues that are supposed to help bring health care relief to the citizens. It is therefore obvious that they form the very basic tenets upon which the narratives of the NHIS stories must subsist. In this study the results showed that all the newspapers focused a large percentage of their stories on the core issues of the NHIS for the entire period as shown on Table 1.

In framing the NHIS news stories around the core NHIS policy issues the newspapers seem to adequately meet their obligations regarding this policy. Many of the stories that come out of this frame deal with the operative issues in the NHIS as evidenced in two excerpts below. The first excerpt under the headline “NHIS beneficiaries urged to renew ID cards” discuses the three core issues of registration, payment of premium, and payment of claims within the story.30

30 NHIS beneficiaries urged to renew ID cards” (2007, October 6). *Daily Graphic*, p. 6
The Board Chairman of the Oguaa Mansin Mutual health Insurance Scheme (MHIS) in the Central Region, Mr. Joseph Nuertey, has called on the beneficiaries of the scheme to renew their identity cards one month before they expire to enable them to continue to benefit from the scheme…

He said the scheme had so far registered 50,833 cards, representing 83% of the registered clients, and had paid GH 270,000 cedis as claims to service providers from January to August this year.

Mr Nuertey stated that the scheme collected a total premium of GH 140,000 cedis (1.4 billion cedis) from January to August this year and received GH 140,000 cedis (1.4 billion from the National Health Insurance Council (NHIC)

Many of the stories that concentrate on the core issues have similar contents like the above. Some of the stories also focus on core issues like drug lists, and drug coverage. Such news stories may beam with headlines such as “ABOLISH TAXES, LEVIES ON NHIS DRUGS… Pharmaceutical business groups appeals to government”31 “High cost of medicines threatens NHIS”32; and “New tariffs for medicine under NHIS,”33 In other sample stories under headlines such as “NHIS should support the mentally ill,”34 and “NHIS must cover Hepatitis B-Doc,”35 disease coverage as a core

31 ABOLISH TAXES, LEVIES ON NHIS DRUGS… Pharmaceutical business groups appeals to government. (2005, August 1). The Ghanaian Times, p.1
34 NHIS should support the mentally ill. (2007, January 30). Daily Graphic, p.12
issue of NHIS becomes the focus of representation. Part of the contents under the headline “NHIS must cover Hepatitis B-Doc,” reads:

A Physician at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, Dr. Adjoa Nkansah has underscored the need to widen the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to cover Hepatitis B treatment in order to encourage people to know their status and seek treatment.

She said that not enough attention has been given to Hepatitis B-a disease described as “slow killer”-although its prevalence rate in the country is between eight to 15 percent, which could be described as “high”

Even though the focus of the story is on the non-inclusion of Hepatitis B in the disease coverage, the significant outcome of the story is its capacity to draw public attention to the issue of disease coverage as a core component of the health policy. Whilst those directly affected by the headline because they have the disease may have a greater level of interest in the story, the general public may also react with some form of interest in the policy by seeking to know which other diseases are covered under the scheme and which have been excluded. In another case, a large portion of a NHIS story in The Chronicle also framed the issue on the theme of drug coverage. The story under the headline, “Under 50% register in New Juaben for NHIS… but manager says patronage is high,” expends much of its designated columns on drug coverage rather than the issues of registration as captured in the headline. Portions of the story read,36

The scheme Manager explained that not all drugs prescribed are found in the Health insurance Drug List which are supposed to be given free of charge to beneficiaries, but was quick to add that his outfit took quick measures to resolve such complaints.

“Initially, we had wanted to sign some pharmacy shops to dispense such drugs to our clients but the hospitals later agreed that they would provide all the drugs within the drug list at their pharmacies”, he said.

Other themes that are used in many of the stories under the core NHIS issues include campaigns for registration and educative roles undertaken by NGOs to help increase awareness about the new health policy. In one such educational drive to encourage the public to join the scheme, portions of the contents of the news story under the headline “Akuapem South makes progress with NHIS” 37 read:

The Akuapem South District Health Insurance scheme is to introduce an innovative benefit package to attract more people to register with the scheme. Under the new package newly born babies to mothers who are members will enjoy free medical care for the next six months.

The scheme’s board chairman, Nana Akoto-Oteng… stated that under the additional packages cards bearing members will be known as “sister-sister” scheme portability programme…

The higher rate of representation of the core NHIS issues in the four newspapers on a normative basis should be seen as providing the needed information baseline that can

---

influence public perception of the policy and as well define how the NHIS policy becomes adopted and co-opted by a greater number of citizens. However, it is significant to note that, the stories should not be presented just as uncontested information from powerful authorities without any news media analysis. Unfortunately, this is the context under which the stories are presented. For example, the majority of the stories under this category deal with educational and campaign drives that normally focus on registration, payment of premium, and reimbursement of claims. In several of the stories sampled, the illustrative statistics on the registration and premium do not come from any independent media source but from political actors and policy makers. Consequently, what is seen here is the news media’s reproduction of the statements of policy makers captured through lengthy quotations without any critical analysis. One such example, under the headline “The poor exempted from NHIS payments,” is captured below,\(^{38}\)

This package covers about 95 percent of all diseases that we see in our health facilities… Mr Owusu Agyei [the Deputy Minister of Health] referred to the Legislative Instrument on the NHIS in which all the diseases covered by the scheme had been listed. He however, stated that all district wide and other health insurance schemes had the right under the law to organize their schemes to cover many diseases and services as desired.

The news media therefore often becomes a conveyer belt for the NHIS policy to reach the public. Indeed very little space is provided for some very important core issues like disease coverage and NHIS premium payments. These are issues that affect the public and can generate intense public debate and discourse. The presumption that

members of the public have the capacity “under the law to organize their schemes to cover as many diseases and services as desired,” though quite important to members, is captured more as anecdote than as a core operative issue. This issue could have been emphasized to generate intense policy debate. However, as already stated, the issues under this category are not analytical and interpretive enough because they deal with rhetorical articulations and not the very operative substance of the national NHIS.

This drawback to the core NHIS issues framework can be rationalized on the grounds that the NHIS could still been regarded as a policy in its infant stage. As a result, many of the core issues that easily emerge for news coverage would obviously center on registration and premium payments. By framing this category under the issues of payment of premium, registration, drugs and disease coverage, education and campaign activities by NGOs and interest groups, the core NHIS issues become nationalized and assumes a place as a news frame with the capacity to adequately communicate the health policy to the general public. It must be reiterated that the results of the study showed that a greater amount of space was allocated by the four newspapers to the coverage of NHIS by framing much of their stories around the core issues. It is also important to note that three of the newspapers used more than twice the thematic space used to cover core NHIS issues than the second most ranking news frame used by the same newspapers to frame the health policy. This is a significant form of coverage that confers prime status on media representation of the new health policy and will “demonstrate its social value and political effectiveness” for the newspapers and the media in Ghana (Deacon, 1999, p.55).
Framing the NHIS as Health issue

According to Table 1, health news frame was a significant channel for communicating the NHIS to the general public. All the newspapers scored an average of 12 percentage points to frame the new policy around dominant health concerns. For the *Daily Graphic* the health news frame was the second most dominant means of communicating the health policy to the general public. It used 52 thematic spaces out of the 276 spaces to discuss the NHIS. This accounts for 18.8% of the quantum of space used on health to represent the policy. As stated earlier, even though it represents less than a fifth of the paper’s total coverage, it is still very significant in relation to the utilization of other frames. *The Ghanaian Times* used 40 out of its 338 thematic spaces to frame the policy. This represents 11.8% of the total coverage for the newspaper. It is not a high news frame preference for the newspaper because it ranked fifth on the scale of preference.

*The Chronicle* ranked the health news frame as its third preferred news frame preference. It used 11 out of its 74 thematic spaces, representing 14.9% of total space of the newspaper to cover the NHIS around health concerns. Even though it is a private-independent newspaper that is wont to use more political frames than any other framing technique to represent social issues, for this particular health policy the paper put a premium on health concerns by framing a third of their stories on the policy through health frames. *The Daily Guide* did not allocate much space to the health news frame. It used only 5 thematic spaces out of its 90 spaces, representing 5.6%, to discuss the health policy around health issues. Perhaps the paper reckoned that communicating the policy through other news frames patterns was more culturally appropriate and acceptable to its
readers than through the same health concerns that the policy seeks to address. Another rationale for this low coverage is the fact that low coverage of health issues in newspapers is a characteristic feature of media culture in Ghana and its absence as a framing device for the coverage of the new policy is more normative than deviance.

The health news frame is another emergent news frame obtained from data interpretation and analysis. This type of news frame focuses on communicating the health benefits that can be bestowed upon the individual by the NHIS through emphasis on the general health concerns and interventions. The frame also portrays the NHIS as an opportunity for the individual to address their health concerns to achieve improved health. It evolved from the interpretation that the opportunity to curtail perennial health issues that caused by poverty can be done the new health policy. Such stories also highlight some of the major health problems that have plagued the country, including endemic diseases, lack of medical professionals, lack of health facilities, and poor hospital attendance. Again, the representation of dominant health issues then becomes an avenue to highlight the NHIS as a policy of substance and immense benefit. The narrative style of framing the policy around health issues embodies the conviction that the NHIS is the solution to all other major ailments. Some of these other major health issues that also form the sub-topics for this news frame are what can be said to constitute the real health concerns of the Ghanaian public.

The NHIS is a relatively unknown health policy and therefore lacks space in the dominant discourse of the people. To make news out of this policy, the newspapers must identify major health concerns through which the people can socially understand the news narrative as a reflection of social realities. One form of this lived health concern as
a social reality used to construct the NHIS news is captured by *Ghanaian Times* through the composition of a narrative on the policy as a document that excludes and downplays an endemic disease like hepatitis B. In the already cited story under the headline “NHIS must cover Hepatitis B-Doc” (see above), the emphasis is the NHIS as seen in the headline. However, the content of the story dwells more on the commonly known hepatitis B, a dangerous disease that can be controlled through immunization but would involve huge costs, if the program is undertaken at the national level.

Other headlines that frame the NHIS by capturing some of the health concerns in country include: “Efficient operation on NHIS could increase life expectancy,” 39 “Multiple attendance hinders NHIS,” 40 “Apathy impedes NHIS take-off as doctors appeal for more doctors,” 41 and “NHIS should support the mentally ill.” 42 In these four headlines, health issues that have plagued many individuals including life expectancy matters, multiple (poor) hospital attendance, lack of doctors and medical professionals to man the various health care centers, and poor attitudes towards patients that has led to individual disenchantment with the health care system, are all galvanized as mechanisms through which the NHIS is framed and communicated to the people. Some of the headlines and their underlying contents covey images that indicate a proposition for the adoption of health policy as urgent need worthy of consideration by individuals in the

41 Apathy impedes NHIS take-off as doctors appeal for more doctors. (2005, November 21). *Ghanaian Chronicle*, p. 10)
42 NHIS should support the mentally ill. (2007, January 30). *Daily Graphic*, p.12
Ghanaian society. Part of an article under the headline “Efficient operation on NHIS could increase life expectancy”\textsuperscript{43} discusses this need:

The Brong Ahafo regional Director of Ghana Health Service, Alhaji Dr. Mohammed Ibn Ibrahim, has observed that life expectancy of Ghanaians could be increased from the current 55 years to 70 for men and 70 to 75 for women if the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) is well nurtured and operated effectively and efficiently…

Dr. Ibrahim said many people died from preventable diseases because they had no money to go to hospital stressing that the NHIS had become the right time to help improve the health status of every Ghanaian

By framing the NHIS stories around some of the dominant health issues in the country the newspapers are able to generate interest in the policy. To the media professionals, any health issue of national concern with the remotest NHIS connections, uttered by an authoritative voice such as a politician or a health officer, legitimates the NHIS narrative as an important news item.

Framing NHIS as Business

As depicted in table 1, the business news frame on the average is the second most dominant frame used by the newspapers to cover the NHIS. It occupies an average of about 17% of the total coverage of the NHIS in the newspapers. The \textit{Daily Graphic} uses the business news frame as the third most significant frame to discuss the policy. It used 38 thematic spaces out of 276 spaces, which is equivalent to 13.8% of the total space on

\textsuperscript{43} Efficient operation on NHIS could increase life expectancy. (2006, October, 5). \textit{Daily Graphic}, p.12
the NHIS stories. *The Ghanaian Times* utilized 52 out its total 338 thematic spaces to construct the NHIS around business issues. This represents 15.4% of the newspapers cumulative space used for the coverage of the NHIS for the study period. The news frame ranks the second highest for *The Ghanaian Times* coverage. *The Chronicle* scores 13 out of its 74 thematic spaces for this news frame. It represents 17% of the total NHIS space for the paper and is the second highest frame of representation of the policy by this paper. *The Daily Guide* uses the business frame as the dominant mode of representation. It uses 28 thematic spaces or 31.1% of its total space to discuss the policy.

The news media choice of framing the NHIS around business issues show that, despite the apparent demonstration by public officials that everything seems to be going on well with the scheme, there is a sense of disquiet about the NHIS in relation to the challenges that face its implementation and sustainability. As operationally defined, this news frame incorporates themes of sustainability, inadequate logistics, (mis)management, and lack of funds, lack of motivation for NHIS staff, and other related issues. The business news frame as a representation style that depicts the NHIS issues in business and management perspective does three things. First, it provides a balanced viewpoint on the NHIS to encourage debate as illustrated in the headline and part of the contents of the article “Doubts over NHIS sustainability,”44

It appears majority of Ghanaians are worried about the sustainability of the National Health Insurance Scheme, as it operators lack innovative ideas to collect premiums and manage them for the benefit of the insured members.

---

The Fund Management Director of the National Insurance Council, Mr. Adu Anane Antwi, has said one of the biggest challenges of the scheme is to make it sustainable.

This problem has resulted in fewer Ghanaian registering their names for the scheme.

Second, it reveals the internal problems and contradictions inherent in the policy. The headline and lead paragraphs of the story “Ho Municipal NHIS suffers setbacks” also exemplifies this position:

Lack of effective cooperation from healthcare providers to ensure efficient delivery, has been identified as a major factor challenging the smooth operation of the National Health Insurance Scheme in the Ho Municipality. This situation if not checked, would not only serve as disincentive to beneficiaries, but also destroy the noble intention of Government to extend health care delivery to the less privileged in the society.

The Public Relations Officer (PRO)… expressed these concerns in an exclusive interview with Daily Guide in Ho, on Wednesday.

The third case of the business news frame as an interpretive device is built on the inadequacies inherent in the policy with emphasis on mismanagement, lack of motivation for staff, over-reimbursement, and lack of funds. However, this situation can introduce some element of mistrust, toward the policy on the part of the people. Consequently, this kind of reportage may not, in the long term, be favorable to the government policy.

---

agenda. An example is depicted in this article with the headline “District Health
Insurance Schemes face collapse.” Excerpts of the story run:

Some Districts Mutual Health Insurance Schemes face the risk of collapse if they
do not receive their administrative funds from the National health Insurance
Council soon.

The Kasena Nakena District Mutual Health Insurance Scheme in the Upper East
Region is of such threatened schemes and it has already sent a petition to the
government for financial assistance.

Joseph Owusu, Manager of Monitoring and Evaluation of the Center for
Development of the People (CEDEP)... made this known in Accra yesterday...

Mr. Owusu said, “If government does not step in now the schemes which are
working hard to get established will collapse and it will be impossible to get them
up again as the goodwill of the citizens of Ghana will have been lost”

He said the scheme desperately trying to access the administrative funds and
subsidies that they are entitled to under the National Health Insurance Act 2003,
adding that they need these government contributions urgently to enable them to
continue to work effectively.

In the above excerpt the government is faulted for its inability to deliver its part of the
contract promptly. It also raises issues of legality and the government’s failure to abide
by the basic legal provision that governs the implementation of the policy as outlined in
the National Health Insurance Act, 2003. The excerpt also brings out contradictions in the

__________

campaign to register large number of people without the financial assistance needed to sustain the registration drive. More importantly, it imputes the loss of confidence in the scheme, not on the earlier asserted theory of apathy, but on government’s apparent inability to manage the scheme.

It is quite surprising that this story is published by *The Ghanaian Times*, a state-owned newspaper. The surprise stems from the fact that bringing out the worst in the policy is a style that is expected to be more utilized, understandably, by the private independent newspapers. This is because the private media’s avowed aim of fighting to ensure transparency and accountability in governance and the public sectors has the tendency to construct news around lack of accountability, lack of transparency, and corruption. The state-owned news media are expected to frame few of their stories around the business news frame. Nevertheless, this assumption is not supported by the findings obtained from the data. Both the *Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times* devote substantial segments and columns of their coverage to themes of sustainability, logistics, motivation, and (mis)management that, at a glance paint government implementation of the policy negatively.

The business news frame also evolves from an aspect of the general reporting practices of journalists in Ghana. This aspect is revealed in the Ghanaian journalists’ deference to the newspaper reading culture of examining a narrative that presents Government polices as perceived, but sometimes proven, failures. It is a narrative that also projects government-sponsored activities as lacking sound management practices. Generally, the high amount of thematic coverage for this issue shows that newspapers in Ghana, especially the two state-owned, the *Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times*, have
gradually moved away from their traditional position of being collusive with government and acting as “delivery services for government messages” (Franklin, 1999, p. 19) toward a more independent reportage.

RQ 1 b) What were the dominant frames through which the NHIS stories were narrated?

The seven new frames categories that emerged from the data assume the characteristics of local cultural images. Images that fit in the Ghanaian social-cultural discourses help stimulate in the reading public an active reception of events and issues. Although news stories can be told through systematic culturally constructed news frames, some can become the dominant frames around which the newspaper present issues. Notwithstanding the importance of a particular news frame, a frame’s significance is that, it helps organize narratives to highlights or obscure particular dimensions of the phenomenon, in this case the NHIS, by “emphasizing a specific storyline, a certain meaning, or range of meanings” (Valeda, 2002). In this study such weighted degree of dominance also emerges for the different news frames. In Table 2, and Figure 2, shown below, the cumulative coverage for the NHIS is distributed among the seven news frames for all the newspapers for the entire period. Table 2 shows the cumulative frequency distribution of the news frames used by the four newspapers for the study period. Figure 2 displays the distribution in a more graphic and pictorial terms.

Table 2 shows that the four newspapers framed most of the NHIS stories around the core issues in the new policy. The core NHIS issues news frame accounted for 33.4% of the entire coverage used for the stories. This is also equivalent to 260 thematic spaces out of the cumulative 778 thematic spaces of representation. This is almost twice the
space allocated to the next most dominant news frame. The implication is that this particular news frame was the most dominant form of representation used for the stories. It is important to understand the significance of this framing pattern by the newspapers.

Table 2. *Cumulative Frequency Distribution of NHIS News Frames used by the Four Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Frames</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com’nity &amp; Dev’t</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social apathy</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core NHIS Issues</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative thematic themes</td>
<td>N=778</td>
<td>N=100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Core NHIS issues news frame

It is the responsibility of the media to bring the fundamental issues in NHIS as a new health policy into the public sphere. However, they must do so by legitimating the issues in the policy concerns that need popular support. To do so, they can draw on the news frames consistent with the health aspirations of the people. Sometimes this means that the stories are framed in a way that localizes the issues by illustrating health needs within the local environment. It is within this framework that the four newspapers utilize the core issues to frame and communicate the NHIS to the public.
It is important to note that representing health policy through core issues introduces an important development for the coverage of health news Ghanaian newspapers. The new development shows that the media is determined to devote much space to issues central to the administration of the new policy and are ready to provide the general public with enough information to make informed choices on the policy. In adopting the core issues frame for the NHIS, themes like payment of premium, registration of members, disease coverage, drug coverage, and public education are framed in terms that clearly communicate the issues at stake to the general public. Even though this news frame emerged from the data, rather being a predetermined category, its effectiveness in communicating the policy lies in the fact that the core themes of the policy were repeatedly reproduced and reframed in different images in a manner that synchronized with the sentiments and realities of the health needs of the greater number of people. This framework of reportage engineered the needed connection between the readers and the policy.

The dominance of this news frame is also accentuated by that fact that the news media presented the core issues as stories of substance. The media incorporated in the narratives a new way of putting discussion of health issues in a broader context within the purview of NHIS. By communicating the NHIS through this frame, the core issues of the health policy, that in normative terms would seem remote and far removed from readers because of their complexities, are regularized, framed, discussed, and presented as individual daily health experiences. Adopting this mechanism also produces a socially constructed news product that disentangles such complexities and allows the policy to be “framed and thematized as a feature of daily discourse” (Altheidi, 2000, p. 228). Again,
one must not lose sight of the fact that communicating the policy to the people implies
the media must able to determine which issues are pertinent to public understanding and
adoption of the policy, and how such issues are placed in the domain of public discussion
(Collin et.al., 2006; van Djik, 1993). The newspapers also utilized this news frame to
provide a more comprehensive insight into the health policy and, by that measure, lived
up to their responsibility of playing “their traditional and honorable role of serving the
citizens with diets of information” (Golding 1999: p.152) to make informed choices
about their health needs.

Business news frame

The second most dominant news frame used by the newspapers to construct the
NHIS stories for the period of inquiry is the business news frame. Framing the health
policy through the business perspective takes up 131 thematic spaces, which amounts to
16.8% of the amount of space used for the all the stories. The business news frame is
another means of providing a context through which readers can interpret the NHIS news
stories. It orients itself on business centered issues to allow audiences to provide a
judgment. The themes of sustainability of the policy, motivation for staff, adequate
logistics and (mis)management are mechanisms for equipping the public with the tools to
provide recommendations for the policy. In framing contexts, the representation of the
health stories through this business frame provide a means of selecting some aspects of
the health policy and holding them up for critical evaluation. Such evaluative
consideration may include the determination of the soundness of the policy’s
management practices or the sustainability of the scheme on issues such as low premium
payment, low patronage, low registration drive, high rates of reimbursement, and inadequate logistics.

Health news frame

The Health news frame is the next prominent frame used by the newspapers in their NHIS narratives. This news frame occupies 108 thematic spaces of all four newspapers’ reports on the NHIS for the three year study. This accounts for 13.9% of the total space used for the coverage. This also has some significant implications for study. The positioning of the health news frame as significant means of communicating the policy connects the relevance of the policy to the health needs people. By framing the policy with health event concepts, individuals are provided with recognizable images that make the narratives of the NHIS meaningful. In line with Gitlin’s (1980) assertion that “frames are the central organizing idea or storyline” (p. 7), the health news frame constructs are the very “essence” of the NHIS policy. This news frame also allows the narrative to attain a normative disposition because the policy is about health concerns and the concerns are evoked in images readily recognizable as essential and significant. Emphasis on diseases such as Hepatitis B, dispensable drugs, medical facilities, hospital attendance, are images that are comprehensible to the readers because they identify with them.

Politics news frame

The Politics news frame takes the mid-level on the of the NHIS news frame narratives. Its receding significance as a major news frame is one of the major findings of this study. For the period under study, 90 thematic spaces representing 11.6% of the total coverage of the NHIS stories were represented through the politics news frame. This
news frame has been established by previous research as a pre-determined news frame of communicative significance in Ghana (Asante, 1999; Domfeh, 1999). Nevertheless, in this study, and for the purpose of placing the NHIS in the health discourse of the Ghanaian media, its communicative relevance became highly diminished.

Politics is assumed to be a dominant discourse in the newspapers of Ghana. This situation stems from the historical developments that surrounded the establishment of both the state-owned press and the private media. The state-owned newspapers were established as political mouthpieces by governments to support their political agenda. In this connection the press in Ghana became the focal point through which government mobilized the people for political support and social development. The private media assume a duty to act as the watchdogs of individual liberty by ensuring accountability and transparency in governance. These developments led to the establishment of a new paradigm where the narratives of all major socio-political events of national significance were framed through politics. Politics became the mode of interpretation, the mirror of engagement, and the yardstick of evaluation for all the events covered by the press. The media in Ghana have had a significant influence on how the people come to understand social, cultural, and political realities because they define the frame through which the readers could engage a discussion of public issues. The major frame of engagement, in most cases, had been politics. Readers adapted to this representation of events, and the regular deployment of the politics news frame became incorporated into the culture of the reading public.

Against this background, it must be acknowledged that the position of the politics news frame may mean that newspapers no longer regard politics as the major frame
through which major social issues should be discussed. Part of the reason for this pattern can be traced to the collective position of the major stakeholders, and civil society to depoliticize the NHIS policy. The newspapers may have decided to uphold the depoliticization, leading to the diminishing importance of this frame in preference to the others. Another reason may be the utilization of an editorial policy that places more emphasis on the core issues of a communicative event rather than on the politics that surround it.

Social apathy news frame

The Social apathy news frame follows the politics news frame in the order of dominance, with a total coverage of 83 thematic spaces which represents 10.7% of the total columns for the NHIS stories. This news frame is significant because that it helps the public in assessing the level of participation in the NHIS. As can be seen from the results, it is almost as common as the politics news, meaning it is an important news frame that should be included in any research on media representation of events in Ghana. Its preserve may also reflect the recognition the negative effect of apathy on the success of many public policies sponsored by governments. Previous policies may have failed because individuals were apathetic towards their implementation. The only means of reducing social apathy is to frame the policy failures or inadequacies in clear terms. For example, there is the assumption that the general public is not patronizing the NHIS because of the belief that, like other government policies, it is bound to fail. This is an issue that has been clearly captured in some of the stories carried by the newspapers. Once the media frames the issues in such pattern, the general public and civil society are likely to pick it up the issue of social apathy as debilitating social malaise that has an
evaluative function of determining the sustainability of the new policy in relation to the
general level of individual participation in the new program. According to this study, the
social apathy news frame may not be a dominant medium of communicating the NHIS
stories, yet it is significant because its communicative purpose helps to reveal another
reason why the public fail to embrace some government policies.

Corruption news frame

The Corruption news frame is among the least dominant news frames used by the
media to narrate the NHIS stories. According to the Table 1, this news frame appeared in
57 thematic spaces to discuss the health policy. Corruption, like politics, has continuously
been a dominant discourse in coverage of events by newspapers in Ghana. However, in
this study, corruption as a frame was not very prominent news frame category. It
gathered less than a tenth of the total space of representation. Three interpretations can be
provided for this result.

First, two of the four major news papers used for the study, the *Daily Graphic* and
*The Ghanaian Times*, are state-owned. These newspapers receive the bulk of their
funding from the central government, and many of their workers are employed directly
by the government. The two newspapers are therefore very hesitant when it comes to
investigating and reporting acts of corruption by political actors or policy makers. Even
though the two private newspapers, *The Chronicle* and *the Daily Guide* are traditionally
more likely to focus on corruption in public offices, they also scored low percentage
points for the coverage on the policy through the corruption news frame. They did, in
relative percentage terms, use more space for the corruption frame than the state-owned
newspaper with the following, the (Daily Graphic, 6.9%; The Ghanaian Times, 7.1%; The Chronicle, 8.1%; and the Daily Guide, 8.9%).

Another important reason for the low use of the corruption news frame has been described as self-censorship on the part of journalist. This restriction arises out of their concern for political and cultural propriety and a “commitment to the positional interests of their newspaper” (Hasty, 2005; p.78). This sense of self-restraint presents itself when a journalist withholds a news story about corruption because the publication of the story may not be in the interest of the state or will have a negative impact on the implementation of the policy. In the case of the NHIS, a massive national exercise, any publication of serious malfeasance could be counter-productive to the goal of encouraging every citizen to join the scheme. In other situations, friendly relations between journalists and state officials produce a collusive working relationship that restrains them from publishing any information deemed adversarial to officialdom or betrayal of friendship.

Secondly, the newspapers mainly use government officials, policy makers, and politicians as the major sources for stories on NHIS. It is difficult to imagine how the same officials would openly discuss an issue like corruption because it risks negative effects on the policy they are promoting. Indeed, the contents of corruption stories reported come in the form of warnings from government officials and political actors to NHIS officials admonishing them to eschew corruption. Again, newspapers in Ghana may lack the ability to engage in independent investigative reporting that could have revealed important stories on corruption due to the unwillingness of officials to provide information to journalists without approval from higher authorities.
Thirdly, the program was officially launched in March 2004 and the study covers the period (January 2005-December 2007) when the NHIS was still in its infancy. Issues of corruption (if any) may emerge later.

Community and development news frame

The least dominant news frame engaged by the newspapers to represent the NHIS is the community and development news frame. This news frame used 49 thematic spaces which translate to 6.3% of the total space of coverage. Even though this news frame scored very low points on the news frame scale, it is an important frame because stories that are presented through this frame incorporate aspects of communal issues, local development programs, and the level of community participation in the policy. Again, newspapers are essentially urban commodities and some of the major stories on the NHIS like issues of community development and participation are more important to the rural areas. The sub-categories for this news frame included themes like durbars and festivals, commissioning of local projects, pronouncements of chiefs all of which set in the rural areas. However, the readership of these newspapers is mostly urban dwellers, not rural folks who are normally the focus of the community and development new frame. It is therefore reasonable that newspapers will devote only a small part of their coverage to community issues because the target readers are just a fragment of the readership.

Though newspapers also recognize health concerns as important issues, it is only when a community project of social significance such as the completion of a health post is being commissioned that the rural communities attracts the attention of these media. Other events, such as festivals or durbars, may provide the forum for an important government functionary to make a pronouncement that may later be published in the
newspapers. These are very rare occasions. Some of them occur annually, and consequently, provide a basis for the low coverage of the community and development news frame category in the representation of the NHIS.

The multi-perspective news frame narrative

The seven thematic categories indicate that newspapers reporting NHIS news stories rely on some form of culturally-grounded routine reportage. Based on this pattern of the local news media narrative, the study discovered that the NHIS were framed through a multi-perspective and multi-thematic approach deeply seated in the cultural milieu. The use of the core issues frame as the most dominant frame helped to lend legitimacy to the scheme and effectively communicated the health policy in manner that really showed a new trend in health news coverage. A frame like social apathy, and community and development news frames borne out of the local media culture of promoting development and diverse discourse on social issues was also used to promote the NHIS policy agenda. Furthermore, whilst it could be inferred from the news frame category distribution that core NHIS issues, business, and health news frames were the prominent framing mode, none could be presented as a single dominant thematic model, because the news frames were not thematically disconnected, but intertwined and interlocked. Figure 1 below is a pictorial representation of the deployment of the seven frames by newspapers.
RQ 1c) what was the degree of prominence given to the NHIS stories in terms of the location of the stories?

News stories achieve prominence depending on their location in a newspaper. In general, news stories of high political and social significance fill the front pages of newspapers. Front page stories are the first point of attraction to any news reader and are supposed to preset the most compelling events and narratives so the reader buys the paper. Regular coverage of an issue on the front page of newspapers helps keep its agenda on course, especially if such agenda has a political implication. Readers first assess the importance of news story by looking at the front page headlines.

*Figure 1.* Bar graph of the cumulative frequency distribution of the seven news frames used for the coverage of NHIS by four newspapers for the period January 2005-December 2007.
Ghanaian newspapers also choose stories for the front pages, based on relevance or provocativeness. The broadcast media in Ghana, especially the FM radio stations read most of the top stories on air every morning and, with the assistance of a discussion panel or radio call-in programs, follow up with an analysis of the contents. Many radio top stories are taken from the headlines on the front pages of newspapers. Whilst the stories that appear elsewhere in the newspaper cannot be discounted, their degree of symbolic significance and invitation to the public to a reading engagement is less.

This research investigated the degree of prominence accorded the NHIS news stories by looking at the number of stories that began with a headline and part or all of the contents on the front page. It also studied similar stories that appeared inside or elsewhere in the newspapers. Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of the location of the NHIS stories in the four newspapers for the period of study.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Location of NHIS News Stories for the 4 Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Graphic</th>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Guide</th>
<th>Chronicle</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front Page</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>84.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* n=279 news articles

As can be seen from the table, in all newspapers, only few of the stories were accorded high prominence. The Daily Graphic, displayed only 20 headlines out of 103 NHIS

Cumulatively, out of the 279 news NHIS news stories published by the four newspapers for the study period, only 46 appeared as either headlines or top stories on the front pages. In percentage terms, 16.5% of the stories gained high prominence by appearing as headlines. The bulk of the new stories representing 83.5% of the total number of NHIS issues, were located inside the paper.

The first major impression is that, in general, editorial newsrooms did not see most of the NHIS stories warranting a front page splash. Two reasons may explain this outcome. Most of the news stories that take front page coverage are sourced from official corridors. A large number of them are woven round the statements or speeches of authoritative personalities such as the president, ministers, government and political functionaries. If, for any reason, the NHIS stories, instead of emanating as powerful pronouncements from such authorial figures, rather come from some low-keyed public affairs officials or low-level civil servants, they are unlikely to make a front page cover. This position can clearly be contextualized as important ground for front page coverage, especially in the case of the state-owned press. The other reason may be that the NHIS is a new concept in the political and social discourse of Ghanaians. Its level of social significance is in developmental stages and must compete for the limited space with other institutionalized events such as politics, sports, and corruption for front page coverage.

The very low number of stories that appeared on the front pages of the two private independent newspapers is evidence of their editorial priority that focuses more on issues
of political provocation as necessary events for front page, and not necessarily social relevance. For example, headlines of the four NHIS news stories that appeared on the front pages of the two newspapers deal with disenchantment or corruption. It can be concluded from the findings that the NHIS news stories were not accorded any high degree of prominence, relevance, or priority by the newspapers in Ghana.

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of location of news stories in each of the four newspapers from January 2005-December 2007.
RQ #1 d) What news sources did the newspapers use for the presentation of the NHIS news stories?

The literature review indicated that, when it comes to news reporting, the African media tend to rely heavily on government and official sources for their news production. This reliance is based on the assumption that government and official sources have a high degree of credibility. This preference for government and official sources means news stories often reproduce official discourse. As stated in the literature review, frequent reliance on government and official sources is an indication that newspapers help preserve the status quo and legitimate the dominant ideology by articulating the ideas of the ruling elites. On the other hand, reliance on other independent news sources means that newspapers are able to give voice to institutions and individuals outside officialdom and create a diverse arena for public discourse. This is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Sources Cited for the Four Newspapers from January 2005-December 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Graphic</th>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Chronicle</th>
<th>Guide</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.8%)</td>
<td>(44.6%)</td>
<td>(52%)</td>
<td>(50%)</td>
<td>(40.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHI/Health officials</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.0%)</td>
<td>(20.0%)</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
<td>(23.1%)</td>
<td>(21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs &amp; Interest Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.9%)</td>
<td>(9.2%)</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
<td>(7.7%)</td>
<td>(6.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire Agency/GNA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15.4%)</td>
<td>(13.9%)</td>
<td>(24%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(14.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27.9%)</td>
<td>(12.3%)</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>(19.2%)</td>
<td>(18.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings as shown in Table 4 indicate that all the newspapers sourced most of their stories from government officials or politicians. The results further show that some news sources were utilized more than others in reporting the NHIS stories. As indicated in Table 4 the private newspapers sourced more than half of their NHIS stories from government, officials and politicians. *The Chronicle* obtained 52% of their news stories from the government whilst the *Daily Guide* gathered 50% of their stories from the same source. This is an interesting finding because the private newspapers have a more developed culture seeking information for their stories outside of official sources than the state-owned newspapers. In addition, the private newspapers have a more adversarial relationship with government officials and politicians because of their mission of transparency and accountability. Hence, it is common knowledge that the private media’s reporting culture gravitates toward the utilization of non-government independent sources. But, because the NHIS is a relatively new policy, most of the information on its implementation can from government rather than other sources. In fact, earlier analysis of some of articles for this study revealed that most of the information on all the core issues such as registration, premium payment, and drug and disease coverage were obtained from government officials or politicians.

*The Daily Graphic* utilized 30.8% of its news sources from government whilst *The Ghanaian Times* used 44.6% of its news stories from the same source. These statistics show a large dependence on official sources in reporting the health policy. The findings for the two newspapers are not surprising. They are both state-owned newspapers and have, since their establishment, developed a collusive working
relationship with government. The two newspapers are also seen as mouth-piece of

government, and, unlike the private newspapers, have easy access to corridors of power
where they are able to access vital information with which they are expected to project
and promote government agenda.

In cumulative terms, 40.7% of NHIS stories reported in newspapers came from
the government sources. So this study can state that, when it comes to coverage of the
NHIS stories, newspapers in Ghana utilized government sources as the major avenue of
news gathering because: 1), they are the only sources where information on the NHIS
could be easily accessed; 2), they are the only sources that had a high degree of
credibility and authenticity; and 3), a collusive working relationship that has developed
between journalists, government official and politicians.

National Health Insurance/ Health Officials

Officials of the NHIS, health officials, and medical professionals were the next
most quoted source for all stories on the new health policy. The Daily Graphic had 24%
of their sources from National Health Insurance/ Health Officials; the Ghanaian Times
20%; The Chronicle 12%; and, the Daily Guide 23.1%. For the entire period of study,
21.1% of sources for all the newspapers came from National Health Insurance/ Health
official.

The result shows an almost equal level of reliance on this news source by all the
newspapers. A claim can be made here that that access to this medium as news source is
non-restrictive and open equally to all journalists. It also means that officials operating
the scheme and the medical professional executing the policy are forthcoming with
information on the NHIS for the media.
NGOs and Interest Groups

The newspapers also depended on NGOs and interest groups to report NHIS stories. Some NGOs and interest groups in Ghana have a reputation of presenting objective facts on national discourse. Again, some of the NGOs and interest groups had shown a high level of interest in the implementation of the scheme by undertaking educational and campaign drives to help more people join program. Other NGOs and interest groups had also conducted research on issues that impact on the scheme. Hence, they formed an independent news source necessary for the confirmation or contestation of information gathered from other sources, especially, from government official or politicians.

The results from the data obtained, as displayed on Table 4, show that 1.9% of news sources for the Daily Graphic came from NGOs and interest groups. The Ghanaian Times used this source in 9.2% of situations, The Chronicle 4%, and the Daily Guide 7.7%. Cumulatively, 6% of news sources for the newspapers NGOs and interest groups. The low rate of reliance on this source shows that, despite their reliability as objective news sources, newspapers in Ghana are reluctant to seek information from them. It is likely that journalists do not want to use their medium to promote frequent contestation of facts between government and other non-governmental agencies, especially in cases where most of the NGOs have foreign/western orientations. Second, NGOs and interest groups, unlike the government sources, do not have regular update on government policies from where the media could, on consistent basis, gather information to feed the public. Most of the information given to journalists from this source came in the form of press releases, press conferences, and quarterly or annual reports on research conducted.
Wire Agency/ Ghana News Agency (GNA)

The newspapers also utilized GNA as the third major source for the coverage of the NHIS news stories. For the *Daily Graphic*, 15.4% of news sources for the stories on the scheme came from the GNA; *The Ghanaian Times*, 13.9%; *The Chronicle*, 24%; the *Daily Guide* never used the source at all. The total amount of usage of this news source by all the newspapers for this category was 14% for the period of research. This indicates that the GNA also represents another major news source with some degree of credibility for the media. This mid-level degree of reliance on GNA may be based on its close affiliation as a government news agency. The *Daily Guide* may not have used this source because they see the GNA as government public relations machinery or as complementary media agency that beefs up the existing public relations role being performed by the state media. Its position as a state agency, in reality, is an extension of the government sources. Many journalists will rather seek information from either source, and not from both at the same time.

Other sources

These news sources include anonymous and other independent sources that are utilized by the newspapers, especially during investigative reporting on the NHIS. The *Daily Graphic* depended heavily on this source, using it in 27.9% of the cases. For this newspaper, dependency on “Other” sources is almost on the same level as that of government sources. *The Ghanaian Times* used these sources in 12.3% cases; *The Chronicle* 8%; and, the *Daily Guide* 19.2%.

For the entire period of research, the aggregate dependence on “other” sources for the NHIS news stories by all the newspapers accounted for 18.2%. This low rate of
dependence on “other” sources means that, newspapers rarely seek news stories from individuals, and anonymous sources. The findings also support the assertion that newspapers rely more on official sources than on investigative reporting. The implication is that, in most cases where the reliance is on government sources, newspapers tend to give the greatest voice to public officials on public discourse. However, the very presence of this news source is an indication that newspapers are, at the same time, willing to seek alternative views, voices and sources to broaden the discussion of issues they put in the public sphere.

Figure 3. Bar graph pictorial representation of the various news sources used by all the four newspapers to report on the NHIS for the period January 2005-December 2007.

Summary

This chapter presented the first part of the findings and analysis for the data obtained for the study. The discussions and findings pertain to the data collected from the
four newspapers for the research. The findings and discussions detailed in this chapter are also part of the outcome of investigations conducted into how the Ghanaian newspapers framed the National Health Insurance Scheme. The second part of the findings will be discussed in the next chapter. The results for the data obtained are in response to the first research question (and sub-questions) that were asked in chapters one and three, namely:

RQ1): How did the media represent or frame the NHIS stories?

1a): What were the dominant frames through which the NHIS stories were narrated?

1b): What was the degree of prominence given to the NHIS stories in terms of the location of the stories?

1c): What news sources did the newspapers use for the presentation of the NHIS news stories?

The first section of the chapter shows the various news frames that emerged from a close reading of the narratives of the four newspapers. The frames are presented in thematic categories and laid out in the form of frequency distribution on tables and graphs accompanied by a detailed analysis of the results for each frame. The findings show that all the seven frames were utilized by the newspapers to discuss the NHIS. The news frames were also analyzed on the degree of dominance of individual news frame over others. The results show that newspapers utilized the core NHIS issues news frame as the most important device to discuss the NHIS whilst the community and development news frame was the least used interpretive frame. The findings also indicate that, in reporting on the NHIS, newspapers in Ghana emphasized on the fundamental core
issues of the scheme rather than on the social issues like politics and corruption that normally surround it.

The chapter also presented the findings of the degree of prominence given to the NHIS stories by investigating the stories’ location. Location categorized a story as prominent if it appeared on the front page of the newspapers. The results also show that newspapers in Ghana did not give the NHIS with any high level of prominence. Only about 16.4% of the stories were given prominence.

Finally, the study inquired about the sources of news in the NHIS coverage. The findings showed that newspapers in Ghana still use government as the major source of collecting information for their news stories. In 40.7% of the cases, newspapers relied on the government sources to present stories on the NHIS. This degree of reliance on government sources implies that newspapers in Ghana still continue to give the greatest voice to politicians and government officials in public discourse.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION II

Journalists as Advocates of Public Health Policies

In the last chapter, I presented the first part of the findings and discussion on how news stories in four newspapers framed the Ghana covered the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). The presentation of the results was limited to the data obtained from the four newspapers. In this chapter, I present the results from the in-depth interviews conducted with media professionals (journalists and public affairs officials) to elicit their views on the coverage of the NHIS in newspapers. While the findings in this second section obviously pertain to the in-depth interviews, the discussion is broadened to include some references to the analysis that emerged from chapter four on how newspapers framed the NHIS. The idea is to help understand how the culture of news framing in the Ghanaian media is closely related to the reporting practices of media professionals as well as their attitudes toward the phenomenon being reported on.

The findings and discussion are presented in relation to two of the research questions that were asked in chapter three. The research questions include;

RQ2. What are the views of media professionals toward the representation of NHIS news stories in newspapers?

RQ 3: Did the NHIS coverage function as stories resonating official discourse on health issues?

The results obtained from the interviews are categorized into themes and extrapolated over the two research questions depending on the relevance of the theme to the research question. The following five themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Transforming NHIS coverage into mainstream health news;
2. Communicating NHIS as informative health messages;
3. NHIS as specialized field for media coverage;
4. Communication gap between media and policy makers in NHIS/health news coverage; and
5. Coverage of NHIS/health news as reproduction official statements.

As indicated in chapter three, six media professionals were interviewed for the study. The interviewees included two journalists from the *Daily Graphic* (made up of a staff reporter and a news editor), a staff reporter from *The Ghanaian Times*; the Public Affairs Manager of the National Health Insurance Secretariat in Accra, a Deputy Director at the Ministry of Health who is also the Ministry’s spokesperson on the NHIS, and the Public Relations officer at Bantama Sub-Metro Mutual Health Insurance Scheme in Kumasi.

The interviews provided insights and divergent views on the coverage of the NHIS in the print media. The responses are presented under each research question in relation to the thematic relevance.

RQ2. What are the views of media professionals toward the representation of NHIS news stories in newspapers?

*Transforming NHIS coverage into mainstream health news*

In the last chapter the results from the data showed that newspapers covered NHIS by framing the stories around several specific images and symbols that had sound interpretive significance to readers and the general public. The packaging of the NHIS stories, like the presentation of any other news story, is influenced by several socio-cultural and organizational structures (Scheufele, 1999; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The
attitudes of media professionals toward the coverage of the NHIS are dictated by their own journalistic practices as well as the perception of how readers come to make sense of their reportage. In the construction of the NHIS stories, newspapers acknowledged the importance of selling the program as an alternative choice for better health care. Through the provision of knowledge to the general public about NHIS, newspapers lived up to their responsibility of providing information that will allow the public to make the necessary choices about health care. It is this sense of responsibility that provided a base for the NHIS issues to be drawn into mainstream news representation.

According to past research, health issues “turned” journalists “off” and, as a result, warranted only limited space of representation in newspapers. However, the NHIS “turned them on” (Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988: p. 93) and was given wider and increased coverage in newspapers in Ghana. The general perception that came out of the interviews was that newspapers emphasized the NHIS through wider and increased coverage of the issues and events relating to the policy.

The news editor for Daily Graphic, Mr. Sam Okaitey (personal communication, March 18, 2008) underlined this point of giving wider coverage on the grounds that the newspaper saw NHIS as the center of all health issues in the country. He further indicated that NHIS can help reduce the many health problems facing individuals and lessen cost of health provision at the point of service. In a response to the prominence given to the NHIS in a relation to other health stories, he revealed that the NHIS had achieved a central position on health issues in the country because a lot of inquiries Graphic received from the general public about health issues centered on NHIS. He states:
I would say that with regards to enquiries that we get from outside, with regard to people who call, at the center of all the health issues is the NHIS. That is the center of all health issues because you know the poverty levels in this country and therefore people are exposed to all forms of illness in this country and therefore they know that without the NHIS most of them would not have any treatment when they go to the hospital. We are publishing more stories because we have more people who asking about some very basic things that they want to know.

This response shows that the central position assumed by NHIS in the representation of health news has been dictated by a general perception that has come to solve many health problems. The statement means that wider and increased coverage has been necessitated by the readers’ reaction to, and feedback on the NHIS to the newspaper and not by any journalistic practice, or established newsroom and culture. More importantly, it also shows that individuals are now beginning to assume a high level of responsibility for their health concerns and are willing to seek information to help them make choices. The news editor points out that, since readers have put these at the center of the health news it is the responsibility of the media to bring the issues to the mainstream social discourse so that people can become more informed on the NHIS. Consequently, the wider and impressive coverage accorded the NHIS as a health policy is a direct outcome of the overwhelming feedback the media received from the readers and the general public.

Miss Lucy AdomahYeboah (personal communication, March 12, 2008) and Mr. Clement Atagra (personal communication, March 14, 2008), the two staff reporters from Daily Graphic and the The Ghanaian Times respectively also shared similar views in separate interviews. According to Atagra, The Ghanaian Times attaches importance to NHIS
because it aims to bring relief to people who otherwise would not have been able to afford health care. He explained that the newspaper went the extra mile to bring up stories that would help more individuals join the scheme. He indicates:

For me as a reporter and as an organization we attach so much importance to the NHIS as opposed to what we had some years ago called the cash and carry. We attach so much importance to it and sometimes we go out of our way to get stories that have to do with the scheme and entice people with our stories to be part of the scheme… we have in a way done many stories to get far more people to register especially the less privileged to make sure that a lot more people enjoy from the scheme.

Lucy Adomah expressed her views along similar lines:

It is laudable scheme that would help people in the country most especially the poor because we are a developing country where most people cannot afford basic health care.

She also adds another dimension to the mainstreaming of this health issue as a significant news event. She opined that the wider coverage is also the outcome of journalists’ personal interest and stake in the coverage of the scheme and other health issues. Accordingly, she takes a lot of her time to do stories because she is personally interested in success of the scheme. She expressed her views:

Personally I had an interest in the scheme, and personally for me when I joined Graphic I was attached to the health desk so I did a lot of stories on health issues and as I’ve already stated that I’m interested in the Health Insurance Scheme and I take much of my time to do stories about the scheme.
This new dimension of the coverage of the NHIS is important because most of the stories that hit the front pages of the *Daily Graphic* are done by Miss Yeboah. Arjouch (1998) stated that the social construction of news is sometimes dictated by the personal perspectives of the journalist. This concept posits that in the determination of news, there are “various instances where personal experiences directly influence the definition of news and the subsequent reporting of news” (p. 349). The concept of personalization allows journalists to relate the human element of their journalistic responsibility to the social reality of readers. Through the above statement, Yeboah subjects her journalistic practice to the construction of the NHIS new stories to the concept of personalization. She adds further:

> We know that this scheme can help the public and can help the ordinary person and most of us reporters here, apart from being reporters, we also have also family members in the rural areas who need this scheme to help them…so like I was telling you as individuals we also have stake in the scheme.

This concept of personalization might have influenced other journalists in other media houses in the representation of NHIS stories in newspapers too. Mr. Ibrahim Wiredu (personal communication, March 26, 2008), the Public Affairs Manager of NHIS secretariat underlines the concept of personalization as an important ingredient for greater and objective coverage. He explains:

> Whereas it may be a little difficult for a newspaper man to walk into a classroom to ask a pupil whether a teacher taught well in the math class today, it is very easy, in fact that newspaper man may even be a member of the scheme, and therefore have a first time experience with the scheme. And therefore wherever he
comes across something about NHIS as not meeting his expectations obviously it become news to him.

Unlike the coverage of other health stories, the NHIS stories became mainstream stories because the newspaper accorded some level of importance and recognition to the policy and allowed it to attain a normative status in the newspaper reporting culture in media rooms. NHIS stories, within the short period of existence, became synonymous with news stories of substance such as those on politics, corruption, and sports that have been the dominant news stories that regularly hit the headlines of newspapers. As they adopted the health policy as a major news event the newspapers were eager to publish any story on the NHIS. Ms Adoma Yeboah emphasizes this point of the unyielding efforts of the media house to publish all NHIS stories:

I don’t remember doing a health insurance story that has been thrown away. I don’t remember. Maybe one or two but I can’t remember or put my figure on any health insurance story that an editor will reject. Anything about health insurance is published.

Newspapers came to regard any communicative event that had the remotest connection with the NHIS as publishable event. Of course, even though the interviewee indicates that “Anything about health insurance is published,” it is a fact that newspapers must use a communicative style that gives the news story substance as top priority. Editorial newsrooms can create the connection through the concept of framing. In this regard the NHIS newspapers took several recognizable themes such as politics, corruption, community development and business that have become part of the readership culture in Ghana and framed the stories around them. It was a method that also packaged
the NHIS stories as publishable pieces worthy of regular release. The stories did not only achieve increased publications because of how they were framed but also some news stories were sourced from remote locations of the country at the community, districts and regional levels. Instances of sourcing NHIS stories nationwide is revealed in how such stories that emanated from the remote community levels were framed as community development themes as well as using the narratives of chiefs, assembly men and local opinion leaders to disseminate the NHIS. Benjamin Kufuor (personal communication, April 6, 2008), the public relations officer for Bantama Sub-Metero Mutual health Insurance Scheme, sheds more light on this phenomenon and explains:

Some traditional authorities are also talking about NHIS so that helps… I mean when we are organizing a durbar, or when we also go for community registration they get us some chiefs to do the local announcement.

Through all these diverse and intertwined publication frameworks, the NHIS became mainstream health news that appeared in both different and repetitive themes during the three year period. This form of coverage was unique because, unlike like malaria and HIV/AIDS campaigns that saw increased coverage during the periods close to the days set aside to give them a global recognition, NHIS achieved newsworthiness on its own without a celebratory date. Again, its mainstream newsworthiness is also seen in the effectiveness of the newspapers ability to describe the health policy in appropriate and relevant terms that reinforced the kind of social knowledge wielded by the readers. Each NHIS new story measures up to the newsworthiness criteria of relevance, proximity, recency, timeliness, and novelty (Fishman, 1980; Lester 1980; Turner, 1980; van Dijk, 1988). Newspapers in Ghana also invoked culture as the vehicle for the
representation of the NHIS so that more readers could identify with the health policy as part of the values, norms, and frames shared in the collective memory of the media professionals and the community in which they live (Van Gorp, 2007).

Communicating NHIS as informative health messages

Despite the assertion that NHIS stories had all the characteristics of newsworthiness item, the persuasive capacity of the stories to provide enough information for the general public to make correct choices still remained hidden. The in-depth interviews revealed different perceptions from media professionals on the informative substance of these stories. While some expressed their satisfaction with the stories and argued that the stories had enough information on the health policy to allow the public to make the needed decision, others disagreed. The review of literature showed that a news story is normally framed to perform two functions. It defines issues at stake for the reported phenomenon, and identifies patterns of representation within the normative narratives that can potentially influence public perception.

Ibrahim Wiredu acknowledged the brilliant job being performed by the media to promote the NHIS. Nevertheless, he was of the opinion that the newspaper, normally, did not provide objective facts for the people to have some positive impression about the scheme. He explained that, sometimes, the story is presented in a biased manner that does not allow readers to make an objective assessment of the scheme. He pointed out a story that appeared in the Daily Graphic that was so one-sided that it lost its informative feature that would have allowed readers to make any objective evaluation of the NHIS. He narrates:
This thing is real- a doctor charges a patient at Takoradi for removing the hernia. He was an NHIS member. That person was a farmer and he got angry and went to the scheme to go and collect his money and somehow Graphic reported the story. You see, but Graphic reported the story as if NHIS is not working which is not true. They did not even report the fact that it was a provider of NHIS who was at fault but the picture was painted as if NHIS does not live up its responsibilities or does not pay what it is supposed to pay or does not live by what it is supposed to be. So that image was quite damaging to a young scheme or a young program that had just began in the country. It discouraged people from joining the scheme.

Wiredu’s disclosure is that the newspaper failed to define issues for the public to make their own judgments. He perceives the inadequacy of the NHIS reportage from an angle of negativity. To him what was communicated was a rather negative image that would only end up denting the substance of the scheme. The newspapers neglected their function of providing objective information and analysis of the event from which individuals could make evaluative choices. The outcome of this biased representation is a resultant loss of faith in the health policy and in that particular medium of communication. It can also lead to the use of alternative forms of media as a way of repairing the damage caused by the negative publicity engaged by the initial media outlet. He adds:

So what did we do? So we went there to bring a positive aspect on the implementation of the scheme to counter this one-the negative on…In fact when we go out our marketing programs to counter such negative images we don’t use the newspapers any more. We are more interested in getting not the newspapers
alone but other media that have interpersonal links that do interpersonal public relations for us which are those programs we have the like GTV, we have “Mmaa Nkomo” program. We take Mmaa Nkomo, the producer and we move to a district.

Any form of adjudged news misrepresentation or information inadequacy in a newspaper can lead to a shift of interest towards another medium such as the broadcast media. It is a shift of interest that symbolizes readers and public contestation of the journalistic practices and reporting style of a particular media house. Of course, such contests of facts can only be performed by parties like the public affairs representatives of organizations who may have operational interests in the coverage and can mobilize to challenge the misrepresented facts. The contestation of facts is a mechanism that can hardly be utilized by individual members of the general public to probe the facts or substance of the story. The only tool available to readers in such circumstances is to engage in oppositional reading or confirm the fact from other sources in a manner that may not necessarily indicate an aggressive contestation of newspaper’s narrative facts.

Benjamin Kufuor supports Wiredu’s position and is of the opinion that the newspapers have been lax in the coverage of the new health policy. The media, according to him, are more interested in politics and entertainment. Even when the newspapers publish NHIS stories they lack objectivity and prominence:

When you look at the Ghanaian media basically what they are interested in is either entertainment or politics which has been the order of the day. Even when

47 Mmaa Nkomo is a weekly adult education program broadcast in the local language Akan on the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Television station- GTV. The program focuses on the role of women in contemporary society as well as feminist perceptions and narratives on social discourse.
you see a health insurance news item, it is either at the center spread or somewhere around page 22 and then it is cornered somewhere so we don’t give the actual view of health insurance. I have never seen a story like -I stand to be corrected- I’ve never seen story with the headline “health insurance pays claim up to the tune of 18 million cedis”, but then we’ve paid claims more than this amount…

He also recounts the loss of trust in the medium and indicates a shift towards the broadcast media. He states further that his office has developed closer and better relationships with the broadcast media than the print media because a simple phone call during a live program can easily correct a misrepresentation or distortion of facts about the scheme. Above all, he intimates that the broadcast media, especially FM radio stations have wider coverage, are cheaper, and easier to access.

Clement Atagra of the *Ghanaian Times* acknowledges that some of the NHIS stories are not informative enough. He states his point of view from his position as a reporter who has covered and reported on similar stories on the NHIS in *The Ghanaian Times*:

> What we always do is to tell them about the scheme and such things like you don’t need to pay upfront before you receive treatment. That’s all the information we provide them. If you go round and ask people what the NHIS is all about, I mean we all know about the core issues and what the NHIS is all about. But we don’t go further to tell them all the details they need to know about the scheme beyond telling them that they don’t need to pay up front before accessing health care and all that and that is all. Even that of us in the media when we report about NHIS what we have in mind is that with NHIS you don’t really need to pay
before you access health care. I mean we don’t really look at all the nitty-gritty of the scheme itself. We concentrate on that aspect and sometimes we make a lot of politics out of it.

In the above statement, Atagra underlines the presence of superficial information in the NHIS stories. This revelation is significant because he is an insider and the substance of his revelation provides a connection between the lack of faith in the newspaper stories and the transfer of allegiance towards other media outlets by the members of the general public. Atagra describes in strong terms the lack of information in some reports. He further explains how some stories clearly dissonance among their headlines, the lead paragraphs, and the rest of the story:

There is commissioning of something and something is said about NHIS and that is the front page story. One, two, there, four lines the subsequent lines have nothing to do with NHIS itself but all what the politicians came to say. So they just use the few first lines to say something about NHIS and really that is what happens and you don’t see the link between your lead and the subsequent paragraph and what you have in your lead and your supporting story. So you see the story kind of have very little information about the NHIS…I mean there a lot of people who will just see the headline and may not read the story, so they will get the impression that NHIS is doing this and then they go and argue that NHIS is doing this but they have not read the rest of the story they’ve seen just the headline… but honestly you realize that most often there is no link between the lead and the rest of the story and if you are giving very little information about the scheme then you are not doing the people any good.
He, however, rationalizes this inadequacy of information. He points out that journalists routinely lack access to the information they need to make news and present objective facts about issues. His submits that even where such flaws about the representation exist, the drawback thrives on the frame of official refusal to provide information to journalists who write stories. He explains:

The biggest problem for me is getting information on all issues. But you know the emphasis here is on NHIS and getting to talk to people. You have heard or you have some perception or you want to investigate about something, you want to hear it from the horse’s own mouth. The one you feel is in a position to talk to, you book an appointment, the person knows you are coming and you get there the person is at a meeting and you have to wait for so long and the person comes and responds that you never had an appointment with me and says come tomorrow and you go the next day and he is at a meeting somewhere. You find it very difficult and frustrating…

Notwithstanding the concession articulated by The Ghanaian Times reporter, it is obvious that a newspaper story that leaves a gaping hole of missing facts will lack informative features. The views of the media professionals interviewed clearly demonstrate a general trend of inadequate information in the coverage of the NHIS policy.

Defining issues about the NHIS is a paramount duty for the media. But, it will be practically impossible for them to provide objective facts if they lack access to information. Without adequate information, the journalistic duty of presenting issues in patterns that can help people make decisions will not be met substantively. However, the
effect of this laxity on the part of newspapers has led to a positive response towards other forms of media by public relations officers and, probably, by the general public. This positive response emerges in the form of a transformation that converts the disappointment encountered with the communicative message into a transfer of allegiance towards another news medium which had earlier been ignored. An expression of disappointment or loss of faith in one medium can lead to an exploration of better communicative avenues to address doubts and help make improvements in the coverage and representation of events. Significantly, the response reveals the necessity of cultivating diverse forms of media outlets as the surest and most responsive way of defining issues for a reported phenomenon. It also helps to identify particular patterns of representation within the normative narratives that can potentially influence the way that phenomenon is perceived. The transfer of allegiance toward a new medium of communication also reinforces the need to seek alternative communicating channels that help to discover new approaches for solving problems (Wallack, 1994).

**NHIS as specialized field for media coverage**

The literature on health news reporting by African journalists identifies specialization and lack of training as some of the limitations that lead to poor coverage. The in-depth interviews also sought views of media professionals on the importance of specialization and training as the ultimate qualification needed by journalists to increase health news stories reported in the media. Two schools of thought have emerged from specialization and training as a mechanism to promote health news coverage by the media. The first school of thought believes that specialization is a prerequisite for informed and better health news reporting since many health issues are scientific and
technical. Journalists who intend to report in these areas must have formal training and education in the subject area to gain in-depth knowledge in order to ask intelligent questions and conduct better interviews for their stories. Their argument is basically founded on specialization and training as a formal and certifiable qualification. The other school argues that even though some form of specialization and training are needed they need not be acquired formally. Specialization and training for specific subject areas are not taught in any journalism school. These are arts that can be learned through self-training and self-motivation.

All the interviewees acknowledged that journalists need some formal training that will equip them with the necessary skills to report competently on health issues. They also see the NHIS as policy written in technical language and will demand some special knowledge on the part of journalists to make stories more understandable to the general public. Ibrahim Wiredu explains that one of the major problems that public relations officers face in the coverage of the NHIS is that journalists are not well educated on the policy and therefore lack the capacity to conduct the best investigation and present comprehensive reports in their stories. In a response to the question, “Do the journalists understand the scheme and what it entails?,” he responded:

No, they don’t and we see that as our responsibility to educate them. You see that is where we come in… The biggest problem is the fact that the media themselves are not well educated. And we are doing something about it. We held a workshop for some of them here in Accra and we intend to go to the regions and hold workshops for them so that some of the misconceptions like the NHIS is one big company, is one big program, some reports which say that this company is one
big company being operated by one big office and this office is the head office will be cleared.

In support of the first school of thought, Wiredu acknowledges the need for some training for journalists to give accurate, objective, and responsible coverage on the scheme. But he internalizes the responsibility to provide the special training to the journalists as an act that should be pursued by his office, the National Health Insurance Secretariat, and not the journalist or the media houses. He provides an illustration of the workshops that they have organized for training media professionals to provide better coverage on the health policy. His perception and response to technical knowledge as a need is revealed in the proactive response taken by the Secretariat to provide mechanisms for addressing the issue. He also exhorts organizations whose activities are impacted by the news reports to help educate journalists to provide better information to the general public. Journalists and their employer organizations may lack the resources to routinely provide such training because the areas of specialization are diverse and wide, and individual journalists and media houses may not have the capacity to independently undertake such job training and specialization programs.

Clement Atagra shares similar perspectives for special training by advancing issues of technicalities as the major hindrance to accurate and objective coverage of health issues. According to him, the technical language of some health polices and issues generates difficulties in understanding the contents of the policy which, in turn, leads to a lack of confidence by journalists to dutifully ask questions or conduct proper interviews for the coverage of the NHIS program. He indicates in his response:
I think that there is the need to have more training. There should be more training for journalists on such issues as NHIS. Because there are technicalities in reporting these issues so that if you are not trained you hear some of the things and you get confused and there are certain questions that you can’t ask. I mean you feel that they are so basic that you should know but you don’t know and you think everybody knows except you. You feel asking such questions will make you look stupid but you have to ask… so for me the issue is we should be equipped through training on regular basis.

The interviewee provides three grounds upon which the training and specialization become prerequisites for health news reporting. The three grounds are the technicality of issues, the lack of basic knowledge in the subject area, and a state of incapacity—the lack of self-confidence of the media to probe the subject area through interviews and questions. Atagra’s grounds of insufficiency for the low coverage of health issues by the media are a reflection of similar sentiments expressed in previous research by Obeng-Quaidoo (1988). In response to the need for journalists to have some training in order to report on health issues Obeng-Quaidoo states:

It is a fact that most journalists need to be educated on health issues in order to ask intelligent questions during interviews…

It appears that quite a number of the respondents need to be trained in basic specific areas of training of journalism like investigative journalism, library research, reporting and scientific reporting, and the rudiments of science research. Perhaps such training would give them self-confidence to search for information (p. 94).
On his part Alhaiji Muniru (personal communication, March 21, 2008), the Ministry of Health spokesperson on the NHIS policy believes that most of the coverage of the NHIS lacks substance because many journalists lack the necessary investigative skills needed for them to probe and uncover all the issues surrounding the scheme. He explains that even when journalists are not able to discuss the policy because of its technical nature, there are enough bureaucrats like him who have the technical knowledge to explain the policy to the journalist in simple terms that can be captured as comprehensible narratives in a news story. He does not advocate for any rudimentary form of training because he believes a lot of the journalists have already had this training. He rather insists that the only skill that media professionals need to know is the art of investigative reporting which according to him is lacking among Ghanaian media professionals.

Sam Okaitey also advocates for specialization as necessary skill for the construction of health news. He discloses in the interview that his media house has taken a huge step towards a better coverage of health news through the creation of special unit in their newsroom that devotes most of their writing on issues on health news. He remarks:

…you will see that that’s why we have specialized personnel like Rosemary Ardayfio, Lucy Adomah Yeboah, Kofi Yeboah, and Caroline Boateng. These are people who we have identified as people with interest in health issues and they have developed the competence to actually look at the issues and analyze them.

Sam Okaitey is the news editor of the Daily Graphic and, as result he wields an authoritative voice in the construction of news by the media. His statement and the
revelation of an established health news reporting unit in the news room of the leading newspaper in the country strongly validate the argument that specialized skill is an important prerequisite for better health news coverage in the Ghanaian media. Lucy Adomah Yeboah shares the view that training and specialization are important skills needed by journalists to report adequately on health issues. Nevertheless, she is of the opinion that specialization skills can be acquired if journalists develop keen interests in the subject and work hard towards it. She adds:

Personally I had an interest in the scheme and personally for me when I joined Graphic I was attached to the health desk so I did a lot of stories on health issues and since I’ve already stated that I’m interested in health insurance scheme I take much of my time to do stories about the scheme.

She also expands her position by indicating that, even though training and specialization can motivate better performance, individual journalists must seek and search for information beyond what is immediately available to them. Miss Adoma Yeboah alludes to the internet as a useful tool for information gathering for all the knowledge one needs in any particular field. She finally downplays the call for specialization as a condition for better coverage on the grounds that responsible news reports depend more on individual interest in the issue than on the acquisition of special skills for reporting health news. In a response to the perception that journalist covering health issues don’t have the requisite skills to do the stories, she articulates her views coherently:

That depends on the individual. Because to me I don’t think it’s always the case. It’s good for you to get some training but it’s not always that you have to sit down for somebody to come and train you and tell you what to do. If you have interest
in a subject it’s up to you to go down and look for information. I mean the internet is now everywhere you can access information and you can move to any other place and you can read all the materials that you can find available. So it depends on the individual. Some people even when you give them the training they can still not produce or perform. So it’s an individual thing that’s how I see it.

This point of view supports the second school of thought which advocates self-motivation, self-training, interest cultivation in the subject area, and utilization of modern methods of communication technology such as the internet as processes that can lead to the acquisition of special skills for the coverage of health issues. This position is underlined by Obeng-Quaidoo’s (1988) statement:

Specialization might not be taught in the African journalism schools, but a responsible journalist who wants to write on agriculture, military, education, or health issues should read more in the particular field and self-educate himself/herself. In terms of health it would involve keeping close contacts with health personnel, frequenting medical libraries and generally getting interested in health issues (p. 97)

The outcome of the interviews on the issues of training and specialization as important tools for increased and improved health news coverage showed that media professionals overwhelmingly support the call to provide these special skills for journalists. However, Wiredu and Adomah Yeboah clearly provide indicates mechanisms that can easily address these needs. Their solutions are significant because their voices represent two major communication outlets in the country, public relations offices and media houses. The solutions they provide are also important as both processes
internalize training and specialization needs as in-house or individual responsibilities. Above all, the solution demand less logistical support, are cost effective, and can easily be replicated all over the continent in all media houses and public offices that have strong interests in how the media cover health news.

**Communication gap between policy makers and the media**

The interviews also explored the communication gap between policy makers and media professionals as one issue that has led to low coverage of health news in the media in Africa. This issue has also been cited by the literature (International Women Media Foundation, 2004; Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988) on Africa health news reporting and outlines the complicit roles of media personnel and their policy making partners on public health issues in accounting for the low representation of health news. The major hindrance, according to the conclusions drawn from the literature, is the lack of coordination between these two parties to roll out adequate information to the public on health matters. The consequence of this uncooperative attitude, according to previous research, is the huge gap that continues to exist between the two groups.

Contrary to the above assertion, the results of the interview did not reveal any huge gap between policy makers and the media. Informants acknowledged that the flow of information between them lacked sufficiency. Indeed in the case of the NHIS, information flow and exchanges between the media and policy makers have been more reliable than evasive. According to the public relations officers of the scheme, and the Ministry of Health official interviewed for this research, their offices enjoy very excellent rapport with the media because they are the major channels of communication that provide feedback to them on what is happening on the ground. They also serve as the
mechanism of evaluating and assessing their performance. Ibrahim Wiredu explains this role of the media:

They serve as feedback to us on what is happening there even though we have our own channels of communicating with them [the media]. So certainly they help because they are independent and they serve as feedback to us.

He also articulates this in the form of a dependency relationship between the media and public officials that demands regular exchanges. This dependency relationship has in turn produced a more cooperative working relationship between the two organizations in a sense that diminishes the notion of an existing communication gap between policy makers and the media. As an illustration, Wiredu acknowledges the need for media to be educated on the contents of the new health policy and the responsibility they have taken upon themselves to institute measures such as organizing workshops to provide this education to the media on the objectives of NHIS.

The interview with Alhaji Muniru, the spokesperson on NHIS at the Ministry of Health, also provided some insights into the working relationship that exists between their office and the media. This relationship stems from the feedback and dependency concepts. He remarks that, as policy makers, they relied heavily on the media to know what is happening on the ground so that issues that need to be addressed can be handled effectively. He describes the media as feedback and channels of communication:

Whatever you are doing you need somebody to critique and these are the people [the media] on the ground. You put up a policy you are not able to go down to test the policy so when the media gets the chance and bring them out then sometimes you are able to identify some of the weaknesses in the policy and by so doing and
as part of your evaluation work you are able to pick them up to address the issues. Sometimes during the implementation stages certain issues come up but you may not have the opportunity of knowing but the media they are able to bring them out... Especially when we started earlier on we had an issue of backlog of registration and this was frustrating a lot of people. You go and register and it takes you over a year and you can’t even get your card to access health. So a few problems were coming up and you could see the lashes from the newspapers that were coming up. So by so doing we had to wake up early to address issues of this nature so that people don’t get discouraged about the scheme…

The interview also reinforces the feedback role played by the media. The response from the interviewee also points out how dependence on the media by government officials for information has helps to identify lapses that arise out of the policy implementation. The regular feedbacks have led to cordial relations between the two entities. He describes this relationship with the media:

The relations are very cordial. We have public relations units and they work closely with the media and most at times when we have our programs we open it to them.

The above statements show that the communication gap between the media and policy makers identified in the literature (Domfeh, 1999; The International Women’s Media Foundation, 2004: Yankah, 1994) is exaggerated. The outcome of these interviews does not fully support the assumption. It may also be that, even if the trend existed, its impact on communication between the two groups has diminished. The policy makers indicated that their continuous dependence on the media for feedback does not allow room for any
coordination or communication gaps. This feedback and cordial relation between the media and policy makers is also supported by findings in chapter four which showed that most of the stories done by the media are sourced from the government sources. If there was a huge communication gap between the media and policymakers, it will have been difficult for media professionals to access most of their stories from government sources.

The two staff reporters from *The Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Graphic* interviewed for this study gave a slightly different assessment of relations between policy makers and the media. Both contended that, even though they rely on public officials and government for their stories on the NHIS, they still found it very difficult to access enough information for the stories. Clement Atagra conceptualizes this obstacle as a big problem in communicating the NHIS to the people:

> The biggest problem for me is getting information on all issues on NHIS, getting to talk to people. You have heard or you have some perception or you want to investigate about something, you want to hear it from the horse’s own mouth. The one you feel is in a position to talk you, you book an appointment, the person knows you are coming and you get there the person is at a meeting and you have to wait for so long and the person comes and responds that you never had an appointment with me and says come tomorrow and you go tomorrow and he is at a meeting somewhere and you find it very difficult and frustrating and you begin to have problems with your news editor because he thinks you probably did not go or something. And I don’t know whether it’s fear or what. It’s like people don’t want to talk. That for me is the problem.
Despite this assertion that seems to support a communication gap between the two groups, the same interviewee that supports the dependency concept espoused earlier. He relates:

In the country we have a problem with sources. I mean how we get our information and it appears that in Ghana the stories we get are from the officials. I mean it’s very difficult to go out of your way and do other stories outside what the officials will say. So most often we rely on what the minister of health would say or the Executive secretary or whatever of the NHIS would say, or anybody we feel is an authority in that field would say, and we hold it almost sacrosanct and that’s what we give prominence to.

His response shows that dependence on official sources for information is a phenomenon that has become an aspect of the reporting practices of the Ghanaian media culture that creates a cordial relationship with public officials. The fact that they hold official sources of information as sacrosanct means the sustenance of this relationship is an important priority for the Ghanaian media. The implication is that there cannot be a huge communication gap between media professionals and policy makers when the media’s relationship with policy has become so entrenched that it has become part of the media culture. This culture of Ghana media dependency on policy makers and officials for news making is further emphasized by Atagra:

I mean that is the culture we have developed over the years you know. So that if you go out and come back to write the story, it is expected that the one you talked to should be an authority in that field. And sometimes you feel that he is an authority in that field but sometimes he is just an official in that position and not
an authority on that field so what the person says becomes your story and you come and reproduce it and it becomes the news.

Adoma Yeboah shares her opinion about communication difficulties with public officials as one of the problems encountered by the media on the coverage of the scheme. She reiterates Atagra’s perspective of evasive policy makers and public officials who are unavailable to share or provide information sought by the media. She narrates her views:

Sometimes it’s difficult to get information from the council. You go there and then they sort of toss you up and down. You get a complaint from somebody… somebody can call you from outside to make a complaint that because of this or that he’s not able to assess his scheme meanwhile he has registered… People pay and for months they are being given cards. A person will come and show you the receipt. You see the receipt that she has registered and you think that the person is supposed to get the card and he’s not getting it, so instead of explaining why so that you would let the public know, they keep telling you go and come go and come and if you are somebody who is interested you can just get frustrated and forget about it... So news gathering from is difficult from the scheme’s side of the council [NHIS]. When you go to the council and you want information it’s difficult…

The informant’s statement seems to imply that the evasive attitude of policy officials toward journalists seeking information deliberately hinders news gathering. The use of the expression “go and come go and come” is Ghanaian slang that symbolizes the lackadaisical attitude of public officials towards individuals who seek information from public service offices or desire solutions for complaints lodged. It is a public service
culture that has always stood between development of policy initiatives and the success of their implementation.

Despite the different points of views on the relationship between public health policy makers and the media, the interviews and the data obtained did not fully support the claim that low coverage of health news is the outcome lack of coordination and communication between the two groups. On the contrary, the research showed strong coordination and working relationships between the media and government/public officials.

RQ 3 Did the NHIS news stories function as narratives that reproduced official discourse on health issues?

One of the issues subjected to further inquiry is the assertion that, when it comes to the health news coverage in Africa, the media reproduce only official statements of politicians, government and public officials. The implication for this kind of representation is that journalists lack the investigative skills that can equip them to conduct insightful investigations for the coverage of health events. The resultant action is a reliance on official statements as the best means of making health news. Again, even when the media reproduce these official statements, they fail to subject the statements to objective analysis or critique. This method of covering health news is also validated on the basis that journalists lack training and specialization and this totally incapacitates them from subjecting the official statements to constructive critical analysis. In the end health stories fail to represent the diverse people affected by the policies implemented by the government, and whose health concerns are being addressed through the media. In the
end the coverage of public health issues become nothing but symbolic representation of official voices, and official discourse.

The responses obtained on this aspect of the NHIS study revealed a divided opinion on the issues. Some respondents confirmed that this trend of news coverage still persists in some media houses and journalistic practices. They, nevertheless, provided some justifications for what they acknowledge has become part of the culture of the media in Ghana. Clement Atagra justifies this practice with the indication that the sacrosanct nature of official statements drives the headlines in the media. He also points out that the idea of capturing a new story through an authoritative voice has become a culture of the media practice in Ghana. The trend is a pervasive practice that transcends all subjects and issues of media coverage in the Ghanaian. He acknowledges that, this culture projects an exclusive and selective form of news making that marginalizes or prevents the voices of those whose health concerns are being addressed from being heard. He adds:

As to going out and talking to ordinary people who are supposed to benefit from this scheme it’s sometimes the issue of logistics. We are not able to get down to the people to talk with them and know what their problems are. What are the challenges? Because everybody wants to be under the scheme but for one or two reasons they are not able to do that. And for us to get them and talk to them and get their issues- you know- issues from their point of view it’s very difficult and then we have to rely mostly on officials to get some of this information. That for me is not really the best but that is what we do now.
The focus on the pronouncement of public officials as the authoritative voices is a concept that, according to the perception of the Ghanaian journalists interviewed, legitimates the stories they write and transforms other stories as narratives worthy of public discourse and social discussion.

On the other hand, other respondents specified that some media houses and journalists are gradually moving away from this pattern and undertaking independent investigative inquiries to cover health news. This perspective is shared by three of the respondents who believe that, when it comes to the coverage of NHIS, journalists portray some level of independence by seeking stories from other sources or critically analyzing the statements before publishing them. Ibrahim Wiredu confirms this trend by indicating that most of the stories that appeared in the newspapers had no link with statements from their office. He explains:

There is no direct connection between our office and the stories as they appear in the newspapers. And it is not strange because of the way the implementation of the NHIS has been crafted.

Wiredu presents a very positive outlook of how stories that appear in the newspapers are independent and not linked to his office. The trend has become very positive for them because they have adopted the position of regarding most of the stories that are published without their input as evaluative tools that provide feedback to them on what is happening on ground.

Lucy Adoma Yeboah admits to a certain level, reliance on government statements to generate coverage in the newspapers. She admits that reliance on official statements will continue for some time because most of the issues that newspapers write
about are policy initiatives that come from government. She also acknowledges this reporting format as a routinized news production exercise that projects the media in Ghana as strategic partners with government on how newspapers promote and explain government policies and their positive impact on the people. In a response to a question on the level of prominence given to the NHIS by the *Daily Graphic*, Adomah Yeboah indicated to me:

> Health stories are taken seriously particularly in *Graphic* here and with the NHIS. I think the paper is doing well because the scheme is a major government policy for this present government. It’s one of the best things that every Ghanaian whether from the other side of the political divide or whatever will agree that it’s a good policy so the government is interested in the scheme and has much stake. Because of that most of the newspapers especially those of us that are state-owned we know that it’s something that we can do to support the government in a way because if it comes up the way that they want it we know that this will benefit our people.

This practice is consistent with the historicized function of newspapers in the post-colonial state that positions the media as representational tools in the state informational apparatus. It is a function that was used to characterize the post-independent African media as agents for the dissemination of the government social, economic and political agenda. For Adoma Yeboah it is the duty of the media to promote any development agenda that will improve the quality of life for the people. She adds that once a program or policy is introduced by the government into the society or public domain it is initially logical that most of the sources for the new stories must immediately
come from government officials. But unless the media lose interest in sustaining coverage of the issue or policy, other versions of the discourse sourced from avenues other than those from government corridors will be utilized in subsequent coverage. Her view is supported by a response given by Sam Okaitey:

Most of the stories that we carried emanated from official sources and later when the thing got to the implementation stage we started gathering materials from the field and other places on the frustrations and the inability of people to know where and when to register and those things.

The above statement is also supported by the results that emerged in chapter 4 on news sources for the NHIS news stories. The results for the Daily Graphic revealed, while most of stories on the NHIS were from government sources, a significant number still came from other sources. In terms of percentages, while the government sources accounted for 30.8%, other sources including individual and anonymous sources accounted for 27.9% of the stories. This showed that the two channels provided balanced avenues or sources of information for the media outlet. A more defined confirmation can also be positioned on the percentage score from government sources versus the results of all the other news sources portrayed in the study. The results showed that even though government news sources scored significant 30.8% it weighted far less against the sum of all the other sources including sources from NGOs/Interest groups, Health/NHI officials, Wire Agency/GNA, and Other sources which, together, represented about 68.2% of where the newspaper obtained information for the NHIS stories.

Adoma Yeboah also rejects the assertion that health news stories in general and news stories on the NHIS in particular resonate official sentiments and positions. She declares:
No, no that is not true because for me personally as am sitting here am having problems even with the people at the National Health Insurance Council. Because to them all that they are interested in is seeing in the papers that they are promoting their job because when you see certain bad things going on and you try to draw their attention through the papers they get annoyed because they tend to think that you want to bring them down or something. So I don’t think our stories are a reproduction of political statements or official statements…if anything at all I think we are rather hitting them because we know that this scheme can help the public and can help the ordinary person

In support of Adomah Yeaboah’s argument, Sam Okaitey reiterated that, emphasis on the dominance of official position in health news stories is a deficient argument for people who do not understand the emerging editorial newsroom transformations in media houses. Okaitey generalizes the reporting culture for health news from the perspective of the Daily Graphic by indicating that the media house does not reproduce official statements when it comes to health issues. The Daily Graphic has a specialized unit comprised of four staff reporters that work on health stories. Furthermore, the Daily Graphic has features and articles section that regularly run commentaries and provide analysis for readers on statements that are attributed to government officials and politician on health and other social issues. His response is captured as follows:

If you look at the paper you will see that even for editorial activities we have two segments. We have the direct editorial and we have the features. We have devoted substantial space to features where we don’t only report what is being said or
what is happening but also try to analyze and explain what is happening to the readership… But I think that we don’t just reproduce officials statements we also analyze them for the readers…Yes, and you will see that that’s why we have specialized personnel like Rosemary Ardayfio, Lucy Adomah Yeboah, Kofi Yeboah, and Caroline Boateng. These are people who we have identified as people with interest in health issues and they have developed the competence to actually look at the issues and analyze them.

His response contradicts the notion of reproduction of official statements as the substance of health news stories. Okaitey gives an insight into what transpires in the editorial newsroom of the Daily Graphic to reveal the existence of a specialized unit that has been tasked to handle the coverage of health news. This insight defeats the oft cited assumption that media coverage of health issues in Ghana is a practice seated in official discourse.

From the responses gathered on the issues of the reproduction of official discourse as the pattern of newspaper representation of health stories, it can be clearly stated that newspapers in Ghana are trying to play a dual but dynamic role in the coverage of health news. First, they are acting as leading advocates for all development-oriented socio-political programs that can impact positively on the lives of the people. Second, the media are trying to live up to their responsibility of holding up government accountable. In fact, Sam Okaitey’s response that references the specialized unit that has been set up by the Daily Graphic to cover health stories challenges the assumption that journalists rely on official statements to produce health news stories. The position also debunks the notion that the narrative authority of the journalist in Ghana is subordinated to the
consensus of state officials (Hasty, 2005). However, the regular use of official statements as the *sacrosanct* source of information for news stories still implies that it is the best and easy way of providing legitimacy for news stories. Indeed when the media focus primarily on pronouncements or rhetoric for the propriety of news making and public interpretation of communicative events, they essentially echo the interpretative frame of the state in both the selection and representation of newsworthy events.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of in-depth interviews conducted with six media professionals to find out their views on the coverage of NHIS issues in newspapers in Ghana. The respondents were drawn from the offices of the *Daily Graphic, The Ghanaian Times*, The Ministry of Health, the National Health Insurance Council, and Bantama Sub-Metro Mutual Health Insurance Scheme. The rationale behind this aspect of the study is to determine the media culture that influenced the coverage of health news in the media. The other reason is to reveal some of the general dispositions and attitudes of journalists towards the coverage of health news.

The interviews were transcribed and subjected to narrative thematic categorization. In all, five main thematic categories emerged from the study. The results of the interviews were presented in relation to two of the three major questions used this study. The research questions are: What are the views of media professionals toward the representation of NHIS news stories in newspapers? And, did the NHIS coverage function as stories that reproduced official discourse on health issues?

The interviews showed that the media constructed the NHIS as a mainstream news story. Again, news stories on the NHIS were constructed as important events and accorded
broader and wider coverage by the media houses. The media also recognized their responsibility towards the scheme and provided increased coverage because they believed the program would help address some of the major health concerns of the greater number of people in the country. Media professionals also attributed increased and wider coverage of the scheme to the personal interests of some journalists towards the policy. In terms of representation, the media evoked a framing culture that provided a very comprehensible portrayal of the policy to readers and the general public. This representation style and framework of coverage generated substantial feedback from the general public to the media houses, which in turn led to a reciprocal reaction of increased and wider coverage of the health policy.

The respondents also shared their views on the informative nature of the NHIS news stories. Almost all the informants agreed that the NHIS coverage was not informative enough as it failed to define the fundamental issues of the policy for the general public. The issue of specialization and training as important factors for better health news construction was another important outcome of the interview. All the informants agreed that media professionals and journalists need specialized skills and training to report effectively to health stories. However, whilst one group believe that journalists should have formal specialization and training programs to enhance the coverage of health issues, others believe and suggest that stakeholders outside the media should internalize these specialization and training programs by providing the media with financial and logistic support to help improve the coverage of health issues. The interviews revealed that contrary to the assertion that a huge communication gap exists between public health policy makers and media, there is a closer working
relationship between the two parties that has helped the NHIS, as a health policy, to gain wider coverage and publicity.

Finally, the interviews also showed that journalists in Ghana continue to depend on public officials for information to construct many health news stories. However, in some newsrooms a new trend is emerging as media houses have begun to establish specialized health news reporting units to motivate staff who have shown interest in the reporting of health news to seek independent sources of information for their stories.
CHAPTER 6: EMERGING TREND IN THE COVERAGE OF HEALTH NEWS IN AFRICA

This chapter discusses the outcome of the research from the perspective of a new trend emerging in editorial rooms on the coverage of health issues in Africa. Consequently, it addresses the last research question: Does the coverage of the NHIS indicate new trends in editorial policies on the coverage of health issues in Africa? An analysis of the significance of the research on the various theoretical issues that underpin the inquiry including framing analysis, framing and ideology, media/newspaper representations on health issues in Africa, is also presented and the diversification of research on health issues in Africa. It then presents its implications for future research. The chapter also delineates the limitations of the study and suggests recommendations for improving health news reporting on the continent. Finally, a summary of the research and the conclusions that were arrived at based on the data analyses are outlined.

Does the coverage of the NHIS indicate a new trend in editorial policies on the coverage of health issues in Africa?

A clear review of the data analyses and their implications for the coverage of health news by newspapers in Africa revealed two important trends. The first trend indicated in the literature and partly supported by the current study depicts a historicized culture of news reporting that depends on official pronouncements as the feed for news output. It is a trend that can also be classified as a form of journalistic ideology and practice constantly pursued by the media in Africa. This ubiquitous ideological cloak has become an indispensable weapon that structures the news reporting style of journalists across the continent. The second trend, revealed in the current study, suggests an
emerging trend of health news reporting in media houses. This trend utilizes the
dynamics of the reliance on official pronouncements for news making and combines it
with acceptable and dependable standard media practices of investigative and
independent reporting to produce health news.

Dependence on official rhetoric for news making on health issues by African
media has been documented copiously in the literature (Asante, 1996; Benefo, 2004:
This theoretical thrust of the media coverage on health issues is partially supported by
this research. The data analyses for this study also showed some reliance on official
sources and instances of direct reproduction of official discourse in the leads of
newspaper narratives on the NHIS. The practice of reproducing hegemonic official voices
as the substance of credible health news reporting is evidenced in the newspaper
reporting culture of the Ghanaian media through the production lengthy quotations from
officials and political press releases from the government and using them as the most
important substance of health news stories. Such narrative structure the health news
stories around public figures, and in many situations, opens the stories with the
authoritative voice of public officials or politicians. The analyses on the framing of the
NHIS showed that the content of some NHIS news stories reproduced official discourse.
In the process, the concentration on official perspectives as the very structure of the
NHIS new stories emanated from a reporting culture of deep devotion from which media
professionals cannot deviate. These are acts that not only constantly defined NHIS but
also showed that in the minds of the reading public health news discourse placed in
public sphere by the media defied the sense of objectivity and independent investigative
reporting practices that under normal circumstances characterize media coverage of news events. Hasty (2005) captures this journalistic ideology of the Ghanaian media in graphic terms from the perspective of the state-owned media:

As the official business of the assignment comes to a close, photocopies of the official speeches are passed around to the state press corps. State journalists rely heavily on these speeches; they routinely open the story with a quote from the most senior state official and organize the rest of the story around quotes from other participants in the assignments. (p. 345)

This image of the journalist seeking the scripts of the speeches of state official is deeply ingrained and projects the media as uncritical agents of information dissemination whose news production functionality is subordinated and subjected to state official rhetoric. These performances begin as routine media practices and permeate editorial news rooms as an ideology that continuously shape the task of news making and gradually accretes as a behavioral norm in the persona of journalists.

In support of the data analyses on framing the NHIS, interviews with media professionals also provided another link to the routinized reproduction of official discourse as the essence of the NHIS news coverage. The media professionals contend that in the art of representing NHIS news stories, official perspectives formed the overwhelming point of coverage. The practice begins with a cordial convivial relationship that positions the media and government officials as working partners on socio-political development agenda to which both entities must show total commitment by way of mutual exchanges of trust and reciprocity. In the attempt to safeguard this historically structured relationship, the identity of the journalists as adversaries of
government officials is subverted by acts of propriety, reciprocity, and dependency on officialdom for news making.

The interviewees also noted that for several reasons the NHIS stories also fell prey to this journalistic ideology in Ghana. In presenting the NHIS news stories the boundaries between media as the formulators of news and public officials as the recipient of the final news product for monitoring and evaluative purposes became blurred. Rather than presenting the NHIS stories as the outcome of synthesized pieces of information sourced from different realms, some turned out as representations that articulated official position on the health policy. Clement Atagra rationalizes this representational style of the NHIS stories as a product of the media culture:

Well I mean, in this country called Ghana we have a problem with sources. I mean how we get our information and it appears that in Ghana the stories we get are from the officials. I mean it’s very difficult to go out of your way and do other stories outside what the officials will say. So most often we rely on what the minister of health would say or the Executive secretary or whatever of the NHIS would say, or anybody we feel is an authority in that field would say, and we hold it almost sacrosanct and that’s what we give prominence to.

This culture of media representation of NHIS stories regularly reproduces itself in the coverage of other health stories. The rationalization for this deeply ingrained journalistic culture of the media in Ghana has been attributed to issues of logistics, lack of specialization, and entrenched convivial social relations that have over time emerged between the media and the state apparatus in Ghana transforming their often cited frosty relationships into acts of solidarity. They are acts that perpetuate the journalistic ideology.
of reproducing official voices as social reality and as factual representation of public
notions of important health concerns.

However, other aspects of the study that emerged from the analyses present a
pattern of representations that seem to contradict this culture of health news coverage.
This latest pattern of health news representation indicates a trend in editorial policy that
positions health news representation in the media as a fusion of reliance on official
discourse, and investigative and independent reporting practices.

The data analyses also disclosed that the NHIS health reportage contradicted the
theoretical basis for poor health news coverage in Africa. Contrary to the assertion that
health news reports lacked in-depth objective assessment of issues, the NHIS coverage
indicated burgeoning and in-depth narratives of the fundamental issues underpinning the
health policy. Greater portions of the coverage in the newspapers detailed the core issues
of the policy in a manner that provided readers with enough information for a critical
assessment of the program. The framing patterns of the NHIS further indicated that most
of the stories were mainstream policy details whose substance was never distorted by any
degree of propriety accorded official pronouncements. The issues of framing health news
as politics and as the compulsion for major headlines suffered from a disengagement by
the media. In this context, the patterns of framing seen in this study showed that media
propriety accorded political representatives of the state apparatus as authoritative voices
of credibility and legitimacy were captured as subdued tones in subordination to the core
issues of the NHIS. The media depended on official sources, releases and statements for
primary messages but, unless such information provided insights into the basics of the
health policy to the benefit of readers and the general public, such official discourse were not accorded any strategic headline or lead in a news story.

The literature also presented a structure of health news reporting that inherently fails to address the needs of the general public (Hughes & Manilla, 1999). The NHIS study showed that newspapers represented the policy assiduously by courting the cultural needs of the public and framed their stories to reflect their interests. Newspapers departed from the mainstream everyday headlines and appropriated notions of locality, communalism, and urbanized business discourse as symbols of representation for the NHIS narratives. The exigency of cultural appropriation used by the media as a powerful filtering mechanism for the construction of the NHIS news is a technique that meets the needs of the people and contextualizes issues to the level of their comprehension. The NHIS saw continued coverage because, as indicated in an interview with Sam Okaiety, newspapers readers constantly flooded newspaper offices with telephone calls and inquires to know more about some of the dominant core issues of the policy. It can be argued that this feedback arises from their ability to comprehend the narratives as representations that address their concern and prime their health needs for government intervention.

The analyses also described a new phenomenon of health reporting in the editorial rooms as an indication of a new orientation being adopted by the media for health news. The new level of orientation acknowledges that health issues must be accorded prime considerations in newsrooms. The first consideration of prioritizing health news is reflected in the news room of the Daily Graphic where an editorial staff has been established to handle health reporting. The impact of this new awareness by news editors
towards health news is actualized in the level of consistency with which the newspapers have followed the NHIS. From 2005-2007, the two major newspapers- the *Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times*- consistently produced an average of three stories per month for each year. It is a trend that presents one of the most consistent and sustained health news reports of any health policy in Africa. Most of the 103 stories sampled for this study from *Daily Graphic* newspaper were written by the core health reporting staff. The reporters have gathered so much skill in this area of health coverage that they are able to articulate clear distinctions among the complex elements of the core issues to the general public. Another argument is that the NHIS reports were accorded some degree of prominence in the newspapers because the stories were presented as essential news items worthy of public discourse and not as an engagement of political expediency.

Another new trend is the recognition of the health news as a special phenomenon that demands more than a bold headline to drive home its communicative import. Newspapers underlined this acknowledgement by expanding the coverage of NHIS to include substantial space for features and commentaries that extrapolate the NHIS message effectively from an anecdotal position to stress its broader significance to social discourse. Indeed apart from such added editorial effort of mainstreaming health news coverage, some of the newspapers have created special columns and pages that are solely devoted to the coverage and representation of other health news stories including the NHIS.

The research noted that journalists are seeking more independent sources for information or news making. This is confirmed by the analyses on the interviewees and the framing of the NHIS which showed that newspapers are not solely depending on
government for information to make major news. On the frames, other news sources of information accounted for more than two thirds of the stories. Newspapers are becoming more investigative and debunking their tagged accolades as complicit partners for the promotion of political agenda. It is a trend that has overturned the scales by using government sources as a corroborative tool to assert the objectivity of the news report and not as a reflection of government policies and ideologies.

Significance of study and Implications for future research

Framing analysis

The data analyses provided some insights into the utilization and the significance of the concept of framing. The literature review indicated that the media employ framing for several purposes. The representation of stories by the media is generally aimed at influencing the intended audience to change a behavior, engage a discourse, or adopt a program for social change. In presenting the issue to their audiences/readers, the media utilize a pattern of reportage by actively selecting some issues and making them salient. This pattern of representation is the concept of media frame. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1987), media frames are “a central organizing idea or story line that provides the meaning to unfolding strips of events… the frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (p.143). Gitlin (1980) provides another perspective of media frames as mechanisms through which the mass media classify news and “package it for efficient relay to audiences” (p.7). Tuchman (1997) also espouses that the media tend to present news stories within the dominant social norms of established frame work. In Ghana, the central organizing idea used by the media to make news has generally been around politics and corruption. These two issues have been the dominant framework
through which narratives have been constructed. It is also the mode of negotiation used by individuals to understand events presented by the media. The NHIS narratives, however, redefined the frame of representation for the Ghanaian media. During the coverage of the NHIS, pre-existing dominant frames were relegated to the background whilst new frames were deployed and given prominence. Instead of politics and corruption as the dominant frames of representation, the media provided business, health, and core issues as the dominant frames through which individuals were to interpret of the NHIS narratives. With a focus on issues that were fundamental to the health policy, readers were provided with a new socio-cultural perspective of negotiating their understanding of the phenomenon. The media presented events that produced, in the collective consciousness of the reading public, new ‘schemata of interpretations’ (Goffman, 1974, p.21)

The marginalization of hitherto dominant issues of politics and corruption by the media, and the reinvention of new dominant frames, as evidenced in this study still functioned within the broader concept of framing analysis. Indeed, the concept of framing which suggests the perceived selection of salient issues or events also implies the relegation, exclusion, or marginalization of others (Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Valeda, 2002). For example, the wide use of politics frame in many other stories in the Ghanaian media leads to regular emphasis on official discourse. As this frame became the established framework, norms of negotiation, interpretation and evaluation of issues, reproduction of official discourse became systematically institutionalized as the major interpretive mode of engaging communicative texts on health issues. The emergence of the NHIS narratives provided diverse framing patterns through which an understanding
of social realities can be undertaken outside the dominant framing culture. Again, it also justifies the assertion that frames are abundant and the media may invoke alternatives to project different and multiple interpretations.

_Framing and ideology_

As indicated in the literature review the media may sometimes frame issues to confirm, identify, or reinforce a particular ideology. It also further indicates that news stories achieve their social relevance because they are made to function within a certain ideological discourse (Becker, 1984; Hall, 1980; Richardson, 2005). When the media pursue this pattern of news making, they enact a journalistic ideology that reinforces elite voices on public discourse. Journalistic ideology implies the regular and sometimes persistent evocation of certain media routines and established culture of news production in a society (Akhavan-Mahid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Murdock and Golding, 1977; Becker 1984). This also means that the routines and established culture become the legitimated mode of interpreting and understanding communicative events by the public.

In this investigation, the enactment of journalistic ideology was very dominant. In line with the dominant representation of news events in Ghana, the data analyses of the framing and the interviews conducted showed that despite the fact that _politics_ and _corruption_ frames were rarely summoned to the NHIS, official discourse was pervasive in the narratives. The news stories and the interviews established that news sourcing and news priming as routine media processes should be presented on the authoritative voices of government officials. This systematic invocation of the official voices and position on public discourse also reinforces elite ideology. Whilst most of the NHIS news stories echoed elite voices in headlines and leads, all the interviews conducted with media
professionals affirmed this culture of news making by indicating the indispensability and inevitability of official rhetoric as the most credible and legitimate source for major news stories. In the NHIS narratives the media showed a higher level of disengagement from politics. Even when they seem to be devoting enough columns to core issues of the health policy, the narratives articulated the ideas of the media and the ruling elite, not the narratives of the ordinary people. Most of the stories on the business, core NHIS, or community and development issues were sourced from government officials or politicians. Only few stories articulated the perspective of individuals other than elite personalities. The culture of creating credibility and legitimacy for news by framing events through a closer identification and connection with the rhetoric of officialdom is a reporting culture of the Ghanaian media. Through this ideological culture of news production and interpretations that articulate the discourse and perspective of public officials, the media do not only impose their own journalist ideology on the individuals and audiences but also confirm, reinforce, and entrench the ideas of the elite as the most dominant mode of negotiating news stories.

*Media representations on health issues in Africa*

The media influence health policy development and promotion by putting health issues at the center of social campaigns. The central role of the media in health issues advocacy and campaigns has been the focus of media research (Alali & Jinadu, 2002; Lynch & Condit, 2006; Singhal & Rogers, 2003; Yankah, 1994). Through sustained media coverage health issues become mainstream social concerns allowing greater percentage of the people to support the policy. Again, the media are very important agents in the construction and dissemination of health polices because the narratives of
news stories can help legitimize the health concerns being addressed by the policy (Soroka, 2002; Walt-Chinders, 1994).

The NHIS has had vibrant and sustained coverage in Ghana. The huge coverage accorded the NHIS by the newspapers also showed that both government and the media acknowledge the prominence of health issues in the country. More importantly, it opens a new era of responsibility where government rhetoric on political stages such as the promise of providing affordability for health care is matched with an equal sense of responsibility and action. Official rhetoric had always articulated that health concerns facing many African populations can only be addressed through comprehensive health polices (Alali & Jiandu, 2002). However, when it came to the delivery of these promises, governments had always been found wanting, mainly as a result of the lack of resources or political will. The NHIS as a comprehensive health policy that aims at providing a comprehensive solution to some major health problems provided an opportunity for government of Ghana to translate their rhetoric into action through a new attitude and a sense of responsibility.

The newspapers in Ghana, through their sustained coverage of the health policy, also communicated to the general public the new impetus of government for health matters. The media brought the NHIS to the center of news coverage by constructing it as the solution to perennial health problems in the country. In performing this function newspapers deconstructed the technical nature of the policy by taking out the relevant portions that affect the general public and presenting them in narratives that captured the goal of the policy. Newspaper representations of the policy focused on conventional health problems that are being addressed by the policy including, the non-payment of fee
at the point of service, drugs and diseases covered by policy, the amount of premium paid, and benefits that accrue to registered members of the scheme. Through such simplified narratives the media adequately provided the public with information about the policy and allowed them to become participants in the general discourse on health. The media also deconstructed the role of government in the NHIS policy dissemination. The coverage presented the policy as people-centered and encouraged the public to take ownership because of the immediate benefits that accrued to members. The stories were consequently framed in patterns that aimed to encourage this participatory process by emphasizing the cultural and community connections between the health policy and the larger society. The immediate concern of the media towards the NHIS coverage was to inform and educate the general public on the importance of the new health initiative. Through sustained coverage the media was able to broaden the scope to show the linkages that exist between the NHIS and other health concerns. In the end, the media marginalized the policy-structure form of the NHIS and projected it as a health issue of high priority that addresses many of the perennial health problems that confront the country. The justification for this style of presentation is that because of the perceived failure of many government policies, the public will approach it with some level of cynicism if the NHIS is presented by the media as just another government policy.

*Diversifying coverage on health issues in Africa*

The study also helped to diversify research on health issues in Africa. Much of the media research on health issues in Africa is concentrated on issues of epidemiology rather than on the dissemination of the policies that address health concerns. Again, African media studies on health in the continent have, in recent times, concentrated on
health issues such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Other media studies have also focused on health campaigns that aim to inform and educate the public on the particularized health issues. In all these situations the various approaches that are fashioned to tackle these health problems are preceded by policy documents that lay in broad terms the mechanism through which such health concerns can be addressed. Sometimes, the technical nature of such policy documents discourages the media from addressing the contents of the policy. They, instead, shift the focus of media coverage to the practical implementation of policy. Media representations that focus on dominant health issues end up designating other health programs and polices to the periphery of the media agenda. This study has, nevertheless, shown that African media have the capacity to diversify the coverage of health issues if they can be motivated to identify other hitherto marginalized health issues and programs that effectively impact the lives of the people and reposition their status on the media agenda as mainstream news stories worthy of pursuit and publication. The study also revealed that African media coverage of health issues can transcend official positions and discourse. This is one area where coverage of health issues has been diversified to emphasize more on voices other than public officials.

The NHIS stories discussed more of the fundamental issues of the policy than the politics and bureaucracy behind it. Government rhetoric on the events were appropriated as necessary mechanism to discuss the core issues of the health policy to keep the public fully educated and well informed. It can consequently be argued that the representations of the NHIS in the media were constructed to meet the needs and concerns of the public.
Limitations of the study and implications for future research

The study used framing analysis as theoretical tool to interrogate the coverage of National Health Insurance Scheme in local newspapers in Ghana. According to the earlier works that used framing analysis for research inquires (Domfeh, 1999; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Obeng-Quaidoo, 1988; Pratt et al., 2002; Reta, 2000; Sanders, 2000; Smith & Wakefield, 2005; Valeda, 2002) two main issues underline the concept of framing. First, framing defines issues at stake for the phenomenon at the center of inquiry. Second, framing identifies particular patterns of representation for the informative narrative and this pattern influences the perception of individuals towards the phenomenon. These two points of projecting frames also underlined this study.

The major issues that were subjected to investigation were defined by the framing patterns deployed by the media, and consequently the perception of both the researcher and some of the participants who were interviewed on the NHIS news stories were highly influenced by the type of frame that structured the narratives of the study. Interpretations and understanding of the perceived reality of the NHIS coverage could be done only from the perspective of dominant framing patterns imposed by the media. Interviewees and analyses of the text were all conducted in contexts that implied that NHIS coverage produced meaningful understanding only within the guidance of the dominant frames which are also a production of socio-cultural norms. According to Gitlin (1980) the media use frames as operations to maintain the status quo. Media reports also function to change or influence the mindset of people and co-opt them into particular ways of perceiving, interpreting, and understanding the reported phenomena.
According to Goffman (1974), even though social norms can create pre-defined frames of interpretations, individuals may rely of their “schemata of interpretation” (p. 21) to manage and negotiate their lived experiences in a manner that may differ from the collective consciousness. This implies that multiple realities can be created from the same communicated event based on individual lived experiences in a fluid multi-dimensional manner. However, this research produced results that did not portray a pattern of fluidity of interpretations and meaning making based on the same communicative event. Almost all the interviewees made their interpretations based on the dominant pattern of representation utilized by the media. The suggestions of a reproduction of official statements because such voices are deemed sacrosanct and authoritative, utilization of political frames as channels for disseminating informative on the reported phenomenon, newsroom performances on health representations, and the concerns shared on issues that stand between media and investigative reporting were the product of existing dominant frames. These dominant frames of representations flow from a systematic institutionalization of meaning making based on established norms and frameworks. The interviewees did not approach the study through an oppositional perspective from which their experiences totally disengaged from the dominant framework of the collective consciousness could have been articulated. The research as a result failed to articulate oppositional voices in the inquiry. The rationale for this occurrence is that all the interviewees are connected and interconnected as joint architects of the final products of most of the NHIS new stories. All of them are professionals whose educational and professional backgrounds are located within the same environment and culture of journalism practice and news making.
This limitation can, nevertheless, be catered to through an inclusion of the voices of individuals other than media professionals in future research. Any future research cast in the mode of audience studies can help determine the perception and views of readers and audiences on the NHIS. In fact such audience research perspective can also capture the voices of many groups and professional bodies regarded as stakeholders of the NHIS. Many of the stakeholders were not included in this study because they seldom are they part of interconnected bodies, groups and individual who are the producers of the NHIS news stories. This recommended research perspective that will include the voices of all identified stakeholders and individual citizens affected by the health policy can reveal the discursive effect of oppositional reading on the policy. As the voices of audiences become manifest they will likely also provide their different and diversified experiences with the NHIS to highlight the concept of fluidity of interpretation on communicative texts.

The research also revealed that the media’s capacity to bring health news to mainstream coverage transcended individual interests and attitudes. A lot more has to do with what goes on in the editorial rooms when it comes to gatekeeping. Issues of logistics eventually impact media professionals’ mobility and their motivation to follow all health issues of national and prime interest. Williams (2003) states that all “representations are the product of the processes of selection which include some aspects of reality and exclude others” (p. 129). Future research can move into newsrooms to investigate the processes that lead to the inclusion, exclusion, and the marginalization of the representation of health news in the media. This is significant, especially when some media houses have set up staffing units to handle health issues as an acknowledgement of
the importance of health to social discourse. Furthermore, previous studies on the media and the coverage of health issues in Africa concentrated on the texts and not on the production processes that occur in the newsroom which ultimately decide the publishable fate of many health stories across the continent.

The newspapers that were purposively sampled for this study were critical to the understanding of the processes and results that emerged from the coverage of health issues in Ghana. The newspapers were drawn from the major the state-owned and private print houses because of their unique qualities and reporting practices. However, when it came to the sampling of the articles for analyses, the private media house were totally overwhelmed by the state-owned media. Whilst the state-owned newspapers produced of about a hundred stories, the private newspapers produced an average of about twenty five stories for the entire study period. Since part of the research was based on numerical considerations, analyses drawn from the summed data generally reflect the perspective of dominant state-owned newspapers. Again, the evasive nature of the editors from the private newspapers led to their exclusion from the interview segment of the study and their non-inclusion confirms the issue of the dominance of the stated-owned media in the research. Even though the objective of the research was achieved, I am of the opinion that future research can isolate the two print media domains and inquire who their respective attitude towards the reported subject. Another important issue is that both media domains have their own independent journalistic social practices that emanate from specific historical and cultural contexts. As the objective of any future research, independent investigations into how each media domain represent the NHIS and other health stories may yield a more comprehensive and contextually productive outcome.
During the interview section of the research, Benjamin Kufuo, the Public Relations officer for the Bantama Sub-Metro Mutual Health Insurance Scheme, remarked:

As I said in Ghana here newspapers reading has reduced since the coming of FM stations because if you listen to, let’s say, if you listen to Peace FM on daily basis you will get to know what is happening in all the newspapers. So I personally prefer to educate people in the electronic media more than the print media which people find it difficult to buy…

Ben Kufuo is asserting the fact that radio stations are the most vibrant forum for engaging the public in Ghana. This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the proliferation of FM radio stations across the length country. The issue here is that any media study conducted in Ghana that focuses on newspapers might capture only one aspect of the functions of the media and might isolate the voices of readers. It is recommended that future audience studies of the media in Ghana focus of the electronic media. Consequently, this research would have been more comprehensive and enhanced if it had expanded the sites of inquiry to include the electronic media, namely radio and television. As articulated by Kufuo, because many people find it difficult to buy newspapers, radio is the preference of lot of rural folks. I recommend that any future research focus on the role of the electronic media on the dissemination of the NHIS and other health matters. Such studies can be structured to incorporate the rural-urban perspectives on the NHIS as well as the effects of other radio broadcast on the broader health narratives or health discourse of the ordinary low income citizens.
Recommendations for African journalists on coverage of health issues

This research provides recommendations for African journalists on the representations of health issues in both broadcast and print media. The data analyses also revealed some reporting styles as important initiatives that can be adopted and incorporated into the culture and practice of journalism across the continent. First, the research showed that, with some level of diligence and a change in attitude on the part of media professionals, health issues which have always suffered from inadequate coverage through marginalization can be transformed into mainstream news. As seen in the coverage of the NHIS, the media kept the momentum of coverage for the entire 3-year period of study to sustain regular coverage with an average of three stories a month in the major newspapers. The regular coverage meant that the print media adopted the issue as one major media agendum and utilized the least opportunity to publish stories on the policy.

Improving coverage also demands a change in attitude to health issues. The research revealed that some media houses have initiated moves to establish units that specialize in the reporting of features, stories, and articles solely related to health. Others are assigning reporting staff who have shown a passion for health issues to do stories and ensure regular features of health news in their newspapers. These are remarkable changes and transformations that various editorial rooms and journalists across the continent can adopt to increase health news coverage. African journalists must see health issues as equally important as political issues and provide them with the same degree of prominence that is given to other politically motivated social issues. Health news stories must not derive publicity from the polemic celebratory periods allocated by international agencies to commemorate and recognize the existence of the issue. African journalists must initiate
sustained coverage as in-house efforts, and with a deep acknowledgement of health matters. The argument is that because the media dictate the issues and pace of public discourse, health issues can only be promoted as an important issue for social discourse if the media provides a central focus to them.

Second, the study also showed that health issues can be detached from the voices of government officials and politicians and still be made vibrant and prominent. Some of the NHIS news stories were detached from official rhetoric as journalists went out of their way to seek other avenues of news sources to represent the issues. Many journalists in Africa suffer from the culture of representing official voices in news stories and use them as the only means of providing legitimacy and credibility to new stories. For the NHIS, despite the fact that some stories were not laced with official voices, their credibility and degree of importance were not compromised. Most of the stories were sourced from independent channels through investigative reporting. In fact, the irony is that some media houses have realized that some members of the public disregard stories with the voices of politicians as not credible because they are made to score political points. For that reason they pay no significant attention to such stories. African journalists need to improve their skills in investigative reporting and disengage themselves from sycophantic working relationships that have been forged with government machinery. The NHIS study changed the aura of inevitability that surrounded official rhetoric as the channel of engaging public attention on health issues. Journalists should rather focus on the needs of the people and articulate popular voices in their narratives as the best means of engaging the public on any health discourse.
The issue of specialization as a yardstick to increase health news coverage also emerged in the study. Whilst ambivalence responses emerged, it also revealed the issue of self-motivation in the area of coverage as a paramount issue. There is the acknowledgement that researching health issues used to be a difficult exercise as various media houses and organization lacked the resources that would enable journalists to access information on health related subjects. However, as indicated by one of the interviewees the advent of the internet. Information can be accessed anywhere and at anytime once there is access to the internet. Journalists can no more use the excuse of “we have no access to information” to justify their inability to bring health issues to the center of media agenda. In fact when it comes to seeking information from government officials the internet has eased such access. Many government ministries, agencies, and departments have their own websites where information can easily be downloaded with the click of a mouse. Journalists who have a passion for health issues can become experts in the field through regular research. However, they will need the support of their editors who must give them resources to sustain such passion. It is therefore important that African journalists and editors of media house address the issue of specialization as a measure of improved and increased health coverage from the perspective of self-motivated, self developed, technology provision by way of internet access, internal news room restructuring, and editorial prioritization.

Fourth, the research showed that an important aspect of directing public attention to health issue is how issues are framed. The failure of media professionals in Africa to address health issue in contexts that are meaningful to their readers and audiences is another cause for lack of coverage in the area. Health news reports presented by African
journalists lack the cultural connections to the very many people who are impacted by those concerns. Health news stories, articles, and features are churned out in technical languages and discourses that seem to alienate the people who are expected to consume the narratives. The NHIS study provided narrative frames that are culturally and contextually specific to the needs of the readers. A frame such as the core issues frame that was specific to the issue being addressed was very prominent to the narrative structure of most of the news stories. Other frames were structured along communal interests and orientations of the rural folks, whilst other frames also concentrated on the business needs of the urbanized citizens to provide the socio-cultural contexts that could attract increase readership and put the health issue at the center of public discussion.

African journalists must therefore be innovative in the framing of health issues. They should transform their reportage by contextualizing the issues based on the culture and lived experiences and catering for the sensibilities of the greater number of people who are affected by the news and not the politicians who roll out the policies. Another emergent issue that can help shape coverage of health issue stems from the representation of NHIS as a diversified health report. The coverage of health issues in Africa has mostly been on issues like HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and others. While these areas are important areas of concern, their dominance as health news in the media trivializes and isolates other health issues to the fringes of media coverage. The study revealed that the Ghana media focus on NHIS showed how other health related issues can be highlighted to diversify the area of health representations. African journalists should recognize that the health issues facing the continent must be approached and addressed holistically. The media has an important role to play in this approach and it is
recommended that they begin by diversifying their stories to cover all the health-related concerns, policies, campaigns, and communicative events that ultimately seek to put the health issues in public domain.

Finally, it is recommended that health reporting in Africa should be included in the curricula of communication and journalism schools and training institutions across the continent. Most of the curricula of these institutions are based on the western models that are alien to the social, cultural and economic conditions of Africa. In fact the framing of most stories on health in the media are based on the western concept of society and journalism practices with little or no room for the African context. It must be noted that any research on audience reception can be effective only if it is based on their lived realities as well as their historical and social backgrounds. It is very difficult for these individuals and groups to participate in any discourse that seemingly alienates them or fail to cater for their needs. The media in Africa must also acknowledge that issues of health are prime social concerns in Africa that must regularly engage. I recommend that African journalists be trained to report health issues in patterns that address community concerns, and through frames which citizens negotiate their understanding of the subject and effectively participate in the discourse.

The urgency of communicating health issues to a wider African public

This project has shown that communicating health issues to an African public must be situated in contexts that address the health needs of the greater percentage of the people. Undoubtedly, the media in Africa have not adequately communicated health issues to the African publics in a way that enhances their capacities to manage health concerns. If the thrust of communicating health issues to wider African publics is to
promote empowerment and capacity building on health matters, then the media must reengineer their facilitative role of mediating health knowledge by positioning the issues as urgent development needs central to societal progress. Health coverage must give critical consideration to the channels and contents that are used to communicate health messages to the people. In this regard only in a dynamic, resourceful media environment where media professionals are as informed on health matters as health practitioners and researchers can this sense of urgency be advocated.

The first consideration that can be given to health representations in order to ensure easy assimilation by the people is by looking at the contents of health stories in the media. In constructing health stories, the media must be culturally sensitive to the health and communicative needs of the people. Situating stories within the appropriate cultural framework can create social reality that will enhance adoption of the health message. Africa media must also strengthen the use of vernacular language as an important tool since despite the relative increased media coverage on health issues many people have become active participants of the health discourse because of language barrier. At this juncture, it is important to acknowledge the sense with which numerous FM radio stations that have sprung across the continent have accepted the challenge of providing linguistic comfort to their audiences by broadcasting mainly in vernacular or local languages. This innovative approach has empowered individuals and communities by providing a forum for them to actively engage social discourse. The media must capitalize on this innovative outreach to communicate health issues to their publics. Cultural sensitivity also implies that the media must always be conscious of the current frames of communication within the society. Such frames can emerge in the form of
politics, corruption, television drama, entertainment, and sports functioning as the vogue of societal rhetoric that bolster communication across existing groups. If health stories are innovatively structured along these frames to mirror the same degree of priority and urgency with which majority of the people attach to the existing frames, the ultimate communication goal of representing health issues in the media can significantly be achieved.

The dynamics of evolving communication technologies have broadened the scope and channels of packaging messages to audiences. From the existing print and broadcast media which have themselves undergone massive transformation and revolution in the last two decades, modern ubiquitous channels communication such as the use of the internet, cell phones, text messages, Facebook, Twitter and many others have made it easier to reach larger audiences in astonishing speed, scope and size. It is not enough for the media in Africa to limit their representation to mainstream media outlets. Even though the deployment of ICT in the continent is rather slow, it is still a prime channel to reach the youth in many countries and communities. Many young people have become addicted to the internet phenomenon where within the same medium they can read newspapers, watch their favorite television shows, access current global issues, and send messages to individuals and organizations. There can never be any better forum for media professional to utilize to carry health messages to wider African population than through these evolving technologies of global access and appeal. The sense of urgency that is needed in communicating health issues demands a prioritization of these modern, cheap and easily accessible channels to develop and empower the capacities of individuals, groups and societies to adequately handles their health concerns. This sense
of urgency also implies that, to send health messages to a wider African audience, health stories, representations, and coverage by the media must be placed at the confluence of all the existing and modern channels of communication including the print media, radio, television, internet, and cell phone technology.

**Summary**

This research examined the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in Ghana to understand the frames and representations utilized by the local newspapers to promote its adoption by members of the general public. It interrogated the overall coverage of the policy to assess whether the media provided adequate information to help the general public address their health concerns. The major focus of the research was to address what had been identified in the literature as the lack of sophistication in the presentation of health issues in Africa by the media with the Ghana NHIS as a case study.

A major drawback of health reporting in Africa has been traced to the lack of in-depth and objective analysis of health issues in the media. The study examined the major themes that were embedded in the NHIS news stories and the extent to which they promoted official perspectives on health issues. Again, it investigated the culture and ideology that guided media professionals in the representation of the NHIS as a health policy. The research inquiries that addressed these issues were conducted from the angle of media professional composed of journalists and public relations officers who together helped to put the NHIS news stories in the local media.

The research used framing analysis (Entman, 1993; Gitlin 1980; Goffman, 1974; Rogers, 1996) and the concept of ideology (Akhavan-Majid& Ramprasad, 2000; Bennet, 1982; Hall, 1982; Richardson, 2005) as some of the major theoretical tools to undertake
the study. It explored the links between framing and ideology as connected concepts that are rarely interrogated in media studies but nevertheless influence the construction of new stories (Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 1998; 2000). The study was also guided by the social theoretical position that news making is based on constructivism (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Jussim, 1991). Social constructivists posit the conceptualization of news by the media as a direct reflection of the social realities of individuals and groups that incorporate their perceptions, biases, beliefs and prejudices (Ajrouch, 1998; Jones, 1986; Spencer & Triche, 1994; Fiske & Taylor, 1984). The research examined the extent to which these theories determined the construction and framing of the newspapers stories on the NHIS in relation to the utilization of dominant frames, the role of authoritative voices, and the ideological inclinations of the media professionals who dictate the construction of the news stories. The study revealed that all these theories became highly interconnected during the construction and dissemination of the NHIS news stories.

A review of the body of literature was performed to establish the historical and research perspective of the study. The study reviewed the literature on the background and history behind of the National Insurance Scheme, the distinctive models and insurance regimes of the NHIS, brief history of the media in Ghana, and the patterns and theories that shape the coverage of health issues in the continent by African journalists. It placed the NHIS in historical perspective by outlining the social and political factors that led to its passage into law and its consequent implementation as a health policy. The review also discussed the media with emphasis on the print media. It also detailed the ideology of the print media and the socio-political developments that have shaped their style of reportage.
The extensive review of literature that also provided the theoretical base for the study led to an examination of four major research questions. First, the research focused on how the media framed or represented the NHIS new stories. As a derivative from the first question other interrogations also emerged. The study examined the domain frames through which the news stories were narrated and whether the narratives functioned to reproduce official discourse on health issues. Second, through interviews, the study examined the perspective of journalists and public relations officers whose departments are strategically related to the NHIS to determine the dynamics that surrounded the representations of the policy in the newspapers. It also assessed their input in the production of the news stories, their interest in the subject area, the prominence accorded the news stories, sources of news information, the dependence or otherwise on official pronouncements, and the implications of their attitude towards the coverage of the policy. The research employed a research design that appropriated both quantitative and qualitative methods for the data collection and analysis. The qualitative aspect of the study was, however, the more dominant method and was based on Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheidi, 1996) of media studies. The quantitative method helped to incorporate numerical data to aid latent content and other qualitative data. The qualitative part incorporated the deeper exploration of meaning embedded in the news stories and the frames that structured the narratives. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with some media professionals to complement the analyses of the data obtained from the newspapers. Four major local newspapers with the highest circulation in Ghana were selected for the study. They included two state-owned newspapers, the Daily Graphic and The Ghanaian Times, and two private-owned independent newspapers, the Chronicle and
the *Daily Guide*. Participants for interviews included three journalists and three public relations officials from the offices of the NHIS and the Ministry of Health.

Conclusions

The examination of the major issues that formed the basis for the research and the data analyses derived from the research questions provided several conclusions to the study. The first part of the research interrogated how the NHIS news stories were framed: the issues that underlined the frames; the degree of dominance of individual frames over others; the degree of prominence accorded the stories; and the news sources of information for the stories. The overall conclusion was that the news stories were dominantly framed around the core issues of the policy and relegated issues of politics and corruption that normally characterize major news stories to the background. Many of the news stories also lacked the high degree of prominence accorded many other social issues. Furthermore, the study also concluded that newspapers generally relied on government sources for information even though the study further revealed a significant shift towards other sources. It also implied that newspapers in Ghana still give government officials and politicians the larger voices on public discourse. It concluded that newspapers in Ghana seem to be moving in a new responsible direction on the coverage of health new stories with emphasis on the core issues of the reported phenomenon rather than on other issues.

The second and third research questions examined the views of media professionals towards the coverage of the NHIS, and whether the NHIS stories functioned as stories that reproduced official discourse on health issues. Several conclusions were drawn from these research questions and the data analyses. The media
embarked on a sustained effort to present the NHIS as a mainstream communicative event. The conclusion is that the media, based on their perspective on the coverage of the NHIS, always give adequate coverage to a health issue if they believe that such coverage will help address the concerns of the greater number of people. Another conclusion is that health issues will be accorded greater coverage if media professionals are themselves beneficiaries of the promotion of those issues. The study also concludes that, from the viewpoint of media professionals, journalists must acquire special skills in order to report effectively on health issues across the continent. However, the acquisition of the special skills can be obtained through self motivation and increased usage of electronic research tools available on the internet. On reproduction of official discourse, the study concluded that the media still see official rhetoric as the most important input for news making. However, some degree of reduction seems to be emerging on the overwhelming dependence on official pronouncements with journalists effectively exploring other independent avenues to lend credibility to their news reports.

The last research question examined the new trend that is emerging in news rooms on the coverage of health news. It concluded that media professionals have begun to acknowledge the importance of health news to public discourse. Media houses have therefore begun to establish special units and engaged reporting staff with a concentration on health issues to efficiently prepare and present health news. Using the NHIS as a case study, it concludes that the establishment of these special units and engagement of staff with special interests in health issues have led to a more vibrant and increased reporting on health.
Finally, it can be argued that analyses of the data have revealed how new attitudes of health reporting are currently emerging in newsrooms. Units and features pages are being set up to handle health news stories. Journalists are beginning to articulate their voices and the voices of members of the public on health issues as sounds that must be echoed in the public sphere, whilst official statements that used to be the pivotal locus of health news are becoming secondary sources for the purpose of ensuring objectivity. Media professionals such as the public relations officers of government agencies and ministries acknowledge this new level of orientation and commitment on the part of the media. They are witnessing the discovery of a new level of independent journalism in health news representation as evidenced in the coverage of the NHIS, and contend that several reports on the NHIS were published or aired without government officials’ customary collaborative input or authoritative stamps of affirmation.
REFERENCES


237


Boateng, R. (2007, May 14,). Speech by the Executive Secretary of the National Health Insurance Council to an open workshop for the media on the NHIS, Accra.


Accra, Ghana: School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana.


243


In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennet and J. Woollacott (Eds.), *Culture, Society, and Media*, pp. 56-90. New York: Methuen.


Kill or cure: Ghana is faithfully following IMF prescriptions but its health service has fallen sick as a result. *New Internationalist, Jan – Feb 1997*. Retrieved June 20, 2008, from; http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JQP/is_287/ai_30411593.


Kumasi residents are apathetic to NHIS. (2005, September 10). *The Ghanaian Times*.


MP sponsors 500 constituents to access NHIS (2007, October29). *The Chronicle*.


NHIS should support the mentally ill. (2007, January 30). *Daily Graphic.*


250


254

APPENDIX A: CODING INSTRUMENT

1. Title of article ________________________________

2. ___________ Newspaper

   1= The Ghanaian Times  2= Daily Graphic
   3= The Chronicle       4= Daily Guide

3. __ __/__ __/__ __ Date of article

4. ___________ Location of article

   1=Front page
   2= Inside

5. ___________ Sources cited

   1=Government officials/Politicians
   2=Interest Groups/ NGOs
   3=Health officials/ National Health Insurance Scheme Officials
   4=Wire Services/GNA
   5=Other
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Thematic Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 = Yes \ 2 = No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Health care delivery**: 
- **Provision of Health facilities**:
  - Lack of health professionals
  - Payment of premium
  - Huge payment of claims
  - Hospital attendance
  - Court action
  - Inadequate logistics
  - Registration of members
  - Campaign on NHIS
  - Poor patronage of NHIS
  - Ignorance
  - Commission of community projects
  - Festivals and durbars
  - Lack of motivation for NHIS staff
  - Poverty
  - Politicization
  - Fraud & Embezzlement
  - Abuse of NHIS
7. ___________ Frames

Politics: politicization of NHIS, policy directives, political party issues

Community & Development: Commission of projects, festivals & durbars

Corruption: Abuse of NHIS, fraud, embezzlement

Social Apathy/Disenchantment: Poverty, poor patronage, ignorance, discrimination against NHIS card holders

Core NHIS issues: payment of premium, registration of members, drug list, disease coverage

Health: Health care, provision of health facilities, lack of health professionals, hospitals attendance
Business: inadequate logistics, mismanagement, lack of motivation for NHIS staff, huge payment of claims, court action, poor patronage

1= Politics
2= Community & Development
3= Corruption
4= Social apathy
5= Core NHIS
6= Health
7= Business
APPENDIX B: CODING PROTOCOL

Instructions

Please, find below explanation for expressions and symbols used for the different items on the coding sheet. Please, read each item section carefully. Beside each item is a blank line space which is an answer space. Please, indicate your answer in that space provide by indicating the corresponding digit/ number beside the item.

**Title of Article:** Write down or type the title of the article exactly as it appears in the newspaper

**Newspaper:** Choose the number beside the name of the newspaper that is being coded. If you are coding for *The Ghanaian Times* indicate the number “1” in the blank space; for *Daily Graphic* indicate “2”; for *The Ghanaian Chronicle* indicate “3”; and, for *Daily Guide* indicate “4”

**Date of article:** This indicates the date the newspaper article was published. The date should be designated as **Month** followed by **Day** and followed by **Year** as in the sample below:

Date of article: 01/27/09

**Location of article:** Indicate where the article is located in the newspaper. You have two options. Please, indicate the number “1” for articles on the front page and “2’ for articles that appeared elsewhere.

**Sources cited:** This part indicates whose is quoted or referred to as the source of the news story or article. The article must be attributed to a person or an office or an agency. There are five options for sources cited. Indicate in the blank space the number that corresponds to the source cited. For *Government* sources indicate “1”, for *Interest*
groups and NGOs indicate “2”; for Health/NHIS officials indicate “3”; for Wire agency/GNA indicate “4”; for Others indicate “5’. If there are more than one source in the article indicate all the sources on the corresponding space and separate by them commas.

**Thematic categories:** This refers to the various themes that are noted in the news story. Indicate “1” for “Yes” if the article discusses that theme and “2” for “No” id there is no discussion. Please, note that there may be more than one theme in a news story.

**Frames:** This item corresponds to the frame under which the thematic category is discussed. Once you have identified a thematic category, check the Frame cluster to which the category belongs and indicate the frame by checking the choice listed. Indicate in the blank line space the digit that corresponds to the frame of choice. In other words for the frame of Politics indicate “1”; for Community and development indicate “2”; for Corruption indicate “3”; for Social apathy indicate “4”; for Core NHIS issues indicate “5”; for Health indicate “6”; and for Business indicate “7”
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE/SCHEDULE

1. Please, kindly introduce yourself and tell me about your background as an official/journalist in this department/media house.

2. How you (your office/media house) are connected to NHIS stories that appear in the mainstream newspapers?

3. What is your relation with the various media houses that report on NHIS stories?

4. How do the news stories assess the performance of your office/media house in relation to the operations and adoption of the scheme?

5. What is your position on the issue that the NHIS is perceived as a reproduction of official discourse/a reproduction of official statements?

6. How would you assess the extent to which particular NHI stories are likely to induce an adoption by the general public/do you see the news stories as narratives that motivate the public to adopt scheme?

7. What level of importance does your office/media house attach to the coverage and appearance of a NHIS story in a particular newspaper?

8. Why are most NHIS stories associated with politics, and developmental projects that may not be necessarily be related to health?

9. What will determine the probability that an NHIS story will be reported in the news media?

10. What concerns and issues do you foresee as the major problems in reporting NHIS stories?

11. What recommendations will you give as a better way of communicating NHIS issues to the general public?
## APPENDIX D: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lucy Adoma-Yeboah</td>
<td>Staff writer, Daily Graphic, Accra</td>
<td>March 12, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sam Okaitety,</td>
<td>News Editor, Daily Graphic, Accra</td>
<td>March 18, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ibrahim Wiredu</td>
<td>Public Affair Manager, NHIC, Accra</td>
<td>March 26, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>