The Cyber Dimension of Citizen Participation on Ghanaweb: An Analysis of Ghana's 2008 Presidential Campaign

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This thesis titled

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Abstract

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While in its original form the public sphere is believed to manifest in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form public opinion, technological convergence has extended assembly to digital spheres for critical dialogue. This has led to the disruption in power hierarchies and a freer participation. Unknown is how this evolution has impacted on content encoding and decoding in online media like Ghanaweb.

Using convenient sampling, virtual ethnography and questionnaires, this study examined the content of 82 (N=82) selected news items and features relating to two presidential candidates in Ghana’s 2008 presidential election in the light of media theories. It extended Hall’s polysemic interpretation of text in analyzing online text, and offered a fourth dimension to the reading of the text.

The results indicate that while individual writers bring their own meanings and multiple influences to content production, news organizations are still immersed in their traditional structures.

Approved: ________________________________

Michael S. Sweeney

Professor of Journalism
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

The explosive growth of the Internet has led to the exponential growth of online news wherever the network extends. Ghanaweb is one such online news hosts/providers. While Ghanaweb itself does not produce news, it hosts news items, features, and commentaries from all the major newspapers and the electronic media in Ghana—both publicly owned and privately owned media outlets—and also posts features, commentaries, and news from individuals who are not identified with or in the employment of any of the news organizations. It also provides an interactive platform where audience or visitors to its site can posts their comments and responses to news, features, and columns, extending the democratic participation to cyberspace.

What was initially known as GhanaHomePage was the brainchild of a Ghanaian living in Finland named Francis Akoto. Akoto conceived the idea of creating a homepage for Ghanaians living abroad in 1992, years before Yahoo and Google became big names in online media. But when exactly this Homepage became functional is unknown, as attempts to elicit information from the proprietor went unanswered. It is however noted that the initial information site was hosted on a server of the University of Tampere in Finland with a couple of pages with information about Ghana. However, it expanded quickly to become a very comprehensive resource on Ghana and for Ghanaians living at home and abroad (Ghanaweb, 2010).

In 1999, the GhanaHomePage was relocated from the University of Tampere server to the domain www.ghanaweb.com hosted by Rob Bellaart, a Dutch web developer. From then on Akoto and Bellaart have been working jointly on Ghanaweb
with their focus on content and web technology respectively. Ghanaweb now consists of millions of web pages with more than 35 million visitors per month. This makes the site a vibrant communication platform for the discussion of political, religious, social, and cultural issues, among Ghanaians living at home and abroad (Ghanaweb, 2010).

The difference between Ghanaweb and other major online news providers, for example, the BBC and the CNN, is that while the aforementioned online media outlets host their own news, or features and commentaries from the public, Ghanaweb hosts news, commentaries and features from news organizations and individuals. Unlike the BBC, which filters contributions and responses from individuals via a moderator before they appear on its commentary site, Ghanaweb gives direct access to contributors to post comments and responses to news, features, and commentaries on its interactive platform.

This offers participants direct participation on its platform. This makes them what Friend (2007) calls the group “formerly known as audience,” who are engaging more fully with the news process in a variety of ways. Often called citizen journalism, the movement is also known as participatory journalism, grassroots or bottom-up media, or user-generated or citizen-created content, and it has been propelled and expanded by the interactive nature and technological convenience of the Internet (Friend, 2007).

The July 2005 terrorist bombings in London have been cited as a landmark event in citizen journalism. Citizens responded by sending emails, videos, tips and photos, which helped the BBC to develop its content shortly after the bombings. Richard Sambrook, the director of BBC’s global news division, described the phenomenon as “a fundamental realignment” of BBC’s citizen media strategy (Friend, 2007).
While the BBC is perceived as the standard bearer and trailblazer in innovations with regard to the media, smaller media outlets, such as Ghanaweb, have long been known to provide unimpeded access to its interactive site for its online users to comment directly on news items, features, and commentaries they find interesting. It also hosts commentaries, features, news, and rejoinders written by some of these individuals.

This study focuses on how selected news items, features, and commentaries on Ghanaweb are created by news organizations and individual writers in the production process, and how they are in turn decoded by users/audience of this public forum. It specifically examines the encoding of news and features on two of Ghana’s presidential candidates—John Evans Atta Mills and Nana Akuffo-Addo—in the December 2008 presidential election in Ghana, and matches responses of participants in the interactive medium of Ghanaweb in relation to political news, features and commentaries in its opinion section. These commentaries are then categorized using Hall’s (1980; 1982) decoding model.

First, the study of the encoding process will determine the sources of news—whether a particular news item, feature or commentary came from a journalist and a media outlet, or from an individual—which should help establish the structure within which the aforementioned entities operate in relation to the values they seek to promote or reinforce in their news or features. Second, the study will examine responses or short comments of participants in the interactive section of the website in relation to each news item, commentaries or features that are elected for examination. These responses or commentaries will be decoded in relation to the selected news within the range of interpretative modes described by Hall (1980) as polysemic—dominant, negotiated and
oppositional. In these modes, the dominant mode, also known as the hegemonic mode, accepts the preferred meaning encoded in the text. The oppositional reading occurs when people understand the preferred reading, reject it and decode meaning according to their own values and attitudes, and negotiated reading occurs when people adapt rather than completely reject the preferred reading (Hall, 1980). This research, adapting Hall’s decoding model in the analysis of online news with interactive platforms, advances a fourth dimension to the decoding of online news, features, and commentaries. This is the “digressive” reading. It expands Hall’s three-dimensional polysemic reading of text to a fourth dimension in online audiences/user analysis. This fourth dimension of interpreting the text provides an ample handle in looking at a text that does not fit into the three dimensions of the decoding models.

Thirdly, the categorized, decoded messages will be aggregated quantitatively for analytical purposes.

Although originally used for audience research in television—for example, the Nationwide news program broadcast by the BBC in the 1970s, which examined the content of the program to identify the main messages that producers sought to impart—the decoding model can be extended to the analysis of responses or commentaries from participants or users in any online medium such as Ghanaweb.

Hine (2000) posits that the Internet, as an object of study, is a boon to the researcher who does not have to “get away” to conduct field research. This underscores the importance of virtual ethnography. This assertion is congruent with that of Soeharto (2004), who said, “I see a cyberspace as a society that we can take as field site, too. We can use the same methodology, qualitative analysis to get at the native’s point of view, via
participant observation and open in-depth-interviews." The point is that the commentaries and responses in interactive forums of online media can be explored for meaning and interpretation. This can, therefore, be extended to the interactive site of Ghanaweb for the exploration of meaning the audience gives to what they read.

Based on the foregoing, this study will employ convenience sampling to select the new items and features for analysis. This will be complemented by participant observation in collecting the responses and commentaries from the interactive medium of Ghanaweb for analysis.

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study

There are four main objectives of this study. These are:

i. To develop a clearer understanding of theories and factors that influence the production of online news (especially in a free online environment like Ghanaweb) from an organizational point and from an individual point.

ii. To test the applicability of Hall’s decoding model and a proposed extension of the model in the analysis of audiences/participants response on interactive platforms such as Ghanaweb, and find out about the advantages and disadvantages of filtered and unfiltered interactive platforms (whether they encourage a true free participation from citizens without fear of repercussions).

iii. To examine audiences/participants online responses in relation to the presidential candidates—John Evans Atta-Mills of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo of the National Patriotic Party (NPP)—of the two major political parties in Ghana’s 2008 general elections.
iv. Make recommendations based on i, ii, and iii.

This research therefore aims to:

i. Examine selected news items, features, and commentaries posted from individuals and organizations and analyze them based on six coding categories—news source, episodic category, stereotypical and bias category, genre theoretical category, ideologically driven category, and narrative theoretical category. This will be complemented by questionnaires to writers/authors of the selected news items and features for their comments on what influence their writings. It also uses questionnaires to explore the advantages and disadvantages associated with filtered and unfiltered interactive platforms.

ii. Explore the meanings within the responses and comments audiences/participants attach to their postings on Ghanaweb’s interactive platform. This is in order to aggregate them in Hall’s (1982) decoding polysemic categories—dominant reading, negotiated reading, oppositional reading, and a suggested fourth reading—deficient reading.

iii. Analyze the responses and comments on the two presidential candidates in estimating the impressions of audiences/participants about the candidates.

1.3. Significance of the Study:

The justification for this research are:

i. To describe patterns in both content creation and decoding of content in online medium against known theories in traditional media and how they fit with the new
media. For example, with Ghanaweb providing unimpeded access to individual writers and news organizations, it is obvious that the structural routines associated with the traditional media are bypassed by individual writers. This research therefore provides an initial understanding to the extension of traditional media theories in examining online contents and audience reaction to content. It provides a significant milestone for further exploration of the various forms of online content and audience analysis which is still a fledging area for academic studies.

ii. The study is also significant in the sense that the analysis of the decoded messages reveals significant trends about Ghanaweb and the political dispensation in Ghana. This is with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of filtered interactive platforms and unfiltered interactive platforms. It will also provide some understanding to how audiences behaved or reacted to the two presidential candidates in the online medium during the 2008 presidential election. This should provide the groundwork for further research and understanding of online comments and responses towards candidates in an election.

1.4. Research Method

This research method will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. In general, this research examines the encoding of online news, features, and commentaries relating to the two presidential candidates on the one hand, and decoding of the responses and commentaries of participants/audiences on the other. It combines both primary and secondary research techniques in understanding and explaining the phenomenon under study.
At the secondary level, the study draws on available literature from two important sources. As stated earlier, encoding and decoding models were initially applied in the study of audiences’ responses in television messages or text. This research has been examined to provide some background knowledge on encoding and decoding. This is with the understanding that the model could be extrapolated to cover the analysis of responses in online news/media.

At the primary level, news items, features and commentaries were selected using convenience sampling techniques. This was complemented by the use of structured questionnaire to elicit information from writers whose articles were selected. Virtual ethnography was also employed to collect responses and commentaries posted online by audience. Graphical illustrations in excel are also employed in analyzing and interpreting the data. A step-by-step explanation of method is provided in chapter three (3).

1.5. Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study are the inherent limitations of internet use and application in Ghana and other developing countries. There is evidence that the internet is skewed more toward the urban, educated and male than female populations. The implication is that the results of this study cannot be generalized and be attributed to the Ghanaian population. It can only explain the response patterns of Ghanaians who use Ghanaweb to access their news and subsequently comment on the news items, features, and commentaries.

Another limitation is the time and resource limitation which did permit sampling a larger case which could lead to the generalization of the results. Time constraints made it
impossible to continue to wait for writers and news organizations which did not respond to the questionnaires. Since the email was employed in sending out the questionnaire, where prospective respondents do not respond to follow-ups on the questionnaire, it is difficult to do anything about it, unlike in face-to-face interaction.

1.6. Presentation of the Study

The work is presented in five (5) main sections as follows:

i. Section zero (0) provides the general information relating to the title page, table of contents, list of tables and figures, acknowledgement, and abstract.

ii. Section one (1) gives general introduction of the work. It discusses the history of Ghanaweb, its approach to news provisions, and its audience. It also lays out the aims and objectives of the study, significance of the study, limitations to the study, research questions, and summary of research methodology.

iii. Section two (2) is the literature review which provides an overview of theories that have been employed in the analysis of both content production and audiences’ response to content. It also highlights the media environment and Internet availability and use in Ghana, vital information necessary in understanding Ghanaweb’s operational environment.

iv. Section three (3) positions this research in a theoretical framework. It employs the “Glocalization” and “Public Sphere” as complementary theories within which operations of Ghanaweb and citizen participation fit.

v. Section four (4) is the methodology chapter. It provides the step-by-step techniques that are employed in generating data for analysis and interpretation.
vi. Section five (5) focuses on the presentation and interpretation of empirical results.

vii. Section six (6) discusses the implications of the study and conclusions based on the results.

viii. A bibliography is provided to acknowledge works of other writers that have been used.

ix. An appendix containing questionnaires and introductory letters are attached.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines available literature on media content creation and audience analysis/reception of media content. It also provides the media environment of Ghana and Internet spread within Ghana.

2.1. Media/Content Production

The quest to understand the factors that influence content creation in the media has led different researchers in different directions. The question even of which media—television, radio, newspaper and, recently, new media—looms large. Shoemaker and Reese (1991, p.24) queried whether these distinctions matter to theories of mass media, and whether different kinds of contents have different effects.

Earliest attempts to answer the foregoing questions led Lasswell (1948) to propose the “who; says what; through which channel; to whom; with what effect” framework for the analysis of media content. The starting point of the model is clearly the “who” element. This element describes the communicator as someone who has a direct correlation with the media content or the “says what” component. It even answers the question of “through which channel” “to whom” and its effects on the audience (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 9).

While the foregoing framework might look quite simple and straightforward, researchers concur that what we see, read, and hear in the media is the end product of a complex process. Films, television programs, pop music, advertising copy, newspaper stories and, recently, online media products are made within media organizations according to a particular set of activities and practices, and by a number of different
people. While the consumer may see the output of the media as simple, straightforward and natural, the makers of media products are engaged in a highly organized and multi-layered system of production (Williams, 2003, p.96).

William argues that it is not only economic pressure that is a key determinant in shaping this production process, but also factors such as the organizational structure and occupational culture of the media. The context in which media practitioners work has been identified by some scholars as not only being central to explaining media content but also to understanding their relationship with other social institutions and with their audience. Media content is therefore not simply determined by the relationship between owner and employee, but also the organizational and occupational factors, from the individual prejudices of media workers to the rules, routines and values of media organizations, and their relations with other social institutions (Williams, 2003, p. 96).

The first research on media workers was by Rosten (1937) who studied the Washington Press Corps. Four years later Rosten (1941) examined those working in the movie industry in Hollywood. Rosten’s studies focused on the personal attitudes and social backgrounds of media practitioners. The implication is that these early studies failed to take account of wider social institutions and organizational structures and how they affect the production of media content, and only examined those working in the industry and to some extent their social backgrounds.

A systematic study of the production process, however, emerged in the late 1950s as a corollary of the emergence of sociological theories about organizational structure and behavior. These theories provided ample analytical tools that could be applied to the study of media organizations and media work and how these dynamics affect media content. In
this regard, the media organization is one of the foremost elements in content production. (Williams, 2003, p. 96).

Second, the struggle between functionalist-pluralist and neo-Marxist approaches focused attention on the extent to which media organizations and those working in them had autonomy from the dominant power structures of society. Third, the political climate of the 1960s increased attention to the role of the media in politics, with scholars examining the interaction between media organizations and political institutions, and the way in which political communication is shaped by this interaction (Williams, 2003, p. 96).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991, p. 4) identified three kinds of factors influencing the performance of the individual media worker: personal attitudes, values and beliefs; social background and experience; and professional orientations and practices. Studies have examined the psychological and political disposition of individual workers who act as decision makers in the production and editorial process, as well as the social characteristics and political values of those who work in the media. The second concentrates on organizational structure and routines and their influence on media practitioners and their work. The focus is on the roles assigned media workers by their organizations and how individuals fulfill the goals of the organizations for which they work. In this case, media content is less shaped by individual actions, enterprise and creativity and more by the outcome of the routines and policies adopted by media organizations to inform and entertain. The third level is the interaction between media organizations and the wider social, political and cultural environment within which they operate. The focus here is on forces external to the media shaping media organizations and
work, and hence what is produced. Shoemaker and Reese (1991, 147) identify factors such as the media’s sources of information, revenue sources, technology, political and legal environment, and perceptions of what audiences want.

At the individual level, the assumption made for the media is that the personality, work and talent of the individual are primarily responsible for shaping what they produce. This is similar to those working in the industry as it reinforces their notion of the freedom and autonomy of individual communicators as well as their audiences, who are encouraged to see media content as reflecting the diversity of voices in society (Williams, 2003, p.100). To Williams (2003), the production process must be conceptualized as a series of “gates” through which ideas had to pass in order to understand the final product or the content. This is consonant with White’s study, “The Gate Keeper: A case study in the selection of news, which was based on decisions made by one news wire editor—whom he called “Mr. Gates”—on what should appear as national and international news on the front and “jump” pages of a small city newspaper. In explaining why some news items were selected and not others in one week in February 1949, Mr. Gate’s reasons for non-usage included “dull writing,” “too vague,” “not interesting,” “too far away,” “too regional,” “no space,” “too much already on the subject,” “he’s too red,” “don’t care for suicide stories,” and “out of good taste.” Mr. Gates acknowledged his prejudices played a role in the selection process, stating, for example, his antipathy to “a publicity-seeking minority with its headquarters in Rome,” which meant “I don’t help them a lot.”

The implication is that the producer’s decision is crucial in shaping what audience sees, hears and reads. In this case, the other crucial elements with regard to organizational routine and social institutions and forces, which are factors external to the communicator,
are disregarded. The market approach and the social responsibility approach which are both under the social forces umbrella are equally ignored (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, p.).

The gatekeeper model is however criticized for ignoring the multiplicity of individuals on the production chain who keep the flow of news in an organization. Bass (1969) identified two types of news workers: “news-gatherers,” such as reporters who go out and get stories, and “news-processors,” such as the newsdesk, sub-editors, and news editors who “filter” stories to fit the space available. Although Bass extended the analytical tool by identifying the multiplicity of individuals in the production of content, he equally failed to take account of the wider social and organizational environment in shaping media content.

Williams (2003, p. 104) recognized the importance of social attitudes and values as important to the production process, but the background of media occupations show, in one way or another, that the industry is unrepresentative of broader society. Media professionals have been characterized in some research as liberal or left wing. In this case, the media worker comes to his or her work ideologically inclined and this shapes the content of his or her product. Lister et al. (1986) found in their study of “elite” reporters in American television and the press that journalists are more likely to see themselves as political liberals compared with the public in general. To Gans (1979) American journalists share a set of “enduring values” that shape the news. He contends these values cannot be classified as either conservative or liberal but represent a kind of progressivism. He identifies ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small town pastoralism, individualism, moderation, social order and national leadership as the values
guiding the American news journalism. Gan’s work echoes that of scholars in Britain who identify the media with consensus values and status quo. Support for these values is seen as a product of the class backgrounds of those working in the media. This is akin to what Hood (1972) refers to as “individual whims being determined by class background, upbringing and education” of the media worker. Tunstall (1971) found most of the prestigious positions in British journalism were filled by graduates from Britain’s two leading universities—Oxford and Cambridge. Johnston et al. (1976) found American journalists were urban, young, white, male and from solid middle-or upper middle-class social backgrounds. Hence the news in large measures reflects male perspectives, and disproportionately centered on urban places and events, and pays little attention to minority or disadvantaged groups. But empirical studies did not show any consistency in the foregoing assertions, as no clear patterns emerged, but rather the results provided conflicting results (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991).

Other major factors that might influence content production have been identified as media workers’ understanding of what their job entails. This could determine the choices made in the production process. Conventions and norms can make the journalist separate his or her personal views and background from their professional undertakings. Objectivity is perhaps the central tenet of this conceptualization of the role of the journalist who does not have to take sides. Cohen (1963) however identified two role conceptions for journalists from his examination of American journalists and the foreign policy process: neutral and participant. Journalists who define their role as participants do not see news as emerging naturally from events but from their efforts to investigate and analyze what is going on. This form of journalism focuses on advocacy, as opposed to
journalist who see their role as neutral and simply transmitters of facts. Kocher (1986) found that British journalists see their role primarily as transmitters of facts. In recent years, however, there is a merging of both roles by a majority of journalists.

At the organizational level, Breed’s (1955) empirical examination of organizational culture and control by which media organizations employ routines, conventions, and policy to transform their raw materials into news are not always conformed to by media workers. The social and cultural environment via powerful social institutions and the audience also shape or determine what is reported and represented in the media. For example, powerful individuals within society with cultural capital providing the primary definition to what is reported in the media (Williams, 117).

“Stereotype and bias” are also two concepts which some scholars view as shaping media content. Since the late 1960s media research has generated a voluminous literature examining a range of bias and stereotyping critics claim to see in the output of the media. Much of this research concludes that the “entertainment and news media do not reflect the diversity of the real world” (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997) and the “media reflect and support the existing patterns of social and economic inequality” (Tunstall, 1983). In the case of bias in news and information implying the systematic inclination to favor “one side in a dispute, or to favor one interpretation or sympathize with one cause” (Street, 2001). The other, stereotyping, described by Walter Lippmann (1922), is a process of categorization central to our ability to communicate with one another. It is however “inadequate and biased, as endorsing the interest of those who use them, as obstacles to rational assessment, and resistant to social change.”
These two concepts take us back to the individual’s values and socialization, since stereotypes and biases are products of an individual’s background and socialization. These ideas generated controversies among practitioners and academics. This led to their replacement by concepts such as genre and narrative, which examines the role the media play in constructing rather than reflecting the world around them (Williams, 124). In this sense, the media organization again comes into the fore as the most important influence on media content “inside the image factory.”

For Hall (1973), the content of the media is encoded ideologically, meaning what appears in the media is determined by the nature of the production process, which operates according to institutional constraints and professional codes and practices to produce a preferred meaning in media messages for audience to understand. While this position is akin to Shoemaker and Reese on the influence of professional ideology and social attitudes and values in media content, Hall recognizes struggles within the production process. He recognizes that a number of messages could be encoded in media texts. He, however, argues there is a dominant message coming from the media’s tendency, consciously or unconsciously, to reproduce the meaning preferred by the dominant powerful groups in society. In this case, that struggle implies that the individual producer must choose one option over the other. The bottom line then is that, ideology, personal, values, and institutional and societal forces combine, interact, at various levels to determine the content of a media product.

The growth of the Internet and new media, however, have concomitantly engendered a completely new phenomenon whereby citizens, in most cases without the formal journalistic training, produce and publish their own content. The Zapatistas
movement in Mexico is noted to communicate with the world, bypassing established media through the use of the Internet and evading all the production influences associated with the mainstream media (Williams, 224). This is in line with the 11 layers of citizen journalism identified by Friend (2007). Similarly, individuals are creating their own blog spheres and for that matter own content escaping the production process involved in the traditional media.

The point is that we can now begin to look at media content from diverse perspectives. Content of media products emanating from the individual may evade the organization influence where individuals have their own blogs. Nevertheless, the multiple factors—social forces, individual values and organizational values will continue to influence what mainstream media outlets produce in the foreseeable future.

2.2. Decoding the Media Content

Audience research in the media has a long history in academia. Even before the emergence of the modern era, ancient Greeks attempted to understand the power and influence of oratory through the works of philosophers and rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Socrates and their contemporaries. Today, researchers attest to understand how audiences react to the messages emanating from the media through a systematic scientific analysis of media content, channels, and their effects on audiences (William, 2003, p.7).

The key question has been whether the media have the power to shape, change or determine the attitudes and behavior of individuals. The notion of an all-powerful media has a long pedigree, and has held sway over public and political debates. Many people have over the years attached fabulous powers to the capacity of the media to influence their audiences. This made them to hold the mass media responsible for a range of social
ills, including juvenile delinquency, football hooliganism, inner-city riots, terrorism, permissive behavior, falling educational standards, and political apathy among others (Williams, 2003, p.7; Traudt, 2005, p.1). The foregoing marked the beginning of inquiries into audience research but not with a systematic rigor. This was in tandem with the era, when mass society theory held sway, portraying the media as a negative and disruptive force that should be controlled.

Mass society theory has encouraged a view of the effects of the media on people’s lives and behavior as straightforward and unambiguous. This perspective labeled as the “hypodermic needle” or “magic bullet,” and “transmission belt theory,” assumes there is a direct correlation between what people see, hear and read and how they behave. Media messages are received in a uniform way by every member of the audience and that immediate and direct responses are triggered by such stimuli. The stimulus-response model was reinforced in the early decades of the twentieth century by the rise in the school of behaviorism in psychology, which saw human action as a conditioned response to events that happened in an individual’s environment. Known as the direct effects theory, it regarded the audience as helpless, isolated and passive. Media effects held sway in the early 1900s until the beginning of World War II, but was debunked by scholars for its failure to take into account wider social context within which learning takes place (William, 2003, p. 173, Traudt, 2005, p.11).

The foregoing led to a shift to the limited effects theory. The two-step model and the diffusion theory explained the effects of the media on the audience. The two-step model emphasized the social characteristics such as religion and class as the determining factors in voting behavior, with the media reinforcing existing beliefs rather than changing
them. The model recognized the role of opinion leaders who pay more attention to the media and transmit what they learn to others whom they can influence through personal contact. They influence others because their views and knowledge are respected. Similarly, the diffusion innovation theory identified the role of opinion leaders as crucial to the mediation process or influence of the media. The bottom line is that for both two-step model and diffusion theory, the media only affect the audience minimally and not directly, and opinion leaders are the conduits by which the media affects its audience.

By the 1960s, limited effects research abandoned the focus on opinion leaders and concentrated on the uses made by people in general of the media. Three basic assumptions underlie this concept. First, people actively use the media for their own purposes; second, people know what these purposes are and can articulate them, and third, despite the variations between individuals in their use of the media, it is possible to identify some basic patterns in uses and gratifications. Researchers attempted to identify the uses people made of the media in their lives, and in particular how and why different media forms appeal to their audience. By this time, systematic and scientific approach to the study of media effect on audience was beginning to emerge (William, 2003, p.177).

Like all the theories and models that preceded it, dissatisfaction among scholars for the limited effects theories grew out of their limited focus on the individual psychology of the audience and their failure to locate discussion of media effects in a broader social context. Cultural effects theories started with the social context and worked into understanding the media. While accepting the media have an effect on their audience, these effects are not immediate but the product of a cumulative build up of beliefs and values over a long period of time. The “cultural effects model” has elements of Marxist
orientation based on the assumption that capitalism creates class society in which inequality is endemic and the ruling class maintains its power through coercion and ideology, and the media is central to the exercise of power through ideology. The idea is that regular media use can influence people’s beliefs and their conduct. Heavy television viewing over time was found to bring people’s views of the world closer to one another. Their exposure to results in them internalizing the political and social picture of the world presented by television (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997, 212).

In the trajectory of “effects, power and influence” of the media (Williams, 2003, p.168), “agenda setting” concludes the discussion on media effects on the audience. Although it also hypothesizes how the media affects the audience, it is vastly different from the initial theories and models which portray the audience as helpless and passive. McCombs and Shaw (1972) introduced the agenda-setting theory, which derived from their study that took place in Chapel Hill, NC, where they surveyed 100 undecided voters during the 1968 presidential campaign on what they thought were key issues and measured that against actual media content. They found a high level of correspondence between the amount of attention given to a particular issue in the media and the level of importance assigned to that issue by people in the community who were exposed to the media (De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989, p.264). The conclusion was that the news “may not be successful in telling people what to think but stunningly successful in telling them what to think about.” They however failed to point out the complexity of the process by which issues become important. This led Langs (1983) to develop the notion of “agenda building” which suggest putting an issue on to the public and policy-making agenda takes time and goes through several stages. Language, the way the media frames the issue, and
the role of credible, well-known people in articulating the importance of an issue are deemed crucial.

Today, media research explores the nature of audiences using cultural approaches. The audience is now perceived as creative in the generation of meaning. Their histories, habits and social interactions are important in determining their reaction to the media. Williams (2003) points out that this thinking is consonant with technological advances that have enabled the media to cater to more specialized audiences. The emergence of "narrowcasting" has been recognized as leading to the growth of channels on cable and/or satellite dedicated to the delivery of specific kinds of output such as history programs, sport, women’s magazine, film genres which may even be further categorized by gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality and so on (Williams, 2003, p.191). To the extent that the narrowcasting makes way for specialized casting, the audience is no longer undifferentiated and passive, there is active interaction between the audience and the text. This approach, akin to the gratifications model, is interested in what audiences do with the media. This thinking is associated with the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s.

This new understanding gave birth to a “new audience research” with David Morley and Charlotte Brunsdon’s study of the audience for the BBC TV news magazine Nationwide in 1978. Their approach was influenced by Hall’s encoding and decoding, which involved a detailed textual analysis of the program to identify preferred reading in the text (Morley and Brunsdon, 1978). The conclusion was that meaning is not solely inscribed in the messages produced by the media but is the outcome of the interaction between the audience and the text. The findings showed people from the same socio-
economic backgrounds could generate different interpretations of the same content. The results stressed the capacity of audiences to appropriate and resist the dominant meaning encoded in media texts (Morley, 1996).

Hall (1980) rejected the linearity and textual determinism of previous models, since they could not account for different interpretations or what are polysemic—dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings. Hall focuses on the mass communication processes in its totality. He argues the content of media is encoded ideologically but also shaped by the production process, which operates according to institutional constraints and professional codes and practices and practices to produce a preferred meaning in media messages for the audience to understand. He recognizes struggles can and do occur within the production process and acknowledges a number of messages could be encoded in the media text, but there is a conscious or unconscious tendency on the part of powerful groups in society to produce the dominant message (Williams, 2003, p.196).

Other recent audience research models include “reception analysis” and “audience resistance.” Radway (1984) examined how women readers of romance novels interpret and make sense of what they are reading. To understand the meaning women readers attached to romance novels, Radway argues, (“it is more important to study the act of reading than the construction of the text. Reception analysis emphasized the ability of audiences to appropriate the meanings they wanted from popular media and cultural forms. The implication is that people actively and creatively make their own meanings and create their own culture rather than passively absorb pre-given meanings imposed on them.”) So in this case, too, similar to Hall’s cultural theory, the audience has the power to create its own meaning. On the other hand, audiences may resist mainstream culture
pumped out by the media, using their critical and creative abilities. In Fiske’s estimation, the audience embraces polysemy, arguing an “excess” of potential meanings exist within media text. This is similar to Hall’s cultural theory (William, 2003, p.201).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the issues of content production and audience research have not been quiet waters with regard to academic research; they are as ever-changing as the topics they try to unravel. There is therefore the need for great circumspection in choosing a theory for the analysis of content creation and audience analysis.

Zeroing in on the Internet, it is obvious that the foregoing theories could be extrapolated in the analysis of online news, especially where interactive platforms exist for collecting comments and response from audiences/users to determine how audience/users interpret online news. Chat rooms and blogs have already become research fields for virtual ethnographers who collect postings on blogs and engage participants in chat rooms for the purpose of generating data for analysis. Miller and Slater (2000) underscore the importance of this process when they posited that it enables the researcher to “immerse in a particular case,” with reference to a specific locality and participant observation (e.g., a chatroom) resulting in long-term contacts and are the cornerstone of an ethnographic practice in Internet research. For Hine (2000) the Internet as an object of study is an advantage to the researcher as he or she no longer has to “get away” to conduct field research. Similarly, Gatson and Zweerink (2004, 185) accept ethnographic studies of the Internet and pointed out that “understanding that it is any number of encultured and habituated bodies that come into particular places on the Internet, we should not be surprised to find people bringing place and identity with them as simultaneously find
themselves in a new space in which they are creating a new place and perhaps a new identities.” Soeharto (2004) also underscores Internet research when he writes, “I see cyberspace as a society that we can take as a field site, too. We can use the same methodology, qualitative analysis to get at the native’s point of view, via participant observation and open in-depth interviews.” The point is that there are many precedents of researchers collecting information from blogs and chat rooms for the research endeavor.

2.3. Ghana’s Media Environment and Timeline

The role of the media in advancing individual freedoms and liberties cannot be underestimated in any geopolitical establishment. In Ghana, these roles of the media can be traced to times before Ghana gained her independence from the British. The media are known to have played a crucial role in the struggle for independence, which eventually resulted in the liberation of the then Gold Coast from colonialism, and it continues to play such roles in advancing individual freedoms and liberties (Amoakohene, n.d).

Under colonialism, the newspaper was introduced and used more as a political tool to link the center to the periphery than a tool for the dissemination of information (Anokwa, 1997; Karikari, 1989). It was used in mobilizing the people of the Gold Coast in opposition to the colonial establishment. The Accra Evening News was Kwame Nkrumah’s own paper and used to mobilize the people to fight to liberate the country from colonialism (Ansah, 1991a)

During much of Ghana’s post-independence history, the media have been largely under government monopoly and control. While Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president, believed that the type of free expression “which established democracies have taken generations to
“evolve” was beyond the reach of young independent country like Ghana (Nkrumah, 1963), and concomitantly suppressed free press, the situation was even worse under military regimes. Some of the military regimes outlawed the independence of the press altogether. For example, during the unconstitutional rule of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC, 1982-1992), the media lived under a regime characterized by a “culture of silence” with the promulgation of the newspaper licensing law (PNDC Law 211) and the Criminal Libel Law.

Ghana’s media environment has been liberalized incrementally over the last two decades. Before the 1990s, Ghana, like many African countries, had been ruled by military dictatorship most of her independent years, with some intermittent civilian regimes.

Until 1992, both the print and the electronic media were the absolute preserves of the government of the day. Appointments to the top hierarchies of the state-run media establishments—the only media outlets of the day and conduits for dissemination of public information—were controlled and managed by the government, depicting how politics was conducted and covered. Dissenting views were seen as dangerous, destabilizing and censored, sometimes with the use of brutal force, mimicking authoritarian media of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries with a top-down approach (Retief, 2002; Blankson and Murphy, 2007).

The ushering of the country into a democratic dispensation, in 1992, led to the liberalization of the media environment. This translated into the establishment of privately owned media outlets and legitimizing dissent. The general media environment portrayed a migration toward a semblance of a libertarian press, based on John Stuart Mill’s concept of “free market of ideas” (Refiel, 2002; Overbeck, 2009). This was not without its
hiccups, as the Criminal Libel Law was still intact and under which many journalists were hauled before the courts for publishing or broadcasting what was considered defamatory against public officials. Some of the issues for which journalist were hauled before the courts clearly bordered on unethical infringement of journalists’ rights of covering public officials in the discharge of their duties. This links journalism to such key notions as democracy and freedom of expression, but at the same time requires journalists to be honest, fair, independent minded, respecting the rights of others, and respecting the truth and public’s right to information (Richards, 2005).

The Ghana Journalist Association (GJA), therefore, instituted a code of ethics to guide the practice of journalism for its members across the media landscape—state-owned media, privately owned media, and freelance practitioners. The code is meant to ensure that members adhere to the highest ethical standards, professional competence, and good behavior in carrying out their duties (GJA, 1994). This was followed in July 2001 by the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law, consolidating the liberalized media environment and assigning greater responsibility to journalists toward the egalitarian, or social responsibility, model of the press (Refiel, 2002; Richards, 2005).

The code of ethics of the Ghana Journalist Association enjoins members to be dutiful in reporting nothing but the truth, as the first article on its ethical code. It requires journalists to be accurate, unbiased, balanced and comprehensive in informing the public. This places a responsibility on journalists to make adequate enquiries and cross-check facts before airing or publishing their findings (GJA, 1994).

The role of the mass media in Ghana, like any other country, has therefore been in tandem with the political dispensation at each time. But since 1992, it has gradually
transformed from the “freedom fighter press” of the early newspapers to its “watchdog role” assigned to it by the 1992 constitution of Ghana (Article 162 (5)) (Ampaw, 2004, p.18).

Comparatively the new media, by virtue of their exponential ease of connection, unlike the traditional media, has set the tone to dislodge the last vestige of government control over the media in Ghana. In Ghana, though the transformation has not been very expeditious, it has progressively transformed the media outlook tending political cum media discourses toward greater freedom from government restrictions by providing alternative conduits by which individuals and news organizations can reach their audiences (Tsikata, 2006).

Presently, there is a multiplicity of online media outlets such as Ghanaweb, JoyFM and Peace FM reporting news, hosting feature articles, commentaries, commercials and editorials, among others, on Ghana. The fascinating thing is that, unlike in the past when censorship was the prerogative of the government with the possibility of killing stories it found distasteful, things have changed a great deal today. Some of these online media houses operate in a way similar to offshore businesses. They are hosted by service providers, in some cases, far away from Ghanaian shores, therefore, eluding control mechanisms which may apply to locally-run or hosted media houses and other media houses with government stake in them. Outsourcing of news, sometimes with or without the consent of the originators, has become a common feature of this transformation in cyberspace. Ghanaweb, Joy FM, Peace FM, Ghana Review International, Ghana News, and Modern Ghana, among other online news provider can be seen hosting the same news, feature, or commentary from the same source at the same time.
Homing in on Ghanaweb, the most widely visited web site among Ghanaians both home and abroad. It is incredible how an individual’s innovation and ingenuity can challenge and eventually surpass the might of nationally resourced media houses such as the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, The Daily Graphic and the Ghanaian Times among others. Ghanaweb has successfully played host to the Daily Graphic, the Ghanaian Times, GBC and other privately owned newspapers and radio stations. Ghanaweb is a “free holding” web site that accepts news, features and commentaries from individuals and news organizations without regard to political affiliation.

It is encouraging to note that the private media, especially those online, have in an unprecedented development, dislodged all the traditional gatekeepers associated with the state-owned media in their conventionality. The interactive platforms of Ghanaweb, Joy FM, and Peace FM have provided access to other news organizations and individuals to host their features and also be able to post commentaries and responses to features that appear on their platforms. The point of divergence is, however, that while Ghanaweb operates an unrestricted/unfiltered interactive platform which allows audience/users to post their comments unfiltered, Joy FM’s platform is filtered, as comments and responses go through a filter/moderator before they are made to appear on its platform. Furthermore, while Peace FM, Joy FM and newspapers such as the Daily Guide, the Ghanaian Chronicle, the Daily Graphic, all have their websites, they have a link to Ghanaweb, but not the other way round.

The Ghanaian with limited political clout, who may choose to be faceless or choose to adopt pseudonyms, is now granted unfettered access to public participation without necessarily going through the press, political parties and other gatekeepers. The
regulatory roles of these gatekeepers are progressively dissipating in cyberspace, as the internet provides multi-links decreasing the opportunity for regulatory intercessions (disruption of media hierarchies).

Comparatively, similar trends are observable in some African countries. While African countries, due to different colonial histories and different development levels, may have different media environments, online news is becoming the norm rather than exception. Online Nigeria (www.onlinenigeria.com/usa/), The Zimbabwean (www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/), The Gambia Now (www.gambianow.com/home/), The Global Post (http://www.globalpost.com/home/kenya), and SouthAfrica.com (www.southafrica.com) are a few examples. While some have interactive platforms, others do not have it.

The point is that these online media outlets are helping entrench dissent on the continent. Obviously, Zimbabwe’s attempts to regulate the Internet have not been successful, as its multilinks are helping evade regulatory mechanisms and making available information government would otherwise want to control.

2.4. Internet Spread and Use/Application in Ghana

The Internet is perhaps the most advanced form of technology penetrating the globe today. Experts and observers of the Internet believe that it has created an unlimited virtual marketplace for the propagation and sales of ideas, goods and services, circulation of money, information and technology, and education delivery, among other things, on a global scale. Its global reach has made it a fast-growing emblem of national economic and social vitality (Akdeniz, Walker and Wall, 2001, p. 1; ITU, 2007, p.1-23).
But there is no doubt that the Internet has spread in similar ways just as the communication infrastructure antedating it. It has replicated a lopsided trend with the most developed countries having a lion’s share in its spread and use. This dichotomy is further reflected within rural and urban regions of developing countries, with most large cities in the Third World having telecenters or cybercafés which are rare in rural areas, making it very much an urban-based ICT (Melkote and Steeve, 2001, p. 256). The digital divide has been rightly captured as “inequalities in access to the Internet, extent of use, knowledge of search strategies, quality of technical connections, social support, ability to evaluate the quality of information, and diversity of use” (DiMaggio et al. cited in Banji, 2005). To other experts, the digital divide even includes the differing impacts of these discrepancies on personal, family and community well-being” (Scott, 2004, p. 1014).

Obviously, unequal access can be viewed from two important dimensions. First, unavailability of the technology is a major hindrance to its use and application. Available statistics indicate that Africa is the most deprived world region with regard to Internet access and use. With an estimated 1.1 billion Internet users globally in 2006, only 44 million (being 3.8%) were in Africa. This global disparity is observable on a country-by-country basis, too. For example, the Seychelles alone, with the highest rate of Internet penetration, reports use at 35.7 per 100 inhabitants in comparison with Ghana with 2.7 per 100 inhabitants in 2006. Similar trends are recorded for broadband availability and use. While global estimates of broadband subscribers were estimated at 281 million by the end of 2006, one million, less than 0.4% had subscribed in Africa. This is also skewed with South Africa alone having 881.5 mbps of Internet bandwidth in 2006, out of a total 28,177. To depict the level of disparity, Norway alone had 43,019 mbps that same year,
almost one and half times more bandwidth than all of Africa. The implication is that though the Internet is planetary, affecting every person and territory, not every place or every person is included in it (ITU, 2007, p. 8-13; Akdeniz et al. p. 4-5).

Further to these findings, it is imperative to note that while data on in-country Internet and main (fixed) telephone lines are difficult to come by in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is easy to draw some inferences from other available data. For example, while there are 1,270 million fixed telephone lines worldwide in 2006, less than 2% of these were located in Africa, while Asia for instance had a share of 48%. Even with the 2%, 80% of that is shared among 6 countries—Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia and South Africa. The implication is that the remaining 20% is shared among the remaining 48 countries. This is further skewed in their locations in cities and randomly in rural areas (ITU, 2007, p. 8-13).

Currently, Ghana has a 65.0% literacy rate (ages 15 and above), according to the United Nations human development index (UN, 2009). This coupled with two-thirds of Ghana’s population in rural areas, it is sound to presume, in the absence of reliable data, that this percentage of rural dwellers and individuals without literacy do not have access to the Internet or use it at all. By 2001, most Internet users in Ghana had to make trunk calls to Accra, where Internet service providers (ISPs) operated (Ahiabenu, 2001). This estimate in conjunction with other researches which established that 70% of fixed lines in Ghana were in Accra, with a national distribution of 0.25 per 100 inhabitants by 2000, suggest a highly skewed distribution in favor of urban locations (Morten, 2004). Even with Ghana’s current 2.7 per 100 main (fixed) telephone based on ITU 2006 estimates, it is deducible that the urban centers would benefit in most part.
There is however evidence of Internet infrastructure on the rise. The use of computers to support education, training and research is increasing in Ghanaian higher educational institutions. In most universities and colleges, basic computer training is becoming an integral part of all diploma and degree-level programs. Access to the Internet to support learning teaching and research is also reasonably widespread in the countries universities. The polytechnics and the colleges, in most cases, have at least a dial-up link to the Internet for e-mail access via an ISP. A number of the academic departments in the major universities have their own local area networks (LANs) and a number of the universities are implementing campus-wide local area networks (Dzidonu, 2002).

The late 1990s saw the introduction of computers into a number of Ghanaian secondary schools. The Ministry of Education is currently considering plans to introduce computers into all secondary schools with Science Resource Centers. Close to 50% of secondary schools have Science Resource Centers. The SCAN-ICT survey shows that currently close to 79% of schools have some computers. Most of the schools obtained their computers through the help of PTAs, NGOs and in some cases by way of corporate donations. Most of the schools involved in the use of computers only offer basic computer education and training as supplementary courses (Dzidonu, 2002). The implication of the foregoing is that access and use of the Internet is further limited by factors in education, as those in the aforementioned institutions may have considerable access to the network, leaving behind illiterates and those who are not lucky enough to be part of those institutions. Other limiting factors are gender, age, and cost to the potential users.

Research has found that global use of the Internet depicts male dominance among users at a ratio of 63% male to 37% female (Panos, 1998, cited in Melkote and Steve 2001, p.
Indeed, this gap could even be wider in developing countries such as Ghana, where education is skewed in favor of males. Education has been recognized as another important requirement for effective participation in Internet use and application (Melkote and Steeve, 2001, p. 259). The ability to move into the information age depends on the capacity of the whole society to be educated, and to be able to assimilate and process complex information (Castella, 1998, p. 952).

There is a noticeable trend to suggest that despite its empowering abilities, the Internet has already become another tool for “disenfranchisement,” stratification, and social exclusion in poor and rural communities in developing countries, for example Ghana, due to unequal access to it. In Ghana, the availability of the Internet is limited to the urban centers of the country, leaving out about 60% of its rural dwellers and the urban poor. In the urban centers, its usage is further skewed toward the young; and within this age group, it is further skewed toward males.

The foregoing is congruent with the historical disparities in global communications with each phase of its evolution evocative of its historical epoch. From the simplest illustrations of Ifes of West Central Africa and the Bvanis of Southern Asia to “The Grocer and the Chief,” it is deducible that access to communication infrastructure throughout human history has been marked by unequal availability and access, and individuals, societies, nations and even whole regions lacked it at one point or the other, with implications for media development and access (Schraam, 1964, p. 14; Lerner, 1958, p.19).

Therefore, if the new media are skewed in availability, access and use in Ghana, then clearly a majority of Ghanaians do not participate in the medium. Participation is
limited in that sense. On that note access is more granted to individuals in the diaspora and the urban centers leaving out the rural dwellers and the illiterates who do not have the educational capacity to use it even where it is available. So even though Ghanaweb, Joy FM (Myjoyoline), Peace FM and other interactive platforms may provide a freer form of democratic participation, its use is limited by the aforementioned factors.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is conceptualized in two complementary theoretical frames, the “glocalization” and the public sphere theoretical frameworks, as they provide ample handles for the discussion of aspects of the phenomenon under study.

3.1. Glocalization

The Internet, which began as an innovation by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) of the United States Department of Defense and named Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), was conceived as a strategic tool to outmaneuver the perceived Cold War threats posed by the Soviet Union to the United States (Eoyang, 2007). It has evolved into a global communication medium or network, stretching beyond the borders of the nation-state and enmeshing localities wherever the network extends into a global system/sphere. This perspective is in accord with Appadurai’s view of globalization as representing a series of interlocking scapes—“ethnoscape,” “technoscape,” “mediascape,” and “ideoscape,” or what Castell refers to as spatial flows (Appadurai, 1996; Castell, 1997). Scholars agree on its global reach as a contributory element of globalization, which entails a dissolving of national state boundaries (Castell, 1997, Lister et al., 2003; Appadurai, 1996).

Seen as giving birth to the new media, the Internet is perceived as underpinning the process of decentralization, the weakening of mechanisms of power and control from the dominant centers of power within African nation-states and elsewhere, from urban “centers” to rural “metropoles.”
Its exponential reach has revolutionized every aspect of our lives, creating opportunities for education and health care delivery and tremendously transformed the practice of journalism, with opportunities for online journalism that includes citizens’ participation (Singer and Friend, 2007). The new media technologies are, therefore, seen as extending the interactive possibilities of the old media. For instance, texting of radio presenters and the online editions of newspaper contribute to a more inclusive and engaged audience (Banda et al., 2009, p.4).

These transformations brought about an aura of change that was quite rapid especially from the late 1980s. They have sped up the deconstructive elements of postmodernity, a contested but widely subscribed attempt to characterize deep and structural changes in societies and economies from the 1960s onwards, with correlative cultural changes. For example, the perceived shift from elitist forms of democracy to participatory forms of democratic expression are associated with the less hierarchical nature of new media technology. This has led to the subversion of the old hierarchies of communication, thereby decentering the act of communicating (Banda et al., 2009, p.3; Castell, 1997).

Media practices and functions have been reinvented in alignment with the foregoing transformations, evading the time and space limitations associated with media preceding the Internet. The Internet is, therefore, perceived by experts and observers as the most revolutionary invention spearheading globalization to maturation (Akdeniz, Walker & Wall, 2000).

Globalization describes some aspects of the current political, economic, social and cultural atmosphere: people around the globe are more connected to each other than ever
before. Information and money flow more quickly than ever. Goods and services produced in one part of the world are increasingly available in all parts of the world. Banda et al. (2009) points out the unprecedented movement of persons across geographically dispersed territories. And intertwined with these mobilities are the possibilities that have opened up for migrants to engage with their places of origin. This involved bringing the imagined communities of “home” to their new locales at the same time as they project themselves onto the realities of the places they have left behind. A corollary is the phenomenon whereby political, social, and economic actions are not confined to the specific territories of sovereign states, but are breaking down boundaries as transnationals are also implicated in the politics of and societies of their home countries. The emergence of increasingly extensive diaspora communities has, therefore, been attended by strong association, not dissociation, from their places of origin. These connections have been aided, in no small measure, by information and communication technologies (Banda et al. 2009, 143).

When Ghanaweb, Joy FM (Myjoyonline), Peace FM, and Modernghana are viewed from the foregoing framework, they provide interactive venues for news and discussions about developments at home to the Ghanaian diasporan community and the Ghanaian at home. Although the diaspora community is away from home, they are unrestricted from participating in discussions taking place at home via the interactive online medium of the aforementioned online news providers. Banada et al (2009) posit that these venues are main sources of information and political engagements for those in the diaspora, helping them to keep abreast with events, issues, and conditions at home while also providing avenues for civic interaction. Adams and Ghose (2003) define these mediascape within which transnational conversations take place as a “bridgespace,”
incorporating not just the Internet but also other electronic media such as music CDs and films.

This global evolution has effaced the concept of the nation-state in cyberspace. A concept based on the Westphalian agreement of the 17th century, the nation-state possesses territorial borders that are internationally recognized and within which resides sovereign political authority; within this territory are citizens who have cultural identity and owe allegiance to the state; and within the state are laws to protect and regulate the activities of the citizens, among others (Mathews, 1997).

However, with the advent of the Internet, the premises on which the state was founded have been submerged. Thus, the state is now enmeshed in a global village. The state can now be regarded as the local authority of the global system and has lost much of its ability to independently affect economic, cultural, social, and political activities, including online media within its territory, as those spheres are now enmeshed in a global process by the power of the Internet (Mathew, 1997). The bottom line is that the Internet ends the concept of the traditional nation-state. Keane (1996) argues that it disregards the borders of the traditional nation-state creating a postmodern public sphere. This is consonant with what Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998) describes as “hyperglobalizers,” a process that ends the concept of the nation state. They point out that “the old dominance of state-structure and territorially bounded public life…is coming to an end. Its hegemony is rapidly being eroded by the development of multiplicity of networked spaces of communication …not tied immediately to territory” (Keane, 1996). The hosting and running of Ghanaweb in particular fits into this model. Although hosted in Finland, it
carries news on Ghana, giving global access and audience to users and audience of the site.

The Internet itself is a worldwide system of computer networks within which any one computer can get information from or talk to any other connected computer using Transmission Control Protocol (TCP)/Internet Protocol (IP). The global impact of the Internet is technically identifiable in three stages: First, the replacement of the analog signals by the digital systems; second, the introduction of the electronic circuit switching and internationally coordinated and standardized numbering system; and third, the advent of fiber optic, microwave and satellite systems, obviating the need for cabling. This has led to the convergence of media, popularly referred to as the New Media, leading to the decline of states and the rise of non-state actors (Bekerley, 2007).

These technical phases identified above, coupled with demilitarization of the Internet, and the use of English as the Internet’s most widely used language, have rapidly facilitated the Internet’s global reach (globalization). The foregoing engendered the platform for the convergence of technologies, applications, media and worldviews. The convergence of the Internet with TV, telephone, fax and, indeed, all forms of media has already occurred, creating an interactive network infrastructure with opportunities for online news. Messages are consistently traversing multiple media with people intercepting information at all levels in the information food chain (Zeff, 1999).

The global interconnectedness between individuals of different socio-cultural backgrounds and different nationalities has led some experts to consider convergence as homogenization, whereby modernization and industrialization will supplant traditional
values and bring about universal civilization including universal values [including democracy] (De Mooij, 2004: 53). Banda et al (2009) refer to this as globalization model and contend that it has elements of diffusion and modernization themes. They identified three elements in this regard. First, the “psycho-sociological” elements entailed “empathy,” or the capacity to see oneself in the other fellow’s situation. This replicates the development ideas/ideals of the other fellow—expansion of economic activity, urbanization, literacy, media use, and democratic participation as main variables. The second element highlighted the mass media as an “institutional” nexus of modernizing practices and institutions in society, functioning as “watchdogs,” “policymakers” and “teachers for the change and modernization.” The third posited “technological” advances as linked to the growth of productive agriculture and industrial sectors, and therefore the transfer of technical know-how from the developed North was seen as extremely crucial for development in Third World nations (Melkote, 1991, 24-25 cited Banda et al, 2009).

The Internet and the new media are similarly seen in this way, with the notion that they will help spread democracy and development.

Other experts point out the divergence among countries and societies as a result of resistance among cultures that use the technology in their distinct ways, refusing assimilation even as they adapt to the technology. This idea suggests that though social, economic and technological processes may affect all countries, there are deep-rooted cultural differences between societies that are not susceptible to change (Hofstede, 1991).

This gave rise to alternative modes of thought, with Zahir et al. suggesting “when new technologies become available and cultures adopt them, the result can be either convergence, cultures becoming more similar as a result, or divergence, when cultures
adopt technologies in different ways that maintain or even further accentuate their differences” (Zahir et al. 2002).

It is, therefore, possible to go beyond those two extreme positions by reflecting on research by Bloom et al. (1994). Their research has led to the development of an approach or model that acknowledges diversity and so supports the culture-specific (divergence) thesis, while the identification of common characteristics that supports the culture-free (convergence) thesis. In the African context, Goldfain and Van der Merwe (2006, p. 120), in their study of political roles of “web-blogging” in Johannesburg, concluded that although blogs are not well established in South Africa, their function is to “provide citizens with alternative source of news, add more perspective to the events and issues of the day, and initiate conversations.” Blogging therefore has the potential to give minorities a voice [and that voice is local]. Hall (1992) refers to this as hybridization and the mixing of the global and the local with the possibility of new identities emerging. Therefore, it does not fit either of the two extremes totally.

The conclusion is that we shall continue to observe convergence in some areas of the Internet, while at the same time, there will also be diverging effects in its application. “Glocalization” will therefore define the future of the medium as the network spreads to new areas of the global economy. Glocalization is a term derived from the words “global” and “local” implying an interaction between the two. In this case, while Ghanaians are opened to new ideas through this participation, they are also embedded in their own local issues. The participation also involves Ghanaians and other national living outside Ghana who interact on local issues via Ghanaweb and other online networks. So both local perspectives and diasporic perspectives interact giving multiple views on issues. This is
what Tettey (2009) describes as transnationalism and deterritorialized politics of the Internet. Migrants are able to engage with their places of origin, bringing the imagined communities of home to their new locales at the same time they project themselves onto the realities of the places they have left behind via the interactive platform.

3.2. The Digital Public Sphere

Convergence of technology has created the technical platform providing a sphere for the exchange of ideas, and Ghanaweb is one such medium. Habermas (1989) describes the public sphere as the reality of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. It comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body/opinion. They confer in an unrestricted fashion—that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions—about matters of general interest.

When Ghanaweb is viewed from the above conceptual framework, it provides the technological platform for citizens to congregate and engage in an unrestricted discourse about issues of interest to them. Tettey (2009) points out that information and communication technologies, in general, and cyberspace, in particular, have accentuated the links between home and diaspora, the local and the global, and have created forums for those connections to be articulated, aggregated, and contested (akin to “offshore” citizenry).

With respect to transnational politics, participation by diasporic Africans [and for that matter Ghanaians] stems from their belief that they are not just unobstructive observers of, and commentators on, events taking place in a far-off place, but that they are
invested in those events and goings on, and are directly or indirectly affected by them. They therefore assert a legitimate right and obligation to engage in the politics of home, even if only in the context of Internet sphericules (Tettey, 2009, p.146).

The extent to which Africans [and for that matter Ghanaians] in the diaspora are emotionally invested in home politics is illustrated by the extensive postings on the interactive platforms of some online news providers such as Ghanaweb, Myjoyonline, and Peace FM, on issues relating to the election of a president for the country (Tettey, 2009, p.146).

These platforms, in cases where they are unrestricted or unfiltered, are freer than the media forms such as the newspaper and radio that preceded them. Mitra (2001) argues that in the past resistance from the audience was confined to the private realm, “because traditional mass media operate by the logic of ‘few producers, many receivers,’ few members of audience have creative access to the media to produce their own counter-discourse. Internet users, on the other hand, can produce and disseminate their own contents. Therefore, users have the capacity to usurp the traditional agenda setting role of the mass or traditional media and also contribute and challenge the hegemonic discourse, as the case has been with Ghanaweb and other interactive platforms. And this is a clear extension of the traditional public sphere, which in its original form was referred to as newspapers, magazines, radio and television or the specific means of transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. The Internet has, therefore in no small way, expanded the frontiers of the public sphere, unfettering the time and space limitations of the early transmission mediums.
In its ideal form, the public sphere is "made up of private people gathered together as a public to articulate the needs of society with the state. Through open assembly and rational-critical dialogue around matters of political, economic [and social] importance, the citizenry can form a consensual "public opinion" which, where necessary, can oppose state power and influence state policy and practice. For Habermas, the period of early capitalism seemed to approach the “ideal speech situation.” During its formative years, discussions among the educated elite were intensely political, focusing on contemporary affairs and state policy. Gentlemen’s clubs, salons, and coffee houses provided the spaces for these informed conversations. The bourgeoisie created networks of information sharing, including newspapers, debating societies, publishing houses, libraries, universities, museums, and the like in order to both express and, more importantly, develop a new political force (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2009, 187).

The "public sphere," then, lies at the heart of a process of participatory democracy underpinned by the values of universal access, rational debate, and disregard of rank. It is central in promoting the liberal ideals of equity, freedom, human rights and justice (Habermas, 1974). Keane (1996) expanded the concept of public sphere further by separating it into three-tiered categories: the micro, meso and macro. Micro public spheres are the small-scale interactions between dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people at subnational levels. An example is Botswana Kgotla and South African imbizo, meaning a gathering of people; a meeting originally called by the traditional leaders. Significantly, social movements employ different media to question and transform the status quo. The meso is where millions interact at the national level. It also refers to communication between
neighboring states or between regions within a state. At the macro level, communication takes place between hundreds of millions at the supernational or global level. This process emerged after the demise of the Cold War and parallel to the available media technology creating a virtual space for global communications. If Ghanaweb is visited by about 35 million people monthly from global locations, then we can rightly affirm that it fits amply with the macro global sphere (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2009, p. 188).

The aforementioned features are fitting with the online news provider, Ghanaweb. Unlike the traditional media preceding it, it has disrupted the power hierarchies associated with the traditional media, granting access to citizens of ordinary standing to have direct or unimpeded access to discuss issues of interest to them in freedom. This is in line with the 11 layers of citizen journalism identified by Singer and Friend (2007). These are “opening up to public comment,” “the citizen add-on reporter,” “open-source reporting,” “the citizen bloghouse,” “newsroom citizen transparency blogs,” “the stand-alone citizen-journalism site: edited version,” “the stand-alone citizen-journalism site: unedited version,” “add a print edition,” “the hybrid: pro+ citizen journalism,” “integrating citizen and pro journalism under one roof,” and “Wiki journalism.”

The point is that while technological convergence has provided an interactive platform that is synonymous to Habermas’s (1974) public sphere concept, the views of participants on this platform are bound to be divergent, emphasizing ideological, social and cultural differences not only across the borders of the nation-state but even within the nation-state among participants in this medium.

These platforms also provide a veritable public sphere in which ideas, which cannot be expressed in the context of the oppressive controls of the state, are articulated,
disseminated, and debated among interactants who may not necessarily be familiar with each other or have any physical contacts as in the traditional public sphere. The fear of harmful retributions from a repressive regime associated with comments in the traditional public sphere is also effectively effaced in this medium (Tettey, 2009, 148). At work are multiple actors and a desegregated sovereign, characterized by multiple and distinct institutional levels—some contained within, others extending beyond, the state. As Ghanaians and other nationals engage in discussions on the Ghanaweb, Joy FM (Myjoyonline), Peace FM and other interactive mediums, they manifest the permutation and characteristics of the public sphere (Tettey, 2009, p. 151).

Further characteristic of the digital public sphere is the “transnationalization of national politics and the diasporization of civil society. This provides a means whereby participants in online forums in the diaspora participate in, and influences, the domestic politics of their countries of origin.” Such engagements, in relation to political parties and political propaganda, Tettey (2009, p.151) argues, has been significantly transformed by the use of the Internet.

These platforms are, therefore, empowered by the very convenience of the Internet infrastructure, as discussed in the earlier, to accommodate heterogeneous audiences and fractures any sense that they can be uniformly “represented” by the media or state, and assumptions that journalism, as an institution must automatically respect “authority” no longer apply. Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli (2009, p.198) affirm that cyber-democracy and the Internet should, therefore, be seen as a site of struggle for power as political parties, individuals, and organizations use it to advance their agendas. This sphere
provides the platform where all citizens can freely discuss politics independent of the influence of the state or capital.

This form of public sphere favors “multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, and deinstitutionalization, interchange of sender-receiver roles and horizontality of communication links at all levels of society.” In a sense, this is a shift from the positivist-instrumentalist approach of the modernization paradigm toward a less quantitative and more qualitative and normative model (Mlkote, 1991, 234). Participatory communication is thus predicated on the notion of “empowerment” of individuals with access to the aforementioned media platforms.

Rensburg (1994) sees “empowerment” as a move to inform and motivate the community to advance development. Participatory communication entails a great deal of emphasis on what he calls “grassroots participation.” In that sense, argues Rensburg, participatory communication tends to be pluralistic and does not suffer from the authoritarian overtones of the dominant paradigm. It enables the community to set its own priorities and standards, which may be unique.
Chapter 4: Research Method

This specific context of this research is the examination of content (content analysis) of news items, features, and commentaries relating to the presidential candidates—John Evans Atta Mills and Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo—of the two main political parties—the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP)—in Ghana’s 2008 general elections. The study examines the encoding of selected items by the respective writers and news organizations on the one hand, and how the selected items were decoded by the audiences/users on the other.

The following research questions, therefore, define, the parameters of this study:

RQ1: How were the selected news items, features, and commentaries encoded and what theories or values informed their production? This explores the issues of ideology, stereotype and bias, social background and values of writers, and organizational structures and routines, among others, and how these theories influence the encoding process. This will be done through interviews. For example, what is your political or ideological view (centrist, center-left, center-right, etc), and do you think your ideological or political views influence your writing? A point of note is that as a result of citizen participation, news, commentaries and features are no longer the preserve of media houses; individuals are actively involved in generating media content independently. This is especially so with the way Ghanaweb is set up. So the questions will apply to both news organizations and journalist writing for them, as well as individuals.
RQ2: Within which of the three polysemic categories—dominant, negotiated, and oppositional—does each of the responses or commentaries fall? And can the fourth dimension be justified?

RQ3: What is the aggregate of each category—dominant, negotiated, and oppositional—of commentaries and response? This will be compared with each particular news item, commentary, or feature to determine the mode within which each participant responded to the aforementioned items. This must be considered against the backdrop that this research has suggested a fourth dimension of responses in the decoding model, which offers an ample handle in analyzing elements within audience interpretation that go beyond the three polysemic interpretations of Hall (1982).

This research combines both primary and secondary research techniques in examining the topic. The secondary research reviewed available literature on media content creation and its analysis, and audience and reception analysis. At the primary level, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are employed in generating, analyzing and interpreting the contents of selected media items and audiences’ responses.

4.1. Secondary Research

When the research topic was finalized with objectives clearly stipulated, it occasioned a comprehensive literature review that examined existing data on the topic of media content creation, and audience and reception analysis. The literature review included extensive search and identification of books and journal articles by academics, experts, and observers on media content creation, and audience and reception analysis.
This led to a thorough appraisal of theories, research findings and conclusions on the topic under study. For example, the literature review elucidated the series of activities that take place “inside the image factory” and the possible corresponding theories pertaining to the production of the media content. The review also exposed the researcher to the gamut of historical arguments that have shaped research and thinking about the effects of the media on the audience. The benefits of the literature review have been a clearer understanding of key issues, concepts, trends, processes and the debates surrounding the topic (Dochartaigh, 2002; Johnson and Christensen, 2004). This has helped in the formulation of the research questions and defining the focus of the current study. Specifically, the review elucidated the history of the field exposing the researcher to the multiplicity of considerations that shape media content creation since it became a topic of academic curiosity. It also elucidated the historical evolution of theories defining audience and reception analysis from the simplistic “direct effects” through “limited effects,” “cultural effects” theories and to a more scientific and systematic “new audience and reception” theories like the “reception analysis,” “audience resistance,” and “active audiences.” (Williams, 2003). Based on the foregoing, the contents of selected media items were closely examined to determine the factors that informed their production. Hall’s decoding model in particular was adapted in the examination of the responses or comments in online media/interactive platforms, even though it was not originally used for the purposes.
4.2. Primary Research

At the primary level, the process involved a variety of activities including sampling, coding, and the use of questionnaires to elicit information from the writers of the selected news items, features or commentaries to complement the analysis of the results of the content analysis.

4.2.1. Sampling Procedure

At the primary level, news items, features and commentaries were culled from Ghanaweb, a web site for news, commentaries, and features with the main focus on Ghana. These features, news, and commentaries are usually posted by news organizations, individuals, Ghanaians both home and abroad, or culled from other websites. Key words, being the names of the candidates, were used to pull relevant stories from Ghanaweb. The names of the candidates, either in full—“John Evans Atta Mills” and “Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo”—or any reference to their short forms—“Mills” and “Nana”—in the headline of any item qualified to be selected for the study. A total of 82 (N=82) relevant news items, features, commentaries (John Evans Atta Mills: Features 12, Politics 2, and News 20, making a total of 34 items; Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo: Features 22, Politics 5, and News 21, making a total of 48) were identified using convenience sampling techniques. Sampling of materials covered October 17, 2008 through December 6, 2008, 50 days before the presidential election in Ghana, a period when news, features, and commentaries were rapidly generated on the two candidates. Each story is the unit of analysis.
At the first stage, an attempt to employ Ghanaweb’s search engine to locate cases failed to generate news items, features, and commentaries under the appropriate designations, not even in the expected chronological order they were posted. This is against the backdrop that Ghanaweb has changed its configuration in early 2010. The previous configuration was easier to navigate in collecting cases from its archives, as it was just clicking on the inscription “Older Items,” which virtually took the user into its old news.

The researcher, therefore, resorted to the use of a search tool called the “Internet archive wayback machine,” available at: www.archive.org. The URL www.ghanaweb.com was fed into this search engine, which generated the archives of Ghanaweb, assembling archival items from January 25, 1999, to October 27, 2009. It, however, omitted items for the period under study—October 17, 2008 through December 6, 2008. Stempel and Stewart (2000) have highlighted this problem with online materials especially when accessing content from newspapers and broadcast online. They pointed out that “files sometimes are missing information such as headlines and placements with broadcast.” In their estimation, “the Internet is like a city without a telephone book or map to guide people. New houses are being built all the time, and the old houses being disserted with no listing of the changes, and therefore sampling requires creative solution.”

Based on the foregoing admonition and recommendation, the researcher resorted to a technique that can best be described as “trial and error,” but which produced the intended results. Although the Internet archive wayback machine generated archival items but omitting the period understudy, the last item under year 2008 was a lead to the other remaining materials for the year, which were missing. A click on the last item under
2008—which is April 30, 2008—opened the page to the old configuration of Ghanaweb. At the top left hand corner is the category “news,” a click on that opened the page with the listing of all the news items, features, and commentaries, among others, for April 29 and 30, 2008.

Scrolling to the bottom of that page, there is the inscription “More Headlines.” A click on “More Headlines” directed the search to where older articles are located by year and month, from 1995 to 2006, but again omitting 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. There is, however, the inscription “Older Articles” on the right hand side, below news items for September 1, 2006, which also appears on the same page. A click on that directed the search to a page where all the articles ever posted by Ghanaweb are listed by day, month, and year, from 1995 through 2010. A click on October, 2008 produces all the items for the month of October in a chronological order—October 1, 2008 through October 31, 2008. The items on the page are arranged under the following categories:

(a) Business
(b) Features
(c) Entertainment
(d) Diasporan News
(e) General News
(f) Politics
(g) Crime and Punishment
(h) Religion
(i) Health News and,
(j) Regional News
The issue of interest to this research is how content about news, features and commentaries about the two presidential candidates in Ghana’s 2008 general elections were produced “inside the image factory” and what theories influence their representation in the production process. This should provide the basis to examine how audiences or participants using Ghanaweb’s interactive platform decoded the selected text or items. The categories of features, general news, and politics were chosen as the most appropriate categories under which news and features directly related to the candidates could be found. In cases where there was more than one news item, feature, political news, or commentary in one category for the same day in relation to a candidate, the post appearing first was chosen. This is akin to what Stempel and Stewart (2000) highlighted as the Internet databases leading to convenience samples rather than representative samples.

Similarly, McMillan (2000) also identified some problems with drawing samples from the Internet. First, he warned scholars to be aware of how the Internet is similar to and not similar to the traditional media. Because it is similar and not necessarily linear, researchers must understand that people use the Internet differently than they use traditional media. Second, he also pointed out the lack of availability of sampling frames and the constantly changing nature of the Internet. Third, sampling must take into account the changing nature of the Internet. Fourth, researchers must be aware that the multimedia nature of the Internet can affect the various study units (sampling, recording, and context). Fifth, the changing nature of the sites can make reliability testing difficult because coders may not be coding identical content. Convenience sampling is therefore recommended for online media, as that creates fewer problems, but with the caveat that the time element of changing online content (Riffe, et al. 2005, p. 119).
The dates—October 17, 2008, through December 6, 2008—were selected to connect or correlate with the issues under study (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991, p. 163). It is believed that the last fifty days before the general elections marked the homestretch of the campaign for the presidency by the candidates, their public relations units, the news media, individuals, and the general populace would be making frantic efforts to put out news on the candidates either to promote them, discredit them or in a neutral manner. Wicks and Souley visited the Bush and Gore Web sites daily in 2000 or more often following high-activity periods such as debates, and downloaded 487 press releases from the final 50 days of the campaign (Riffe, 2005, p. 119). Samples of outputs were, therefore, collected from Ghanaweb every day for the last 50 days before the election on December 7, 2008.

From the complete set of articles, eight (8) articles—four (4) features and four (news)—were selected using a systematic sample with a random start for the purpose of establishing intercoder reliability. All 84 articles were read for the content analysis. Two coders, both Ghanaian college students, achieved an intercoder reliability of .86.

4.2.2. Intercoder Process for Content

Coding was conducted with the help a Ghanaian student in International Development Studies and Economics. This gentleman has spent all his time in Ghana except the last two years for his studies at Ohio University. He is, therefore, able to grasp the political, cultural, and social nuance associated with electioneering campaigns in Ghana as reflected within selected news items, features, and commentaries. Moreover, the coder comes from an ethnic group different from that of the researcher. This is positive in
the sense that it eliminated some of the biases that the researcher might be carrying from his own ethnic/political understanding of the political dispensation within which the news items, features and the commentaries originated.

Intercoder reliability was established using eight (8) systematic samples with a random start to select articles. All the selected items were put together and numbered from one to eighty-four (1-82). The number 10 was selected randomly and all subsequent tenth numbers were selected—10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80. This generated at least one article from each news category—news, features, and politics. Categories were established by the researcher with their boundaries well established. The defined categories were explained to the coder to enable him to know what to look for in an article. Although there was an initial misunderstanding of what the researcher is actually about, since the coder’s background is not in communication, explanation of the wider concepts, apart from the defined boundaries, made him to grasp the goal of the research project and what to look for. Using Wimmer’s and Dominick’s (2003) reliability test for intercoder reliability was conducted for 10% of selected items achieving intercoder reliability of 0.88 as indicated as follows: \[ \text{Reliability} = \frac{2(37)}{42+42} = 0.88. \]

4.2.3. Coding Categories for Content Production

Six (6) categories were created in analyzing the contents of the selected media items: news sources, episodic frame, stereotypical and bias theoretical frame, genre theoretical frame, ideologically driven frame, and narrative theoretical frame. The operational definition of each frame/category is explained under their various headings.
4.2.3.1. News Source/Category

A simple identification of news source to differentiate whether the news or the feature was produced by a news organization or an individual was the first step toward categorization of the news for further analysis of content. Sources were categorized into “News Organization or Institution,” “Private Individual/Freelance writers,” and “Unknown Source.”

4.2.3.2. Episodic Category

Patterson’s (1993) episodic frame was chosen in the analysis of the neutrality and objectivity of the writer or the institution to the content. In this type of coverage journalists basically report current campaign events and the beliefs of the actors, usually limiting themselves to quoting their statements. Patterson (1993) found a strong predominance of “descriptive news stories” in the US press. In this study, the term is adapted to refer to event-centered news stories that report “facts” or “actors’ statements” adopting objectivity or neutrality in the reportage. This also implies being neutral to the content without offering own point of view on the content.

Content deemed to be neutral and objective is devoid of personal views and assumptions. Key attributes that determined content neutrality and objectivity included “quotable sources” and “unquotable source” of statements. An example is a quote from the presidential candidates and their spokespersons, and quoting of experts in selected items. Unsubstantiated allegations and unverifiable claims were deemed personal views informed by personal attitudes and social background and not regarded as neutral and
objective. This also answers the question of the social, cultural, and political environment of media content.

### 4.2.3.3. Stereotypical and Biased Category

The research looked for traces of systematic indication of favor “taking one side in controversies” arising out of the electioneering campaign. The research looks for “one-dimensional view” in contents. Any content that systematically extols the virtue of a candidate without considering their shortfalls or alternative characteristics about them fell into the “bias-stereotype” category and the obverse is applicable. In this sense, a whole news item, feature or commentary may be classified as “biased and stereotypical” or otherwise. The sub-categories are, therefore, “consistently favorable view,” “consistently unfavorable view,” “name-calling,” and “ridicule” which may either way be one-dimensional in a sentence.

### 4.2.3.4. Genre Theoretical Category

The study also examined the content of selected items in terms of genre theory. While this theory is known to widely influence the content of films, its relevance in shaping news has also been recognized. The conventions of the news story, its ordering and presentation, its narrative structure, have been shown to shape not only what becomes news but also how it is presented (Schudson, 1995). Preliminary examination of content of selected items ruled out aesthetic genre (in its truest sense of the word) from content. Contents were therefore examined from the ritual approach. “Sentiments,” “values,” and “moods” of the political environment were coded to determine if identified sentiments, values, and moods reflected in items selected. So there were six sub codes in this
category—“positive sentiments,” “negative sentiments,” “positive values,” “negative values,” “positive moods,” and “negative values.” Any sentence that expressed these sentiments, values or mood was selected.

4.2.3.5. Ideologically Driven Category

Democratic elections are normally ideologically driven. The two candidates in this study represented the two main political parties in Ghana. Ideally, the two political parties are ideologically opposed. While John Evans Atta Mills of the NDC subscribed to a social democratic orientation with liberal views, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo’s party has a conservative rightist view of politics. The electioneering campaign is therefore generally viewed within the dichotomy of these two ideological leanings. The selected items were therefore examined for traces of ideologically driven content. For this theme to be deemed present in content, the following categories were sought, “a call for change of the status quo” or “a call for the maintenance of the status quo.” This is based on the fact that ideally, the two political parties and their candidates represent ideologies in contest—liberalism and conservatism. A call for a change in government implies a call for the electorate to vote against Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo who represented the ruling government and the ruling ideology—conservatism—and vice versa. Similarly, a call for a vote for John Evans Atta Mills implies a call for a change in the ideological direction of the state. So the two items, “change of the status quo” and “maintenance of the status quo,” were coded from sentences.
**4.2.3.6. Narrative Theoretical Category**

Narratives were categorized into binary oppositions with deductions from the classification of the Gulf War by the British Press—the West as “good” and Iraqis as “evil.” Based on preliminary reading of text, the following categories were formed: “portrayal as honest,” “portrayal as dishonest,” “portrayal as responsible,” “portrayal as irresponsible,” and “portrayal as good” or “portray as evil.” This is based on the “symbolic code under the narrative theory. Any of such portrayals in a sentence is, therefore, selected.

**4.2.4. Virtual Ethnography**

This stage involved a virtual ethnography. At this stage, the researcher visited the interactive platform of Ghanaweb and gathered the comments and responses of users and subsequently decoded them into the various models identified under coding categories for media effects. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to explore the meanings participants attached to their comments in the interactive medium. In this case, data is comments or responses that are directly copied from the computer-mediated communication of participants and precisely referred to as netnography—what Kozinets (2009) describes as a rich and continuous insight into the life of consumers for creative analysis and interpretation of online contents. Although originally used in analyzing consumer behaviors, it is suitable for analyzing online comments of participants on Ghanaweb. Access is not restricted to the platform, so it can rightly be classified as a public sphere. This is congruent with what Miller and Slater (2000) describe as “immersion in a particular case,” with reference to a specific locality and participant
observation (e.g., chat room) resulting in long-term contacts and are the cornerstone of an ethnographic practice in Internet research. In this case, it is the collection of computer-mediated communication on Ghanaweb’s interactive platform.

A total of 3,697 comments or responses were collected from the interactive platform of Ghanaweb relating to the selected news items. Although the interactive platform of Ghanaweb is configured with a space/designation for participants to provide their names, the authenticity of the names provided is not verifiable. It is therefore prone to the use of multiple identities, pseudonyms, and even impersonation. Even platforms that require registration before users are allowed on their sites are equally prone to some of these limitations associated with platforms with free access.

**4.2.4.1 Intercoder Process for Media Effects**

Coding of response and commentaries was done with the help of the coder for the content analysis. He examined the contents of the 8 selected items and categorized them based on Hall’s (1972) decoding model. This was simply reading the comments/responses and placing them under the appropriate category—dominant reading, oppositional reading, negotiated reading, [and deficient reading], which is not in the original decoding models of the cultural theory.

**4.2.4.2 Coding Categories for Media Effects**

Multiplicity of researches points to a complete shift from theories of early media effects, through direct effects, and limited effects, to a more systematic and scientific approach to the study of the audience and how it members receive media contents
While uses and gratifications argues people come to the media with their own purposes, and know how to articulate them, the cultural theory posits that the influence of the media is a matter of cultivation of the individual over a period of time. The effect is its “homogenizing” role by its tendency to erode differences amongst divergent social groups. Garbner and colleagues labeled this the “muting” of differences as “mainstreaming” (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997:212). Heavy viewers are, therefore, seen in cultivation analysis as “accumulating deposits of message fat” which eventually submerges him or her in the media’s world view.

The point is that nowhere is it more tenable that the audience comes to the media with their own purposes and can articulate them than in the new media or in online forums such as Ghanaweb. Uses and gratifications, therefore, fits or is in consonance with Hall’s (1973) polysemic reading, where the three dimensions—dominant, negotiated, and oppositional—of decoding the text implies that the audience inflects to take account of his or her social condition or situation. On the other hand, the cultural reading is a return to the effects theories but not in their original forms. The implication is that while the uses and gratification theme finds a place in Hall’s cultural theory for the analysis of the audience responses and comments to selected items, the cultural theory is redundant for its rehashed of elements of the effects theories.

Further to the foregoing, preliminary examination of contents and responses from audience indicate that the news media, interest groups, government officials and individual writers or citizens can contribute to setting the media agenda, as even some of the individual writings elicited more responses from the audience than those from the
GNA. Agenda setting is not the main focus of this analysis, as all the identified interest
groups equally set the media agenda.

For its expansive handle in audience analysis, this research adapted the interpretive
decoding model of Hall (1973) in analyzing the responses and comments of participants in
Ghanaweb’s interactive forum. Hall (1973) argues that the content of the media, described
as media text, is open to a range of interpretations as it is polysemic. Although originally
used for examining audience of broadcast media, it has a clear fit with online media such
as Ghanaweb’s interactive platform. Hall identifies three possible kinds of decoding or
readings of media content: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. The dominant—or
hegemonic—reading accepts the preferred meaning encoded in the text/content. The
oppositional reading occurs when people understand the preferred reading, reject it and
decoded meaning according to their own values and attitudes, and a negotiated reading is
where people adapt rather than reject the preferred reading.

There is a suggestion for a fourth level of reading for the text. This is based on
preliminary analysis of some of the responses. This can be categorized as “alternative
reading of the text.” Within the alternative reading, the audience defies all the three
readings within the polysemic reading and offers a reading that is completely irrelevant to
the discourse. Within the alternative reading, there is the deficient reading and the
propositional readings. The deficient reading is completely unrelated and irrelevant to the
content or the discourse. For example, a response to a content that extols the virtues of
Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo may simply be “death to Rawlings,” a totally unrelated
response to the topic. The response cannot be said to be in the dominant, negotiated or
oppositional to the content. The other alternative is those whose social situation favors the
preferred reading may go further to in decoding the data offering even a much more positive comments or responses about the candidate.

4.2.4.3. Questionnaire Distribution

Three categories of respondents were surveyed. One, individual writers whose items were selected; two, news organizations whose items were selected; and three, three online news providers with interactive platform including Ghanaweb. The three are: Ghanaweb, Joy FM, and Peace FM. This was based on purposive sampling as they meet the purpose of the study, which is to find out from them the main considerations that influence the contents of their writings (Bailey, 1992, p. 99). For the online news providers with interactive platforms/forums for responses and comments from users/participants, the questionnaire was designed to elicit information from them on whether their platform is filtered or unrestricted and what advantages or disadvantages are associated with each approach.

A total of 28 individuals and four news organizations—Ghana News Agency (GNA), The Ghanaian Chronicle, The Policy and Strategy Association Inc and Joy FM—were identified. A thorough search was conducted on the Internet to locate the email addresses of the individuals and the identified news organizations. A total of 12 individuals were contacted by email. Only 5 (42%) of those individuals responded. For the 4 organizations that were identified and contacted, none responded (0% response rate). Similarly, Ghanaweb, GNA, Joy FM, and Peace FM also failed to respond to the questionnaire.
The questionnaires were designed to be very concise in order for them not to generate disinterest among respondents. Ten questions were initially put together but after the pretesting, some of the questions were dropped and others rephrased to bring a clearer meaning to the respondents (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, p. 177). A total of 8 questions were retained for the questionnaire meant for news organizations about the approach they adopt to the use of their interactive platform. Ghanaweb, Joy FM, and Peace FM were contacted to elicit information on the benefits of operating either a filtered platform or unfiltered platform. Eight (8) open-ended questions were retained on the questionnaire for news organizations about what influences their media contents. The third questionnaire, meant for individual writers, also contained 8 questions which were meant to elicit information on the main influences of the individual writer in generating the type of content he or she writes.

4.2.4.4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Excel spreadsheet was used in presenting the findings and analysis of the research in a graphical form. This stage also involved building theories and correlations between the data.
Chapter 5: Empirical Results and Interpretation

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section is data analysis and interpretation with regard to content production. The second section analyzes and interprets the decoding of selected news items, and the third section analyzes the data generated through the use of questionnaires and observation of Ghanaweb, Joy FM (Myjoyonline) and Peace FM interactive platforms.

5.1. Data Analysis and Interpretation of Content Production

Results are compartmentalized into six categories as follows: news source, episodic category, Stereotype and bias, genre theory, ideologically driven category, and narrative category.

5.1.1. News Source

On candidate John Evans Atta Mills, out of the 34 news items, features, and commentaries selected, 25 (74%) were produced by news organizations and institutions. While the Ghana News Agency (GNA) alone produced 19 of the 34 (56%) of the selected items, various institutions produced the remaining 6 (18%) of the overall news items. These are the NDC Communication Team, Joy FM/Nathan Gaduga, The Ghanaian Chronicle, office of the former president, Jerry John Rawlings/Kofi Adams, the Danquah Institute/Okyere Darko, and Policy Strategy Association Inc (an institution whose existence most commentators doubt). The rest of the selected items, which were 9 (26%) of total news selected, were produced by individual writers/freelancers. The breakdown is presented in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate’s Name</th>
<th>Ghana News Agency (GNA)</th>
<th>Private Source</th>
<th>Others (Chronicle, Joy FM, NDC, Office of Rawlings, Danquah Institute, Policy Strategy Association Inc)</th>
<th>Unknown source</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Evans Atta-Mills</td>
<td>19 (56%) (6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34)</td>
<td>9 (26%) (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12)</td>
<td>6 (18%) (5, 8, 21, 23, 28, 29)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Headlines bearing the name Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo or any of the nicknames identifying him generated more articles for that stated period of the study than his competitor’s name generated. In all, Akuffo-Addo generated 48 items within the specified period. This is illustrated in the table below.
## Table 5.1.1b News Sources for Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates Name</th>
<th>Ghana News Agency (GNA) (identifying no. for article)</th>
<th>Private Source (Chronicle)</th>
<th>Others (Chronicle)</th>
<th>Unknown Source</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>22 (46%) (17, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48)</td>
<td>22 (46%) (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 29, 36)</td>
<td>1 (2%) (47)</td>
<td>3 (6%) (27, 23, 19)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the 48 news items, features and commentaries selected on Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo, 23 (48%) news items were produced by news organizations. Out of this 23, 1 (2%) news item was produced by *The Ghanaian Chronicle*. The rest of the 22 (46%) were produced by the *Ghana News Agency* (GNA). Private writers and freelancers not in the employment of news organizations, writing on their own accord, also produced 22 (46%) features and news items, while 3 (6%) of selected items with the headlines bearing the name of the candidate could not be traced to any sources, and were subsequently placed under the heading “unknown source.”

### 5.1.2. Episodic Category

In the episodic category, all the selected news items with headlines bearing the name John Evans Atta-Mills or any nickname identifying him produced by the GNA fell within the episodic category. The contents of the 19 (56%) selected items produced by the
GNA on Atta-Mills were quotes from statements made by Atta-Mills, his public relations persons, the former first family (the Rawlingses) and officials of the NDC. Similarly, all 22 (46%) items selected with headlines bearing the name of Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo or any nickname identifying him produced by the GNA were also quotes from the candidate and individuals within his inner circles—members of his campaign team and the then president who is a member of his party, among others. This implies that personal opinions of the writers were highly restricted in the production process. The writings were descriptive and attributive. Writers had to adhere to the professional ethos of the GNA. This is in line with existing previous research that points to the organizational structure and routine of the news agency and its influences on the production process. The point to note here is that the GNA is a state institution with the mandate to provide 24-hour news to all media platforms in Ghana—it is the “news clearing house” for media organizations in Ghana. Parallel to its procedures will be somewhat similar to the Associated Press providing around the clock news to its clients with a business-to-business (B-2-B) approach to news distribution. GNA’s mandate is, therefore, regulated by the ethos establishing it. It can neither be political, nor ideological, nor be seen to be partial in its reportage.
Table 5.1.2a Episodic Category in Reference to Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Statement and Source</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotable Source</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20,</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34</td>
<td>(88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unquotable sources</td>
<td>7, 9, 12, 23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(12%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four (12%) of the 34 items on Atta-Mills, however, are devoid of quotes that could place them within the episodic category. They are in many ways personal opinions and statements from unsubstantiated sources which could not be measured with objectivity and fairness as required in the practice of journalism. For example, in the article, “Deconstructing John Evans Atta-Mills,” the writer wrote as if he was on “a demolishing exercise” to unmask the veiled Atta-Mills to a susceptible electorate. “Is Atta-Mills physically fit to rule Ghana?” “Has he got serious health issues that may complicate his presidency?” “The political Atta Mills appears, in all measures, not sophisticated and independent minded, a far cry from his remarkable picture as a good classroom teacher.” On the other hand, you have an item, “Mills and the search of a president,” which did the candidate’s bidding for. “Professor Mills has listened to the tragic and disappointing stories of many young promising men. He has seen through the stories of many, how, over the past 8 years or so, majority of Ghanaians have been fighting unsuccessful battles against an increase cost of living; how, over the same period of time, considerable number of our youngsters nationwide failed, through no fault of their.” Three (3) of the 4 items
without attribution came from private sources, with 1 coming from the office of Rawlings and can be identified as coming from an ideological base. The implication is that even the items authored by other news organizations and institutions carried some form of quotes.

An important point to note here is the question of whether features and opinion pieces should, by their nature, be devoid of objectivity and fairness. Can the two extremes—selling or a demolishing a candidate—be objective or fair from either angle? This is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 5.1.2b Episodic Category in Reference to Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of statement and source</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotable Source</td>
<td>1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48</td>
<td>42 (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unquotable source</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13,</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to items on Akuffo-Addo, 6 (12%) of 42 items lacked quotable sources, and could be deemed opinions of the writers. All 6 were from individual writers. In this case, they cannot be placed within the episodic category. It is, therefore deducible from the above data that 72 (88%) of the 82 selected items from both sides have some element of objectivity in them, while the same characteristic cannot be attributed to 10 (12%) of the 82 selected items, which are mostly opinion writings.
5.1.3. Stereotype and Bias Category

With all 41 (50%) of items produced by the GNA having attributable characteristics, they are concomitantly exempted from the issue of stereotype and bias based on the definition of this study. For the remainder of 41 (50%), 15 are articles from private writers and other institutions who authored articles on Atta-Mills. Out this 15, 12 were biased toward Atta-Mills in one way or the other. For example, in the item “Mills Equals Rawlings Redivivus,” the writer consistently employed pejorative words to berate the candidate, tapping into known but negative stereotypes and biases of the candidate. The following attest to that, “Oguaa Kofi took his circus act, once more, to the chiefs and people of Okakoi North Constituency of the Greater-Accra Region,” “as usual, Oguaa Kofi bawled boorishly about how if voted into power, his government would promptly declare a Jihad against what the former vice president of Ghana—he acted more like Dzelukope Jeremiah’s private secretary—termed as the acquisition of “Offensive wealth.” The item was replete with similar contents suggesting Atta-Mills could never be his own man, but a stooge. Other items also depicted him by tapping into known stereotypes of either name-calling or ridicule, or singing his known accolades. Six (6) of the items have been identified to have depicted Atta-Mills consistently in a bad light, while the other 6 of the items consistently depicted him favorably. This is illustrated in the table 5.1.3a below:
5.1.3a Stereotype and Bias Category in Reference to Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Stereotype and Bias</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name-Calling</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11,</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridicule</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 7, 11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently favorable view of candidate</td>
<td>9, 10, 12, 21, 23,28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently unfavorable view of candidate</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The implication is that 12 (80%) of the 15 items with headlines bearing Atta-Mills have some elements of stereotype and bias in their production either in favor of Atta-Mills or against him.

Stereotype and Bias Category in Reference to Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Stereotype and Bias</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name-calling</td>
<td>4, 14, 16, 17, 19,20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridicule</td>
<td>4, 14, 16, 17, 19,20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently favorable view of candidate</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 29</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently unfavorable view of candidate</td>
<td>4, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, 10 (38%) of the 26 items (i.e. excluding GNA items of 22) were either biased or tapped into negative stereotypes about Akuffo-Addo, while 11 (42%) of the 26 items consistently extolled his accolades, also by tapping into known stereotypes and biases about him. It must be noted that items 4, 14, 16, 19, and 20 carried all the three
negative stereotypes and the biases. For example, while in the item, “Nana Akuffo-Addo—Ghana’s Next positive president,” he was touted as the “god father” of free speech the item, “Ghana cannot be safe under Akuffo-Addo,” slighted him consistently as a reckless freak. The implication is that 33 (80%) of combined Atta-Mills and Akuffo-Addo items (excluding GNA items) are stereotypical and biased in one way or the other.

5.1.4. Genre Theoretical Category

Under genre theoretical categorization, the emergent trend is that an item that depicted negative sentiments also depicted both negative values and negative moods that enveloped the Ghanaian political environment leading to the general elections. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, and 12 depicted all three of the negative sub-categories within the genre theoretical category. Similarly, an item that depicted positive sentiments, for example item 9 and 10, also depicted the other sub-categories within the theoretical genre—positive values and positive moods. Here again, items produced by the GNA are exempted from this category since they only reported statements attributable to the candidates in quotes. Therefore, even were there were traces of genre theoretical categories, that would only be attributable to the candidates and not the reporters.
### 5.1.4a Genre Category in Reference to Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ritual</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Sentiments</td>
<td>9, 10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative sentiments</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive values</td>
<td>9, 10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Values</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive moods</td>
<td>9, 10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative moods</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As deducible from the table above, 8 articles with reference to Atta-Mills employed the genre category highlighting the mood of Ghanaians in the days leading to the presidential election. An additional 2, however, painted a positive picture by also employing the genre category. Similar to the stereotype and bias category, all the articles within the genre category with reference to candidate Mills were written by private individuals. This brings to 10 (67%) items out of the 15 written by private individuals and other institutions than the GNA that employed the genre theoretical category.
### 5.1.4b Genre Category in Reference to Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of ritual</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive sentiments</td>
<td>3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 20,</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative sentiments</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 16, 20, 22, 29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive values</td>
<td>3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 19, 20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative values</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive moods</td>
<td>3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 14,</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative moods</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, it is observable from the data with regard to articles with reference to Akuffo-Addo that articles that employed one sub-category of genre theory also employed the other. Akin to articles with reference to Atta-Mills, these are articles written by individuals or private writers or from unknown source. In this category, 15 (58%) items employed negative genre sub-category, while 9 (35%) of the items employed positive genre sub-category in depicting the political environment. The implication is that all selected items with headings bearing the name of Akuffo-Addo, excluding GNA news, employed one form of genre theory or the other. The combined genre theory for Atta-Mills and Akuffo-Addo sums up to 36 (88%) of items.

### 5.1.5. Ideologically Driven Category

Whereas it was deducible from the tone of some of the authors of the items selected that they implicitly would want to see a change in the status quo, only a few of the items explicitly called for a change of government. In the case of items referring to
Atta-Mills, 6 (40%) called for a change of government, and in that sense a change in the ideological direction of the country. Four (27%) within the Atta-Mills category, on the other hand, called for the maintenance of the status quo. This is illustrated in the table below:

Table 5.1.5a Ideologically Driven Category in Reference to Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Ideology</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of status quo (conservatism)</td>
<td>2, 4, 7, 11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of status quo (liberalism)</td>
<td>9, 10, 12, 21, 23, 28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table 5.1.5a, it is observable that 10 (67%) of the items were ideologically encoded by the writers consciously or unconsciously.

5.1.5b Ideologically Driven Category in Reference to Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Ideology</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of status quo (conservatism)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 20, 22,</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of status quo (installation of liberalism)</td>
<td>4, 11, 14, 16, 21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With reference to articles bearing the name of Akuffo-Addo in their headlines, 17 (being 65%) were ideologically encoded. While 12 (46%) of them called for the
maintenance of the status quo, five (19%) called for a change in the ideological direction of the country. In this regard, the overall ideological driven content was noticeable explicitly in 27 (66%) items.

5.1.6. Narrative Category

The narrative theory of selected items also depicted similar tendencies just as the genre theoretical category. Items that depicted the candidate as honest also depicted the candidate as responsible and good, while items that portrayed the candidate as dishonest also portrayed the candidate as irresponsible and evil. This is illustrated in the table below:

5.1.6a Narrative Category in Reference to Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of portrayal</th>
<th>No of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>9, 10, 12, 28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonest</td>
<td>2, 4, 7, 11, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>9, 10, 12, 28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irresponsible</td>
<td>2, 4, 7, 11, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>9, 10, 12, 28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>2, 4, 7, 11, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all, 4 of the articles with references to Atta-Mills portrayed him as honest, responsible, and good. Four (4) other articles depicted him as dishonest, irresponsible, and evil. This brings the number of narrative category content to 8 (53%) of items in reference to Atta-Mills.
With regard to articles concerning Akuffo-Addo, 7 items depicted him as honest. The same 7 depicted him as responsible with an additional 1 making 8 items depicting him as responsible. The same 8 items depicted him as good. On the other hand, 8 depicted him as dishonest with 7 of the same items depicting him as irresponsible. Five (5) items from the original eight depicting him as dishonest also depicted him as evil. This is illustrated in the table below:

### Table 5.1.6b Narrative Category in Reference to Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Portrayal</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>2, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20, 22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonest</td>
<td>4, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20, 22</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irresponsible</td>
<td>4, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>2, 5, 7, 10, 15, 19, 20, 22</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>4, 12, 13, 14, 16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the foregoing, the total use of narrative therefore brings the total number to 16 (67%) of items that employed the narrative category. The combined narrative theory for Atta-Mills and Akuffo-Addo therefore comes to 24 (59%) of content that employed narrative category.
5.2. Data Analysis and Interpretation for Content Decoding

This section analyzes and interprets how audience/participants/users of Ghanaweb interactive platform decode the selected news items, features, and commentaries that appeared on its platform.

5.2.1. Decoding Content and the Fourth-Dimension

Twenty (20) articles are selected for each candidate making a total of 40 items—10 items from features, 10 from news for each candidate. These articles were selected in a chronologically reverse order (the ten closest items towards the Election Day—December 7, 2008).

The responses to each selected article have been aggregated under Hall’s (1982) decoding model with a range of interpretations—dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. In this regard, the dominant reading accepts the preferred meaning encoded in the text. The oppositional reading occurs when people understand the preferred reading, reject it and decode meaning according to their own values and attitudes, and a negotiated reading is where people adapt rather than completely reject the preferred reading. This study however proposes a fourth dimensional reading of the text. This is the digressive reading of the text. In this case, the participant completely veers from the message of the text, submitting a response that is neither within the realm of the dominant, negotiated, or the oppositional reading, but completely unrelated. This may also be regarded as an alternative reading.
Just as in normal face-to-face conversations between two or more individuals, where there could be digressions from the subject of discussion, the deficient reading can be discursive and unrelated to the topic. For example, in the news article, “Mills congratulates Barack Obama,” posted on Ghanaweb on November 5, 2008, at URL http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=152612, the fourth participant to contribute to the article completely digressed from the news item. The words of the contributor are captured thus:

Nana Addo is a drug user and will never smell power. What he knows Smelling well is cocaine which he will not get after 7th de. he may decide to seek political asylum in BOGOTA, Venezuela or in the hills of Afghanistan.

When these deficient digressions occur, it can lead other contributors to digress from the topic as well. This may go on until someone redirects the discussion to the main article. In the same example, the thread linking the initial deficient digression digresses as well. But this digression might be relational to the first digression. Like a riposte, the second digression might try to respond to the first, as in the following response with a thread directly linking the first digression:

Has Rawlings who was indeed raw in smoking wee and lings [links] it with an admission of theft of sofa chairs, and sending his children to school abroad after supervising the development of education for 19 odd years confessed these ill-deeds? Even he who was raw in education and raw in ideas was mistakenly elected as president, don’t you feel ashamed?

As observable from the two examples, the two quotes are completely disparate with the congratulatory message John Evans Atta-Mills sent to president-elect Barack Obama. If there is any part of that congratulatory message that even resonates with local politics in Ghana, then it is the following quote:
The yearning for change and a new direction is felt here in Ghana too. It will be made manifest on December 7, 2008 when the party I lead, the NDC, emerges victorious, in a very emphatic manner, thanks to the goodwill of the people of Ghana.

In a close examination of the two quotes in relation to Hall’s polysemic interpretations, they cannot be said to be within the dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings. This is because the responses have nothing directly to do with the recipient of the message, Barack Obama, nor the sender of the message, John Evans Atta Mills. They, therefore, fall within the digressive model. From the perspective of the originator of the news item or the feature, this response may be seen as deficient and distractive.

5.2.2. Decoding Features

In analyzing the responses of participants, it is important to take note of the following. While in selecting the articles, the names of the candidates were used in pulling out the articles, it does not automatically suggest that once the heading bears the name of the candidate, the content is in favor of the candidate. There headings and contents that are oppositional to the candidate. In this case, oppositional reading of such items will rather be in favor of the candidate.

The following table shows the number of responses or comments examined with regards to selected articles. The abbreviations DR, NR, OR, DR1 and ILON stands for “dominant reading,” “negotiated reading,” “oppositional reading,” “digressive reading,” and “item list corresponding to original number of item.” The table below presents the total number of each category of reading of the text or comments. But this is without separating...
the readings that are in opposition to items opposing the candidate, indicating an implied reading in the dominant mode for the candidate in question.

Table 5.2.1. Total Number of Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of candidates</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>NR</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>DR1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atta-Mills</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>1980 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>1717 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>910 (25%)</td>
<td>616 (17%)</td>
<td>1633 (44%)</td>
<td>538 (14%)</td>
<td>3697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reading of the text is further presented graphically in figure 5.1.1 below. From the figure, oppositional reading recorded the highest number of readings in total of 1,633 (44%) and deficient reading (DR1) being the lowest category recorded 538 (14%) reading in total for both Atta-Mills and Akuffo-Addo.
In all, the 40 selected articles attracted 3,697 comments or responses from participants with Atta-Mills recording the highest responses of 1,980. There were also more oppositional readings of the 40 articles than there were dominant readings.

In the table 5.2.1a, the selected features bearing the name of Atta-Mills in their headlines are aggregated. The item “Re: Atta Mills leads 53.6%, Akuffo-Addo 42.0: Mills latest polls” attracted the highest number of responses, with 364 responses, while “Mills and the search for a president” attracted the lowest number of responses, with 27 responses.

As pointed out earlier, not all items bearing the name of the candidate carried favorable content on the candidate.
Table 5.2.2a Features Bearing Atta-Mills Headlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Item</th>
<th>ILON</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>NR</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>DR1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Health Status, Professor Mills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Atta-Mills is a shamelessly naked man</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rawlings never insulted Fantis—Atta-Mills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mills congratulates Obama</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Deconstructing John Evans Atta-Mills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Re: Atta-Mills Leads 53.6%, Akuff0-Addo 42.0: latest polls</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Mills is the man with a plan</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ghanaians have chosen Mills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. J.J. Rawlings and Atta-Mills: marriage of convenience</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Mills and the search for a president</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, in table 5.2.1a, the following articles: “Health status, professor Mills,” “Atta-Mills is a shamelessly naked man,” “Deconstructing John Evans Atta-Mills,” and “J.J. and Mills: marriage of convenience,” carried the name of the candidate, they are items that are either oppositional or somewhat oppositional to Atta-Mills presidency. In this case, oppositional reading to that content implies, to a large extent, an
endorsement for Mills. Therefore, in aggregating all the dominant readings in favor of Mills, oppositional readings for those items must be aggregated with the dominant reading of contents in favor of candidate Atta-Mills. The same applies to candidate Akuffo-Addo.

![Features bearing Atta-Mills Headlines](image)

**Figure 5.2.2a Features bearing Atta-Mills Headlines**

The data in table 5.2.2a is further illustrated graphically in figure 5.2.2a with 331 being the DR and 587 being the OR.

Table 5.2.2b aggregates both the real and implied readings for both the dominant and oppositional readings.
### Table 5.2.2b Implied and Real Readings for Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant readings in favor of Mills in real terms</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Oppositional readings against Mills in real terms</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied readings in favor of Mills</td>
<td></td>
<td>Implied reading against Mills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>410</td>
<td></td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data indicates that overall 410 comments or responses in response to the selected items were in favor candidate Atta-Mills. This is 236 that were directly read in the dominant mode and 174 in opposition to items that were in opposition to Atta-Mills. On the other hand, 508 comments or responses were in opposition to the Mills presidency.
This is 413 directly decoded in the oppositional mode with 95 given preferred reading to items opposed to Atta-Mills’ presidency.

![Bar Chart: Implied and real reading Atta-Mills](chart)

**Figure 5.2.2b Implied and real reading Atta-Mills**

The data in the table 5.2.2b is represented in figure 5.2.2b above showing more oppositional reading for Atta-Mills than preferred or dominant reading.

Features bearing the name Akuffo-Addo in their headlines also generated a total of 911 comments or responses. Akuffo-Addo also generated more oppositional readings to selected items than it did preferred or dominant readings. This is illustrated in table 5.2.2c below:
Table 5.2.2c Features Bearing Akuffo-Addo Headlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Item</th>
<th>ILON</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>NR</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>DR1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Why they prefer Akuffo-Addo to Aliu Mahama</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ghana cannot be safe under Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. All hail the man with impeccable pedigree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Akuff-Addo; clear your name</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Reject politics of tribalism”—Nana Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Re: I will fulfill my election promise—Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Is Akuffo-Addo his own man?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Election 2008: why Akuffo-Addo deserves the mandate</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Akuffo-Addo’s Utopian campaign promises on tertiary education</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Goig up or down with Akuffo-Addo’s ship</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>303</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>911</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The representation in table 5.2.2c is further illustrated graphically in figure 5.2.2c below showing oppositional reading with the highest reading and digressive reading as the lowest.

**Figure 5.2.2c Features bearing Akuff-Addo**

In the case of Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo, the following articles were unfavorable to his presidency: “Why they prefer Akuffo-Addo to Aliu Mahama,” “Ghana cannot be safe under Akuffo-Addo,” “Akuffo-Addo: clear your name,” “Is Akuffo-Addo his own man?” and “Akuffo-Addo’s Utopian campaign promises on tertiary education.” In this case, any reading that opposed this article is in support of Akuffo-Addo’s presidency. For that matter those readings in opposed to the aforementioned readings become the implied readings in favor of Akuffo-Addo, as presented in the table below.
Table 5.2.2d Implied and Real Readings for Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant readings in favor in favor of Akuffo-Addo in real terms</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Oppositional reading against Akuffo-Addo in real terms</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied reading in favor of Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Implied reading against Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>329</td>
<td></td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table above, it is indicative that 329 responses were in favor of Akuffo-Addo’s presidency. This was 99 who favored him directly through the preferred reading and 230 who were in opposition to items to items that were in opposition to his presidency. The same number (329) of responses was in opposition to Akuffo-Addo’s
presidency. This was 125 directly in oppositional reading and 204 implicitly oppositional to his presidency. This is further illustrated in figure 5.2.2c below:

![Bar Graph](image)

**Figure 5.2.2d Implied and real reading for Akuffo-Addo**

As illustrated in the figure above, the bar connecting point 1 and point 2 are on the same pedestal, connoting both items—DR and OR—recorded the same number of comments as captured in the table.

With regard to news on Atta-Mills, none of the selected items was in opposition to Atta-Mills presidency. The selected items were positive statements or somewhat assenting headlines in support of Atta-Mills. They are therefore all real readings for Atta-Mills—dominant, negotiated, oppositional, and deficient. In this case, there are no implied readings. This is illustrated in table 5.2.2e below.
Table 5.2.2e News Items in Reference to Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Item</th>
<th>ILON</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>NR</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>DR1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. National Reform Party supports Atta-Mills</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NDC will partner chiefs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No discrimination in sharing national cake—Mills</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mills endorses peace meeting</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. NPP man denies campaigning for Mills</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mills begins Eastern region tour</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I will prosecute any member of my government engaged in corruption—Mills</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Mills to run government of fairness</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mills urges security agencies to vote for “a better Ghana”</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. NDC will use resources for the benefit of all</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Total</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the selected news items with regard to responses to content regarding Atta-Mills, 132 responses were decoded in the dominant model, while 221 were decoded in the oppositional model.
The data in table 5.2.2e is further illustrated in the graph above with the highest point of the bar (221) denoting oppositional reading, while the lowest point of the graph marks the negotiated reading.

On news regarding Akuffo-Addo, table 5.2.2f represents the total number of news items selected on Akuffo-Addo. While 144 of the news were decoded in the dominant mode, 470 were decoded in the oppositional mode.
### Table 5.2.2f News Items in Reference to Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Item</th>
<th>ILON</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>NR</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>DR1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ghanaians have lost confidence in the NDC</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Akuffo-Addo challenged on free second cycle education promise</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Don’t take the NDC serious</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Akuff-Addo’s convoy involved in an accident</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Akuffo-Addo to explore oil in Keta basin</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am not a criminal—Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. NPP will industrialize the economy—Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Nana calls for peaceful election</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Akuffo-Addos children are not his—Konadu</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I will deliver on my promises—Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>806</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The representation in table 5.2.2f is further illustrated in the graph in figure 5.2.2f with 470 being the apex of the graph, representing readings in the oppositional mode.

![Figure 5.2.2f News in reference to Akuffo-Addo](image)

Akin to the features, some selected news items were unfavorable to Akuffo-Addo presidency. These are, “Akuffo-Addo challenged on free second cycle education promise,” and “Akuffo-Addo’s children are not his.” Therefore the dominant reading of those two items is in opposition to his presidency and oppositional reading of those items implicitly supports his presidency. This is presented in table 5.2.2g below.
### Table 5.2.2g Implied and Real Reading of News on Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant reading in favor of Akuffo-Addo in real terms</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Oppositional reading against Akuffo-Addo in real terms</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Implied reading in favor of Akuffo-Addo**

| 56                                                     | 17     |                                                      |        |
| 159                                                    | 215    | 32                                                   | 49     |
|                                                        | 310    |                                                      | 304    |

In the table above, 310 responses were in support of Akuffo-Addo’s presidency. This was 95 directly within the dominant reading of selected articles and 215 implicitly endorsing his presidency. On the other hand, 304, responses were oppositional to Akuffo-Addo presidency. This was 255 direct oppositional and 49 implicit oppositional readings.
The data in table 5.2.2g is further illustrated in the graph 5.2.2g below. It is observable from the graph that the dominant reading is a bit higher than the oppositional reading in this case.

![Graph: Implied and real reading of news Akuffo-Addo](image)

**Figure 5.2.2g Implied and real reading of news on Akuffo-Addo**

In the final analysis, Atta-Mills attracted more oppositional readings from audience/participants than preferred readings. While 542 comments considered Atta-Mills presidency within the preferred reading (favorably), 729 responses were oppositional to his presidency, therefore, unfavorable to him. On the other hand, Akuffo-Addo attracted more responses within the dominant reading (favorable) from participants than within oppositional readings. Whereas 639 responses considered Akuffo-Addo presidency favorably, 633 considered it unfavorably. This is illustrated in the table 5.2.2.h below.
Table 5.2.2h Total Number of Readings (Implied and Actual)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Candidates</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>NR</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>DR1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atta-Mills</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akuffo-Addo</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>1717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1181 (32%)</td>
<td>616 (17%)</td>
<td>1362 (37%)</td>
<td>538 (14%)</td>
<td>3697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Readings in the negotiated and deficient models remain constant, since they are either neutral or completely digressional. The results are further captured in graph 5.2.2h below with oppositional reading receiving 1,362 as the highest number of response.

![Total reading (implied and actual)](image)

**Figure 5.2.2h Total number of readings (implied and actual)**

The overall figures indicate that that selected items on Atta-Mills generated more responses and comments than selected items on Akuffo-Addo.
5.3. Questionnaire-Generated Results

This section has two subsections. While one section analyzes questionnaires from writers, the other looks at the operational models Ghanaweb, Joy FM, and Peace FM with regard to their interactive platforms.

5.3.1. Questionnaire Generated Results from Writers

This section analyzes the responses generated through the questionnaire. Although not the central subject of this research, it is believed it might shed some light, from the perspective of the writers and news organizations, on what influenced their approach to writing the articles. The low response rate of the questionnaire limits its generalizability, but the responses lend a rich qualitative element to the analysis of the data.

With regard to the question of whether respondents write for any news organization, 2 out of the 5 respondents write for private news organizations, while the remaining 3 may be classified as private writers/freelancers who are not in the employment of any news organization or institution.

On whether the news organization they write for subscribes to any political ideology, while one writer intimated that his news organization subscribes to a political ideology, the other indicated that his news organization only subscribes to democracy as an ideology. The other three who do not write for any news organization or institution, however, have their views about political ideology and its influence on writing. The first put forward that:

I send my articles to newspapers that are sympathetic to the political Ideology I subscribe to.
Based on this submission, it is obvious that the writer, though not affiliated with any news organization or writing for any, is aware of the ideological influences within the production process of the media. The point is that his article might not get published if it is diametrically opposed to the ideological leaning of a newspaper he might want to publish with.

Although the remaining two also indicated they do not have any ideological inclination from which they write, their writing might be unbeknownst to them, ideological as their submissions are examined critically. As one of them pointed out:

do not subscribe to any particular political ideology…am a realist and a moralist I always tend to support the political ideology that is closest to my dreams and aspirations…the NDC has demonstrated over the years that it has a collective spirit of pro-poor socially oriented development programs.

The point is that not being ideological but tending to shift to the ideology that is closest to one’s dreams and aspirations is no longer seen as “free from ideological bias.” The middle has been taken; and it is the position of the centrist. For that matter, his writing is influenced in one way or the other by the most suitable ideology to him at each particular time. Another interpretation of the foregoing statement might find meaning in the pejorative connotation attached to “ideology” since the days of the Cold War. This might explain why some individuals would not like to be seen or regarded as being ideological.

For the last writer in this category, he confirms my initial observations that Ghanaweb provides free, open, and unfettered access to writers to publish without having to satisfy specific requirements that goes with other news organizations before they publish articles from individuals. Anything goes as far as Ghanaweb is concerned. Once
the article is readable, it is published. He intimated that Ghanaweb has no political ideology. The following explains the personal influences of his writings:

am moved and touched by the daily cry and needs of the masses. I am disgusted by the flagrant demonstration of hypocrisy of African politicians and the common practice of mediocre leadership with the lack of set principles and any moral foundation. I am appalled at the daily paradoxes and contradictions of life and the pretension displayed by politicians any time they mount platforms. Unkept promises, constitutional and legal maneuvers by incumbent parties any time the situation suits them, constant rationalization of failures to deliver on political promises, and many other government-led propaganda systems used often to hide the truth and reality from mostly the uneducated and the unschooled. These are the things I consider when I write, and not ideology.

On the issue of political party affiliation, three of the respondents indicated neither of the news organizations that publish their work is affiliated to any political party. One of them is however inclined to democratic dispensation. While the remaining two work directly with newspapers that are driven by political ideology.

I have a strong affiliation with the New Patriotic Party (NPP), so are most of the newspapers I submit my scripts to. The most important considerations are objectivity and the search for the truth. One thing I always do is ensure that I present my preferred candidates in the best possible light.

On the issue of motivation for writing, each writer has his/her own perspective from which he/she writes. For even those who consider their environment ideological and requiring them to present a certain view of the world, there must be some motivation to pick a particular story. While four of the writers gave a detailed account of what their motivations are, one could not provide any answer on that subject. The motivations ranged from the need to advance democracy to the very idea of promoting the agenda of the party with which one’s sympathies lie. For the writer with strong affiliations with the New Patriotic Party, this is what he had to say:

That is my style. I believe so much in the vision of Nana Addo Dankwa
Akuffo-Addo. I believe he is a man who has good intentions for the country, but is greatly misunderstood. I believe that if people get to know him at personal level, such people will begin to revise their impressions about him...thus anytime I write to defend him or refute some wrong impressions about him, I do that with passion.

Arguably, if political campaigns and activities hinge on ideologically driven messages, then it is irrefutable that Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo, just like all other politicians, is driven by his ideology. The foregoing assertion of the writer, therefore, further underscores how ideology influences his writing at the personal level.

To underscore his earlier point that he tends to align with the ideology that is closest to his dreams and aspirations, the writer with inclinations towards the NDC had this to say:

I realized Ghana is a very young democracy and nation. The population is very young and talented, with sky high aspirations and expectations. Against this backdrop it is a resource-rich country with very poor infrastructure and institutions. The perennial struggle has been how to harness our resources for optimal benefits of all...it requires a blend of central planning independent of political ideologies—just pragmatic fiscal responsibility plus private capital initiatives—to bring about development. These are the thoughts that permeate my writings.

Certainly while his earlier submission depicted centrist ideology, the foregoing clearly underpins his social background and views permeating his writings.

On the question of what other important considerations might influence their writings, all the five writers have varied views. For the writer with NPP affiliations, it his passion to portray his adored candidate in a good light:

I love what I do to ensure that the good person in society is given the opportunity to turn the economy of the country around

Again, this underscores his inclination towards the maintenance of the status quo.

If maintaining the status quo implies maintaining the political ideological foundation on
which the incumbent government operates, then there is no doubt that ideological
considerations inform his writing in one way or the other (consciously or unconsciously).

For one of those who write for a news organization, the other consideration is in
informing his readers about the exactitude of the facts. But in so doing, he also tries to
catch the attention of both his readers and his editor with some sensationalism:

I try to catch the attention of the readers with some sensationalism. There is also the desire to catch my editor’s attention to put the story on the front page; it also means the desire to create a positive image or myself; and the desire to teach others who see me as a role model.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that not only does ideological consideration
influence this writer, but commercial considerations are also as important while at the
same time considering the routines and structures of his organization, pandering to all
those considerations in the process of content creation.

For the other writer with news organization affiliation, the other considerations are
the history, the culture and developments around the continent inform his writing. In this
case, his writing reflects the history and the culture of the African society:

African history, African culture, and global development ideals inform what I write. I use democratic tenets to diagnose Africa’s development challenges. Democracy will help Africa unearth its development potentials.

Finally, for another individual writer, it is the ills within the Ghanaian society that
give him an added impetus to write as he rightly illustrated in the quote below:

I consider Ghana as a work-in-progress. We are on different speeds at various sections of the country. We have a very small but vociferous educated community who are able to skew the issues to what suits their interests, whereas we tend to consider the needs of the overwhelming rural poor as an after-thought…these are the issues that get me to the computer to write. These things have no tribal colors, but unscrupulous politicians are able to knock the people’s heads
together by deflecting any attack on them as an attack on their tribes and get the gullible masses to their defense.

The foregoing responses indicate that while the ideological leaning of a news organization might be an important consideration for its writers, there are other factors that also combine with ideology in shaping the news. As noticed in one of the comments from one of the writers who works for a news organization, even though he writes from an ideological point of view, he also panders to the reader, as observable in this statement, “the desire to catch the attention of the reader.”

For the 3 others who are not affiliated to any news organization, social justice, history, democracy, development, and culture have some relations with ideology, upbringing, background and views of the writer. These elements are therefore intertwined in the production process, rather than just one element informing a writers approach each time.

5.3.2. Questionnaire-Generated Results and Observations on Interactive Platforms

There is no doubt that the form of interactive platform operated by the online news providers—Ghanaweb, Joy FM, and Peace FM—contacted in this study affect the level of interaction. While there was no response from all the 3 online news providers, a close observation and participation on the 3 interactive platforms for the purpose of this study reveals some important aspects of the various platforms that need to be highlighted.

First, it is obvious, as in the case of Ghanaweb, that free access to its interactive platform has its pros and cons. The advantages are definitely free and unfettered expression of all forms by participants. This is regardless of ethical and other socio-
cultural considerations that might be a check on the contributors, if these responses were to be letters to the editor. The fact that participants do not even have to register and have user names, as in the case of the BBC, to participate on its platform makes it even freer. In this regard, there is impersonation, the use of pseudonyms and the use of multiple identities on its interactive platform. Since individuals cannot be traced to these names, unless the administrators have reason to actually trace comments, it is “free for all.” While majority of participants make meaningful contributions to articles posted, a substantial number of participants also engaged in triviality, ethnic invectives and outright insulting behavior. But behind the “mask of the computer,” these might be individuals who might not be able to articulate some of those hard diatribes in a physical public setting. There is therefore no question about “free participation” on Ghanaweb’s interactive platform.

On the other hand, a restricted platform has the tendency to operate on the model of the traditional media, where the “gatekeeping” role of the newspaper editor is extended into cyberspace. The editor or moderator reads and determine who gets read or heard on the platform and who doesn’t get read or heard. Just as the unfiltered platforms have their advantages, so do the filtered platforms. They can prevent defamation, restriction of outrageous comments and maintenance of some level of “decorum and sanity” on the platform. But they have the potential to stifle dissent, as the moderator becomes a wall between the participant and the wider audiences. In the case where the moderator disagrees with the participant, it is obvious that the comments and responses of the participant will be gagged, defeating the important motive of democratic participation. Where even rules exist as to what constitute outrageous language, there is no doubts that
human qualitative interpretation of these comments will somewhat vary from one person to another, and the moderator may be suspiciously embedded in the process of selection.

In the case of Joy FM, initial participation on its interactive platform revealed it as a filtered platform. But contrary to this assertion, during data collection, JOY FM issued a statement regarding its online interactive platform (myjoyonline) regarding what it considered as unsavory comments in relation to a news item on the board chairperson of Ghana National Youth Council, Ms. Esther Cobba. The statement reads: “we apologize unreservedly to Ms Esther Cobba, Board Chairperson of the Ghana National Youth Council, for certain unsavory readers’ comments posted on myjoyonline.com (Joy FM, July 28, 2010).

The foregoing statement raises a few questions. Did the moderator goof in publishing what he later considered to be unsavory? Has the platform being deregulated to allow for a freer participation, or has it always been opened but somehow some comments simply don’t make it to its platform? Would Joy FM be able to apologize to every individual—the rich as well as the poor, the high-ranking as well as the low-ranking, and even the young and old—who is slighted on its platform? The ethical dimension of this action definitely has implications for participation and organizational approach.

For Peace FM, its model is in line with Ghanaweb with all the pros and the cons that come with unfiltered platforms. But all in all, Ghanaweb remains the focal point for unfettered online participation among Ghanaians.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

From the empirical results and their analysis, it can be pointed out that Ghanaweb has successfully extended the public sphere to digital sphere, providing unimpeded access to Ghanaians both within territorial Ghana and outside Ghana and others with interest in Ghana, to engage in a critical dialogue on issues concerning Ghana and other issues of interest.

On the one hand, it has provided a platform for news organizations and individuals both at home and abroad to engage in a critical dialogue about issues of interest to them. On the other, it has offered participants or users of Ghanaweb access to contribute in a way of comments and responses to some of the items they read. This dispensation affords the producers of the news and readers of the news to shape and position the public discourse in ways never before in Ghanaian media history.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah is on record to have used his notorious Preventive Detention Act (PDA) to gaol his critics, killing dissent in the public sphere including the media. Similar tendencies were exhibited by the military juntas that ruled Ghana after Nkrumah. It is obvious that items such as “Ghana cannot be safe under Akuffo-Addo,” which accuses the former foreign minister of involvement in drug could not could be published without serious repercussions for the publisher. Similarly, items that expose the alleged failing health of Atta-Mills, for example, “Health status, Professor Mills,” would have had its own political repercussions, too.

But with the Internet and Ghanaweb, the selected items depict “the loosening of the shackles that once held free speech at bay.” Ghanaweb is hosted in far away finland, but carries news and features on Ghana. There is no doubt that when even “the powers that
be” find its publications distasteful, it does not lend itself to the usual clampdown that is unleashed on the traditional media. The ability of writers to even use pseudonyms, and impersonate and speculate even makes regulation difficult. Although a positive development, it raises questions of credibility, global regulation and so on.

Turning to Ghana News Agency, it appears it adopted strict adherence to its organizational structures and routines in the production of its contents. This is in line with available literature with regard to how organizational structures and routines shape media content (Williams, 2003). Being a state institution, GNA’s ethos forbids it from engaging in any skewed reportage. It is supposed to provide a balanced, objective and fair report on events.

It is deducible from the form of content—highly descriptive and attributable to sources—that the journalists who produced the selected contents received some form of professional training that shaped the way they produced content. This ties in with the use of the institutional face –GNA – as the source rather than the individual writer’s name. Writers in this organization being aware of the institutional responsibility and liability for content, therefore, appear to adhere strictly to the ethos of their organization, as depicted by the selected news items.

To illustrate this further, one can consider the GNA in the image of the Associated Press (AP). Just as AP provides unbiased “raw materials” with regard to news to its affiliate organizations, so is Ghana News Agency expected to supply unbiased news stories to all media platforms in Ghana. So if the strategic rituals, the inverted pyramids and routines, as examples of organizational routines, were followed, the media product from the GNA should be neutral and objective in such respects. This does not take away
the fact that individual writers who write for organizations like the GNA still have some leeway in angling their story in terms of length, time, what to quote and what not to quote and so. And if length, timing of publication, selective quotes can impact positively or negatively on audience, they must be imbued with their own biases, but that is beyond the scope of this study.

One of the tasks of this research was to examine whether its contents portray neutrality and objectivity. Obviously, all the 41 GNA items analyzed fell within the episodic category with attributable quotes in all of them. Traces of stereotypes may therefore not be for the purposes of skewing a report by the GNA. The GNA must have only used stereotypes in the sense as Lippmann describes it—different categories which enable us to communicate about them (those categories). In this case, stereotypes such as the former vice president in reference to Atta-Mills and the former foreign minister, Akuffo-Addo, may be central in communicating about the two presidential candidates.

This study examined whether content is shaped by the social and cultural environment in the production of GNA news. It also examined whether individual news items were influenced by the social environment and how much influence from the socio-cultural environment shaped the production of content.

From the examination of content, most quotes were attributable and could be closely linked with neutrality. However, if the quotes emphasized some permeation of dominant ideologies in the production of content, then GNA “like a messenger in the “King’s Palace was just an ideological envoy of the primary definers who wield cultural capital. If those who wield influence in society are the primary definers of those attributable quotes, then the cultural and the ideological environment shaped the GNA
news for which the GNA is not responsible. If the contents portrayed lopsided reportage, the indication is non-adherence to the organizational structures and routines of the GNA. Content neutrality further implies adherence to organizational structure and routine and elimination of other roles and conceptions, for example participant journalism or role (William, 2003, p. 107). It is therefore important to point out that the GNA adhered to its role as described by its ethos of neutrality.

Although the study was unsuccessful in generating items on private newspapers that are online in a sufficient amount for generalization, examination of GNA news items indicate that organizational structures and routines are still very important in its production of media content and so are the socio-cultural environment.

Connecting this with Ghanaweb, it is obvious that hosting of news items produced by GNA by Ghanaweb does not affect its content in any significant ways. Rather, Ghanaweb has only extended access to its news to segments of the Ghanaian society and other interest groups who before the advent of the Internet may not have had access to GNA news. The diasporic populations of Ghanaians and other interest groups who may not be physically present in Ghana now have access to GNA news.

The aforementioned influences on content production are not seen in any way to affect GNA news on Ghanaweb. Observations from data are that while features generate more interest in participants, based on the number of comments they generate on Ghanaweb’s interactive platform, GNA news tend to be bland to participants. For example, whereas features on Atta-Mills generated 1,497 comments, news on Atta-Mills (mostly generated by the GNA) generated only 483 comments. A close observation
reveals that features authored by individuals are more provocative as opposed to the bland and straightforward news of the GNA.

With regard to private writers, the data indicate that a range of theories and factors influenced content production. The content is not uniquely shaped by stereotype and bias, ideology, narrative, or genre. With 80% (stereotype and bias), 88%, (genre theory) 66% (ideology) and 59% (narrative theory) of selected items, the implication is that two or more theories influenced the production of content of selected items at each particular time. This is consonant with available literature that suggests there are constantly overlaps among the various theories in the production process, but at each time “empirical research has wrestled with one overriding theory” (Williams, 2003). For example, only 3 items (7, 9, and 12) with reference to Atta-Mills by private writers did not have quotable sources. Similarly, 6 items, (3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13) with reference to Akuffo-Addo did not have quotes. The implication is that even majority of private writers—6+16, being 22 and 71% of private writers—used quotes in their writing. This is indicative of the fact that there are two or more elements of the identified theories in the writings of private individuals.

While some writings may be consciously biased in a particular way, others may not. The data further underscore the fact that individuals bring their own meaning, understanding, history, and worldviews to the online production process. Obviously with the “open door” policy of Ghanaweb, it implies that individual writers evade the mediating roles of the “gatekeepers” in traditional mainstream media. This includes evading its organizational structures and routines as well. This is very much in line with what observers and experts refer to as the disruption of power hierarchies in online media participation. The individual is able to produce and publish his topic of interest and in a manner and shape
he/she chooses. Agency, creativity, personal disposition and the multiple production theories identified in this study converge to define what the individual produces.

This is not only manifest in the content analysis, but also in the responses generated by the questionnaire. Even though the response rate with regard to the questionnaire was very low, the nuances in the motivations and the multiple motivations for which individuals write lend further credence to the foregoing point. While two of the writers actually acknowledge their conscious ideologically driven writings, the nuances in the answer of the other three writers suggest they also write from some sort of ideological perspective consciously or unconsciously.

Closely linked to this is the usurpation of the agenda-setting role of the media by individuals in online media environments such as Ghanaweb, where institutional limitations and constraints associated with the traditional media outlets are not applicable. Traditionally, agenda-setting has been the sole preserve of the media as an institution. Media professionals work within media structures in setting what becomes the public agenda. The comments generated by audiences/participants on the interactive platform of Ghanaweb indicates that, that power of the media to set the agenda for the public, as an institution, is being diffused and challenged in cyberspace by individuals who shape and position the public discussion in a manner never before in the history of the media. One may be tempted to ask: what about letters to the editor which may appear in newspapers? The difference is that they may not be setting the agenda—they mostly are responses to what might have already been published or an observation by an individual or an expert on a topic. The difference between the two is that, from the articles examined in this research, the individual’s writing now takes center stage, and Ghanaweb provides the platform for
that dialogue to take place. This is evidenced in the fact that the articles that generated the most responses and comments were from individual or private writers/sources and not institutions such as the GNA or the others. The 40 articles—10 news items, 10 features for each candidate—selected from a chronically reverse order underscore this. For example, while the aggregated comments or responses from audiences on the 10 news items with reference to Mills amounted to only 483 comments, the aggregated comments or responses from audiences on the 10 features amounted to 1,497. Similarly, the 10 news items on Akuffo-Addo generated 806 comments or responses, while the 10 features on him generated 911 comments or responses. Evidently, the number of responses to writings from private sources far outnumbered responses for items from institutions like the GNA. The individual writer is definitely in competition with news organizations for dominion over the role of agenda-setting, at least on the web.

With regard to space, time and length, the Internet provides unlimited space for length of articles. For example, the item with the title, “All hail the man of impeccable pedigree, Akuffo-Addo,” contained 4,965 words. This is an enormous space that no newspaper can provide for a single article in its publication. As a depository, the Internet and for that matter Ghanaweb evades the time and space limitations, making available whatever it publishes everywhere and every time, wherever the network extends.

With regard to the ritual approach in genre theory, it is obvious from the data that Ghanaweb provided a mirrored reflection of both the public life and the private life of the presidential candidates and the mood of society with regard to their private and public lives. The continuous reference to the health status of Atta-Mills as well as the continuous reference to the alleged drug use by Akuffo-Addo do not only reflect the vigilance of the
Ghanaian society with regard to the economic and development issues, but also reflects their concerns over the private lives of those who intend to lead them. No matter how legitimate this demand might appear to be as a reflection of societal mood and values, it is obvious that the traditional media houses and news organizations might probably have shied away from carrying them without fear of retribution, especially from the government side. Obviously, any news on the two candidates that would place them in a bad light would not be pleasant to their supporters. Considering the Ghanaian media history, these stories might not have made it to public forums in the past military regimes or even in the early days of the deregulation of the media.

To support the foregoing assertion, in the estimation of a cabinet minister, Hackman Owusu Agyeman, in the NPP administration in its early days when publications on Ghanaweb was putting pressure on the government, he descended heavily on the site, accusing its management of nursing a diabolic agenda to discredit government. It stands to logic that, if Ghanaweb were operating locally, government would clamp down on it or haul its management before court. But being offshore, its operations could not have been halted. The point is that articles on the presidential candidates posted on Ghanaweb validate the theoretical frameworks undergirding this research—“glocalization.”. Contents produced locally by private individuals and news organizations in Ghana are given a global audience on Ghanaweb. Similarly, contents produced by individuals and news organizations in the diaspora with interest on Ghana find a place on Ghanaweb. Ghanaweb is therefore the bridge between the local and the global, evading the regulatory mechanisms or controls that might have prevented the aforementioned stories from reaching the public sphere. Similarly, the commentaries and responses from participants
are both local and global, evading political retributions that may accompany making those comments publicly in certain physical spheres.

Considering the current state of content production, where at the individual level, multiplicity of factors and theories informed production, it is obvious that we would continue to observe the weakening of the strictures—the constraints and limitations—that militated against access to public information on the private lives of public officials. The watchword, therefore, is “gate-opening” as opposed to “gate-keeping” in the traditional media.

Turning to the practice of journalism, individual writers and journalists who position some of these issues on the public agenda must be commended for their fearless efforts in throwing the searchlight into the private lives of those who intend to be at the forefront of public life. But that is only when these revelations have no other considerations than making the truth known. Obviously, it is also a challenge to society to examine itself, its institutions and provisos with regard to the presidency. When these issues occur, they must be seen as an opportunity to redefine and strengthen the edicts concerning the presidency, rather than limiting their interpretation to the affected individuals. In this regard, journalists need the support of the whole society in separating the truth from the falsehood.

This research has successfully extended Hall’s three-dimensional readings of the text to the analysis of online contributions of audience/participants. With a total of 3,697 readings, 1,633 oppositional readings were identified as the highest number of readings and 538 deficient readings as the lowest number of readings. It has also successfully justified a fourth dimension to the reading of the text. With 538 (14%) of deficient
readings, digressions and discursive readings could neither have been ignored nor could they have fit into any of the three-dimensional readings.

With regard to responses or comments from audience/participants, it is clear that it does not reflect the exactitude of the results of the 2008 presidential elections. While John Evans Atta-Mills won the election with a slim margin, the online comments or responses to the selected articles conversely put Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo ahead of John Evans Atta-Mills with regard to preferred reading of articles. John Evans Atta-Mills received more oppositional readings to articles relating to him than his competitor. In that case, if online responses and comments were to be viewed as a measure of how successful a candidate would be at the election, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo would have been the preferred choice of participants based on the online comments.

However, the results could be looked at in terms of individuals with access to the Internet and their ability to use it. Based on the skewed availability of the Internet with access to more urban and diasporic populations, it is possible that participants who are likely to endorse Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo and at the same time oppose Atta-Mills candidacy might be of the elite class in Ghana and the diaspora and therefore have access to Internet facilities. This, to a large extent, might be a reflection of the kind of support base each party has. If the NDC, which prides itself with being a social democracy with pro-poor oriented policies appeals more to the rural-poor, it is logical to suggest these individuals may not have access and the capacity to participate in these medium. Similarly, the NPP, with conservative ideology is likely to have more followers within the middle class and up, and urban dwellers who may have access to the facility for participation
There is no doubt that the ruling class in Ghana is aware of the influence of what appears on Ghanaweb and other online platforms on what participants think about. But the question of how these interactions—news, features, and commentaries and their responses—affect public policy formulation and implementation remains to be tested and validated. The issue is while the traditional public sphere is known to have tremendous effects on the direction of state policy, it remains to be seen how online-generated dialogues and debates can be effectively tested and measured in a country such as Ghana. With over 60% of her population in the rural areas without access to the Internet, it is obvious they are excluded from the daily discussions on these forums, no matter how critical these dialogues might be. So whether the views of the critical few on the forum outweigh the mass without access needs to be tested. If Akuffo-Addo could receive more favorable (preferred) readings on articles with reference to him than his competitor, Atta-Mills, and still lose in the election, does it mean the voice of the critical few on the Internet is drowned by the masses without access?

Although the lowest number of comments was recorded within the digressive reading, it was significant, implying the human tendency among participants to deviate from the topic under discussion. This way, other ripostes directly in response to the digression digresses as well.

Projections are that, the Internet and for that matter Ghanaweb will continue to expand the frontiers of free speech, bringing to light issues with huge implications for politicians and individuals who intend to be in public life. There may be some goofing, but overall, the Internet and Ghanaweb will continue to shape and position public agenda especially some of the difficult subjects that might not find place in the traditional media.
It is therefore important for politicians to be ready to respond to some of the issues to save their own images than to pretend they do not exist or to adopt the abrasive approach in their response.

Finally, the polysemic reading of text, including the digressive reading can now be adopted and applied by marketing executives, political communicators, researchers, and a host of institutions in analyzing or evaluating online comments from their customers, constituents, and general users of their online media.
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## Appendix A: Coding Protocols for Content Analysis

1. **News Source**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News source of selected Items</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Organization/Institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Writers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Episodic Category**

### John Evans Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Statement and Source</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotable Source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unquotable Source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Statement and Source</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotable source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unquotable source</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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3. **Stereotypes and Bias Category**

### John Evans Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Stereotype and Bias</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistently favorable view of candidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently unfavorable view of candidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name-calling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridicule</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Akuffo-Addo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Stereotype and Bias</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistently favorable view of candidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently unfavorable view of candidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name-calling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridicule</td>
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</table>

4. **Genre Theoretical Category**

### Atta-Mills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ritual</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive sentiments</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative sentiments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative values</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive moods</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
## Negative moods

<table>
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<th>Akuffo-Addo</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Ritual</td>
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<td>Positive sentiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative sentiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive values</td>
</tr>
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<td>Negative values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive moods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative moods</td>
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### 5. Ideologically Driven Category

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of status quo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change of status quo</td>
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<tr>
<th>Akuffo-Addo</th>
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<tr>
<td>Types</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance of status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in status quo</td>
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### 6. Narrative category

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<td>Type of portrayal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dishonest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irresponsible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akuffo-Addo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of Portray</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dishonest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irresponsible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
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</table>
### Coding Protocols for Media Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Item</th>
<th>Dominant Reading</th>
<th>Negotiated Reading</th>
<th>Oppositional Reading</th>
<th>Deficient Reading</th>
<th>Propositional Reading</th>
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</table>
Appendix B: Questionnaire

Ohio University
E.W. Schools of Journalism
Athens, Ohio 45701
Email: pt340808@ohio.edu  Tel: 740-590-6267

The Cyber Dimension of Citizen Participation on Ghanaweb: an analysis of Ghana’s 2008 presidential campaign

This questionnaire is prepared as part of a research project on the topic: ‘The Cyber Dimension of Citizen Participation on Ghanaweb: an analysis of Ghana’s 2008 presidential campaign. The questionnaire is to examine the dispensations that influenced the encoding of the selected news, features, or commentaries. This is to help connect the news or feature with the presidential candidates—Atta Mills and Nana Addo—and to analyze the response or commentaries the selected news, commentaries and features generated on the interactive platform of Ghanaweb. Please be assured that the information that will be generated by this questionnaire will be treated in all confidentiality with due regard to ethics of privacy and anonymity. Please return completed questionnaire to the above address.

By proceeding to answer the question, you have agreed that the results of this research can be published without identify you to the content.

1. What is the name of your organization?

__________________________________________________________________________

2. Does your organization subscribe to any political ideology? If yes, what is it?

_____________________________________________

3. Is your organization affiliated to any political party? Please name the party affiliation

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

4. Are there any considerations when you write features on political issues? Please, what are they? (This is with reference to Stuart Hall’s (1980) ideological encoding—what appears in the media is determined by the nature of the production process to produce preferred meaning)

__________________________________________________________

133
5. What motivates you to write the way do? I have attached one of your articles which you can use as a reference point for your comments.

6. Is there anything else you would like to say about the topic?

7. Are there other considerations that influence you when you write?

8. Is there anything else you would like to say
The Cyber Dimension of Citizen Participation on Ghanaweb: an analysis of Ghana’s 2008 presidential campaign

This questionnaire is prepared as part of a research project on the topic: ‘The Cyber Dimension of Citizen Participation on Ghanaweb: an analysis of Ghana’s 2008 presidential campaign. The questionnaire is to examine the logic behind the choice not to filter/moderate comments and responses to articles before they appear on Ghanaweb/Peace FM and other blog/interactive platforms. This is to provide an ample handle to compare Ghanaweb interactive platform with the restricted interactive platform of the BBC. Please be assured that the information that will be generated by this questionnaire will be treated in all confidentiality with due regard to ethics of privacy and anonymity. Please return completed questionnaire to the above address or email

Please complete the following questions ticking where appropriate:

1. Does your online news have an interactive platform where users post comments?
   a. Yes    b. No

2. Do users have to provide their particulars to post comments, as in the case of the BBC?
   a. Yes    b. No

3. Why do users have to provide their particulars to post comments?

4. How certain are you that users provide their right names and locations when they comments?

5. Does your organization moderate its platform? Please explain your answer

6. Please state 3 advantages and 3 disadvantages of unrestricted access to platforms.
7. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of restricted platforms?
8. Is there anything else you would like to point out regarding this topic?

Thank you very much for your attention
Appendix C: Consent Form

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: The Cyber Dimensions of Citizen Participation: what are the responses?

Researchers: Prosper Tsikata

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to participate in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done because it offers the opportunity for understanding the advantages and disadvantages of mediated platforms and unrestricted platforms in online news/media and how commentators make use of the two different platforms.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire with questions related to the topic under study.

Your participation in the study will last for between 10 to 20 minutes

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts are anticipated

Benefits

This study is important to science/society because it compares the advantages and disadvantages of moderated platforms as compared to restricted platforms in responding to news stories in online news/media to help improve internet communication. There are no immediate personal
benefits to the individual participant except the knowledge that will be made available through this research.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by delinking the data from the respondent by deidentifying data into codes and processing it into word document before sharing with supervisor of the project. The master key list will then be destroyed immediately after deidentifying the data and coding it. This should happen within the first week when questionnaires are returned by respondents. This is supposed to happen within the last week of July (July 27, 2010).

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Compensation

No compensation will be provided

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:

Prosper Tsikata  
E.W. Scripps School of Journalism  
Ohio University  
Athens, Ohio 45701  
Tel: 740.590.6257  
Email: pt340808@ohio.edu

Advisor  
Dr. Mike Sweeney  
E.W. Scripps School of Journalism  
Ohio University  
Athens, Ohio 45701  
Tel: 740.593.2590  
Email: Sweeneym3@ohio.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.
By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.