



## Health information from elite to popular media: are Ghanaian media creating more space for health information/education?

Esi Eduwaa Thompson & Abena Animwaa Yeboah

To cite this article: Esi Eduwaa Thompson & Abena Animwaa Yeboah (2013) Health information from elite to popular media: are Ghanaian media creating more space for health information/education?, *Critical Arts*, 27:3, 370-385, DOI: [10.1080/02560046.2013.800669](https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2013.800669)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2013.800669>



Published online: 25 Jun 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 82



View related articles [↗](#)



## Health information from elite to popular media: are Ghanaian media creating more space for health information/education?

Esi Eduwaa Thompson and Abena Animwaa Yeboah

### Abstract

In countries where illiteracy levels are high, media platforms such as print have tended to be exclusive of certain segments of the population, and therefore not wholly effective in reaching the masses with information, such as that relating to health. In Ghana, this barrier between literacy, media and audiences is blurring, as radio 'converges' with print such that newspaper stories of the day form the basis for morning radio (local language) discussions. This article investigates the implications of this 'converged' platform for expanding the spaces for health communication. Further, it explores audience interest in health issues in a growing cacophony of politics-based discourse. A qualitative content analysis of selected editions of two leading Ghanaian newspapers (*Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide*) and the most popular morning radio programme (*Kokrokoo*) was undertaken to examine the extent to which newspaper stories on three health conditions (malaria, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis) gain prominence or suffer neglect as they transit from print through morning radio to the listening public. The findings suggest that the 'converged' platform may not wholly be creating more space for health education/communication.

**Keywords:** agenda setting, convergence, elite media, health information/education, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, malaria, media spaces, popular media, prominence

Esi Eduwaa Thompson is assistant lecturer in Public Relations and Health Communication at the School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana. eduwaa@gmail.com. Abena Animwaa Yeboah is assistant lecturer at the School of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana. animwaayeboah@yahoo.com



27 (3) 2013

DOI:10.1080/02560046.2013.800669



ISSN 0256-0046/Online 1992-6049  
pp. 370-385

© Critical Arts Projects & Unisa Press

## Introduction

Mass media are critical channels for educating people about their health, since they remain most peoples' only real access to credible health information. Particularly in the case of critical health conditions such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and, increasingly, hepatitis, the mass media can play a very useful role in extending the platforms available to health planners for educating the public towards more health-conscious living.

Depending on such contextual factors as literacy rates, however, mass media platforms can vary in their effectiveness in reaching the population with critical health information. For instance, in a developing context such as Ghana, high illiteracy levels – 49 per cent of the population cannot read and write in English or a local language (GSS 2008) – render the print medium (published in English) limited in terms of its ability to reach the masses with relevant information. Educating the public on health issues thus remains a challenge, especially considering Esther Thorson's (2006) argument that only newspapers have the space to provide the kind of in-depth coverage that health issues require and audiences need.

On the other hand, other media platforms such as radio and television are able to 'speak the language' (most radio stations broadcast in the local language) of audiences, and in being able to do so become more helpful in efforts aimed at building a more health-literate populace. Radio is the medium of choice for most Ghanaians, surpassing the preference for print by seven times (GMSIP 2009). It is also the most trusted medium for health information (Bowen 2010). This being the case, it becomes important to explore ways in which newspaper content on health (which otherwise is 'elitist' and limited in its popular reach) could be expanded in its reach through the affordances created by the language-flexible medium of radio. Even more importantly, where there is the opportunity to carry newspaper health content onto radio, it is vital to examine whether such content is afforded sufficient prominence to expand the frontiers of health information and education.

### Print and radio convergence in Ghana: background

Ghana enjoys a buoyant media environment in which several radio, television and newspaper organisations operate. By the end of third quarter of 2012, 225 radio stations and 28 television stations were in operation (NCA 2012). In the midst of this very active media environment, one of the most enduring emergent trends has been what has come to be known as 'newspaper review' segments in radio programming (GMSIP 2009).

Morning radio is characterised by the comprehensive scanning, reading and translation of the newspaper content of the day. Often, presenters and producers call the sources named in the stories, as well as others who are not named, but

are considered knowledgeable enough to provide further information, clarify controversial points, or offer different perspectives altogether. Studio panellists, often comprising journalists, editors and politicians, also debate these stories, drawing on their political or ideological leanings.

In the particular case of the morning programme on Peace FM, *Kokrokoo*, which is the converged platform of interest to this study, the host often first reads the headlines of selected print stories in English. Translators then translate the content of such stories into Akan. In some cases, the host follows this up with a live interview with persons cited in, or connected to, the original story as captured by the print media. Again, depending on the emphasis being placed on a story by the host/producers, a particular story may then move on to a studio panel discussion. During the programme, listener input (texts and emails) is read live by the host. There is also a separate segment for listener input in the form of phone-ins.

### **Malaria, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B in Ghana**

The focus of this study, on three health conditions, stems from their prevalence in the country, coupled with their devastating effect on the people and the economy. Malaria is the number one cause of morbidity in Ghana, accounting in recent years for 33 per cent of hospital deaths in children under five, about 38 per cent of all outpatient illnesses, and 36 per cent of all admissions (USAID 2013). It is also the single most important cause of mortality and morbidity, especially among children under five, pregnant women and the poor in Ghana. In addition, it is responsible for the loss of about 10.6 per cent Disability Adjusted Life Years, costing the equivalent of up to six per cent of GDP annually in terms of economic burden (Ghana Health Service 2009).

HIV/AIDS seems to be on a roller coaster, with the prevalence rate rising and falling from 2.7 per cent in 2003 to 2.7 per cent in 2005, rising to 3.2 per cent in 2006, falling again to 2.2 per cent in 2008 before rising to 2.9 per cent in 2009 (Ghana AIDS Commission, March 2010).

Hepatitis is described as endemic in Ghana (Adjei, Tettey & Aviyase et al. 2009; Morrow, Smetana & Sai et al. 1968) and is said to cause serious illness, death and financial burden (Nkrumah et al. 2011). Sero-prevalence rates range from 6.7 per cent to ten per cent in blood donors, to 15.6 per cent in children (Martinson in Blankson, Wiredu & Gyasi et al. 2005). On 26 July 2011, Stephen Corquaye, a clinical pharmacist at the Korle Bu teaching hospital, at a public lecture to mark National Hepatitis Day in Ghana, estimated that about four million people carry the virus in that country.

For a developing country such as Ghana, these diseases pose serious threats to development and require a concerted effort to educate and inform the public. In this way, not only is the public better positioned to prevent the spread of the diseases,

but they would also know the appropriate systems of redress to follow. It is in this vein that this study sought to assess the contribution radio makes to this effort. The study is premised on the fact that radio has wide popularity, which presents a unique opportunity to facilitate public education on these aforementioned killer diseases. Such a study is timely as it offers health educators and planners indicators on how supportive the medium is, of their efforts.

## Conceptual framework

A long tradition of media effects theory-based research has established that the mass media do have some ability to influence the thoughts and actions of their audiences. Organisations and others who seek to persuade the public therefore tend to resort to the mass media. Against this background, it is generally accepted that though media audiences are not passive recipients of information delivered by the mass media, they do act on them when such information has implications for their lives.

This study of radio as a platform for mass education is premised on the notion that if radio producers pay attention to the aforementioned diseases, not only would there be a more health-literate populace, but audiences would also be minded to take appropriate actions to protect themselves.

However, the emphasis in this study is not so much on media effects as it is on the converging print–radio platform and its implications for health education. The study thus examines the possible expanded opportunity for HIV/AIDS, malaria and Hepatitis B health education that the merger between radio and print may present.

## Media convergence

Media convergence is a process whereby content from a variety of media is shared and cross-promoted through newsroom collaboration and partnership (Brooks, Kennedy & Moen et al. 2004). It is also described in terms of companies engaging in cross-media cooperation between formerly separated staffers, newsrooms and departments (Deuze 2007). Media convergence entails the use of shared resources between newspaper and broadcast partners, to provide more thorough coverage of issues (Ketterer, Weir & Smethers et al. 2004). This last view, being more functionalist, not only dwells on the collaborative elements behind convergence, but also incorporates the resultant effect: improved coverage of issues.

It appears, however, that the more popular conceptualisation is that which emphasises the role of new information and communication technologies – the Internet, in particular (Erdal 2007; Jenkins 2006). Peter Verweij (2009) argues that convergence refers to the digitalisation of information, such that traditional media content is carried on new media platforms. Henry Jenkins (2006: 2) describes it as a space ‘where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate

media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways’.

Underlying all these views of convergence is the meeting of content from different media platforms. Seen from a ‘digitisation’ frame, convergence may have taken root with the advent of Internet news, when traditional media (e.g., newspaper and radio) sought ways to avoid becoming redundant in the face of the Internet boom. Thus newspapers, for instance, set up websites where they replicated their printed stories.

Although this is the more popular conceptualisation of convergence, it can be argued that such a view limits the real relevance and effects of the new platform (its elastic reach). Therefore, Stan Ketterer et al.’s (2004) conceptualisation of convergence has been adopted here, namely the use of shared resources of newspaper and broadcast partners to provide more thorough coverage of issues. Thus, the expectation is that convergence should improve the coverage of relevant issues. In the context of health, the expectation then is that convergence between different media should expand the frontiers of health education, as messages transcend the barriers of individual media.

This reliance on Ketterer et al.’s (2004) view is informed by the specific developing context of Ghana. In a country where illiteracy levels are still regrettably high, power supply is unreliable and Internet penetration is low (0.0518: *World factbook* 2009), convergence should not be restricted to digitisation as that may limit, rather than open up, access to information. Arguably, the convergence that should draw research attention should be extended to include non-digitised forms that may evolve out of contextual factors. As Janet Kolodzy (2006) notes, convergence may manifest differently across different contexts – no one form is ‘the best’ or should be projected as ‘the ideal’.

The authors conceive of morning radio platforms such as *Kokrokoo* as a converged platform where print media content is blended with radio programming. Better still, this study used such ‘convergence’ as an empirical setting for examining the spaces accorded health information. While convergence has received much research attention in terms of its profiling and description, the body of knowledge on its actual implications for media coverage of ‘neglected issues’ appears limited. This study, therefore, found academic merit in helping to fill the gap in knowledge of the implications of ‘convergence’ for health education and information.

Against this background, the study sought to establish whether this ‘converged’ platform could be trusted to expand the frontiers of health information and education, by posing the following research questions:

1. Are newspaper stories on the three diseases guaranteed access onto the ‘converged’ platform?

2. Are newspaper stories on the three diseases given prominence if/when they make it onto the ‘converged’ platform?
3. Judging from listener input/feedback, do members of the public demonstrate a visible interest in these health issues?

According to the literature on media coverage, health issues receive inadequate coverage (Caburnay, Kreuter & Luke et al. 2003; Lai & Odunlami 2008; Shuchman & Wilkes 1997; Thorson 2006; Weber 1990). For instance, Thorson (2010) concluded from her study of US print media coverage of health news that there is room for improvement in terms of the level of attention given to health. However, such literature has been published with evidence from individual media. Seemingly, convergent platforms have yet to be placed under researchers’ lenses to establish how well they fare when it comes to health education. Thus, it is important to examine whether convergent platforms are any different in that they offer a better promise for mass health education.

## Methodology

The research aims required the researchers to compare the content of selected 2012 editions of two newspapers with the corresponding content of the most popular ‘converged’ platform in Ghana, namely *Kokrokoo* on *Peace FM*.

### Sampling procedure

- Newspapers

Two newspapers were purposively selected due to their popularity: the state-owned *Daily Graphic*, which is the widest circulating daily newspaper in the country, and *Daily Guide*, the widest circulating privately owned newspaper. The former reflects officialdom; the latter, popular attitudes (Midttun, Coulter & Gadzekpo et al. 2011).

- Radio

Peace FM’s *Kokrokoo* was also selected due to its popularity and reach as Ghana’s biggest radio breakfast show (GMSIP 2009). It is largely built around current affairs, often drawn from newspaper content. An Akan-based programme with instances of English language usage, most of the discussions are carried in the Akan language (the lingua franca of most Ghanaians).

Three editions each of *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* were purposively selected out of a particular week during a period of three months. First, the months in which the targeted health conditions are celebrated globally, were selected: April, July and December for malaria, hepatitis and HIV/AIDS respectively.

Next, the particular editions published on World Malaria Day, World Hepatitis Day and World AIDS Day (25 April, 28 July and 1 December) were selected for both newspapers and *Kokrokoo*. Two other days were selected randomly from each week in which these days fall, to make up three issues for each month, with one edition published before and one after each of the respective days. This allowed the researchers to capture stories that may have been used to prime the celebrations, or to offer post-celebrations coverage. In all, the sample consisted of 18 newspaper editions and nine radio broadcasts. Because the study was exploratory and qualitative – seeking depth rather than breadth – this sample was considered to be adequate.

Stories published on malaria, hepatitis and HIV/AIDS in the selected newspaper editions were then profiled for the nature of their coverage and their prominence in the print media. To avoid variations in the interpretation of codes, data collection was done collaboratively by the two authors. Profiling covered two main themes:

- Treatment: the salience of the respective health issue, whether it was written from an issue/event-based reporting perspective, the general approach of the story (informational, educative or persuasive), as well as the focus (on the disease as an issue, on the people affected by it, or both);
- Prominence: this covered the expertise levels of the sources cited in the story, the pages on which the stories appeared, the relative visibility of the headlines, as well as the use of photographic enhancements to draw attention to the story.

The authors' findings from this profiling were used as the basis for assessing how much attention the three health conditions received, on their respective celebratory days, on radio. Coding for the *Kokrokoo* editions was also qualitative, and employed similar criteria for assessing treatment and prominence to those used for print. However, for radio, the authors included matching to determine whether any of the print stories had access onto the radio platform. Because the use of Akan expands the reach of discussions on the programme, the authors assessed the extent to which the print health stories under discussion obtained a deeper reach, through the use of translation. Thus, for each newspaper story they examined whether it was mentioned on *Kokrokoo*, whether it was translated, whether resource-person interviews were held and whether they moved on to the panel discussion phase of the programme.

Lastly, due to the authors' interest in assessing listeners' displayed interest in health information, radio coding also examined listener input via text messages, emails, etc. (read on the programme) and the phone-in segment. In that regard, they analysed whether any listener comments focused on or even referred to the diseases.

**Table 1:** Data gathered from newspapers

No	Health issue	Publication date	Treatment				Prominence		
			theme	focus	perspective	approach	page	enhancement	sources used
1	HIV/AIDS	April 25	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Combines both event and issue-based reporting	Story is mainly informational	Inside pages	none	Uses a combination of expert and non expert sources
2	Malaria	April 26	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Issue based reporting	Story is informational and persuasive	Inside pages	none	Uses a combination of expert and non expert sources
3	Malaria	April 26	primary	Story focuses on the disease with no attention to the people affected	Event-based reporting	Story is informational	Back page	Photo accompanies story	Uses a combination of expert and non-expert sources
4	Malaria	April 27	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Combines both event and issue-based reporting	Story is informational	Inside (health) page	Photo accompanies story	Uses a combination of expert and non-expert sources
5	Malaria	April 27	primary	Story focuses on the disease with no attention to the people affected	Event-based reporting	Story is informational	Inside (health) page	none	No expert sources
6	Malaria	April 27	primary	Story focuses on the disease with no attention to the people affected	Event-based reporting	Story is informational	Inside page	Photo accompanies story	Uses a combination of expert and non-expert sources
7	Hepatitis	July 28	primary	Story focuses on the disease with no attention to the people affected	Combines both event and issue-based reporting	Story is informational	Inside page	None	Expert sources
8	Malaria	July 29	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Event-based reporting	Story is persuasive with a light - hearted tone	Inside page	none	No sources cited
9	Hepatitis	July 29	primary	Story focuses mainly on the people affected	Event-based reporting	Informational	Inside (foreign news) page	none	No expert sources
10	Malaria	July 29	Secondary	Neither: the disease is only secondary to theme	Event-based reporting	Informational	Back page	none	No expert sources
11	HIV/AIDS	Nov 30	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Combines both event and issue-based reporting	Informational	Front page	none	Expert and non expert sources
12	HIV/AIDS	Dec 1	secondary	Neither: the disease is only secondary to theme	Event-based reporting	Informational	Inside page	none	No expert sources
13	HIV/AIDS	Dec 1	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Combines both event and issue-based	Informational	Inside page	none	No expert sources
14	Hepatitis	July 28	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Combines both event and issue-based	Informational	Inside (health) page	Photo accompanies story	No expert sources
15	HIV/AIDS	Dec 1	primary	Story focuses on both the disease and the people affected	Combines both event and issue-based	Informational	Inside (health) page	Photo accompanies story	Expert and non expert sources

## Findings

To draw inferences on whether the converged platform between print and radio extended opportunities for health information and education, the authors began by examining how the newspapers treated the health issues in the sampled editions. This enabled a comparison of how such stories were treated once they made it onto the ‘converged’ platform.

Generally, the authors found a mixed bag in terms of newspapers’ coverage of the three health conditions in the weeks when those conditions were recognised internationally. As seen in Table 1, most of the stories featured the respective disease conditions as their primary theme, cited multiple sources (including experts), and built a connection between the disease and the people affected by it. However, the stories appeared on less prominent pages and had no photographic enhancement to attract readers’ attention.

Table 2 details the data gathered from radio. Only one of the print stories under study made it onto the platform in terms of receiving a mention from the presenter and being the focus of an interview with experts. The same story was mentioned on separate days, and saw one listener commenting on it on the second day.

## Analysis

The first research question sought to establish whether newspaper stories on the three diseases were guaranteed access to the ‘converged’ platform of *Kokrokoo*, which would allow the platform to be considered as expanding the space for health education/information. The data did not support this. Of the 15 newspaper stories sampled, only one (a banner headlined story on HIV/AIDS and the Global Fund) made it onto the platform. Thus, irrespective of whether the said health conditions were being recognised worldwide, thereby creating the expectation that this ‘mass’ platform would seize the opportunity to educate the public, it failed to do so. Even though both sampled newspapers were featured on the programme and had other HIV/AIDS stories apart from the HIV/AIDS lead story, those were not mentioned.

Malaria is highly endemic in Ghana, which is why one would have expected the media to play an advocacy and educator role, yet the topic failed to transit from print onto this platform. This, despite the fact that it had the most stories (seven out of 15) in the print sample. Hepatitis, on the other hand, did not fare well in either the print or the converged radio platform. Unlike the two other diseases, which saw actual stories being done on them in the newspapers, hepatitis had nothing of the sort. Apart from press releases that were published as stories on World Hepatitis Day, no other related stories were found. Malaria and HIV/AIDS, however, were the topics of stories published in other months (not only the months in which they were celebrated).

**Table 2:** Data gathered from radio

No	Date	Presenter treatment (English or Akan)	'Newspaper review' (translators) treatment Story (English or in Akan)	Panel discussion treatment Expert interview	Listeners' treatment Expert' treatment	Segment not done on the day.	The story did not make it into the panel discussion; The presenter did not raise it for discussion, nor did any panel member voluntarily comment on it.	The story was not mentioned in any of the listener comments that came.
1	Nov 30	Headline (English or Akan) First story to have its headline read on the day's programme; Presenter read the story's headline in English and Akan and commented that the situation described was frightening	Presenter read the story up to the third paragraph; Beyond reading these paragraphs in English, he did not explain the contents in Akan (or any other local language).	Expert interview Presenter called in an expert source who had been cited in original print story for an interview; The interview, conducted in Akan, covered aspects that went beyond those originally presented in the print story; The interview lasted 6 mins. 31 secs; The interview was generally informative/educative	Expert' treatment The expert was very detailed in his presentation and took the audience through: -use of ARVs for managing HIV -implications of global fund withdrawing funding for ARVs and - need for Ghana to generate internal funds for the purpose	Segment not done on the day.	The story did not make it into the panel discussion; The presenter did not raise it for discussion, nor did any panel member voluntarily comment on it.	The story was not mentioned in any of the listener comments that came.
2	Dec 1	Presenter mentioned the day as that set aside for the Celebration of World AIDS Day; He then alluded to the previous day's programme in which he had conducted an expert interview on funding for HIV management and support; He also alluded to the previous day's story (banner headlined) by the <i>Daily Graphic</i> on the same issue; He spoke in Akan				The translators did not touch on any of the stories on HIV that made the print news of the day.	The story did not make it into the panel discussion; The presenter did not raise it for discussion neither did any panel member voluntarily comment on it.	One texter, who is described as affiliated to a civil society organisation (Right to Live); Sought to remind listeners of the theme for the day's celebration and to persuade Ghanaians towards the achievement of "zero new infections"; zero discrimination" "zero AIDS - related deaths"; Judging from the identification provided in the text, the texter was a male.

In the case of HIV/AIDS, where one story made it onto the ‘converged’ platform, it appears it did so because it was the banner headline story on the most popular newspaper in the country, *Daily Graphic*. In the same edition in which said story appeared, other HIV/AIDS stories on the inside pages failed to gain access onto the radio platform. This could be a result of the value placed on the newspaper carrying the story, as well as the prominence the original story received in the paper. Even though 13 of the 15 stories in the sample came from the *Daily Graphic*, only one gained access to the ‘converged’ platform. This position is significant when contextualised with the fact that stories read on air are mostly lead stories in the newspapers. In answer to the first research question, therefore, it seems that health stories published by the newspapers are not necessarily guaranteed access onto the ‘converged’ radio platform. This may only happen if they are primed as banner headline stories in prominent newspapers.

The second research question sought to establish the nature of the treatment (prominence, etc.) accorded stories that were selected for attention on morning radio. While the mere mention of a particular print story on the ‘converged’ radio platform could mean an expansion in its reach, the meaningfulness of this expansion could only be discerned from the level of emphasis (as inferable from the treatment) given the story. The only story to gain access onto the converged platform received attention on two consecutive days, but the intensity levels varied. It appears that the treatment given the story depended on the prominence it received as a newspaper story. The lead story for that day’s edition of the *Daily Graphic* cited an expert source and provided facts and figures to contextualise the issue. On radio, the story gained considerable attention during the pre-panel discussion phase of the programme, but failed to make it into that extensive segment. The story’s headline, ‘60,000 AIDS patients in danger’, was first read by the shocked presenter, who commented that ‘this is frightening’. It was the first headline to be read, possibly because on the programme (as on many others), *Daily Graphic* is usually the first newspaper to be reviewed on air. The presenter read not only the lead of the story (often he only provides a gist, as he did for other stories on this occasion) but also read out loud up to the end of the third paragraph. While this may be deemed to have expanded the space for informing listeners on HIV/AIDS (as it relates to the story), such space was still limited in its reach, since he did the reading in English.

This challenge was addressed when the presenter called on the expert cited in the print story to discuss the issue in Akan. Calling in an expert for his/her opinion, to some extent shows the degree to which an issue has been primed for further prominence. In a considerably extensive (6 min 31 sec) discussion, the expert (a programme manager with the Ghana AIDS Commission) shared the details of the print story, what needed to be done, and possible solutions. The expert also took the opportunity to educate listeners on how antiretroviral drugs work, and the need for

patients to adhere to the treatment regimen. In addition, he advocated for government to support the management and care of HIV/AIDS patients.

After the detailed interview, the presenter reiterated the frightening nature of the issue and, with a sigh, moved on to another topic. As a whole, this could be deemed to have primed the story in the minds of the public. However, unlike other newspaper stories of the day, this was the last mention of the HIV/AIDS article, which was neither passed on to the 'newspaper review' segment, nor primed for discussion by the panel. While revisiting the story in the 'newspaper review' segment would have been repetitive, its omission from the studio panel discussion was surprising, as the presenter had ended the expert interview with 'we would not drop the issue but will pursue it and possibly call you back for more discussion'. Since this was a health issue of national concern, it seemed obvious that the panellists would discuss it (they have the liberty to touch on issues of concern to them, that the presenter may not have tabled) and use their political/media clout to push government to act on the matter, but that did not happen.

As indicated earlier, the studio panel was made up of politicians and media practitioners. It is not surprising, therefore, that their contributions focused on the two other stories on the front page of that day's *Daily Graphic*, which were political in nature.

The following day (1 December), the presenter started the show by reminding listeners that it was World AIDS Day. He followed this up by alluding to the previous day's story about dwindling funding for HIV/AIDS from the Global Fund, this time explaining the issue in Akan. In his explanation, he described HIV/AIDS as a 'disability' (translation of the Akan: '*demdie*'), not an infection. This could be seen to feed into many Ghanaians' perception that the disease causes disability. Perhaps this framing reflects the presenter's own perceptions of the disease. However, such a comment coming from a presenter who enjoys a lot of credibility could serve to deepen the misconception. The allusion to the previous day's story was the last time the presenter referred to the issue.

Thus, even though it was World AIDS Day and most newspapers ran stories on HIV/AIDS, neither the issue of dwindling funds nor the celebration of World AIDS Day made it to the 'newspaper review' segment or the panel discussion. It is safe to say that on 1 December, none of the day's newspaper stories on HIV/AIDS gained access to the converged platform. In regard to the second research question, it was found that although the newspaper health story that gained access to radio received some prominence, its treatment was limited to certain phases of the programme, and failed to make it to the discussion segment.

Regarding the third research question, of whether listeners' comments (via text, email and phone-in) demonstrated a visible interest in health issues, it appears that they did not. Across the two days that a health story was raised, only one text was

read from a listener who sought to encourage others to work toward achieving the goal of World AIDS Day: ‘Zero new infections, zero discrimination, zero AIDS-related deaths.’ The listener identified himself with a campaign (Right to Live) and indicated that he was speaking on their behalf. His comment did not seem to follow any studio framing, nor did it draw from earlier comments by the presenter. It appears that this person had an agenda and would have sent in his comment even without being prompted by the presenter. There were many other texts, but none commented on HIV/AIDS or the national celebrations (or any other health issue for that matter). While the authors cannot claim to know whether other listener comments touched on the issue but were not read by the presenter, the evidence suggests that listeners who sent in comments did not show any interest in the issue of HIV/AIDS. This is unfortunate indeed, as sometimes issues that have not been primed for attention and discussion by the presenter, come into focus through listener comments.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Convergence holds many advantages, key among which is the extensive reach it brings to media content (Ketterer et al. 2004). In certain developing contexts (e.g., high illiteracy rates), convergence could offer an extended space for discoursing on issues and thus reaching more people. This study sought to examine a ‘converged’ platform between print and radio for the extent to which it may be expanding the space for public health education. Overall, one can conclude that the platform, which represents a type of external cross-media convergence (Erdal 2011), is not very receptive to health stories from the print medium. Of the 15 stories sampled, only one received attention on the platform, and even that story failed to make it through all the phases of the programme that can be deemed to extend print content beyond the confines of the English-literate population. This was despite the topic being the banner headline story of the day, in the country’s most popular newspaper.

Media organisations have commercial interests which guide their content (Kannis 1991) and it appears that health issues do not rank highly in the hierarchy of what sells (Thorson 2010). Thus, if a health story can move from print to a converged platform, it needs other factors to work in its favour: it must have originally been treated with ‘special’ attention; it must have appeared in the most popular newspaper (*Daily Graphic* is synonymous with newspaper); and it must be deemed really strong on ‘impact’ news value. A closer look at the presenter’s reaction to the story indicates that it probably gained prominence due to the possible effects a withdrawal of funds from the Global fund would have on a developing country such as Ghana, which is faced with other bread-and-butter issues.

The fact that health stories need special treatment in print in order to have their space expanded on radio is even more evident when one considers the other diseases on which data were collected. Although malaria is the leading cause of morbidity in

Ghana, and actually received the greatest coverage in the sampled editions, it was the HIV/AIDS story that garnered attention on the ‘converged’ platform. Of the three diseases hepatitis is the least known, and therefore requires more media attention for agenda building (Lang & Lang 1983) in the public domain, yet it failed to make it onto the platform. Thus, it appears that gaining access to radio from print may be the result of myriad factors, the least of which is the ‘healthiness’ of the story or the quest to educate/inform citizens about health matters.

Beyond actual access to the platform, expanding the space for health information is dependent on the actual treatment given the health issue in question. Evidence showed that the ‘converged’ platform was not wholly expanding such spaces. Although the expert interview was conducted in Akan, on other occasions when the presenter read the story and its headline, only English was used. The popularity of the show correlates with the language used. However, as the data show, the presenter sometimes read headlines and stories in English, thus limiting their reach. The presenter failed to use Akan to explain what he had read in English, even though he commented on it in Akan. In addition, even though in all nine editions sampled other stories were translated into Akan (in the ‘newspaper review’ segment), the segment did not mention any of the health stories that appeared.

Furthermore, the fact that the story did not make it to the panel discussion stage despite the presenter deeming it as serious is surprising, and may be a result of the visible political emphasis of the segment. With the panel structured along political lines, panellists would obviously not have much knowledge of or expertise on health issues.

It is important to touch on the presenter’s description of HIV/AIDS as a disability, which could detract from the previous day’s discussion by feeding into popular perceptions of the disease in Ghana. This may have reduced the impact of the space accorded the issue on the previous day.

The data also show a seeming listener disinterest in health-related stories. The only story to make it onto radio had no listener commenting on it. The only comment made, had no bearing on any newspaper story published that day.

Drawing from the above, the authors conclude that the converged platform of *Kokrokoo* may not be wholly expanding the space for health information and education. It is, therefore, recommended that health communication planners either explore ways of endearing themselves to the platform (Briggs & Halin 2010), or attempt to influence the treatment of health stories in print to ensure that the medium opens up to it. The authors sought to investigate a rather complex issue using qualitative samples that did not enable them to establish how widespread the phenomenon is. Further studies using random quantitative sampling methods will help to give meaning to the results. An audience study to ascertain the extent to which they engage with the health information they receive from the converged platform

will also provide interesting results. Further studies on the selection of stories by the radio gatekeepers may also reveal interesting findings.

## References

- Adjei, A., Y. Tettey, J. Aviyase, C. Adu-Gyamfi, S. Obed, J. Mingle, P. Ayeh-Kumi and T. Adiku. 2009. Hepatitis E virus infection is highly prevalent among pregnant women in Accra, Ghana. *Virology Journal* 6: 1–5. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/content/pdf/1743-422X-6-108.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2012).
- Blankson, A., E. Wiredu, R. Gyasi, A. Adjei and Y. Tettey. 2005. Sero-prevalence of Hepatitis B and C viruses in cirrhosis of the liver in Accra, Ghana. *Ghana Medical Journal* 39(4): 132–137.
- Bowen, H. 2010. Africa Development Research Series: Ghana. *AudienceScapes*. InterMedia. <http://audiencescapes.org/sites/default/files/AudienceScapes%20Ghana%20Survey%20Research%20Report%202010.pdf> (accessed 4 April 2013).
- Briggs, C. and D. Hallin. 2010. Health reporting as political reporting: biocommunicability and the public. *Journalism* 11(2): 149–165.
- Brooks, B., G. Kennedy, D. Moen and D. Ranly. 2004. *Telling the story: the convergence of print, broadcast and online media*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Caburnay, C.A., M.W. Kreuter, D.A. Luke, R.A. Logan, H.A. Jacobsen, V.C. Reddy, A.R. Vempaty and R.H. Zayed. 2003. The news on health behavior: coverage of diet, activity, and tobacco in local newspapers. *Health Education Behaviour* 30(6): 709–722.
- Deuze, M. 2007. *Media work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Erdal, I.J. 2007. Researching media convergence and crossmedia news production: mapping the field. *Nordicom Review* 28(2): 51–61.
- Erdal, I.J. 2011. Coming to terms with convergence journalism: cross-media as a theoretical and analytical concept. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17(2): 213–223.
- Ghana AIDS Commission. 2010. Ghana's Progress Report on the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS. [http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/knowyourresponse/countryprogressreports/2010countries/ghana\\_2010\\_country\\_progress\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/knowyourresponse/countryprogressreports/2010countries/ghana_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf) (accessed 6 June 2012).
- Ghana Health Service. 2009. Anti-malaria drug policy for Ghana, revised edition. <http://www.ghanahealthservice.org/includes/upload/publications/ANTIMALARIA%20DRUG%20POLICY.pdf> (accessed 4 April 2013).
- Ghana Media Standard Improvement Programme (GMSIP). 2009. Journalism in practice: a study of newspaper and radio content in Ghana. Unpublished research report submitted to the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA).
- Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). 2008. Ghana Living Standards Survey: report of the fifth round. [http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/glss5\\_report.pdf](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/glss5_report.pdf) (accessed 4 April 2013).
- Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kaniss, P. 1991. *Making local news*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Ketterer, S., T. Weir, J. Smethers and J. Back. 2004. Case study shows limited benefits of convergence. *Newspaper Research Journal* 25(3): 52–65.
- Kolodzy, J. 2006. *Convergence journalism: writing and reporting across the news media*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lai, O. and D. Odunlami. 2008. Breadth or depth: a content analysis of health pages in the Nigerian press. *Sexual Health Matters* 9(1): 9–13.
- Lang, K. and G. Lang. 1983. *The battle for public opinion: the president, the press, and the polls during Watergate*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Middtun, A., A. Coulter, A. Gadzekpo, J. Wang and E. Staurem. 2011. Climate change policy shifts across three continents: media coverage in Norway, China and Ghana. CERES 21 Report. <http://www.ceres21.org/media/UserMedia/20111125%20CERES21%20Media%20report.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2013).
- Morrow R.H., H.F. Smetana, F.T. Sai and J.H. Edgcomb. 1968. Unusual features of viral hepatitis in Accra, Ghana. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 68(6): 1250–1264.
- National Communications Authority (NCA). 2012. Industry information. <http://www.nca.org.gh/51/116/Industry-Information.html> (accessed 1 March 2012).
- Nkrumah, B., M. Owusu, H. Frempong and P. Averu. 2011. Hepatitis B and C viral infections among blood donors from rural Ghana. *Ghana Medical Journal* 45(3): 97–100.
- Shuchman, M. and M. Wilkes. 1997. Medical scientists and health news reporting: a case of miscommunication. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 126(12): 976–982.
- The World Factbook*. 2009. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (accessed 30 July 2012).
- Thorson, E. 2006. Print news and health psychology: some observations. *Journal of Health Psychology* 11(2): 175–182.
- Verweij, P. 2009. Making convergence work in the newsroom: a case study of convergence of print, radio, television and online newsrooms at the African Media Matrix in South Africa during the National Arts Festival. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 15(1): 75–87.
- Weber, R.P. 1990. *Basic content analysis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.