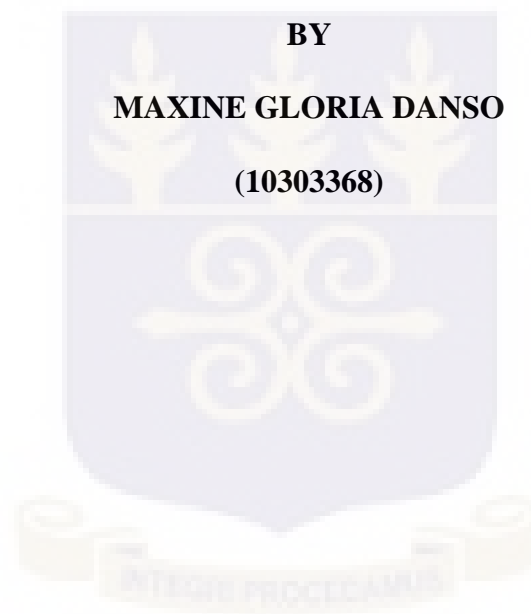


**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**INTEGRATION AND GATEKEEPING OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT IN
GHANAIAN NEWSROOMS: A STUDY OF TV3, CITI FM AND DAILY GRAPHIC**



**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MHPIL
COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEGREE**

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES


JULY 2019

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research, undertaken under the supervision of Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo at Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana. All references used in this study have been duly acknowledged.



.....
Maxine Gloria Danso
(Student)



.....
Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo
(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

To my mother, who battled cancer during the years of my Masters programme, and has survived it to witness me complete this work.

And to my father, who battled cancer during the same period and passed on before I completed this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank my Lord Jesus Christ, for faithfully being my beginning and my end.

I am immensely grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo, who has patiently guided me in this work.

I deeply appreciate all the lecturers at the Department of Communication Studies who have imparted knowledge to me. I am especially grateful to Dr. Sarah Akrofi- Quarcoo and Dr. Gilbert Tietaah who both believed in me and affirmed me continually.

A very big thank you to TV3, Citi FM and Daily Graphic staff for their warm reception and kind assistance to me.

My profound gratitude to Rev. and Mrs. Eastwood Anaba, Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Gordon Kisseih and the Ministry of Education for their gracious support towards this programme.

I appreciate my parents and my brothers so much for steadfastly overwhelming me with love.

I am forever thankful to Solomon Katachie, John Sackar and Jennifer Anafo for being wonderful friends and selflessly pouring into me and into this work in diverse ways. I am truly grateful to every person who contributed to this work in the capacity that they could.

God bless you all.

ABSTRACT

The upsurge of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) has provided various platforms for individuals traditionally considered audiences of legacy media products to assume journalistic roles of gathering and disseminating information. With the immediacy that these platforms offer, content generated by users (eye-witness reports, personal human interest stories, *et cetera*) have become widely adopted sources of news. Editorial standards such as those adhered to in mainstream media production are, however, often lacking in the news production processes of users across these internet-based platforms. However, mainstream media outlets are increasingly integrating this content into their news products, maintaining their primacy as gatekeepers of news and controlling the effects of unfiltered user-generated content (UGC). Although previous studies have shown that Ghanaian newsrooms integrate UGC in their operations, scholars have not as yet focused on the gatekeeping processes UGC is subjected to. The present study, therefore, sought to investigate the gatekeeping processes UGC is subjected to in Ghanaian newsrooms, as well as the factors that influence these processes. By observing newsroom practices and interviewing journalists at a television station (*TV3*), a radio station (*Citi FM*) and a newspaper (*Daily Graphic*), the study found that verification, moderation, training and message reconstruction were the main gatekeeping processes UGC are subjected to. These processes were predominantly guided by ethical/professional standards, organisational standards, and cultural/legal implications. Also, *Facebook*'s algorithm facilitated journalists' moderation of UGC online, while accessible/affordable software such as *GeoTweet* and *Google Maps* (location of posts); *Adobe PhotoShop* (doctored photos); and *Grammarly* (plagiarised content) were used for verification. The study concluded that although Ghanaian mainstream media were engaged in processes of gatekeeping, newsrooms lacked advanced technology to control the rise of fake news and misinformation associated with UGC.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Background.....	1
1.0.1 User-generated Content (UGC)	2
1.0.2 Integrating UGC in Mainstream Media	4
1.0.3 UGC in Ghanaian Newsrooms.....	5
1.0.4 Gatekeeping UGC in Mainstream Media	6
1.1 Problem Statement.....	9
1.2 Research Objectives.....	11
1.3 Research Questions.....	11
1.4 Significance of the Study	11
1.5 Operational Definition of Terms.....	12
1.6 Summary	13
CHAPTER TWO	15
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	15
2.0 Introduction.....	15
2.1 Gatekeeping Theory.....	15
2.1.1 Advancement of Gatekeeping theory.....	16
2.1.2 Contemporary Gatekeeping model	20
2.2 Summary	22
CHAPTER THREE	23
RELATED STUDIES.....	23
3.0 Introduction.....	23
3.1 Moderation on online platforms.....	24
3.2 Verification in newsrooms.....	28
3.3 Summary	31
CHAPTER FOUR.....	33

METHODOLOGY	33
4.0 Introduction.....	33
4.1 Research design	33
4.2 Data collection methods.....	34
4.2.1 Participant observation.....	34
4.2.2 In-depth interviews	37
4. 3 The study setting	39
4.3.1 <i>TV3</i>	40
4.3.2 <i>Citi FM</i>	41
4.3.3 <i>Daily Graphic</i>	43
4.4 Data Analyses	44
4.5 Summary	46
CHAPTER FIVE	47
FINDINGS	47
5.0 Introduction.....	47
5.1 Input Stage: Accessing UGC	47
5.1.1 The Sourcing of UGC	48
5.1.2 The Genre of UGC.....	61
5.1.3 News values	66
5. 2 Throughput Stage: Processing UGC.....	67
5.2.1 Verification	67
5.2.2 Training of citizen journalists	82
5.2.3 Moderation.....	82
5.2.4 Message Reconstruction	84
5.3 Output stage: Publishing UGC.....	87
5.4 Feedback	88
5.5 Selection and rejection of UGC	90
5.5.1 Ensuring Ethical and Professional Standards	90
5.5.2 Organisational standards.....	92
5.5.3 Personal values.....	95
5.5.4. Legal implications.....	96
5.6 Summary	96
CHAPTER SIX.....	97
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	97
6.0 Introduction.....	97

6.1 The processes of gatekeeping UGC in Ghanaian newsrooms	97
6.1.1 Verification	99
6.1.2 Moderation	100
6.1.3 Training of citizen journalists	102
6.1.4 Message Reconstruction	102
6.2 The difference between Wallace Gatekeeping Model and Gatekeeping in Ghanaian newsrooms	103
6.3 The factors influencing gatekeeping UGC in Ghanaian newsrooms.....	105
6.3.1 Professional standards.....	106
6.3.2 Organisational standards.....	106
6.3.3 Inadequate software	107
6.3.4 Personal standards.....	108
6.3.5. Legal implications.....	109
6.3.6 Cultural influences	110
6.4 Summary	111
CHAPTER SEVEN	112
CONCLUSION.....	112
7.0 Introduction.....	112
7.1 Summary of key findings.....	112
7.2 Limitations of the study	113
7.3 Recommendations.....	114
7.4 Conclusion	115
REFERENCES	118
APPENDIX.....	126
OBSERVATION GUIDE.....	126
INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	128
ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER.....	130

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Wallace (2018) Contemporary Gatekeeping model.....21

Figure 2: Newsroom Hierarchy at TV3.....41

Figure 3: Newsroom Hierarchy at Citi FM.....42

Figure 4: Newsroom Hierarchy at Daily Graphic.....44

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Technological innovations, over the course of the last century, have distinctly and progressively catalysed the evolution of both the field of journalism and its practice. Audio, visual and digital technologies such as tape recorders, video cameras and Computer-Assisted Reporting (a digital quantitative analysis of journalistic data) have been fundamental to and instrumental in newsgathering and sharing processes, facilitating conducive conditions for the work of the journalist (Emery & Emery, 1996; Larsosa, Lewis & Holton, 2011; Coddington, 2014). Over the last two decades, with the upsurge of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet, social media and smartphones, a new lap within the evolution of journalism has been precipitated. These new ICTs, now widely adapted into press tools, have enabled users, who hitherto the emergence of these innovations would not have been considered journalists, assume semblances of the traditional journalistic role of gathering and disseminating information (Rosen, 2008; Banda, 2010; Haak, Parks & Castells, 2012; Rogers, 2017). In effect, audiences who were, in the past, considered consumers of traditional media products (print newspapers, radio and television) have become producers themselves of news content (Pavlik, 2001; O'Reilly, 2005; Singer, 2006; Bruns, 2012). Scholars (Gillmor, 2004; Cleary & Bloom, 2011) have noted that this trend is increasingly causing an occupational shift in the production, distribution, and usage of information in ways that affect and redefine the practice of journalism, as the role of professional journalists and audiences have become indistinct. Consequently, opposing views have emerged on the consideration of these audiences as journalists. On the one hand, there is a school of thought that believes that an individual does not require professional affiliation to a news organisation to be a journalist (Dimitrov, 2014). Arguing that journalism transcends many of the defining elements

of a profession, Dimitrov (2014) points out that the lack of professional training and rejection of association/licensing by many practicing journalists open the door for anyone to be a journalist.

On the other hand, there is a viewpoint that journalists need training and some manner of affiliation to a professional body, suggesting that audiences' engagement in journalistic practices and their online content-sharing behaviours do not necessarily make them journalists (Ugland & Henderson, 2007). Proponents of this point of view argue that the legal and professional ethical considerations associated with the media's status as the fourth estate require that journalists gain a certain basic understanding of the tenets governing journalism as a profession. These tenets, such as those at the basis of the journalist's role of gatekeeping, are imbibed through a cycle of training and professional practice, which non-professional producers of news are presumed not to possess.

This presumption, among other economic and practical reasons, has motivated mainstream news organisations to extend their gatekeeping role by moderating the news produced on internet-based platforms. Traditional news media are, therefore, expected to apply professional practices of fact-checking, source corroboration, balance & fairness, *et cetera* to the news content sourced from non-professional news producers on internet-based platforms. This news content is what journalists and news organisations refer to as user-generated content.

1.0.1 User-generated Content (UGC)

The content generated by people who were assumed to be audiences of traditional media, and are now users of new digital tools, is widely referred to as user-generated content (UGC), user media or user-created content (O'Reilly, 2005; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Bruns & Schmidt, 2011). These audiences are mostly untrained individuals practising journalism in largely non-professional terms, whose activities may typically include the creation and sharing of posts in formats of photos, videos or texts (opinions or facts) made public and or accessible through socially-mediated spaces

such as the Internet (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007; Gordon, 2007). As Cleary & Bloom (2011) have noted, digital still photography, blog sites, and audio and video reports are among the press tools formerly almost exclusively utilised by professional journalists in their news production processes, yet are now commonly available to anyone for everyday use. The vast range of topics that can be covered almost instantly using these technologies shadows the equally limitless range of experiences in the everyday lives of their users. The content, therefore, likely to be generated by these everyday users may broadly include straight news items, commentaries, analyses of witnessed events and public discourse (Cleary & Bloom, 2011).

There are also some identifiable traits associated with user-generated content. Scholars (O'Reilly, 2005; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007) generally agree that firstly, UGC must have a distinct form, where it proves originality and creativity from the generator. It must also be created outside professional and conventional routines and practices of journalism. Thirdly, it must be made publicly accessible without any commercial motivation for its production, and finally, it must have a clear internet-based source (O'Reilly, 2005; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).

The internet-based sources for accessing UGC are varied. Blogs, websites, podcasts, messaging applications such as *WhatsApp*, and social platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *SnapChat*, *YouTube* and *Instagram* are examples of sources that have different features and serve different purposes for the users of the technology (Hermida & Thurman, 2007; Schiffres, Newman, Thurman, Corney, Göker & Martin, 2014). These sources are characterised by instantaneity and interactivity and they enable their users to connect with friends and family, engage in public discourse and express themselves through the ways the medium of choice allows them to (Cover, 2006). According to Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery (2007), technological and social factors (among economic, legal and institutional factors) are some of the primary motivations that lead audiences to create content.

1.0.2 Integrating UGC in Mainstream Media

Undeniably, the new digital era has enabled a rapid flow of information, more diversified sources to information, and a multiplicity of stories (Goode, 2009). Limitations of journalists' availability to cover every story has led the modern newsroom to incorporate UGC as a useful source of news (Tolmie et. al, 2017). Studies (Harrison, 2010; Stassen, 2010; Paulessen & Harder, 2014) have shown that the adoption of UGC has grown to become a routine for journalists and a very prevalent feature in most newsroom activities. By adopting UGC in their operations, many newsrooms have increased their access to stories and sources by adapting to unconventional means of newsgathering in a world where the first and fastest to share information is more prized than ever before (Rodriguez, 2012). Some journalists have identified UGC as complementary to their conventionally-sourced news items, in the sense that they provide more detail and accuracy to their stories; others find UGC as the main source for leads to stories (Storm, 2007; DeMers, 2013). Harrison (2010, p.224) noted that, for journalists who employ UGC in their news, it could be an added advantage functioning as the “discovery of unsolicited news stories, the provision of solicited coverage of anticipated events, locating content for specific items and features which could include finding sources, and filling the role of watchdog audience”.

Beyond merely having diverse access to stories, other scholars have shown that the integration of UGC in newsrooms has enabled the participation of local and international audiences in news gathering to advance civic participation (Nah, Namkoong, Record & Van Stee, 2017). Particularly, the participation of these audiences has helped largely in addressing global concerns and in giving audiences the right representation and framing of their stories (Armani, 2010; Storm, 2007; Palmer, 2012; Storck, 2014; Chu & Hung, 2016). In the UK, for example, television and radio broadcast station *BBC*'s initiative titled *Syrian-citizen-as-witness*, allows Syrians to own their narrative and give their perspective on the war in their country by providing professional journalists at the *BBC* with the content on issues such as individual experiences and amateur

footage of the war. Also, through the *BBC*'s mediation of the content received from Syrian citizen journalists, cultural and linguistic barriers are bridged and made accessible to a largely dominated English audience, globally (Storck, 2014). Similarly, in the USA, television broadcast station *CNN*'s website *iReport* solicits international stories from citizen journalists across the world, to be incorporated into *CNN*'s news content on-air or online for a global audience. *CNN*'s *iReport* initiative is intended to provide a more inclusive coverage of every country within the world of news (Palmer, 2012).

In the specific Ghanaian context, this study seeks to explore the use of these user generated news content in Ghanaian newsrooms by observing the daily routine of selected newsrooms and sourcing information from journalists in Ghana. In an evolving media context such as Ghana's where traditional media are sourcing news from social media (Katachie, 2017), it would be of interest to understand the processes of integration of UGC in mainstream Ghanaian news as a way of further understanding the evolution in news production patterns.

1.0.3 UGC in Ghanaian Newsrooms

In Ghana, some studies have shown that there has been a progressive adoption of user-generated content (Banda, 2010; Deo-Silas, 2013; Owusu-Yeboah, 2015) to a reliance on it (Ahiabenu II, Ofosu-Peasah & Sam, 2018) in many newsrooms. Increasingly, journalists and newsrooms are incorporating UGC, mainly from social media, into their online and mainstream news dissemination, enabling audiences to be partakers of the news production process (Banda, 2010; Deo-Silas, 2013; Owusu-Yeboah, 2015, Katachie, 2017).

According to Owusu-Yeboah (2015), there was a noticeable difference in the level of adoption of UGC by Ghanaian mainstream media organisations. He argued that most television and radio stations are innovators and early adopters (entities that seek out innovations and are often out to

test them) of any growing technological changes in the media landscape while the print media are often laggards to these innovations. The study's findings suggested that Ghanaian television and radio organisations were more open to using UGC in their news coverage than Ghanaian print media who showed significantly less interest in their usage.

Katachie (2017) further found that the Ghanaian print media were steadily integrating user-generated content in their operations. During the 2016 Ghanaian presidential elections, for example, headline stories of newspaper organisations: *Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times*, *Daily Guide* and *The Chronicle* (as well as radio organisations: *Citi FM* and *Joy FM*), were generated from Twitter users' posts which were mostly commentaries on the election event and opinions on the presidential and parliamentary candidates (Katachie, 2017).

1.0.4 Gatekeeping UGC in Mainstream Media

Most professional journalists who acknowledge the need and urgency to respond to the changes in the media landscape have raised concerns on the nature of unfiltered UGC (Calcutt & Hammond, 2011; Paulesen & Harder, 2014). Some scholars have noted that, the prevalent use of UGC in newsrooms poses a threat with regards to the quality and veracity of information disseminated, as the sources for such content usually have little or no professional editorial control (Tolmie *et al.*, 2017; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Ahiabenu II *et al.*, 2018).

Beyond merely gathering and sharing news stories, one of the fundamental roles and responsibilities of journalists includes gatekeeping (Weaver *et al.*, 2007). Gatekeeping is “the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news” (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2009, p. 73). It is also a “regime of control” (Bruns, 2005, p.11) over what content is permitted out of newsrooms for public consumption and interpretation.

Shoemaker *et al.* (2009) argue that gatekeeping is critical in the professionalism of journalism in disseminating news and information because, notably, there is an observed difference in how the ordinary world distributes information and how the media represents various topics as news. Blogs, for example, usually have an opinionated tone as they reveal the subjective views and sentiments of the writer. This characteristic of most blogs defeats the professional role of objectivity in journalism (Rodriguez, 2012). Given such possible differences, professional journalists transform information through several channels and distribute it as news for audiences through the process of gatekeeping (Soroka, 2012). Gatekeeping can, therefore, serve as a means by which public opinion is differentiated from journalistic news to provide a more presentable and reliable account of stories for the public (Tutherford, 2017).

Furthermore, studies show that the nature of most of the content generated by users of new media is soft news, such as weather updates, celebrity news, and human interest stories, more than hard news such as political and financial stories (Harrison, 2010; Singer, 2011). According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010) news has become a "shared social experience as people exchange links and recommendations as a form of cultural currency in their social networks". The increased production of soft news by audiences also necessitates that professional journalists maintain the balance in providing a diversity of news for different audiences. By maintaining gatekeeping roles, a journalist is charged with the duty of ensuring the quality and credibility of diverse stories for its audiences (Zelizer, 1993).

Tutherford (2017) states that the occupational shift that has made consumers and producers of news indistinct, as ordinary citizens are enabled to practice a form of journalism, is creating difficulty in gatekeeping roles for professional journalists. Some scholars (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Harrison, 2010) have also questioned if the gatekeeping function traditionally carried out by the press is abandoned if citizens act as journalists and if gatekeeping is irrelevant in the age of

digital media as audiences have the ultimate control of what and where to consume news. Bowman & Willis (2005, p.6) stated that “the venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history when, for the first time, its hegemony as the gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but by the audience it serves”.

However, Chin-Fook & Simmonds (2011) assert that new media technologies with their interactive features may have even introduced another level of gatekeeping for professionals as the ability to readily reach content contributors online facilitates the process of verifying any information. According to Williams & Carpini (2000), gatekeeping remains even more relevant today to contend with the challenges such as inaccuracies, unreliability, and falsity that unfiltered user-generated content may pose to society. For example, the war in Syria created an interest in audiences to receive and share information on the war, and as a result, the video of the “Syrian Hero Boy” by a Norwegian filmmaker, which went viral on social media was assumed by audiences as one of such. The video, which showed a young boy who was supposedly under gunfire and shot while saving a girl, was later identified as fake. It took some *BBC* journalists (and other activists) to sign an open letter to discredit the video and declare it a hoax. The filmmaker later apologized to the public for the unintentional misleading content (TomChak & McDonald, 2014). News organisations and journalists, therefore, play a critical role in determining how widespread falsehood or truth, can go, based on their power to identify fake news, discredit rumours or affirm the truth of a trending story in social discussions (Silverman, 2015). Similarly, Shoemaker & Vos (2009) have emphasized the importance of even more stringent gatekeeping by professional journalists. They argue that journalists have the skills and training in knowing what is credible to be published to audiences, thereby determining what will be perceived as a social reality by the world. Journalists are, therefore, obligated to promote truth in a digitized era of *PhotoShop*, multiple social media accounts by users, and anonymity fueled by the Internet.

Also, Groshec & Tandok (2016) gave importance to the increasing need for journalists to gate-keep UGC due to the penetration of clickbaits (sensational headlines online), fake news and non-journalistic social media pages misleading audiences. Particularly in Ghana, these have become a growing threat in the media landscape as the traffic and clout on such sites generate profit for their users by deceiving, confusing and aiming to set a political agenda for the public (Ahiabenu II *et al.*, 2018).

Scholars (Hayes *et al.*, 2007) have addressed the issues associated with UGC through an ethical lens and have suggested authenticity, accountability, and autonomy as measures in blurring the lines between professional and unprofessional news production. In this regard, by integrating UGC in newsroom operations, professional journalists assume their role of gatekeeping, assert control over the construction of news and serve as a regulatory body for quality educational and topical news that is made accessible to audiences by applying ethical standards to the content (Groshec & Tandok, 2016).

1.1 Problem Statement

Shoemaker, Vos & Reese (2009) have stated that since journalists act as gatekeepers, it is important to know the processes involved in gatekeeping information for audiences. Some studies (Hermida & Thurman, 2008) that have examined the process of gatekeeping user-generated content in newsrooms have noted that many newsrooms are faced with the contention of which editorial standards to be applied on UGC. For example, many editors are faced with the dilemma of subjecting UGC to professional editorial standards as well as being cautious not to lose the authenticity of the material which could consequently have legal implications such as issues of copyright (Glickman & Fingerhut, 2011). Other scholars (Shabir, Safdar, Imran, Mumtaz & Amjun, 2015), however, argue that the issue of transforming information is not new with UGC as the process of gatekeeping has always included a measure of filtering and editing anyway, without

necessarily altering the facts. They add that, in the case of inaccuracies, for example, journalists that identify with certain ethical considerations associated with the profession may decide outrightly not to publish such content. Studies that have, nonetheless, revealed the editorial standards applied in gatekeeping UGC in newsrooms have shown that traditional media gatekeep UGC in different ways. A lot of precision is applied in newsroom standards and journalistic principles as they subject the content to different methods of editorial control before publishing (Chung, 2007; Domingo et al., 2007; Domingo, 2008; Hermida and Thurman, 2008).

In Ghana, scholarly studies (Banda, 2010; Deo-Silas, 2003, Owusu-Yeboah, 2005) have mainly looked into the emerging trends of UGC, the perception of newsrooms on the use of social media, and the adoption of UGC and its general effects on mainstream newsroom operations in the broader democratic space. Deo-Silas (2013) and Owusu-Yeboah (2015), for example, discovered that although the integration of UGC enhanced mainstream journalistic work, most Ghanaian journalists and newsrooms had concerns about the challenges of credibility, reliability, and veracity in the use of UGC, and as a result necessitated gatekeeping. None of these studies, however, provide insight into the gatekeeping measures that ensure Ghanaian newsrooms subject UGC to the needed professional and editorial standards before its publication. There remains, therefore, a lack of scholarly knowledge on the processes user-generated content undergo in Ghanaian newsrooms and the nature of gatekeeping such content is subjected to.

Shoemaker, Vos & Reese (2009) have stated that certain factors influence the gatekeeping processes in newsrooms. These factors include people's values, professional codes of conduct, company policies and computer algorithms. Other studies (Alhmaghlooth, 2013) have also shown that these factors are non-exhaustive, as other factors could influence the process of gatekeeping depending primarily on the context of the study. It is important, therefore, to not only investigate

the processes but to also explore possible factors that may influence the processes of gatekeeping UGC in the Ghanaian context.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the processes of gatekeeping user-generated content are subjected to in Ghanaian newsrooms and to assess the factors that may contribute to newsroom decisions to gatekeep the UGC. Therefore, the study seeks to specifically;

- (1) investigate the gatekeeping processes that user-generated content is subjected to in Ghanaian newsrooms before reaching the Ghanaian public online and offline.
- (2) explore the factors that may contribute to the gatekeeping processes in Ghanaian newsrooms

1.3 Research Questions

Given the objectives the study sought to investigate; the following research questions were raised:

RQ 1: What are the processes of gatekeeping involved in integrating user-generated content in Ghanaian newsrooms?

RQ 2: What are the factors that influence gatekeeping user-generated content in Ghanaian newsrooms?

1.4 Significance of the Study

As several scholars (Singer & Ashman, 2009; Harrison, 2010; Cleary & Bloom, 2011; Singer, 2013) have extensively interrogated the integration of UGC and the editorial control applied to it in newsrooms, the study seeks to make a contribution to the body of literature on the evolving

concept of gatekeeping in the digital age in the Ghanaian context. It will provide empirical insights into the emerging professional and ethical newsroom practices in Ghana. This may serve as a source for communication researchers to interrogate other emerging trends, particularly with UGC, in the Ghanaian media landscape.

Secondly, as Dimmick (1974) stated, gatekeeping theory has remained an uncertainty theory and therefore, gatekeepers and decision-makers should be provided with a model that will relieve their uncertainty and ambiguity on the definition of news, to consequently reduce conflict during the newsgathering and news processing stages. The study may, for that reason, also provide some insight on the complexities involved in user-generated content as a source of news to journalists, and the need to identify them and apply the appropriate gatekeeping measures.

1.5 Operational Definition of Terms

In this study, the following concepts were operationalized to give a more definite context for their usage:

Audiences: Receivers of media products (television, radio, print newspaper, social media and website). Interchangeably referred to as public in this study, it is also used as a generic term for content generators such as citizen journalists, ordinary citizens and newsmakers as identified from the findings.

Citizen Journalists: A group of audiences who independently gathered news, current affairs content and development-oriented stories to be sent to newsrooms.

Factors: Decision-making guidelines which may influence, enhance or facilitate gatekeeping practices.

Gatekeeping: The selection, confirmation, and transformation of messages before disseminated as news to the public either through online or mainstream media platforms by professional journalists and newsrooms.

Journalists: Interchangeably referred to as professional journalists to include both reporters as newsgatherers, and editors as news processors. For the television and radio media organisations, some reporters and editors may have other responsibilities such as hosts of shows or news anchors.

Integration: An inclusion of user-generated content into mainstream media operations.

Mainstream media: It includes television, radio and print newspaper media organisations. Interchangeably referred to as traditional media or legacy media in this study.

Offline: Mainstream media (television, radio and print newspaper) broadcasts and publications.

Online: Internet-based publications, specifically social media and websites.

User-generated content (UGC): Any potentially newsworthy material, created or posted by non-professional journalists, that is either solicited or unsolicited and retrieved from internet-based applications by professional journalists. It may be in the form of texts, audios, photos or videos.

1.6 Summary

This chapter presented the study's background which identified the influence technological advancements have had on journalism over the years to a present-day phase where technology enables the audiences that journalists once served, to practice a form of journalism through newsgathering and sharing. By integrating the content of these audiences in newsroom operations, journalists do not only have alternate sources to information but they can also reinforce their gatekeeping autonomy by having editorial control over some of the challenges that confront UGC

such as unethical practices and inaccuracies. The chapter further presented the study's problem statement as it revealed that studies have shown that Ghanaian newsrooms integrate user-generated content in their operations, yet these studies do not provide detail on how content is selected and transformed for publication. The study found it important, therefore, to discover the processes of gatekeeping that Ghanaian newsrooms subject such content to, and the factors that consequently affect the processes, as the study's objectives. The chapter further presented the study's research questions, significance and an operational definition of terms that were used in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the study. As studies on media gatekeeping mainly seek to contribute to understanding the processes, and criteria in news selection, this study uses gatekeeping theory to help in the understanding of how Ghanaian newsrooms engage with user-generated content. The chapter also discusses the advancement of the theory, describing how each advancement uniquely contributes to the investigation of the study. It further discusses the new contemporary model of the theory (detailed below) as a framework for the analysis of the study's data.

2.1 Gatekeeping Theory

Gatekeeping is a process that essentially entails selecting the news. It is largely defined as a selection process where decisions are made on which news items are used in the media (White, 1950). As suggested by Reese & Ballinger (2001), the basis for gatekeeping is that, not all information is news, hence not all information should become news.

Shoemaker & Vos (2009) stated that inherent in the selection process is a decision to either outrightly reject or to reconstruct certain information for the audience. Ultimately, both decisions form the boundaries within which what is considered news is or will be defined for the public.

Derived from norms and observations, the theory of gatekeeping is descriptive (White, 1950). It is the summation of the various factors that influence decision-making by journalists in news selection for audiences (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). It may also generally serve as a guide for researchers in the news selection processes of journalists.

2.1.1 Advancement of Gatekeeping theory

Gatekeeping theory has evolved over the years to add to the initial conceptualization of factors influencing news selection processes not considered and included by earlier theoreticians. Scholars such as White (1950), Gieber (1956), Westley & Maclean (1957), McNelly (1959), Snider (1967), Bass (1969), Brown (1979), Shoemaker (1991), Shoemaker & Vos (2009); and Wallace (2018) have provided expansions on the theory to include a wider range of external factors such as organisational control, newsroom routines and professional norms in addition to individual preferences that influence gatekeepers. In recent times, new ICTs have introduced newer considerations for gatekeeping by both researchers and journalists in the field (Roberts, 2005; Ali & Fahmy, 2013, Wallace, 2018). As a result, modern studies on gatekeeping have included newer trends of news sources, that are generated from online spaces and new ICTs (Scott, 2005). Although the concept of gatekeeping has advanced beyond mainstream newsroom practices to be applied to online spaces, the fundamental description of the theory remains relevant to guide the selection processes, both online and offline.

The earliest notable mention of gatekeeping is attributed to Kurt Lewin (Lewin, 1947), who introduced the concept of gates as how control is exerted on what enters or leaves a group in the society through a set of rules. The rules influence the decisions of the one assuming the role of the gatekeeper - an individual or a group in charge of controlling what goes in and what goes out (of the household, in this case) through decision-making.

White (1950) built on Lewin's (1947) concept of gates by introducing it within the context of journalism. In a week, White (1950) studied and documented a newspaper wire editor's decision-making process on his selection of stories received from wires for publication. Based on the editor's responses, White (1950) identified that news items were received from a source. These news items then passed through gates which either discarded items or selected items for audiences (White,

1950; Watson, 2003; Roberts, 2005). White (1950) found that individual traits and values of the editor influenced the selection process. White's (1950) study helped this present study in identifying the individual preferences of Ghanaian editors (and reporters) which influenced news selection or rejection.

Gieber (1956) expanded White's (1950) model to include more variables, such as the number and state of the editors, and external influences. He included more wire editors (16) in his study whereas White (1950) observed just one editor. Gieber's (1956) study noted the mechanical state in which the editors who published stories provided by the press associations operated. His study also showed the passivity and reactionary state of the editors who did not particularly have the free will to decide against the publication of a story. Another factor revealed from Gieber's (1956) study on gatekeepers was organisational influences such as work routines and deadlines. While White (1950) focused on the man making the decisions, Gieber (1956) studied the external influences that led to the process of decision-making and emphasized the importance of these external organisational factors which were bound to influence the editors' decisions.

Similarly, Brown (1979) critiqued White's (1950) model for failing to address two key factors Lewin's (1947) initial concept of gatekeeping included: external forces and the rules of gatekeeping. Brown (1979) stated that a gatekeeper was not in isolation during the gatekeeping process but interdependent on any existing external force that could influence the decision-making process. He added that gatekeeping was subject to rules that guide the decision-making process and re-emphasized that all factors included in Lewin's (1947) original theory should not be neglected (Brown, 1979). Considering Gieber (1956) and Brown's (1979) contributions, the study found it helpful in observing and studying a group of editors in the news selection process in Ghanaian newsrooms. Their contributions further helped this study to identify how external factors

such as organisational influences, in addition to individual traits and values, contribute to the decision-making process in selecting UGC for audiences.

Westley & Maclean (1957) also contributed to the gatekeeping theory by introducing the element of feedback in their co-orientation model. The model suggested that two entities- the sender and the receiver- communicate a message through a mediator or gatekeeper. The mediated message, subsequently produced feedback from the receiver's end. Likewise, the present study explored the necessity of feedback for Ghanaian newsrooms in measuring an effective gatekeeping process after the publication of UGC.

Whereas Lewin (1950) and Gieber (1956) only considered the editors as gatekeepers, McNelly (1959) on the other hand, took into consideration the one closest to any source of information. His study, focused on multiple gatekeeping agents controlling different functions in the gatekeeping process, to show that reporters more than editors were the first and most important in the process. The potential of any news story is, thus, foremost determined by a reporter before its publication is finally decided on by editors. He emphasized that the attention given to a reporter in gatekeeping should not be overlooked as it is critical in the gatekeeping process (McNelly,1959).

Similarly, Bass (1969) affirmed that the editor is not the key decision-maker in the gatekeeping process yet criticized McNelly (1959) for not identifying the various roles of reporters to be a factor that affected gatekeeping decisions. Bass (1969) introduced the double-action interval news flow model to show the flow from raw news to a complete processed product for consumers. The model described news as being processed in two stages before the final publication. First by the news gatherers who report news based on facts, and then by the news processors who apply editorial rules and newsroom standards. He stated that news gatherers such as reporters and line editors functioned differently from news processors such as editors and translators. He emphasized that studies should focus more on newsgatherers as they initiate the process of the selection of

news by gathering the information to be published. This study, therefore, found it relevant in including reporters to editors to be studied, in view of McNelly (1959) and Bass' (1969) emphasis on the importance of reporters as the initiators of the news selection process.

Although earlier theoreticians (Lewin, 1950; Gieber, 1956; Westley & Maclean, 1957) at the time, only studied gatekeeping for news selection in print newspapers, others, such as Snider (1967) looked beyond newspapers to include different media such as television and photography. His inclusion of these media showed that the process of gatekeeping could be applied to all media, not just newspapers. Snider's (1967) contribution, therefore, helped this study in two ways. Firstly, it served as a basis to include broadcast television and radio newsrooms to print newspaper newsrooms, to be examined in their gatekeeping processes. Furthermore, as user-generated content could be in formats of photos, Snider's (1967) study helped establish that besides texts, other content such as photos and videos can be subjected to gatekeeping measures.

Shoemaker's (1991) contribution to the theory outlined all the various contributions scholars have made over the years on the gatekeeping theory, since its inception, into a comprehensive model. She stated that gatekeepers, working either as an individual or as a group in an institution, are faced with either personal or institutional factors which influence the process of transforming information into news. Gatekeepers are, thereafter, open to receiving feedback from their audiences. Shoemaker's (1991) original theory of gatekeeping has however been revised by scholars given the new digital age of unstandardized information dissemination. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) for example, included computer algorithms and software which facilitate fact-checking content online. Gatekeeping theory has expanded further to include gatekeeping on online spaces and has been adapted to suit the contemporary media landscape (Vos, 2015). This study also investigated if Ghanaian newsrooms employed computer algorithms and software to facilitate gatekeeping processes.

2.1.2 Contemporary Gatekeeping model

In more recent times, scholars such as Wallace (2018) have contributed to the gatekeeping theory by introducing digital variables. Wallace (2018) combines previous gatekeeping factors with new digital approaches for news selection. Wallace's (2018) model includes new gatekeepers, stages of gatekeeping and different publication possibilities that were adopted to guide this present study.

The model considers three new identified gatekeepers who are individual amateurs, strategic professionals and algorithms, in addition to journalists. Although these new identified gatekeepers are a new category of gatekeepers called secondary gatekeepers, only the journalist (which includes editors and reporters) remained the gatekeeper relevant to this study.

Wallace's (2018) gatekeeping model also described three stages of gatekeeping. The first stage referred to as the input stage described the access to information and the integration of content. It stated that journalists had wider access to information by selecting from a variety of available sources, either by traditional newsgathering means or facilitated by the Internet. As UGC is primarily sourced from the Internet or enhanced by internet-based applications, this present study found this stage helpful to use in describing the newsgathering process of user-generated content in Ghanaian newsrooms.

The second stage referred to as the throughput stage described the selection processes of journalists by choosing information and processing them into a news item based on some selection criteria. This stage revealed that, although the selection process in most cases, is dependent on both personal and institutional factors (Donohue, Olien, & Tichenor, 1989; Shoemaker *et al.*, 2001), the personal decision making of journalists, is largely influenced by the institutional factors such as journalistic standards and organisational policies (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). The study equally investigated this assertion in Ghanaian newsrooms.

The last stage, referred to as the output stage, was concerned with the varied publication possibilities due to the Internet. Content can be published either on social media platforms or websites or broadcast on traditional media or both. This stage helped identify how Ghanaian newsrooms gate-keep UGC for their online and mainstream publication outlets.

The model further described the mechanism of gatekeeping applied by journalists on the preferred or selected medium for publication. Journalists operated with a centralised mechanism (Shaw, 2012), by maintaining their traditional gatekeeping roles and using this role to control the processing of information into a news item and its dissemination, on whatever platform they chose to publish (Wallace, 2018).

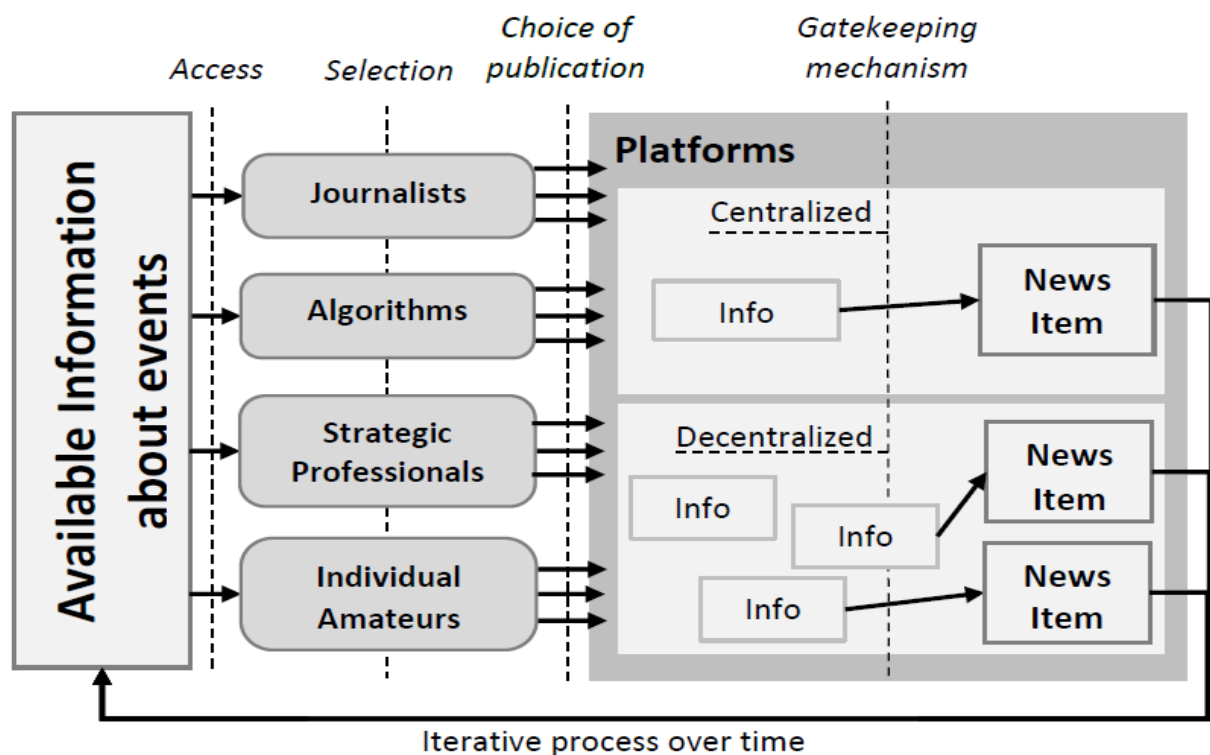


Figure 1 Wallace's contemporary gatekeeping model

Source: Wallace (2018)

2.2 Summary

The chapter presented the advancement of the theory over the years (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950; Gieber, 1956; Westley & Maclean, 1957; McNelly, 1959; Snider, 1967; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, Wallace, 2018) and how it is applicable to the present study. Although Wallace's (2018) contemporary gatekeeping model introduces digital variables and the three stages of selection of news adopted for this study, the model does not detail all the other considerations of earlier theorists as discussed in this chapter. Therefore, Wallace's (2018) model is employed particularly in describing the gatekeeping processes of UGC in Ghanaian newsrooms based on the three stages, while the contributions to the theory over the years (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950; Gieber, 1956; Westley & Maclean, 1957; McNelly, 1959; Snider, 1967; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), is employed to justify the selection of the study's participants, and give background and detail to Wallace's (2018) throughput stage by identifying how the various factors ultimately contribute to a holistic process of gatekeeping UGC to audiences in Ghana.

CHAPTER THREE

RELATED STUDIES

3.0 Introduction

The review of literature found studies related to the integration of user-generated content into mainstream media content and how the traditional gatekeeping processes are extended to UGC. This chapter discusses a selection of these studies that have investigated the integration of UGC, and the processes of gatekeeping UGC is subjected to in mainstream media organisations.

Emerging media scholarship suggests that user-generated content has created a shift in retaining professional journalists' roles as the sole gatekeepers of news dissemination to audiences (Gillmor, 2004; Singer, 2013; Wallace, 2018). The generators of content function as gatewatchers where they also assume some editorial control over what is published online (Bruns, 2003). Nonetheless, by integrating UGC into mainstream news, the autonomy of journalists' traditional gatekeeping role is reaffirmed (Wallace, 2018; Ahiabenu et al., 2018) especially as Bruns (2003; 2018) argues that gatekeeping, which is a traditional function of journalists, is different from gatewatching, a function assumed by content generators.

Journalists have the opportunity to take on the role of controlling UGC by filtering and sharing it in ways that are relevant to audiences through processes such as moderation, verification, and training of amateur journalists, which, among several other factors, are mainly influenced by the organisations' standards (Paulussen & Ogille, 2008). Scholars (Scott, 2005, Singer, 2008, and Wallace, 2018) have found that news organisations have adapted to having an online presence either by social media or a website, in addition to their mainstream medium of news publication or broadcast. As a result, gatekeeping processes are applied to both mainstream broadcasts and publications and on online platforms.

3.1 Moderation on online platforms

Moderation is the term scholars have attributed to the gatekeeping mechanism used on online public discussions by most mainstream news organisations to reduce inappropriate content for audiences (Hermida & Thurman, 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Harrison, 2010; Cleary & Bloom, 2011; Almaghlooth, 2013; Singer, 2014). Studies have found moderation as an appropriate means for user-generated content to be sourced in line with the identities and values of mainstream news organisations.

Hermida & Thurman (2007) studied 12 national UK based newspaper website platforms with a focus on news organisations' struggle with the integration of UGC. The study interviewed 11 editors who revealed that values of their organisations, the culture of their newsrooms, issues of reputation, credibility and legal considerations remained the core factors for which moderating user content on their sites was intensified. The newspapers used in the study were *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Star*, *FT*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Mirror*, *Telegraph*, *The Sun*, *The Times*, *This is London* and *Scotsman*. Moderation was considered a filtered model that aimed at integrating user content without tarnishing the brand and credibility of these established newspapers.

Through an initial content analysis of the newspaper websites, the study found that these newspaper websites engaged their audiences through polls, message boards, “have-your-say” sections, comments on stories, Question and Answer sections, blogs; and “your media and your story” sections. The study revealed that the comments section which permitted readers to contribute by making submissions of their views on a story was predominantly moderated for most of the sites. User content for these websites was identified to be fully moderated, reactively-moderated or the comments sections were outrightly disenabled. A full moderation suggested that content was run by a moderator in the virtual newsroom before posting and a reactive moderation

suggested that a post that was flagged by other users on the site as offensive was removed by a moderator.

However, for the newspaper websites that allowed no particular moderation, the study showed that professional content produced by journalists in the newspaper organizations was differentiated from amateur content produced by audiences on the site. Besides the identity and values of the newspaper organisations that influenced the moderation of user-generated content, the study also revealed that the culture of the newsroom which was defined as “the shared beliefs and practices that shape employees' thinking and behavior” (p. 24) equally influenced the approach and moderation of UGC on their websites. Furthermore, registration on the sites and confirmation of email addresses by users of the websites was another means of moderation and verifying users before posting on the sites (Hermida and Thurman, 2007).

Hermida & Thurman (2008) in another study, studied 12 UK national newspapers by using the approaches of online surveys and in-depth interviews of editors. The study revealed that beyond newsroom standards, professional journalistic norms and values and scanning software known as *JiveSoft* were factors that influenced and facilitated the gatekeeping process through moderation. The study showed that the selection of UGC was enhanced by the use of *JiveSoft* which enabled journalists to scan emails for spam and publish content faster than they manually would. Although the software relieved journalists from a time-consuming process of controlling information online, the study showed a defect in the use of the software which still necessitated journalists to manually moderate content and filter comments before publishing (Hermida & Thurman, 2008).

Harrison (2010), studied gatekeeping on online public discussions at the *BBC*. The study revealed that the news values of *BBC* were at the core of the gatekeeping process. By observing newsroom practices at the *BBC*, the study found that moderation was a mechanism by which the organisation effectively monitored and removed illegal and inappropriate material that did not reflect the

standards of the organisation's broadcast programmes. At the *BBC*, UGC was found to have been routinely incorporated into existing newsroom operations. According to the researcher, because the organisation received an overflow of UGC daily, a UGC newsroom hub was created to control the content. The study found that moderation was facilitated by a moderator or a group of moderators at the *BBC* who controlled content in two stages: pre-moderation and post-moderation, similar to Hermida & Thurman's (2007) full moderation and reactive moderation. Pre-moderation indicated that material could not be accessed by visitors to the *BBC*'s website unless verified by a moderator as suitable for posting. Post-moderation suggested that a post was decided on after its publication, whether it was suitable to remain on the site after being filtered for pornographic content, abusive language, racist or offensive comments and or profanity. With such moderation, the *BBC* received feedback- as an element found important in Westley & Maclean's model (1957)- from audiences showing displeasure in the removal of their posts (which were considered offensive) by stating an infringement on their freedom of speech. The study nonetheless, showed that moderation at the *BBC* remained a mechanism for editorial values and newsroom standards not to be compromised despite their increased use of UGC (Harrison, 2010).

Cleary & Bloom (2011) analysed content taken from 353 local commercial television websites in the US to verify if professional standards were applied as a gatekeeping factor in maintaining the integrity of these television stations affiliated with *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC* or *FOX*. Cleary & Bloom's (2011) study revealed guidelines for the integration of UGC. The guidelines served as conditions to be met for UGC submissions to be published on these websites, which is somewhat similar to Hermida & Thurman (2007) and Harrison's (2010) concepts of full moderation and pre-moderation respectively. Although the findings of the study did not provide insight into a systematic gatekeeping process, the study revealed guidelines established by the television stations for the use of UGC in forms of text, graphics, streaming video and interactive elements such as polls, quizzes and message boards on their websites. The study revealed that, by prioritising legal considerations

and not editorial values, the guidelines for the submission of UGC centered on terms of use and privacy policy links on the websites. More specifically, the websites insisted on the affirmation of owners' copyright and trademark rights of the content. Authorisation on the usage and sharing of content to partners, affiliates and other services was also sought by the local television websites from the contributors. Although the study found that websites assumed no specific editorial control over the content, they reserved the right to remove any inappropriate content that violated their rules and guidelines.

Singer (2014) studied the gatekeeping mechanisms of 138 US-based community newspaper websites through content analysis. Singer (2014) found that users of the sites were given the responsibility of abiding by legal and ethical publication standards known as secondary gatekeeping. Online editors, nonetheless, maintained their autonomy in moderating content on the online space. Similar to the findings of Hermida & Thurman (2007), Singer's study revealed that as part of a secondary gatekeeping process assigned to users, users were responsible for flagging abusive comments from other users. too. The study further revealed that a software for rating and reviewing known as *Pluck*, enabled users to rate or recommend the comments provided by other users and rate or recommend the commenter on a few of the newspaper sites. The software also enabled users to access other users' profiles including the history of comments made by the user and this was key in revealing the anonymity of accounts.

Moderation, in the form of post-production, is the gatekeeping process revealed by Almaghlooth's (2013) study on the relevance of gatekeeping in Saudi Arabia newspaper newsrooms to tackle contemporary digital advances in the media landscape. Almaghlooth's (2013) concept of gatekeeping is similar to Hermida & Thurman's (2007) concept of reactive moderation and Harrison's (2010) concept of post-moderation. However, Almaghlooth's (2013) post-production contained more stringent processes which included the editing of material after its publication, the

deletion of posts and news items from the sites, blocking offensive user accounts and websites, controlling cyber-attacks and pursuing posters of UGC with their IP addresses or locations through *Twitter* hashtags. These processes were to control the effects of digital information which the researcher stated, had changed journalism in Saudi Arabia. Almaghlooth (2013) observed gatekeeping processes in the newsrooms of two Saudi newspapers: *Alriyadh* (a print and online newspaper) and *Sabq* (an electronic newspaper). He further interviewed 13 participants including the editors-in-chief, journalists, webmasters, bloggers, and micro-bloggers. The study revealed two external factors beyond organisational and newsroom standards that affected the process of contemporary creation and dissemination of news. Social and religious factors were introduced as factors affecting the use of UGC in newspaper newsrooms in Saudi Arabia. These factors excluded women in newsrooms as either editors or journalists primarily because of the country's strict religious and social prohibitions of the gender in the public sphere, consequently affecting their inclusion in media content and production.

3.2 Verification in newsrooms

Although verifying information and fact-checking is a process that is required in every gatekeeping stage regardless of the publication platform, studies have shown that verification is a term widely used when gatekeeping is applied to UGC for television, radio and newspaper publications (Storm, 2007; Tolmie, Rouncefield, Zubiaga, Procter, Burger, Randall, Wung, Sak Hoi and Lukiata, 2017). These studies have operationalised verification as a process facilitated by either personal contact of the generators of content or in recent times, software and algorithms for content whose generators cannot be readily accessed.

Storm (2007) studied how user-web-generated content was integrated into South Carolina's community print newspaper *BluffTon Today* and the gatekeeping processes the newsroom applied to such content. Through observation and interviews with the newsroom staff members, the study

found that the organisation created a community website (which was their main source of UGC), to allow community members who subscribed to the site, to post content which was later selected and published in the professionally published newspaper. The site consisted of seven sections: blogs, photos, classifieds, forum, movies, and weather. However, the study found the blog to be the main entry point for the public to share their stories on newsworthy events and opinions with the newsroom. Although the study does not provide a systematic description of gatekeeping, Storm (2007) revealed that the professional journalists' interactions with contributors of content, subscribers, and users of the website enabled the journalists to know the details of the contributors and the content they provided. Though the newspaper aimed at primarily giving a voice to community members through the website, the newsroom reviewed and verified content from the contributors in strict terms before selected as news in the newspaper.

Similarly, Tolmie, Rouncefield, Zubiaga, Procter, Burger, Randall, Wung, Sak Hoi & Lukiata (2017) conducted an ethnographic study in the newsroom of a national newspaper in Switzerland. They observed 15 journalists and editorial staff in the newsroom and noticed that gatekeeping was ensured in three stages: story production, editorial selection, and publication. The UGC was subjected to organisational criteria, newsroom standards, and a social media verification dashboard design. The study showed that the main source for the newspaper's UGC was *Twitter* and the dashboard design was a collection of analytical tools and visualisations that helped journalists to report more effectively. The study found that some of the designs on the dashboard addressed the issue of trustworthiness on social media, enabled journalists to determine a trustworthy piece of information and to understand how rumours emerged and unfolded by fact-checking. Some dashboard designs also revealed background information such as the location, the history, the reach and the authenticity of a tweet. Although there were issues of technical usability and economic constraints associated with accessing the dashboard design, it was the main tool used in the

gatekeeping process that filtered content retrieved from *Twitter* that was subsequently, integrated into the Swiss national newspaper.

In converged media newsrooms, which are categorised as news organisations that publish both online and through their mainstream media, studies found moderation and verification as gatekeeping processes (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Channel, 2010) as well as the training of identified amateur journalists whose content were used in newsrooms.

Paulussen & Ugille (2008) studied the challenges and opportunities a mainstream Belgian newspaper organisation *Concentra Media Newspapers* were faced with in incorporating UGC in different stages of news production. By observing three newsrooms of the organisation -*Gazet van Antwerpen, Het Belang van Limburg* and *HasseltLokaal*- and interviewing 20 practitioners, which included managers, IT staff and editorial staff, the study showed how organisational structure, professional standards, and newsroom practices influenced the content permitted on the organisation's online websites such as *HasseltLokaal* from citizen journalists. Although the study did not provide a detailed description of gatekeeping processes, it mentioned moderation and the training of amateur journalists as mechanisms used to control the quality of the content produced on the community online website by the organization's editors. Especially for the print newspaper publications, the study showed that amateur journalists were trained by professional journalists on how to gather and select information for news integrated into their print newspaper, thereby including them in the process of gatekeeping.

Channel (2010) examined how *CNN* adopted citizen journalism content through iReport, a participatory online news community website. iReport allows the public to engage in discussions and share content that is later filtered and used on *CNN's* on-air broadcast or their website (*CNN.com*). Interviews with employees of *CNN's* iReport revealed that technological and traditional gatekeeping processes were applied to the content produced to ensure that *CNN*

maintained credibility as a news source. The study showed that moderation was applied to ensure content was within the iReport community's guidelines and standards that prohibited pornography, obscene discussions, and extreme personal attacks. If any of these guidelines and standards were violated, the post was pulled down. Also, users or subscribers of content self-censored and flagged other users that violated the rules, similar to Hermida & Thurman's (2007) and Harrison's (2010) findings. Channel (2010) found that verification was facilitated by an algorithm that was used by the producers to help filter content. Also, contributors of content on the iReport website were contacted to verify for authenticity and truth of the content contributed. Verification was primarily made through telephone calls to ask contributors questions on personal details and details of the content. However, the study revealed that besides *CNN's* organisational standards, the selection of news for production on air or the website was based on a subjective discretion and personal values on what was news which differed from editor to editor.

3.3 Summary

This chapter described the different processes such as moderation, verification, and training that various newsrooms applied in gatekeeping user-generated content for their audiences, who either consume news online or through mainstream media. It also looked at the factors that influenced these journalists and newsrooms in making decisions on which UGC was appropriate for audiences. All studies reviewed confirmed how institutional factors such as journalistic and organisational standards, more than individual values, were dominant factors influencing the gatekeeping processes, as revealed in Wallace's (2018) study.

Most of the literature reviewed in this chapter has focused more on how mainstream media organisations have applied gatekeeping measures to UGC on their online publications and a few have detailed processes of gatekeeping UGC for their traditional media publications. This present study, therefore, explores not only the online publication gatekeeping measures for UGC but also

the mainstream publication gatekeeping measures for UGC by media organisations in the Ghanaian context.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction

The study examined the gatekeeping processes employed by Ghanaian mainstream media organisations in the integration of user-generated content for news dissemination operations in May 2018. Three media organisations were selected for the study: one television station, *TV3*; one radio station, *Citi FM*; and one print newspaper, *Daily Graphic*. This chapter outlines the research design, explains how data was collected, the basis and description of the study's settings, how the data was analysed and how the findings were consequently reported.

4.1 Research design

The study employed a qualitative research approach. According to Bruns (2008), qualitative research helps understand how citizen journalism (UGC) is integrated into newsrooms. The approach is interpretive and naturalistic and allows for "researchers to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.3). As the present study aimed at investigating the processes and exploring the factors involved in gatekeeping UGC in selected Ghanaian newsrooms, qualitative research was found to be the most appropriate means in understanding this phenomenon. Also, qualitative research does not have "firm guidelines and procedures and is evolving and changing constantly" (Creswell, 1998, p.27). This is particularly useful for the theory of media gatekeeping, which describes the processes, and has evolved to include newer considerations, as shown over the years. Therefore, qualitative research was essential in investigating the evolution of gatekeeping practices relating to UGC in the selected Ghanaian newsrooms. Again, qualitative research is a means to "instigate a process of reflection" (Kvale, 1996, p.4). Therefore, the study found it helpful in understanding the decision-making processes

that characterise gatekeeping by reporters and editors in the Ghanaian newsrooms. As the most appropriate way to draw on the aforementioned advantages of qualitative research to gatekeeping research related to the incorporation of UGC, the study specifically employed the ethnographic approach, using observation and in-depth interviews.

4.2 Data collection methods

In building the body of literature theorising gatekeeping, scholars have employed qualitative approaches, employing participant observation and in-depth interview methods as tools in their study of decision-making processes associated with news selection (White, 1950; Gieber, 1956; Westley & Maclean, 1957; McNelly, 1959; Snider 1967; Bass, 1969, Brown, 1979; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Wallace, 2018). Previous studies that have also examined the processes and factors influencing gatekeeping in mainstream media newsrooms have also used methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews in gathering data (Paulussen & Ogille, 2008; Channel, 2010; Harrison, 2010; Almaghlooth, 2013). Considering the approaches employed in the studies that were reviewed, this study also employs newsroom participant observation and in-depth interview approaches in its bid to discover the gatekeeping processes journalists in the selected Ghanaian newsrooms employ and the factors influencing their gatekeeping decisions regarding the incorporation of UGC in their news coverage and production processes.

4.2.1 Participant observation

Observation helps the researcher to describe a recurring situation in a social setting, by providing a written account of everything witnessed (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). By being a participant in the observation process, the researcher is immersed in the culture of the social group and actively partakes in activities. Kawulich (2005) stated that participant observation is a helpful data collection tool in understanding people, processes and cultures in qualitative studies. It can

be defined as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting" (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p.91).

The method allowed the researcher to identify the various activities newsroom journalists engaged in before news publication, examining the criteria for news selection, the editing of the messages, the judgment made on which stories to be published online, on mainstream media or both, and generally understanding how various factors influenced the process of gatekeeping observed during the period of research in the newsrooms. Furthermore, the method allowed the researcher to answer the research questions through involvement in each newsroom's environment and routines, to provide consistency with what was said and what was done by journalists (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

4.2.1.1. Observation process

The researcher presented endorsed letters of introduction by the Department of Communication Studies, and ethical protocol consent forms approved by the Ethics Committee of the Graduate School, to the Human Resource Manager and the Manager of News at *TV3*; the Human Resource Manager and Director of News at *Citi FM*; and to the Corporate Communications Manager and Editor-in-chief at *Daily Graphic*. The letters, which facilitated the researcher's access to the newsrooms, stated the intent of the study, the study period and the affiliation of the researcher while the ethical protocol consent forms stated the ethical considerations of the study. Some of the ethical considerations included recording participants with their consent, promising anonymity of participants and not disclosing confidential information gathered on participants during the research. All media organisations authorised the researcher to participate in and observe newsroom activities during the period indicated for the study. Subsequently, the researcher was formally introduced to the news team. For *TV3* and *Citi FM*, the researcher was introduced to the team by

their heads of news during the midday news analysis, while for *Daily Graphic* the researcher was introduced to the news team individually by the editor-in-chief, after an editorial meeting.

The researcher further established rapport with some members of the news team in order to learn the function of the various news desks, to be familiarized with the newsroom setting and essentially to identify key informants to provide the needed information for the study. The same process was followed by previous studies (Bernard, 1994; Kawulich, 2005). Rapport was built in several ways, which included having lunch over related and unrelated topics to the study at the organisations' cafeteria with staff, and assisting in newsroom assignments when needed. Thereafter, the researcher engaged in daily editorial meetings for all the media organisations and participated in the daily midday news analysis for *TV3* and *Citi FM*.

Although the method suggests a prolonged engagement at the settings of the study to establish trust and gain more detailed findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011), according to Cramer & McDevitt (2004) it also makes room for the shortening of the study period given possible restraining factors. In this case, the researcher was constrained by access and time. For all newsrooms, access for a prolonged stay was granted to interns and not to researchers, and this prevented the researcher from engaging in a prolonged stay at the study's settings. White's (1950) seminal study on gatekeeping has shown that one week is sufficient for the observation process for the selection and rejection of news. The researcher observed and studied operations in each newsroom for 10 days, including weekdays and weekends. The period of observing each newsroom for 10 days provided rich enough details for the study's findings. A period of a month in May 2018 was, consequently, agreed for fieldwork.

As suggested by Merriam (1988), the researcher developed an observation guide to facilitate the findings pertinent to the study in the newsrooms. In view of this, the guide set out to observe how user-generated content was integrated in the newsroom, and the elements that characterize

gatekeeping of the content- the decision-making process, the selection process, the transformation of messages, and how and where the content was published. With the help of the guide, the researcher observed by critically watching, listening, asking questions to seek clarity and documenting as much relevant information as practicable through a detailed note-taking exercise. Note-taking ensured pertinent data was recorded and a reliable database for producing a final report was compiled (Shaw, 1995).

4.2.2 In-depth interviews

Interviews enable researchers to have a more thorough understanding of the activities and perspectives of people (Lindlof, 1995). In view of this, through probing, in-depth interviews serve as a means of seeking more detail into the practices and ideologies influencing decision-making in the selection of news by reporters and editors. Therefore, interviews were conducted with reporters and editors at *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* to ascertain, in more detail, the routine in newsgathering and the incorporation of UGC as mainstream news content. This section details how the interviews were conducted, and how the interviewees were sampled.

The researcher, who was the sole interviewer in the study, obtained permission from all interviewees, and their consent was given before the researcher recorded all interviews. For two journalists from the *Daily Graphic*, who did not give consent to be recorded, the researcher did not make an audio recording. The researcher, however, took notes of both interviews. All other interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio recorded on the premises of each organisation.

Through a semi-structured interview guide detailed in the Appendix section, which allowed for flexibility and adaptability of questions to responses of interviewees, and the possibility of further detail from interviewees (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019), interviews were granted individually and lasted a maximum of one hour and a minimum of 30 minutes.

4.2.2.1 Sampling of Interviewees

Interviewees were selected through a purposive sampling process. Wimmer & Dominick (2011) state that, as a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling is subjective and is based on the characteristics that the sample has to meet the objectives of the study. The purposive selection of participants was, thus, based solely on their knowledge and ability to adequately contribute information needed for the purpose of the study. As a result, reporters and editors that the researcher identified to integrate user-generated content in their operations were sampled for the study.

However, the researcher acknowledges that availability may have been a factor that also contributed to the selection of participants. This is because the nature of newsroom activities permitted some journalists to work from home, some were constantly out on assignments during the day, and some were on leave during the period of study. Therefore, besides identifying journalists who incorporated user-generated content in their operations as a key criterion, the sampling was influenced by the availability of journalists during the period of study for all selected newsrooms.

Consequently, a total of 21 journalists were sampled. The study interviewed seven journalists- five reporters, one mainstream editor and one online editor each from *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic*. The number of participants selected for interviews in media gatekeeping has ranged from one (Hermida & Thurmann, 2008) to eight (Channel, 2010) media practitioners for each selected media organisation. Therefore, seven journalists were sampled for each media organisation. This was an adequate number that prevented saturation of repeated information and provided sufficient information to address the study's objectives (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs & Jinks, 2017)

Further, the researcher interviewed more reporters than editors because, as earlier studies (McNelly, 1959; Bass, 1969) on gatekeeping practices have identified, reporters, who are the news gatherers, are more critical in the initiation of news selection, than editors, who are the news processors. The potential of any news story to be selected is first determined by the reporter before its publication is finally decided on by editors (McNelly, 1959; Bass, 1969). Therefore, more reporters were interviewed than editors, in all the selected newsrooms.

4. 3 The study setting

Snider's (1967) seminal study revealed that gatekeeping could be applied beyond newspapers. His study, which included different media such as television, served as the primary basis for the selection of television, radio and print newspaper newsrooms to represent the mainstream media landscape in Ghana.

The selection of the particular newsrooms for this study was based on the patronage of audiences. The last yearly GeoPoll (2017) study indicated that the selected newsrooms were the most patronised English-operating media outlets in the country. The last national census also revealed that more than half of the population of Ghana are English speakers, which is approximately 66.67 % (Statsghana.gov.gh, 2012). The audience market research showed that *TV3* had the most viewership with an average of 554, 000 viewers, *Citi FM* had the highest listenership with a daily audience share of 84, 000 and *Daily Graphic* had the widest readership with 1.5 million readers per day (Elliot, 2018). Therefore, *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* were selected as a representative sample for television, radio and print newspaper newsrooms in Ghana, given their reach.

4.3.1 TV3

TV3 Network Limited (TV3 Ghana) is a private free-to-air television broadcasting organization located at Kanda in Accra. They are part of a media group, Media General which includes radio stations *3 FM* and *Onua FM* in Accra, *Connect FM* in Takoradi and *Akoma FM* in Kumasi. The company began on-air transmission on October 1, 1997, and produces a variety of television programmes including news, drama, reality and entertainment shows. TV3 has since operated with the tagline, “First in News, Best in Entertainment”. It broadcasts nationwide. TV3 also has an active online presence with a website (3news.com), social media accounts on *Facebook* and *Twitter* (@tv3_ghana), and a YouTube account. It publishes news on these media for its online audiences.

The station has two main newsrooms; one for mainstream television broadcast and another for their digital operations. They are both located in their “News Hub” building opposite the main entrance of the station. The television newsroom is on the ground floor of the building and seats about 20 reporters with three inner rooms for editors. The editing suite, a control room, and the news production studio are close to the newsroom. The sports desk, however, works from a separate office on the ground floor in the same building. The digital newsroom on the other hand, which is on the first floor, has a much smaller space seating about 10 staff comprising the website, social media, production, and technical teams. It also has an inner room for the website editor.

The TV3 newsroom was organised hierarchically. The Board of Directors were on top of the chart, followed by the Group CEO. Then followed the General Manager, News. After, the Managers of TV news and radio news followed. They were followed by the Editors, then the Assignment Editor. After, the Senior Journalists/Reporters followed. Then the Junior Journalists/Reporters.

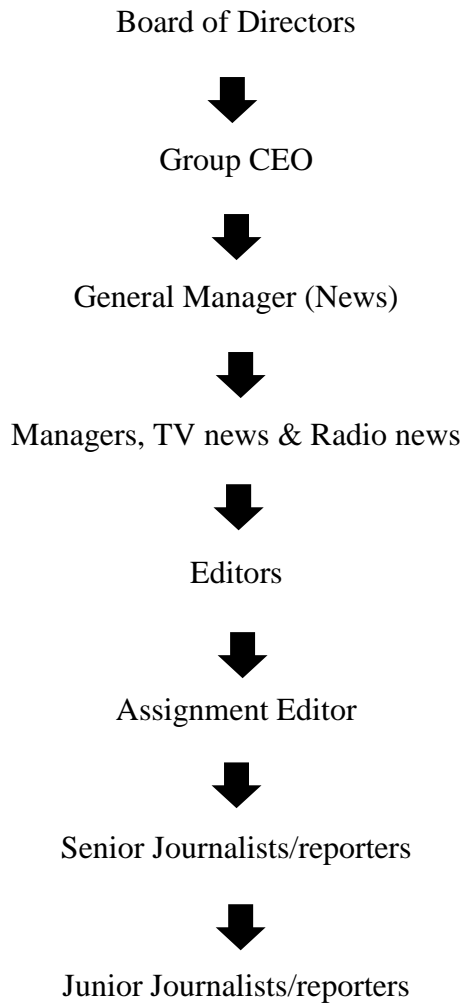


Figure 2 Newsroom Hierarchy at TV3

4.3.2 Citi FM

Citi FM, which operates under the frequency 97.3 FM, is a private radio station located at Adabraka in Accra. *Citi FM* is owned by Omni Media Company Limited which also has a television station, *Citi TV*. The radio station commenced operations in August 2004 and operates with the tagline “Relevant radio, always”. It transmits to Greater Accra, Eastern, Western, Central, and Volta regions and transmits to other regions through partner stations. *Citi FM* has a vibrant online presence, with a website (citinewsroom.com), and social media accounts on *Facebook* and *Twitter* (@Citi973). *Citi FM* publishes content on these media for its audiences online.

The station has two newsrooms; one for mainstream radio broadcasts and the other for digital content production. They are located in two separate buildings on the same premises. The radio newsroom which seats about 30 journalists, is segmented into the sports desk on the left upon entry, the general news desk in the middle, the business desk in a corner to the right, and an inner room for the Business and General News Editor. The online newsroom is on the first floor in another building and is a much smaller newsroom seating about 12 journalists, comprising reporters and editors. It also has two inner rooms for editors. The studio is on the ground floor in the same building.

The *Citi FM* newsroom was organised hierarchically and diagonally. The Head of News Programming was on top of the hierarchy, followed by the Head of News. Then followed the Daytime or General News Editor, the Business Desk Editor and the Sports Desk editor on the same level. After these three editors followed the Night Editor, then followed the reporters.



Figure 3 Newsroom Hierarchy at *Citi FM*

4.3.3 *Daily Graphic*

Daily Graphic is a state-owned print newspaper located at Adabraka Official Town in Accra. It belongs to the Graphic Communications Group Limited which produces other newspapers such as *Graphic Sports*, *Graphic Showbiz*, *Junior Graphic*, *Graphic Business*, and *The Mirror*. The company became state-owned in 1962. *Daily Graphic* produces mainly general news in the form of news stories, features, articles, and editorials. They operate with the tagline “Truth and Accuracy... Every Day”, and have a nationwide circulation. *Daily Graphic* has an online presence with a website (graphic.com.gh) and social media handles on *Facebook* and *Twitter* (@Graphicgh). They publish on their website and their social media accounts for their online audiences.

Daily Graphic has two main newsrooms, one for the print newspaper production and another for online content, located in two separate buildings on two different premises. The main newsroom is on the first floor of the main building. It seats about 100 staff which includes reporters, editors, and graphic designers. The editor-in-chief has a separate office. The printing press is located on another compound a few kilometres from the main building. The newsroom for the online team is located on the first floor in a second building across the street from the main building. It is a rather small newsroom which seats eight staff that is, six journalists and two technical staff.

The *Daily Graphic* newsroom staff was organised hierarchically. It was headed by the Acting Editor, followed by the night editors, the News Editors and Deputies, then the Page Editors (Gender, Education, Women and Children, Political, Business page *et cetera*), the Staff Writers followed, then the Senior Reporters and finally the reporters.

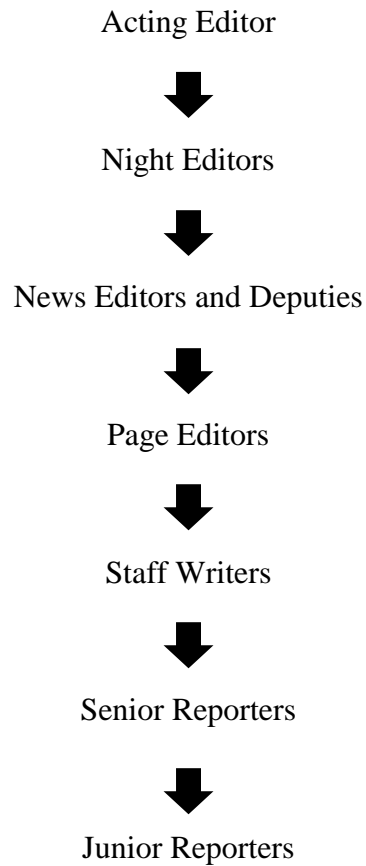


Figure 4 Newsroom Hierarchy at *Daily Graphic*

4.4 Data Analyses

In analysing the data collected for this study, the researcher employed the framework analysis. Data collected from interviews and observations were analysed thematically based on recurring patterns across the dataset. The theoretical framework, which combines aspects of the gatekeeping theory, and Wallace's (2018) contemporary gatekeeping model was the study's main guide in analysing the data.

Firstly, as part of the process of familiarising with the data, the researcher transcribed all audio recordings gathered from the interviews into written documents. Thereafter, using qualitative text analysis software, *Nvivo*, the data from the transcribed interviews and notes from observations

were analysed for themes. The documents were entered into *Nvivo* to auto code. This process of auto-coding, only grouped sentences with the same words into themes. As *Nvivo* was automatically deficient in interpreting and coding synonym words, phrases and ideas that suggested the same theme, the researcher interpreted the data by manually creating nodes on the software to further group phrases, sentences, paragraphs and ideas that contextually concentrated on the same theme, with respect to the research questions and the theoretical framework. This was done by a careful line by line analysis of all the transcripts and field notes, and coding for themes that were generated from the data. This also facilitated report writing as the researcher's comments from the data were done simultaneously during the process of coding. The findings were subsequently reported thematically in the next chapter, through a systematic outline of Wallace's (2018) input, throughput and output stages in gatekeeping.

4.5.1 Data validity and reliability

The study's validity and reliability were accounted for by ensuring the right application of methods in providing quality findings, the accuracy of the findings reported in reflecting the data collected, and consistency in the analysis of the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Therefore, the researcher applied these measures to ensure that the data was valid and reliable.

Firstly, to ensure the right application of methods in providing quality findings, the researcher employed the technique of triangulation. Maykut & Morehouse (1994) as cited in Almaghlooth (2013), state that a factor that helps build validity in qualitative research is multiple research methods. Therefore, participant observation and interviews were used to strengthen each other. Furthermore, as suggested by DeWalt & DeWalt (1998), one way to increase the validity of a participant observation study is to include additional methods to help describe a phenomenon under study. This is because, while participant observation helps the researcher to better understand the context under study, additional methods such as interviews can provide insight into

the perspectives of the participants, and can, therefore, serve as a way to increase the validity of the study's findings. Therefore, where participant observations failed in providing satisfactory detail to the study, interviews were used to add depth to the observations made, and vice versa. This consequently enabled the researcher to fully capture findings, if missed in one approach, thereby yielding higher reliability for the study.

Secondly, by ensuring that the findings were accurately reported to reflect the data set, the researcher frequently included direct quotes of participants from the interviews, to support the interpretation of the themes formulated. This also reduced researcher bias as some of the respondents' statements were included verbatim in the report. Furthermore, by seeking out patterns of similarities and differences in the data set, the different perspectives on a theme across the data set were represented in the report.

Lastly, by ensuring consistency in the analysis of the data, the researcher employed the technique of respondent validation. By establishing relationships with key informants in all newsrooms, the researcher had access to clarify any information in the data set when necessary, even after the data collection period. This ensured that no participant was misrepresented in the process of analysis.

4.5 Summary

The chapter presented participant observation and in-depth interviews as data collection tools for the study. The study sampled *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* based on their reach on the Ghanaian English-speaking community and described each of these organisations. It further justified the purposive sampling of 7 journalists from each newsroom based on previous studies on media gatekeeping. The study was analysed thematically based on recurring patterns across the dataset to reflect the study's objectives.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from observations made in the newsrooms of *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* and from interviews conducted with journalists within those newsrooms. The chapter has been organised into themes that address the study's main objectives, which are: to investigate the processes of gatekeeping user-generated content in the selected newsrooms and the factors that influence these processes. The findings are reported to reflect Wallace's (2018) gatekeeping model which outlines the input, throughput and output stages of gatekeeping. These stages describe how user-generated content is accessed, processed and published.

5.1 Input Stage: Accessing UGC

The input stage involved the varied access to news by newsrooms; either through traditional means of newsgathering and or from the Internet. The researcher observed in *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms that news was accessed through both traditional news gathering processes and through Internet sources. It was observed that most of the news sourced from internet-based applications was user-generated.

Journalists in *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms showed a preference for social media, specifically *Facebook* and *Twitter* in accessing UGC. Most of the journalists indicated that, although *WhatsApp* is considered in some contexts as a messaging application, they considered it a social medium. In interviews with them, these journalists said that the accessibility of *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *WhatsApp* influenced their preference for and usage of such media from which they routinely sourced news content.

At *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic*, the researcher observed that journalists looked out for certain characteristics of user content before proceeding to process and publish. In all the selected newsrooms, the input stage was characterised by sourcing content, determining the genre of the content sourced, and the diverse judgements placed on the content within the boundaries of specific news values.

5.1.1 The Sourcing of UGC

The researcher observed that in all three newsrooms, the sourcing of content involved the mode of access and the source of the content. The mode of access (how user-generated content was received by *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* journalists) was either “solicited” or “unsolicited”. Solicited content refers to newsrooms’ purposeful demand of content from audiences while unsolicited content refers to content that is not purposefully requested from audiences.

The source of the content (the different categories of audiences who contributed content), was classified as either “ordinary citizens” or “newsmakers”. “Ordinary citizens” was the generic term the journalists interviewed called content contributors and “newsmakers” was the term the journalists interviewed called people they considered experts in a certain vocation.

5. 1.1.1 The mode of accessing UGC: Solicited content

The researcher observed that for all the selected newsrooms, solicited content was accessed in two ways. Solicited content was either sourced from ordinary citizens who submitted news reports to *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic*, or received from audiences in the form of comments on the media organisations' or the journalists' personal social media platforms.

The researcher observed that the quotes or actualities such as sound bites used to enhance news in mainstream media broadcasts or publications informed the format of the content that was received

from ordinary citizens, or, the format that would be processed for the news by the newsrooms. Additionally, the online platforms of all the newsrooms also allowed solicited content to be received in multimedia formats for publication. These characteristics of content were particularly manifest in the news reports that *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* received from ordinary citizens.

For example, in the newsroom at *TV3*, the researcher observed that the viewing nature of television required that *TV3* receive solicited news reports in video formats, as was the case for *TV3*'s "MTN video report", sponsored by telecommunications group MTN. "MTN video report" allowed for ordinary citizens to send footage of issues about their communities to *TV3*, received through *WhatsApp*. There was a daily advertisement on *TV3* for videos to be sent through this means. The "MTN video report" is a segment included in the midday and evening news bulletins, that is, *Midday Live*, which broadcasts from 12 pm to 1 pm, and *News 360*, which broadcasts from 7 pm to 8 pm.

A reporter on the "MTN video report" team at *TV3*, revealed the concept behind the soliciting of such content by noting the following:

It's a citizen journalism platform where ordinary persons, ordinary Ghanaians... as in people who are not trained journalists have the opportunity to cause social change. They have the opportunity to report their very own stories and see some bit of positive change recorded

Similarly, the researcher observed that the nature of radio allowed for *Citi FM* to receive solicited audio content. The audio content served as sound bites for their radio publications. Content in multimedia formats of videos, pictures, and texts which were useful for *Citi FM*'s online publications, were also received. *Citi FM* journalists revealed through interviews that, a campaign was started around 2010 called "Citizen reporters" to include content from ordinary citizens, received through a *WhatsApp* platform, into their radio and digital productions. Over time,

audiences had become familiar with the concept and readily sent content to be aired on *Citi FM*.

An editor gave an example of such content in their operations as follows:

There's a show...of a broken-down bridge...we did a feature on it after somebody had sent us a ...message and a picture of a bridge that broke down in Ashalaja¹ So I went with Richard Sky² to the place to do a video feature on the broken-down bridge and we played the audio on radio and put the video online. So that was an example... and we had told the people to get in touch for such if you have something in your community... so we call it citizen reporters

At *Daily Graphic*, the nature of print newspapers required that the newsroom receive solicited content in textual and pictorial formats. The researcher observed that solicited content was received through *WhatsApp* from ordinary citizens through *Daily Graphic's* "Citizen iReporter", which allowed for photos to be received from audiences for publication. *Daily Graphic* advertised in every edition of a publication for such content to be sent and dedicated a page for the publication of such content from citizens. Journalists stated that this initiative was to enable journalists receive content due to their inability to cover every story. A reporter on the "Citizen iReporter" desk stated this as follows:

Our citizen reporting is supposed to be sent through text, photos, and videos through *WhatsApp* alone... People are able to capture things. I remember there was some rubbish on a pavement at Madina³... somebody sent it to us... maybe you will not be able to get it by the time you get there so we rely on what we've received

Most journalists in *TV3* and *Daily Graphic* that were interviewed stated that the main issue that confronted receiving solicited content from ordinary citizens was the formats that the content were sent in. They stated that, despite the guidelines of the formats expected by the media houses stated in the advertisements, some ordinary citizens defied the rules and contributed content through

¹ Ashalaja is a populated area located in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

² Richard Sky is a journalist at Citi FM.

³ Madina is a suburb of Accra, in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

other unrelated formats such as phone calls, as well as inappropriate material. A reporter at *TV3* shared an example of this:

So, when the stories come...they are not supposed to be calling... they are supposed to be sending video reports. Some don't... get it, so they add us to group chats, unnecessary chats. They send devotionals. Some send music. Anything you find interesting that you'll send to a friend of yours on WhatsApp, they do all that. So we sort of ...screen all those things, take those... out and look for the proper report

A reporter from *Daily Graphic* expressed similar concerns concerning the formats of solicited content as follows:

Somebody called me... you know, our citizen reporting is supposed to be sent through text, photos, and videos through WhatsApp alone -just send these. But people ...call. They'll say 'Hi, okay, I've seen this, so if I get anything, I'll send' and sometimes want to start a conversation so we are also very selective

Journalists at *TV3* and *Daily Graphic* observed that, the concept of citizen journalism was relatively new to the average Ghanaian community. As such, some Ghanaians were accustomed to traditional means of contributing content to newsrooms, so they sent content to newsrooms predominantly through phone calls, as they would for phone-in sessions. The non-conformity of some audiences to the guidelines stated in the advertisements would, therefore, require that all newsrooms filtered all the content received to find the appropriate formats.

Besides receiving solicited content from citizen journalists, the researcher observed that for all the selected newsrooms, solicited content was also received in the form of online comments from audiences. The comments were answers to questions posed by newsrooms or contributions on open discussions initiated by newsrooms on their social media pages.

The researcher also observed that comments and submissions from audiences on *TV3*'s social media pages were integrated into some of their television broadcasts and news segments. The use of audience comments and submissions was especially evident in *TV3*'s live morning flagship

programme “New Day” which aired on weekdays and Saturdays from 6 am to 9 am; and their evening news segment, “News 360”, which aired from 7 pm to 8 pm.

Similarly, *Citi FM*'s news segments and programmes included segments with audience comments and submissions, to give voice to audiences on trending issues. The researcher observed the input of audience comments and submissions on *Citi FM*'s live morning flagship programme, “Citi Breakfast Show” which aired on weekdays from 6 am to 10 am; and their evening news segment “EyeWitness News” which aired from 5.30 pm to 7 pm. A reporter at *Citi FM* explained the reason for the integration of solicited comments from audiences in the following narration:

Facebook has a wider reach, ...so we put it there and ask, ‘What's your view on this'? Then you find people commenting on posts that we made. So that's more official. The other times too... we put out videos, we put out maybe infographics and we have people commenting... So with that, you have people giving you detailed experiences. I did a story on Tramadol⁴... I think *Citi FM* was the first media house to do that story and report the Tramadol issue. It was shocking the number of people who got through to us through our *WhatsApp* lines because the matter was being discussed on our Breakfast Show⁵. Our *WhatsApp* line is also another medium where people send us information. We realised that, by telling us about the abuse, it engaged people more and it gives us more perspectives of the issue that we are dealing with

Particularly for *Citi FM*, the researcher observed that, besides the organisation's social media pages, comments from audiences were accessed from the personal social media accounts of the journalists. This was done not only to have audiences contribute to an on-going discussion spearheaded by *Citi FM* but also to analyse the sentiments of audiences and generate a story from them, as is clear in the following narration by a *Citi FM* editor:

So a typical example is, I come to the office, and I'm like ‘Oh my lights went off last night’. and then another colleague goes like, ‘Oh I experienced same’. Then for me, it looks like a

⁴ Tramadol is a painkiller found to be a growing addictive drug and abused by some Ghanaian youth during the period of the study.

⁵ Breakfast show is *Citi FM*'s morning show which starts at 6 am and ends at 10 am only on weekdays. It is popularly called the Citi Breakfast Show and abbreviated as CBS on social media.

trend. So I'll post on Facebook that 'What is the dumsor⁶ situation in your neighbourhood?', so I get a feel of what is happening. So when I go through the comments I'm able to know that okay, these parts of Accra are complaining about this. So I can do a story around something like that. Or we hear that there is an accident somewhere... we ask, 'Are you in that area? Are you close to the situation? Can you send us photos?' Or flooding somewhere, 'Can you send us photos of the situation where you are?' Yeah, so we do that from time to time

Journalists from *Citi FM* revealed that, using their personal social media pages to solicit for comments, they received more detail to a story than they typically would have from the media house's social media pages. A reporter from *Citi FM* gave an example of this situation as follows:

I needed people to speak to about a particular issue. We were discussing it on our Breakfast Show, and I needed real examples. Now, it was getting very difficult for me to get the people to speak to so I had to resort to ...my personal Facebook page to put out the report that 'If you have found yourself in such a situation, just send me a message'. And I got a lot...In fact, I got more than I needed

For both *TV3* and *Citi FM*, the researcher observed that it was mostly the responsibility of the producer of either the news bulletin or show, to select and screen social media comments from audiences to be read on air by the news anchor or host. Furthermore, as a way of soliciting comments, news anchors and hosts of shows asked audiences to contribute to a particular topic during on-air live mentions.

Daily Graphic also integrated audience online comments into their print newspaper publications, referred to as "Facebook Wall". Facebook Wall was purposefully for allowing audiences to discuss a topic initiated by *Daily Graphic*. The researcher observed that a whole page in the Monday editions of the newspaper was dedicated to selected contributions from audiences on *Daily Graphic*'s Facebook page. An editor observed the following:

⁶ Dumsor is a coined expression from a local language in Ghana, Twi, to mean power outages.

It depends on what we are looking for. Now for example ...we have a platform, we have a *Facebook*, and we float a question and ask them to react to the questions that we have floated. Now they will send their views to us, and... we publish their views

Whether from the organisation's social media pages as was the case for all the selected newsrooms, or from a journalist's personal social media page as was particularly observed at *Citi FM*, comments from audiences had certain characteristics: Comments reflected audiences' perspectives on a subject matter, their diverse sentiments on an issue or situation, and their examples of situations, which contributed to the media organisation's discourses.

The researcher observed that, although comments from audiences and content from ordinary citizens were both solicited content by the selected newsrooms, they were treated differently by the news organisations. While the comments gave detail to an already existing story initiated by the media organisations, the content received from ordinary citizens was independently packaged before submitted to *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic*. Also, comments from audiences were gathered online, and published on both online and offline platforms of all the organisations, whereas content from citizen journalists were gathered traditionally by citizen journalists to be incorporated into *TV3*'s television and *Citi FM*'s radio broadcasts; and *Daily Graphic*'s print newspaper publications.

5.1.1.2 The mode of accessing UGC: Unsolicited content

Unsolicited content, which is content that is not purposefully invited from audiences, was received in two ways by *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic*. The researcher observed that, by engaging on social media, journalists in all selected newsrooms may either find such content themselves intentionally or unintentionally, or it may be sent to them by the generators of such content.

In all the selected newsrooms, some journalists stated that unsolicited user-generated content was a conscious and deliberate resolve to monitor social media and find newsworthy material. Others,

however, stated that receiving unsolicited UGC was not always based on specific intentions by the journalist to capture news but interactions on the platform could inadvertently lead to finding such content. Whether found consciously or unconsciously, journalists at *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* revealed that social media was a good platform for journalists to analyse the general sentiments of audiences on a trending issue and, based on that, develop stories for wider audience consumption on both their mainstream and online outlets.

Besides journalists finding unsolicited content themselves either on purpose or by chance, journalists also received unsolicited content personally from the content generators. Content generators either tagged journalists in posts or sent their content to journalists directly through private messages on social media, especially *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *WhatsApp*; or through emails. Particularly at *Citi FM*, journalists revealed that receiving unsolicited content from generators had been instrumental when the newsroom was limited in a story's coverage. An editor at *Citi FM* gave an example of this as follows:

When the gas explosion occurred, people in Legon⁷ posted videos, some sent videos to us. Even though we got to Legon after the explosion, we were able to get videos to show

Besides the mode of access, the sourcing of user-generated content also included the categorisation of sources of the content. As the researcher observed, all the newsrooms received user-generated content from people who most journalists categorized as either ordinary citizens or newsmakers.

⁷ Legon is a suburb of Accra located in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It is, however, more popularly used, to refer to the University of Ghana which is located in that suburb.

5.1.1.3 The source of UGC: Ordinary citizens

TV3, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* journalists referred to some sources of UGC as “ordinary citizens” who facilitated the newsgathering process by providing newsworthy content, whether solicited or unsolicited. The researcher observed that “ordinary citizens” was used as a generic term across all the three newsrooms, and included citizen journalists who sent in solicited video reports to *TV3*'s “MTN video report”, *Citi FM*'s “Citizen reporter” and *Daily Graphic*'s “Citizen iReporter”.

The researcher further observed in *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms that, as sources for unsolicited UGC, some of these ordinary citizens informed journalists about a situation either by tagging them in a post or sending them details of a story. Other ordinary citizens, however, posted information as regular social media updates about a situation that developed into a news story once processed by journalists. A *Citi FM* editor illustrated this with an example:

So there are times that... somebody is just walking somewhere, and just sees a broken-down traffic light, takes a picture and says, ‘Oh Ghana!’. The person thinks he or she is lamenting but for us, that is news. So we pick that and then we do a story from it. We may call the guys at Road Safety⁸ or whoever is in charge and ask, ‘Why is this traffic light broken down?’ So from that simple picture, we get a news story which is good for our audiences

Journalists interviewed at *Citi FM* stated that, most times, ordinary citizens helped provide information on breaking news. A reporter from *Citi FM* gave an example of this as follows:

⁸ Road Safety is the Ghana Road Safety Commission- a state-owned agency in charge of road safety education in Ghana

The atomic blast⁹, for example. If you lived in that area... University of Ghana¹⁰, Presec¹¹, Haatso¹², Atomic¹³, Kwabenya¹⁴, Agbogba¹⁵, even people within that range and motorists, everybody felt the impact. While it was happening, some people managed to have footage and they shared on social media. In those footages, you had audio sounds of people screaming, representing the pandemonium or the chaos... If you are telling a story, you are narrating that after the dust has settled. You probably will need some of these videos, audio clips and stuff like that to make your story complete, because a lot of the time, by the time you get there, the dust has probably settled. So depending on the impact of the thing... think about June 3¹⁶ for example, I'm not sure journalists had their cameras and their recorders on waiting for a disaster to happen but... the people may have filmed and... shared it on social media and you can verify clearly. I mean, you can incorporate some of these things

All the interviewed journalists in the selected newsrooms revealed that ordinary citizens were a good source for newsworthy content especially in times when needed the most, such as during breaking news.

5.1.1.4 The source of UGC: Newsmakers

Journalists at *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* stated that “newsmakers” as a source of UGC, were individuals who hold positions of authority, expertise or popularity in a certain field. Some journalists also referred to them as influential people who make trusted contributions to specialized areas such as International and Business news, that could in no way be accessed from the reports or submissions of ordinary citizens. Consequently, newsmakers include politicians, celebrities,

⁹ Atomic blast was a gas explosion that happened at the environs of a place called Atomic Junction, in the suburb of Legon.

¹⁰ University of Ghana is the first public university in Ghana situated at Legon. It is popularly called Legon.

¹¹ Presec is an acronym for Presbyterian Boys' Senior Secondary School. It is an only boy secondary school situated at Legon.

¹² Haatso is one of the newly developed cities in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

¹³ Atomic is a roundabout in the suburb of Legon. It is popularly called Atomic Junction.

¹⁴ Kwabenya is a district in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

¹⁵ Agbogba is one of the newly developed cities in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

¹⁶ June 3 is a day a lot of lives were lost and injured due to a flood and fire situation at a suburb called Circle in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

academics and professionals. Also, most of these newsmakers had verified accounts on social media.

Journalists at *TV3* and *Citi FM* particularly stated that, although newsmakers had always been sources of information for the media, these newsmakers had also become content generators through the use of their social media. They added that these newsmakers provided information that may have been previously inaccessible to journalists through conventional means of newsgathering. This, according to the journalists, is because information that would have been considered as classified was no longer bound by privacy laws once newsmakers published them on social media. As a result, journalists have found easier access to information by keenly following newsmakers' posts and interactions on social media that were otherwise, exclusive to these newsmakers in more private spaces.

An editor at *TV3* gave an example in the following narration:

I pick stories from... especially newsmakers. For someone who likes politics and business, there are important people who speak on matters that sometimes there may have not been a platform to say. Previously we'd have to go to them with a microphone and a pen for them to say something for us to go and report. These days, thanks to the power of social media, they feel something, they hear about something, they want to talk about something, they won't wait to call a journalist to report it... So I'm surfing *Facebook*, I see a comment from Ace Ankomah, he's a lawyer; he's not a political person but if you look at politics in our country and how it is practiced, law is a hugely important part of it. And because of Ace's work, he's done with OccupyGhana¹⁷ and being in the political space and running commentary on political stuff, he's one such person whom I respect. I pick a lot of things. So I see a post by Ace Ankomah, I don't just read it on face value. I see people like ...Omane Boamah, even though he was the Minister of State before, he hardly writes on social media but also puts on very important information there when he does. So for example, I saw something on his timeline two days before the incident happened. And when I saw it, I took a screenshot. I began to want to know more about it. He said, 'Renaming the University of Ghana, JB Danquah University will be the biggest mistake of Akufo-Addo'

¹⁷ Occupy Ghana is a social and political non-partisan pressure group that protests through internet activism, picketing and demonstrations for Ghana's economic and democratic growth.

two days before Akufo-Addo¹⁸ read this speech at the University of Ghana. ...That became a huge talking point. So for me, I read that and I immediately picked a news item in there

An editor at *Citi FM* affirmed the advantage of newsmakers being helpful sources of user generated content to journalists, in the following narration:

There are people we mark as newsmakers, so these people we follow them closely. So like a Franklin Cudjoe of Imani is a newsmaker, a Kofi Bentsil of Imani is a newsmaker, Ace Ankomah of Occupy Ghana is a newsmaker, Gabby Otchere- Darko is a newsmaker. You will not typically get them to do an interview for you about a certain topic or a trending issue but you would have them typically discuss those issues on their timelines. And so with people like that, you message them, 'Oh I saw you discussing this, I want to use it for a story'. They'll go like 'Yeah, go ahead'. So that's their views, we'll pick it.

The study found that, by extension, notable groups such as political parties, football clubs, associations, and organizations, were also considered as newsmakers. The researcher observed that the social media accounts of football groups were particularly helpful to the sports desks for both local and international stories in *TV3* and *Citi FM* newsrooms. There was a heavy reliance on official social media pages of clubs, leagues and sportspeople to generate leads for stories or receive details to stories.

A sports editor at *TV3* confirmed this observation in the following narration:

I will follow the official accounts of French Open... I'm able to look at their accounts and find a lot of statistics and the rest. So basically things that only enhances my work... *Twitter* is a magnificent news source. *Facebook* as well. But not in its entirety. It can be an independent resource on its own so the choices of who I follow sometimes gives me leads, to verify, sometimes to get resource persons. Because if I follow someone who understands tennis...and I'm covering the tournament, I can drop in an interview once in a while rather than just do a straight forward story that says somebody has lost and somebody has won.

¹⁸ Akufo-Addo is the 12th president of the Republic of Ghana. His full name is Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo.

The researcher observed a similar situation at the *Citi FM* newsroom, and a sports editor confirmed this observation in the narration as follows:

So I find Accra Hearts of Oak¹⁹ *Twitter* handle... For example, I see this story 'Hearts of Oak to hold Phar FC Rangers²⁰ in a friendly today'. So I see this and I go like 'Okay this is interesting', so there's a link, I'll click on the link, I'll read the story and say, 'Okay, what's the next thing I do?'

These two examples from the sports editors at *TV3* and *Citi FM* revealed how official pages of football clubs on social media were considered as newsmakers and consequently, sources of UGC for sports journalists. They further stated that, comparatively, a greater percentage of user-generated content from sports desks was sourced from newsmakers rather than from ordinary citizens.

Although journalists found content from newsmakers generally helpful, some journalists at *Citi FM* showed disapproval of the continuous publication of newsmakers' content. They stated that, in a lot of ways, news has always been dominated by newsmakers through traditional means of newsgathering such as press releases. Therefore, they suggested that more UGC should be accessed from ordinary citizens, who, hitherto, had little or no access to media spaces to make substantial contributions. Furthermore, journalists stated that, they had come to be mindful of the political agenda of some newsmakers with regards to the media; therefore, caution must be applied in selecting their content for publication. They added that, on average, most ordinary citizens rarely had any political agenda to promote except for their grievances and pleas for economic and social development. For these reasons, some journalists have emphasised the need for ordinary citizens to be the focal source for UGC, as opposed to newsmakers. A reporter from *Citi FM* explained in the following narration:

¹⁹ Accra Hearts of Oak is a local football club in Ghana.

²⁰ Phar FC Rangers is also a local football club in Ghana.

User-generated content is extremely useful. Many times for me, when the news is dominated by the voices of officialdom I get frustrated, I get angry. Officialdom, I'm talking about politicians, I'm talking about PR. These people are pushing an image and a reputation. The ultimate goal for a politician is to win an election, the ultimate goal of a PR company is to attract customers. And so, they may not present the entire truth. If you're speaking to the citizen on the street, the ordinary man, they are telling you their reality and they don't polish the truth, and for me, nothing could be better for a journalist than that

The study found that journalists with a contrary perspective on integrating newsmakers' content did not seek to discredit the use of newsmakers' content in newsrooms, as they found it generally helpful. They only cautioned on the prominence given to newsmakers' content as there was a possibility of some of these newsmakers to set an agenda. Therefore, newsrooms were required to establish measures in processing such content as they did for all content accessed.

5.1.2 The Genre of UGC

The researcher observed the types of stories that dominated solicited and unsolicited user-generated content. In all the selected newsrooms, solicited content that was sourced from citizen journalists was development-oriented stories such as the provision of infrastructure in a community. While, for unsolicited content, content that was accessed from ordinary citizens or newsmakers was mostly human interest stories. The researcher observed further that, for both development and human interest stories, the objective and orientation of the organisation, as well as the background and interests of journalists, influenced the choice for such stories.

5.1.2.1 Development-oriented stories

The researcher observed that the solicited content received for *TV3's* "MTN video report", *Citi FM's* "Citizen reporter" and *Daily Graphic's* "Citizen iReporter" were in the form of development-oriented stories. This genre of content was purposefully requested by all the newsrooms and, as such, was stated in their advertisements for such content from citizen journalists. Although not

explicitly stated in the advertisements as wanting development-oriented stories, the researcher observed that the wording used in the message for such advertisements was directed at encouraging people to send in development-oriented stories. Consequently, citizen journalists who complied with the guidelines stated in the advertisements contributed development-oriented stories based on the request from the newsrooms.

As revealed through the researcher's observations and interviews with journalists, development-oriented stories received were community-based and project-oriented. Such stories were mostly centered on the need for the repair, replacement or provision of infrastructure in a particular Ghanaian community.

An editor from *TV3* revealed that the purpose for receiving solicited content as development-oriented stories was to facilitate development communication through their “MTN video report”. He stated that the “MTN video report” did not only allow ordinary citizens to be a part of the newsgathering process, but also to be a part of the development of their community. He further explained in the following narration:

We have something like the MTN video report which is generated from the audience, and it is fed back to the audience... We are looking at a particular format that you should send a story. So usually you try to narrate what the problem is, and then we air and then authorities, those in authority will come and resolve it for you. Yes, that is the concept behind it... So there is something called development communication. So development communication is using the media or your communication tools to try to engender or promote development. So if we air these stories or videos that people send about development. At the end of the day, it will get to the doorsteps of those in power... It's purely development-oriented. We want people to, you know our lenses cannot catch every problem, so this is just an avenue for people to ...become citizen journalists and report their problems.

Similarly, journalists from *Citi FM* stated that development-oriented stories were a genre of stories that enabled citizens to participate in the newsgathering process and own their narratives concerning their communal problems. Some journalists revealed that their educational background in psychology and geography helped them to process solicited development-oriented stories for

audience consumption. A reporter from *Citi FM* expounded on this by stating further what constituted development stories from citizen journalists in the following narration:

Development stories, we're talking about infrastructure... we're talking about either the lack or the obstruction of...so if you are looking at development stories, you're looking at road networks, you're looking at drainages...you're looking at built environments and the interactions with human beings. You're looking at traffic, transportation, you're looking at the mode of transport itself... I studied Geography and Psychology, so a lot of what I do personally, I find the links between built environment and human behavior. So sanitation drains, roads, settlements. ...provision of utilities like water, electricity, the lack of them, such... stuff

Similarly, *Daily Graphic's* “Citizen iReporter” received development-oriented stories from citizen journalists as solicited content. Some journalists stated that, the newsroom had an already existing orientation to report on development-oriented stories; therefore, the soliciting of development-oriented stories was not new with their “Citizen iReporter”. They added that, the orientation of *Daily Graphic* rather influenced the purpose of soliciting for development stories from citizen journalists. An editor from *Daily Graphic* confirmed the main genre of solicited content to be development-oriented stories in the following narration:

We have introduced what we call the Citizen Report in... especially in print, where we ask people to send us their... content. As in videos, audio, pictures and all that. They normally send us things that are happening in their society that need to be corrected. For example, there's a road, it's in a bad state that needs to be corrected, there's probably an electric power pole that is falling off ... So the citizen journalism ...may feature in our operations

Journalists across all newsrooms confirmed that solicited content from citizen journalists were predominantly development-oriented stories.

The researcher observed that, all selected newsrooms did not have any genre-specific guidelines for solicited comments from audiences online. Audience comments reflected the type of story under discussion on *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic's* social media platforms.

5.1.2.2 Human interest stories

The researcher observed that another genre of stories that was prevalent in user-generated content was human interest stories. Journalists indicated that human interest stories were stories that essentially affected human lives, such as rape, poverty, deprivation, injustice, and inequality. All the selected newsrooms had varying reasons for accessing human interest stories.

Most reporters at *TV3* stated that human interest stories were the most important element they considered in identifying what unsolicited UGC needed to be covered. This was because a human interest element in an unsolicited UGC would mean that the story would, consequently, be an impactful story that would resonate with audiences. Take for example this narration from a reporter at *TV3*:

There needs to be some human interest in it... If its human interest, it means that there are individuals involved, there are people around who have been affected in one way or the other... Those are the basics of news... So if you know your stuff, you know what you are about, it shouldn't be difficult for you to identify what's newsworthy, what's not. A couple of times I've been here, colleagues have brought stories and I say 'And so what?' that's the thing. It should affect, you don't just want to see the story on TV. You see it on TV and you are affected by it, positively or negatively. That's how we get the news.

At *Citi FM*, journalists revealed that human interest stories were a genre of news that had great potential to escalate quickly and turn into big stories for *Citi FM* to set an agenda with. During the period of observation in the *Citi FM* newsroom, the researcher identified several instances when *Citi FM* integrated human interest stories, which later turned out to be major headlines and set the agenda for weeks. An example of such a story was one on a physically challenged woman who was not allowed to board an African World Airline plane to Kumasi by the airline. An editor at *Citi FM* explained how this story was developed:

So we did a story about the disabled lady... at Kotoka Airport²¹. I just saw a post on *Facebook* ...and I was like, 'Oh, this is a human interest story'... From our point, from our end, it was triggered by a post. Cause I saw her narrative, she narrated her experience. So we asked our reporter to follow up. So he went there and spoke to her. So we... gathered her voice on record. What triggered it was the post that I saw on *Facebook*.

At *Daily Graphic*, most journalists stated that what influenced them to incorporate human interest stories into their news item was their interests and their field in writing or news desk assignments. In view of this, journalists selected to cover more of human interest stories from the numerous unsolicited content received. A reporter at *Daily Graphic* explained this further:

One of the things that we've been trained to do, I think is identifying our stronghold... For me, I realise that I like human interest stories. Things about people's development, rape, fraud, prostitution -so these are the things that get my attention. So anytime I find myself on social media and I'm seeing stories of fraud boys, stories on prostitution, it gets my attention quickly and the first thing I ask myself 'What is the trend becoming now?'

Journalists across all newsrooms, however, mentioned that some human interest stories had the propensity to be accusatory, face-threatening, victimising and reputation damaging, and as a result, journalists exercised caution with their integration. An editor from *Daily Graphic* explained this as follows:

Content that is full of allegations.... Somebody sends us something that a man has beaten his wife to death because the woman refused him sex. Were you there? How do you verify that? I mean, these are human interest stuff, I mean, the woman refusing the man sex for which reason the man abuses her. Especially for our Saturday Mirror we can do that but we have to verify anyway and make sure that what the person is saying is true, otherwise, we will be in trouble.

²¹ Kotoka Airport, which is formally called Kotoka International Airport is the main international airport in Ghana, situated in the capital city, Accra.

The study found that, although user-generated content that were human interest stories had the tendency to be full of allegations, journalists applied the necessary gatekeeping measures (such as verification) in processing such content.

5.1.3 News values

The researcher observed that traditional news values such as relevance and accuracy were considered by all newsrooms at the initial stage of accessing both solicited and unsolicited content for selection and processing as news. Journalists from *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms stated that the value in a story helped journalists in determining its importance to audiences. Hence, before interrogating UGC, journalists would look to answer questions such as:

What is the news value? What is the news value in posting this picture? It might bring you clicks but is it useful? Has anybody learnt anything? Is it true? What additional value is someone gonna' learn something from it? –Reporter, *Citi FM*

Based on the interviews with journalists across all the selected newsrooms, the news values that journalists put a premium on were relevance, impact, believability, truth, accuracy, respect, objectivity, fairness, topical, timeliness, and public interest. A piece of user-generated content which was rich in any of these values passed for journalists to pursue such a story. The researcher observed that, some of these news values reflected in the taglines of the media organisations and served as a guide for content to be selected and processed by journalists to further reflect the identity of the organisation. This was particularly evident in *Citi FM's* tagline 'Relevant Radio... Always', and *Daily Graphic's* tagline 'Truth and Accuracy, every day'.

Some journalists at *Citi FM* stated that, although traditional news values were pivotal in assessing the importance of UGC to its audiences, the presentation of the story by newsrooms to audiences was also crucial. This, according to them, was because, the complexity of audiences necessitated

that, even though some UGC was rich in news values, journalists needed to be creative in the presentation of content for it to appeal to audiences. A *Citi FM* reporter stated this explicitly:

Citi FM operates with the principle that... not everything... interesting is in the interest of the public and not everything that is in the interest of the public is interesting... So it's your responsibility... as a journalist to make what is in the public interest, interesting for the public and decipher between whether or not what is exciting in the public is worth your platform. That's the difference

The study found that news values were key in the selection of any accessed UGC in *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms. Some *Citi FM* journalists were also particular about the presentation of the content to make the content appeal to audiences.

5. 2 Throughput Stage: Processing UGC

The throughput stage involved the processing of user-generated content into publishable news. This stage necessitated newsrooms to apply gatekeeping measures on all content that were accessed before publication. The researcher observed that the main processes *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms subjected UGC to were verification, moderation, training and message reconstruction.

5.2.1 Verification

The researcher observed that verification was the term *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* journalists used in referring to the newsroom activity which ensured that the content being processed as news, conformed to the news values of truth and accuracy. Journalists in all newsrooms emphasised that journalism was obligated to the truth and consequently, they were tasked with verification. For this reason, the verification of content was cardinal to the profession. As an editor at *Citi FM* stated:

You are liable for what you put on your website, you don't want to be sued for what is somebody's untruth.

As journalists across all newsrooms stated, professional standards of journalism required that journalists be guided by certain principles, and paramount to these principles was that all information must be checked, cross-checked and checked again before publication.

The researcher observed that, the first technique applied in the verification process was that journalists captured posts online- either with a computer or a smartphone. *Citi FM* referred to this activity as taking screenshots while *Daily Graphic* referred to it as screen printing. Journalists at *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* revealed that, particularly for unsolicited content from social media, once a story was found worthy of pursuit, a screenshot or screen print of the post was taken as proof. This was done in the likelihood that the generators of the content would retrieve it from online or deny posting such content. Journalists emphasized that this act of taking screenshots of posts as proof was in no way an unethical act or a breach of someone's privacy since any information found on social media, was made accessible to the public and not classified information. An editor at *Citi FM* stated this as follows:

Take screenshots of the post. So these are some of the things we do as evidence, you understand. Because there are people who post stuff and later come and deny it, so, first thing, and the guys here will tell you, the first thing I always do is to take screenshots...there's nothing private about it after they publish it.

Furthermore, journalists who were interested in using the exact post of audiences in their stories online went a step beyond screen printing to embed the codes of the posts directly from the generator's account unto the organisation's accounts. The embedding of screenprints was particularly helpful in the sense that, whatever subsequent changes the creator of the post made on the post, it automatically reflected on the site of the media organisation. An editor at *Daily Graphic* gave insight into this in the following narration:

Let's say we are talking about a celebrity John Dumelo²², he says something and it's topical, people are talking about it, yes, we will also write about it and say 'this is what John Dumelo has said', in order to be able to get our audience to see that yes that's exactly what John Dumelo said, we'll just go to his... wall and pick whatever he wrote and put it in our story and probably also screen print it as well and then put it there. So assuming if tomorrow he should go into it and then change it, that also becomes a different story, that maybe whatever he said initially he had gone to modify it. So sometimes we use all these technical stuff to be able to do these things

Journalists further stated that, in some cases, they relied on their journalistic instincts (which have been shaped by years of experience from the routine nature of the job) to authenticate the veracity of a story. For example, over time, most journalists had come to know the personality and mode of communication of some individuals in the public space. Consequently, journalists were instinctively able to identify what information such individuals were likely to give and what they would not, in verifying content purported to be from such individuals. Notwithstanding, journalists stated that the process of verifying UGC was done principally by traditional means of confirming and fact-checking from content generators and other sources, by journalists going on the location of the incident, and with the help of some software programmes such as *Adobe PhotoShop*.

5.2.1.1 Verifying from generators of the content

The researcher observed that audiences who sent content to the selected newsrooms as solicited content, or those from whom unsolicited content was received by journalists were the primary persons contacted to verify the information in the material in all the selected newsrooms. Audiences who generated content were contacted to confirm the authenticity of the content, and specifically for unsolicited content, to get approval for its usage and to get additional information to the original content accessed.

²² John Dumelo is a Ghanaian actor, agriculturist, entrepreneur and an aspiring parliamentarian.

For solicited content, citizen journalists were contacted directly through messages or calls. It is for this ease in communication that *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* revealed the key advantage of receiving their solicited content from citizen journalists through *WhatsApp*. This was because, through *WhatsApp*, the phone number of the content generator was easily retrieved to send instant messages or place calls to hasten the process of verification.

For unsolicited content, particularly content from ordinary citizens, journalists went through a process of contacting the generator of the content to receive consent to use their content. This process was usually initiated with a private message to the contributor's social media account, where the content was found by the journalist. Once permission was given by the generator of the content for its usage, journalists proceeded with asking for the phone number of the content generator. Finally, journalists arranged to meet with the content generator face to face for an interview if possible, not only to fact check but to gather information not otherwise stated in the contributor's initial post. Journalists across the three newsrooms underlined the difficulty in gaining consent from ordinary citizens, as the primary means of reaching these citizens (example private social media messaging) were often time-consuming and largely ineffective.

Besides the delay in reaching some ordinary citizens on social media, some journalists at *Citi FM* stated that the skepticism over the online content of some ordinary citizens dissuaded some journalists from contacting them. Some journalists stated that verifying from these ordinary citizens did not necessarily confirm the truth and accuracy of the content as some generated and circulated content and unconfirmed rumours for popularity, to gain recognition for going viral, and in extreme cases, cause panic online.

Journalists at *Daily Graphic* also expressed another difficulty with contacting the generators of unsolicited content before pursuing a newsworthy story. Firstly, the unwillingness of some ordinary citizens to provide additional information or details to their content deterred journalists.

Some content generators were unwilling to interact with journalists for reasons such as not wanting to be facially or audibly recognised through interviews, or have their names appearing in mainstream media. Other content generators had a nonchalant approach to the journalists pursuing their content. A reporter from *Daily Graphic* gave an example in the following narration:

Some people are scared of just the fact that journalists are coming. The word journalist can even scare people, they don't want to talk, they say 'So... I'm doing my own thing, I just put it on social media, I'm not willing to pursue anything'. And with some people, we tell them 'look if you don't get this thing done, it's gonna persist'. Other people are willing to take it 'oh come, I will give you everything you need' They will even introduce you to other people so some open up, others close the door. That doesn't stop us from pursuing a story. Once we see that we move to that community and we follow that up.

The study found that, the challenges with contacting ordinary citizens who were content generators, deterred some journalists from primarily contacting them to verify their content. As a result, journalists resorted to other means of verifying their content, such as going on the location of the story themselves if possible, or verifying from other sources.

The researcher further observed that the prominence attributed to newsmakers required that *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms had established connections with many members of that category of content generators. All three newsrooms had the telephone numbers of newsmakers in their contact database, which made it easier and faster to verify content from the newsmakers. Although some newsmakers had verified accounts on social media, especially *Twitter*, most journalists stated that there was still the need to call them and verify posts decided to be newsworthy. This, according to the journalists, was because people often hacked into newsmakers' social media accounts or created parody accounts to confuse or deceive audiences.

5.2.1.2 Verifying from multiple sources

The researcher observed that all selected newsrooms verified and confirmed user-generated content from multiple sources to make the story more credible. Other sources such as subject

matter experts and people implicated in a story were contacted to verify the truth in a user-generated content. Subject matter experts included professionals, traditional leaders, duty bearers and regulatory bodies in Ghana. Depending on the story, other sources were also contacted to verify content, and these included eyewitnesses, relatives of the victims in a story, other journalists in the newsroom, and media practitioners from other media organisations. The researcher further observed that, as some sources such as subject matter experts were considered as newsmakers, their influential status required newsrooms to have their phone numbers in their contact database, which facilitated the process of verification. These sources were also contacted through phone calls or met face to face for interviews when necessary.

At *TV3*, the researcher observed that, other sources contacted by journalists did not only confirm the facts in a user-generated content. The other sources also provided background, detail and a more potent account to the story. An editor from *TV3* gave an example in the following narration:

One of the key things we do as a media house is to also get in touch with people in authority. So whenever there is an issue with armed robbery... and we see it on social media, we have to first of all call the police -those who have jurisdiction over where the thing happened- and confirm from them whether they have a reported case like that based on that. So ...we try to use multiple sources to confirm information on social media before we go ahead with it. And as I said, it is Check, cross check and check again.

The researcher observed that some of *Citi FM*'s organisational standards were influenced by the culture of the Ghanaian society. For example, *Citi FM* did not publish UGC that gave the newsroom a lead on a death story, without first confirming from a family member of the deceased.

An editor gave an example as follows:

A typical example is Komla Dumor²³ when he died. We didn't do the story immediately not because we didn't know that he had died. We had the story but the father had not

²³ Komla Dumor was a Ghanaian journalist who worked for BBC World News. He died on January 2012.

received a report yet so we waited till it was confirmed. A family member spoke, so we used a family member's angle confirming the news to *Citi FM*

The researcher also observed that journalists verifying from multiple sources was one major distinction between user-generated content and processed news stories by all the selected newsrooms. According to journalists, they were trained to consult multiple sources for news whereas content generated by users of social media had just one angle to the story from either the content generator or the person in the story. Journalists added that confirming from multiple sources, and adding their voices to the story, made a complete news package. Journalists at *Daily Graphic* particularly stated that a story was not a good story if it was one-sided, therefore, the more sources in a story, the more credible a story was. An editor at *Daily Graphic* stated this expressly as follows:

A well-written story should have all the ingredients. There should be sources, it should have multiple sources. For example, if there is an accident happening and a citizen journalist is sending you something, we don't run with only that. There should be the police angle confirming, there should probably be a reporter going to the scene, and then also describing... Such a story, have multiple sources, it makes it very credible. It tells you this is the truth, something is happening.

The researcher observed at *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms that, besides confirming and providing additional details to UGC, verifying from multiple sources also helped journalists to control misinformation such as rumours and outdated content online. An editor at *Daily Graphic* gave an example of this in the following narration:

If it is a rumour, we won't publish it. I'll give you an example, recently it was on social media that a young millionaire... has been arrested for money laundering...Ibra²⁴...It was a story. We went to Conference, we mentioned it and because of the traffic on social media, we were interested in it. By then this station ...had broadcast the guy with a nice expensive car that the guy uses. And suddenly there was going to be a big story for us and we checked from police, we checked from CID, we checked from the police station where we believed

²⁴ Ibra is a young Ghanaian man alleged to have been arrested for engaging in money laundering during the period of study

he could have been arrested you know, and we didn't get any information so we dropped it... Around 8 o'clock the same day, then we had information that it was not true

The study found that, similar to some content generators, some sources refrained from speaking to journalists after having been contacted to confirm the veracity of a story or to give additional details. For example, journalists said that there were times when some policemen were not forthcoming with confirming an incident due to security reasons. Some sources also refrained chiefly because of fears relating to potential damage to their reputations. An editor at *Citi FM* gave an example as follows:

The lady who wrote the post on *Facebook* about her experience at the airport. Yes, how did we verify? ...you call AWA²⁵, and they say 'oh something like that happened, but we don't want to respond to it'. So they've confirmed that the thing happened, you understand what I'm saying, but they won't speak to it, so they did not speak to it"

Some journalists at *Citi FM* added that persons who were implicated in a UGC and refrained from being sources from whom journalists could verify had a lot of power in unconsciously dictating whether a story would be pursued or rejected. According to the journalists, this was because, a story which was devoid of the account of the persons implicated could be allegations, and this had legal implications for the media organization. A reporter at *Citi FM* gave an example in the following narration:

It was a hospital this person had attended and she vented her spleen...on social media.... I ...wrote to her and told her I thought it was a great story, interacted with her and got all of the information...: She went to the hospital and the doctor was charging 200 cedis for what she thought wasn't that much. And the doctors, according to her, were ...verbally abusive to her, and she eventually left angry... I come back to the newsroom and my editors are like 'Well...Great story but you need to get the side of the hospital'. Because the hospital again refused to speak to us. The danger with that is that it's in the interest of the hospital to keep quiet... They know that if they don't speak to you, you are not going to air the story. And the story is not a good one for their reputation or their image, they are certainly not going to speak to you. So, I disagreed with my editors, but I understood them to the point because these entities could also sue your company because then you're not there. It's just a report from somebody... If you need to verify from the accuser, and the accuser restrains himself from speaking to you to ...confirm or deny, it makes the story a bit light...

²⁵ AWA is an acronym for Africa World Airlines

This is just somebody ranting and you may never know... What's your evidence? If they sue you, what are you gonna use as proof?

The study found that there were occasions where the story in the user-generated content was situated out of Ghana. For such situations, journalists across the three newsrooms revealed that they relied on trusted sources who were nearby or present in that location, to confirm the situation and provide additional details where possible. An editor of *TV3* gave an example of this situation as follows:

I'll give you an example of what happened in ...Libya where we were told that some Ghanaians were being arrested and were being molested... That is, those who travelled to Libya. So first of all, we get in touch with the Foreign Affairs ministry, ask them whether they know about it, then we take it from there. We as a media house too, we do have foreign contacts. So we do have...currently, we have correspondents in Sierra Leone and we have some in Nigeria and then in Kenya. So when some of these things happen, we can easily go to Kenya and speak to our correspondent there who we can vouch for that the information he will give to us is right or authentic.

For *Citi FM*, their trusted sources for verifying user-generated content that was situated out of Ghana were credible news portals and media practitioners from other media houses. A reporter from *Citi FM* gave an account of how UGC was verified in the following narration:

We hardly get content or news from outside, but even if it's happening we will easily resort to the *BBC*'s and *CNN*'s to quickly verify. However, if it's happening, we have some of our staff, who are on study leave, so if they are closer to the location we are able to tell them that okay, can you work it out for us? Check if it's true. For instance, Congo has an outbreak of Ebola now, we do not have a correspondent there but there are people here who have friends or who have liaised with other people from other countries so with outside the country for instance, if we are not sure, what we do is to call our friend journalists who are in the country to work it out for us. Sierra Leone recently had elections, even before that when they had, there was a mudslide, a lot of people lost their lives, we relied on the local journalists there to give us the information. So that's what we do

At *Citi FM*, some journalists stated that newsroom staff were also sources journalists verified content from. Journalists contacted other newsroom staff not to add their voices to a story but to rely on their diverse expertise in verifying content. For example, some journalists stated that they had no experience in verifying doctored photos and, as such, they relied on other experts in

videography and photography in the newsrooms for confirmation. It is for this reason that they emphasised that, due to the complexities of content online, a newsroom should include photo editors, video editors and programmers beside reporters and editors to work together in verifying UGC.

5.2.1.3 Verifying from reporters on the location of the incident

The study found that another way *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* verified user-generated content was by either deploying journalists to confirm what it is said or through correspondents on location to confirm and have a complete analysis of the situation, depending on the location of the story.

The researcher observed that *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* sent reporters from the newsroom to the location of a user-generated content when it was relatively close to the newsroom. As all newsrooms under study were situated in Accra, reporters in the newsrooms were sent to confirm and gather additional details of the story in and around Accra. Reporters who were sent on such assignments would go with the camera crew to hold interviews and record actualities such as video, sound bites and photos for the stories, to add to what was accessed through the UGC. An editor at *TV3* revealed one of such instances as follows:

So with a situation like a flood, I remember somewhere last year, we had rain... and people started splashing in pictures of old floods within the media space or within the social media platforms. Some said it was Kaneshie²⁶ and all that but Kaneshie had undergone some renovation of some sort. We know that even though they were still experiencing some form of flooding, it wasn't as what we saw. So what we do is quickly send our reporters there, for them to confirm, if that is the situation, we have to shoot it, because you can't depend on the small footage that you are getting from social media perhaps you need to narrate the story more. Maybe what is on social media won't give you the in-depth information you need to come out with a full story. So what we do is that we quickly have to send a team there to verify.

²⁶ Kaneshie is a suburb of Accra in the Greater Accra Region in Ghana.

At *Citi FM*, journalists stated that, by physically going on location to verify UGC, it was not always the case that they got other angles to the story but there were times that they confirmed that the story was misinformation, false or outdated content. A reporter from *Citi FM* gave an account of such an experience:

I remember there was a story on social media that said that there was a gas explosion on the Tema motorway and that people should be careful when using it. And there was also an explosion at Dzorwulu²⁷. We later rushed to the scene and realised nothing like that had happened... Sometimes the person puts it there, 'Oh there is an accident... this thing is happening here, there is chaos here', you can't get through to the person, you need to send someone to verify if this is true or not

At *Daily Graphic*, some journalists revealed that the poor quality or unethical versions of some of the photo and video formats of UGC also necessitated that newsrooms created additional ones if possible. Given such instances, journalists were deployed to go on scene to record new actualities for the story. A reporter from *Daily Graphic* gave an example of this in the following narration:

I remember there was the Madina market, the pavement, there used to be some rubbish, somebody sent it, I think he was in a moving car or something, so we also sent our photographer there to actually capture it, and we got it as it was, so you can see that we did it more professionally, but it was the same thing that the citizen reporter sent to us, you understand. So sometimes where we have to do a follow-up, we follow up and own it

The study found that the different reasons which were given by *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* journalists revealed how reporters from these newsrooms were critical in confirming, gathering additional details, providing more professional visuals and in identifying untrue UGC by being physically present on the scene to verify the story. Although being physically present on location was a great advantage for all journalists to verify content, some journalists, acknowledged that the

²⁷ Dzorwulu is a residential area in Accra

nature of some stories was fleeting and rendered their move there useless, as the said event would be over by the time the team finally got on scene.

The researcher observed that, particularly for stories that were situated outside the Greater Accra Region, which is where *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* were located, these newsrooms sent their regional correspondents, or in some situations their stringers to the location of the story to confirm and cover the story. All the newsrooms under study indicated that they had regional correspondents in all the regions in Ghana. Each newsroom had on average, one or two correspondents in each region in Ghana, at the time of the study.

5.2.1.4 Verifying with accessible software

The study found that, besides journalists contacting content generators or multiple sources and going on location to verify information in UGC, a few journalists also verified information with the aid of some accessible software. A number of journalists revealed that they were unaware of the existence of appropriate and specific software tools to engage in a detailed verification process online. Others, however, stated that they were aware of the existence of verification software but had no access to it for newsroom operations, due to financial constraints. Nonetheless, a few journalists in all the selected newsrooms employed the most affordable and accessible software programmes to verify some content online, as they acknowledged its usefulness especially in verifying user-generated content. All the newsrooms had different ways of verifying content online.

The researcher observed how *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* verified texts. Journalists at *Citi FM* stated that texts online were verified with *Grammarly*. According to the journalists interviewed, *Grammarly* was the most accessible and relatively affordable software programme employed by

journalists to enable them check posts online, mainly for plagiarism. A reporter from *Citi FM* explained this as follows:

When it comes to text in terms of plagiarism, we have *Grammarly*. So when I do my stories, I have *Grammarly*, I check for grammar and it will also tell me if I'm plagiarizing someone's words...as for text, we can get software, *Grammarly* is good

The researcher observed that at *Daily Graphic*, *Google* was employed mainly to verify texts for plagiarism. The researcher observed how a journalist at *Daily Graphic* used *Google* to check for plagiarism. A highlighted text entered into *Google* did not produce the needed results of plagiarism. Therefore, the technique applied by the journalist, was to put the highlighted text in quotes which provided all references online of that particular text thereby verifying for plagiarism.

The researcher further observed that, at *Citi FM* in particular, a few journalists employed *Google Maps* to reveal the location of a post. This was a helpful tool in verifying the location of events and incidents mentioned in a user-generated content. Particularly for fleeting stories such as traffic situations *Google Maps* was used to verify the situation first before other sources were contacted or the journalists went on location to verify. However, the main disadvantage with *Google Maps* for journalists was that in cases where content generators failed to provide the location of the post or the situation, it was difficult to verify with *Google Maps*. *GeoTweet*, which is specifically for *Twitter*, was another software employed by journalists at *Citi FM* to ascertain the unfolding of events based on location. A reporter at *Citi FM* confirmed how *Google Maps* and *GeoTweet* were generally helpful tools for journalists in verifying the location of content online as follows:

Sometimes you use *Google Maps*, for example, to take it to the places and you get an aerial view and it can give you live presentations of what is going on. There is a thing they call *GeoTweet*... so that you can know what is happening at what time, in what space, what geographical area, so there are tools that you can employ

The study found that, particularly for *Daily Graphic*, the online team had access to *Adobe Photoshop* and editing software to verify doctored photos. Nonetheless, the researcher observed

how other journalists engaged in some techniques using software programmes to determine the authenticity of photos and videos. Especially for photos and videos, the metadata (the properties that described and provided information on a photo), revealed the details of a photo. Therefore, with that information, journalists were easily able to tell the accuracy of a photo or video. For instance, the metadata revealed the time a photo was taken which would help journalists in verifying how outdated a photo was to be resurfacing on the internet. The metadata would also show the original location of the photo which would reveal if the location being purported with the story of the photo was accurate or not. It would also reveal the name of the owner of the camera which could be verified with the originator of the post. Furthermore, a doctored photo could also be indicated based on the properties of the photo the metadata revealed. An editor at *Daily Graphic* explained this in the following narration:

If we are able to have the soft copy, sometimes we will look at... what we call the metadata... Every digital file has metadata. The software that created it, the date and time that it was created, who created it and all that. They all come as part of any digital file, so if you use it... for some time, even if I see a picture and I want to know if it is one of my people who took it, I can go into the system and check the metadata, so that I will be able to know this is Mr. A's picture, this is Mr. B's picture. Cause it will tell me even the camera model that was used to take the picture, the type of lens so if... assuming you go out and you send me pictures, and they are not your pictures, when I take the pictures, I will be able to go into the system and I will know that you are using a canon, this camera or this picture was taken with Nikon camera, so whose are these?... Or you are using a canon, this one too was taken with a Canon, but which model of Canon, everything will be there for you to know that this camera or this... the date it was taken, the time it was taken, where and all that. They are all there. So if it is not photoshopped, you will know. But if it also touched or let's say edited, then you will see the play for editing software, and you will see that something has been touched, you will know the software that was used on it.

As most journalists from *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* were either not knowledgeable of or did not have the appropriate software tools to engage in the verification of inaccurate and doctored content online, they improvised by employing some strategies and techniques from the readily accessible software programmes for such purposes. The researcher further observed that, apart from these accessible and affordable software programmes used to verify texts and visuals online,

none helped journalists in verifying audio content online in all selected newsrooms. Therefore, in verifying audio content, most journalists stated that they relied on their instincts and experience with determining true or false content to ascertain the accuracy or inaccuracy of an audio content online. This was narrated by an editor at *TV3* as follows:

UniBank²⁸ announced that they had taken over ADB²⁹ ... Then there was a supposed voice of the Governor of the Bank of Ghana saying they haven't sanctioned anything... When UniBank announced I said, 'No, this is not right'... So usually the regulator in giving the approval would either issue a statement, put something out there before the parties will even begin to speak to it. So I was already suspicious of the regulation UniBank put out. So when I heard that voice... it was on *WhatsApp*, even though I had not done any confirmation, I was inclined to believe it was true purely because of my understanding of how these things work that a Regulator will always... come out... Even though I couldn't confirm the voice of the Governor at the time, I was inclined to believe it was true

The study found that the newsrooms under study verified with accessible and convenient software. *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* verified text online with *Grammarly* and *Google*, respectively, for plagiarism. *Citi FM* also verified the location of posts with *Google Maps* and *GeoTweet*. At *Daily Graphic*, journalists revealed using *Adobe PhotoShop* for verifying doctored and confirming the authenticity of photos from the metadata of the photo. According to journalists in all the selected newsrooms, there was not a heavy reliance on the use of these easily accessible software programmes in their daily newsroom activities for verification but they were employed especially in crucial times of a glaring mistrust with UGC. However, the study found that the selected newsrooms did not engage with advanced software and technology to verify the complexities associated with user-generated content.

²⁸ UniBank is a private-owned bank in Ghana at the time of the study

²⁹ ADB is an acronym for Agricultural Development Bank, a state-owned bank in Ghana

5.2.2 Training of citizen journalists

The study found that training of citizen journalists was another process employed specifically by *TV3* and *Citi FM* newsrooms in gatekeeping user-generated content. Training was either official or unofficial by these newsrooms.

TV3 journalists provided unofficial training to citizen journalists that sent content to *TV3*'s "MTN video report". This training focused on the technical aspects of news reporting such as the production of quality videos. Journalists further stated that it was an unofficial form of training because they instructed citizen journalists occasionally on the technical approaches in news reporting such as camera positioning and brightness. A reporter at *TV3* stated this as follows:

They are citizen journalists, they are not trained journalists, so we can't have... correct visuals and videography and photography and all that... There are times you can direct the person that 'Oh you could have shot it this way' and they go back and they correct it

Citi FM also provided official training to citizen journalists that contributed to their "Citizen reporter". *Citi FM* trained citizen journalists, which primarily covered ethical approaches and standards, such as accuracy in election reporting. The training was held as a workshop for three months in 2016, before the parliamentary and presidential elections, for an average of 30 citizen journalists from all the regions in Ghana. Thus, official and unofficial training, albeit not as regular, was another process by which *TV3* and *Citi FM* provided journalistic expertise to citizen journalists to help them gather and report quality and credible content for dissemination by these newsrooms.

5.2.3 Moderation

Moderation was a newsroom activity that concerned how online editors monitored audience comments which did not reflect editorial standards. All online editors at *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* revealed that they moderated online comments from audiences across their organisation's websites and social media handles. The researcher observed that the online editors and the assistant

online editors in all the selected newsrooms were responsible for moderating comments by deleting, hiding or blocking them on the organisations' social media platforms and websites. Additionally, reporters who were responsible for managing the organisation's social media pages also had oversight over audience comments. Newsrooms synchronised their social media accounts with their websites such that comments made underneath the social media posts of headlines, were automatically reflected on the websites. The synchronisation of online platforms made control of comments easier for journalists.

As the study found, moderation was mostly used for the control of offensive language in the form of insults and swear words on the social media platforms of these news organisations. Journalists stated that the algorithm of *Facebook* also facilitated moderation. This is because *Facebook* provided a "Keyword Moderation" and "Profanity Filter and Blocklist" algorithm which restricted and automatically deleted the use of some abusive words when those specific words were keyed into the algorithm by journalists. It also had the option for moderators to hide, delete or block comments from other users, as was evident in this narration by an online editor at *Daily Graphic*:

We now allow people to use social media to comment and it gets reflected on our website. So for example, on *Facebook*, you see an article, you can easily comment... and it gets shown on the website and it gets shown on *Facebook* as well... That's the work of the editors, by monitoring what is happening. We don't do it electronically but when we put up a story, that is also why we are using *Facebook*. For example, *Facebook* has used its algorithm such that, if you use foul language, insulting language, the robot will automatically delete such comments. We also do monitor and check the comments. If there is a comment and it is in bad taste, we just take them off... But if you report directly to us, we also take it off. What we are doing now, we used to allow people to comment directly on our system but because we don't have the bot to do that and ...we cannot also manually be monitoring all the stuff all the time, *Facebook* has got it, why not"

Particularly at *Citi FM*, the researcher observed that some journalists were cautious with deleting every inappropriate user comment. They stated that some comments were not explicitly abusive but they had a derogatory tone. They added that some audiences complained that the deletion of their arguments or opinions on a subject matter impeded their freedom of speech and was

suggestive of censorship. A reporter who was responsible for *Citi FM* 's social media pages gave an example of this in the following narration:

I don't do much regulation cause that will mean blocking anyone who sends me anything that seems to raise an offensive but intellectual argument, and that will also be cumbersome cause in a day I can post more than 25 stories and if one story gathers over a hundred comments, I have to go through all of that check, which restricts people in their comments. We are a media house, we want more engagement with people that way, ... So Hajia Fati³⁰ slaps someone and we're talking about it, and the government comes to say, we don't like what you're talking about, so don't talk about it, now we will scream censorship. If someone puts on that page what we don't have direct control over and we try to stop them, that one too will be a similar thing-censorship on audiences

All online editors in the selected newsrooms stated that they moderated comments on their *Facebook* pages which subsequently reflected on their websites, to reduce inappropriate comments.

5.2.4 Message Reconstruction

The process of gatekeeping also required that newsrooms transform user-generated content to suit professional and organisational standards in the way the messages were crafted and presented to the public. The reconstruction of messages was a newsroom activity which indicated that content was selected to be published and required modification in the construction of the message to reflect editorial standards. Journalists, therefore, carefully transformed UGC formats of texts and visuals for mainstream media consumption.

Journalists stated that, particularly for solicited content in the form of audience comments online, messages needed reconstruction if they were to be integrated into mainstream outlets. Journalists

³⁰ Hajia Fati is the name of a female supporter of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which is the incumbent political party in Ghana. She made the news during the period of study by slapping a reporter who she purports to have mistaken for an onion seller.

added that some audience comments were prone to attract legal pitfalls for newsrooms if the messages were not reconstructed.

The study found that *TV3* had encountered one such legal pitfall when it integrated a user comment in their midday news bulletin in February 2018. In January 2018, Mr. Martin Amidu was announced to have been be nominated Special Prosecutor by the President of Ghana, Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo. Prior to his nomination, Mr. Amidu had served as an Attorney-General and presided over a judgment debt case involving Ghanaian businessman, Mr. Agbesi Woyome. When Mr. Amidu's nomination was announced, some citizens took to social media to discuss the implications Mr. Amidu's responsibility as Special Prosecutor may have on Mr. Woyome. One of these audience comments stated that Mr. Woyome had fainted and was on admission at Sogakofe Government Hospital after hearing the announcement of Mr. Amidu's nomination. *TV3* integrated this comment in a midday news bulletin and this story trended for some weeks. However, Mr. Woyome's aide, Mr. Reginald Dogbey, denied the reports of Mr. Woyome's fainting or being hospitalised, cited *TV3* as starting the false reports and demanded an unqualified apology from the television station. *TV3* later addressed the situation by offering Mr. Woyome a chance to rebut through a rejoinder on their midday news bulletin.

Due to such possible pitfalls, *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* applied some techniques to audience comments that were selected for mainstream publications. Some techniques the newsrooms observed used in message reconstruction were attributions, issuing of disclaimers and caveats in the presentation of such solicited content for on-air or for the papers. For example, the researcher observed that producers of *TV3* and *Citi FM* morning flagship breakfast shows and news bulletins were mostly responsible for the selection of audience comments for hosts and news anchors. News anchors and hosts who would subsequently precede audience comments with

attributions such as “According to ...”, or they would issue caveats such as “These comments are from our audiences and do not reflect the views of the organization in any way”.

Attributions and issuing of caveats were not only used for audience comments but for other user-generated content that were undergoing verification. An example of this was stories that were considered as breaking news yet newsrooms were still in the process of verifying. Journalists stated that the interest of the public for such stories compelled media organizations to publish the content but with attributions and caveats. A mainstream editor from *TV3* attested to this as follows:

So there are situations that you know you are not going to get the picture or visuals by the time you get there, you try and put it out with a caveat, that ‘unconfirmed...’ But if the story matches with the picture we are picking from the internet, then yes, it means that we will use it, yeah. But most of the time, you also have to give credit to whoever you are picking the information from so even if it is from a particular umm *Facebook* handle, and the information has been confirmed by people in authority but this is the only video available, we use it. We use it, and then credit whoever put it out there. Most of the time these are picture put out by eyewitnesses, because they are there, they have first-hand information

Similarly, *Daily Graphic's* page titled “*Facebook* Wall” integrated audience comments from the organization's *Facebook* page. The researcher observed that a team headed by the Features Editor carefully selected *Facebook* comments and reconstructed the messages to reflect editorial standards. The team selected constructive criticisms and attributed the users, for publication in the newspaper, and outrightly rejected all slanderous comments against individuals.

The study discovered that besides textual content, visual content was also constructed to avoid legal implications. During the period of study, *Daily Graphic* had reformulated an organisational policy on the presentation of visual content. The policy stated that the mugshots of crime suspects be substituted with illustrations and cartoons of the suspects. Journalists did this to avoid instances where suspects were later proven innocent and decided on suing *Daily Graphic*.

The study found that all the selected newsrooms reconstructed textual content in the form of audience comments online and UGC which were still in the process of verification to reflect

editorial standards. Reconstruction used techniques in diction such as attribution and issuing of caveats. Particularly at *Daily Graphic*, pictorial content of the mugshot of crime suspects was carefully reconstructed as cartoons.

5.3 Output stage: Publishing UGC

The output stage involved the options media organisations had with publishing content -either online or on traditional media. The study found that all selected newsrooms published user-generated content on both their online and mainstream outlets, which was referred to by journalists as a converged newsroom or an integrated framework. Journalists stated that content was published on both outlets because their audiences had varying media preferences. While some audiences preferred to consume news from mainstream media, others preferred to consume news from websites or social media pages.

The researcher observed particularly at *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* that, journalists were faced with editorial decisions on which outlet to publish some news stories. For example, the boundary of radio's time and space disallowed a lot more detail on an intriguing story. The story could, however, be detailed on an online website. This would, therefore, necessitate, for example, *Citi FM* to air one version and put a longer version online. An editor at *Citi FM* gave an example as follows:

The main radio story is ...30 minutes but each story is like 2 minutes. There isn't a lot to do in two minutes but the online story will give you background, will give you some context and history. So a story is never done in isolation. There will always be links in a story to tell you that this has happened before, something close to this has happened or here's another perspective

Similarly, limitations in daily newspaper production at dawn did not cater to an immediate publication of stories that were breaking during the day. In such situations, *Daily Graphic* resorted to publishing an online version, and subsequently published the story in the papers the day after,

with updated details. Also, the fleeting nature of some stories was suited for *Daily Graphic's* online media and not for their newspaper publications. An editor of *Daily Graphic* gave an example of this in the following narration:

Somebody sends you... a picture of the burst pipe, water gushing out in the morning. If it is online, maybe immediately you can post it. But with the newspaper, the earliest will be the next morning... Maybe the thing happened at eight in the morning, by the time it's 2, 3 pm or even later, it could be fixed but the newspaper is coming out the next morning. So if you are not careful, the next paper will have it that 'This thing has happened and there is a broken pipe'. Meanwhile, in the course of the day, the situation has been fixed, the problem has been solved

The researcher found that the newsrooms under study did not always publish news stories on both online and traditional media proportionally. Stories that were selected to be aired or published in *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic's* mainstream media were equally published on their online media platforms. However, not all UGC that was published on their online media platforms made it into their mainstream media. Journalists across all the newsrooms under study stated that the decision of publishing some content online and not on their mainstream media was because some stories were of interest to social media audiences. Therefore, media organisations published such stories only on their social media and not on mainstream media.

5.4 Feedback

Journalists stated that feedback was a means by which the newsrooms assessed the quality of news production. In all the selected newsrooms, the researcher observed that feedback was received from the news team and analysed during the post-production process. The activity of analysing feedback which newsrooms received on news production was referred to as news analysis by *TV3* and *Citi FM* journalists.

By sitting in the meetings, the researcher observed how *TV3* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms organised their midday news analysis. During the period of study, the analysis started at 12.30pm

after midday news and was moderated by an editor. The agenda of the news analysis mostly focused on the necessary changes which needed to be effected in the subsequent news production.

An editor from Citi FM gave an example of the importance of feedback as follows:

If my reporters do a story and the story is aired, if I listen, I can tell... I have my own way of measuring. For example, I look at how the story is written. How does it read? If it reads well, okay. If it doesn't read well, then we have a problem. Is the voice editing good? What's the quality of the voice? What's the relevance of the story? Why this story? Why do you want somebody to listen to this? Sometimes the feedback will come from outside, a listener, or maybe somebody who is higher up like the General News Editor ...or the MD. They'll say 'I heard this story, it's a nonsense story, why did you guys do it?'

At *Daily Graphic*, feedback was discussed during editorial meetings at 1 p.m. Journalists referred to this meeting as "Conference". "Conference" was moderated by the Acting Editor and attended by the editorial team. Journalists revealed that feedback had been instrumental in helping *Daily Graphic* to review and revise organisational policies to reflect on the content published. According to these journalists, a recent example was *Daily Graphic's* new policy of cartooning the mugshot of crime suspects. A reporter gave an example of this as follows:

So our policy has evolved based on our experience along the line. We don't use pictures because of legal issues. Because people take us on and because of the feedback we receive. There may be written down guidelines or policies, but day to day activities, day to day experiences can also guide you as to whether to do this or not. Just recently...the Acting MD³¹ came in and said that there are too many court cases and suits against us so we should be careful and insisted that we should not do some stories

The study found that feedback from audiences and newsroom team members was crucial for *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic*. Feedback helped not only in aligning with the considerations of audiences but also in further projecting the standards of the organisations.

³¹ Abbreviation for Managing Director.

5.5 Selection and rejection of UGC

Many of the journalists in all the selected newsrooms gave insight into some reasons for an outright rejection of a user-generated content. Most of these reasons were guided by ensuring ethical and professional standards such as not publishing gory images, not delving into the sexual lives of individuals and not covering sexist stories. Other factors which guided journalists in the selection and rejection process of UGC included organisational standards such as not compromising the organisation's credibility, and legal implications.

5.5.1 Ensuring Ethical and Professional Standards

Based on observations in the newsrooms and interviews with journalists, the selection of user-generated content was determined by how well it conformed to traditional and ethical standards of the profession. Stories that did not align with the ethics and principles given by the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) were not pursued. These ethics included the refusal of inducements to favour a party in the story, the protection of minors and the non-publication of gory images to a story. An online editor at *Citi FM* gave an example of this as follows:

When Ebony's³² unfortunate mortuary photos were leaked and circulating, we didn't use those photos. The photo is not the story. It adds to the story but that is not the story... it doesn't really take much away from the story if you don't add the photos of the dead body. So there are times we'll just crop some parts off and present one which is more decent to the public... So these are some of the things we do, like minors, we won't publish such photos, we will not

Again, journalists in all the selected newsrooms stated that they would typically not publish stories of people's death, which they had not verified from the deceased's family, no matter how widespread and true the story was. Journalists stated that it was culturally disrespectful and

³² Ebony was a young female Ghanaian musician who died in a car accident a few months before the fieldwork of the study.

insensitive for a family to hear of a member's death in the public sphere first, rather than being informed privately.

5.5.1.1 Sexual lives of individuals

Some journalists from *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* stated that they had personal values which was influenced by the ethical practices of the profession. They stated that it was unethical to publish stories that invaded the sexual lives of individuals. They added that such stories victimised those involved. As a result, journalists would typically not cover LGBTQ+ stories or sex scandals, no matter how intense such stories were trending on social media. As a reporter from *Citi FM* revealed:

I don't normally do...social preferences, gay, lesbian, ... It's got nothing to do with Citi... it's a personal thing... Well someone will say that this, it's an open society, some people like to do whatever they want to do behind closed doors so those stories I don't need them... those things are private and then I feel such stories sometimes turn out to victimize whoever is involved in the story, so for example, Akosua is a lesbian, you are victimizing the person, it's the person's private life, leave the person to do whatever she wants to do behind closed doors

Another reporter from *Daily Graphic* gave an example of his ethical considerations in not covering the sexual lives of people. He added that, *Daily Graphic* also supported such ethical considerations.

Somebody says that Kennedy Agyapong³³ ...is paying young girls 200 cedis a month to sleep with them... I won't even follow up because nobody is gonna publish that story in *Graphic*. We don't do those kinds of things, it's the person's private life. He can even pay somebody whatever... we don't care. Unless he's caught. If the police is giving us a story we will do it, but if it's coming out from somebody, we will never do it because that person is not authorised to give us that statement. So yeah, a number of things go on, so we don't do those kinds of stories

³³ Kennedy Agyapong is a Ghanaian politician and a Member of Parliament during the period of study.

5.5.1.2 Sexism

A few reporters also gave some personal ideologies that influenced their ethical considerations in the rejection of a story. At *Citi FM*, an editor revealed gender sensitivity as a reason for outright rejection of content that caused an imbalance in the portrayal of a gender. According to the journalists, this was also because, it was professionally unethical to favour or disfavour a party in a story. As stated:

If your story or picture is sexist, no. I'm certainly not going to use it. It's not going to show up... I think Joy FM did a story where they said 'here's the Attorney General looking hot in parliament' after her pictures starting trending on social media... It's first of all disrespectful to her and her position, and it's very sexist. Like 'she's hot'. She's not on a fashion show for you to be describing her as hot... .. because it's news and there are a lot of things to consider, I don't just consider gender. But I am aware, when we are picking the stories, when we are asking for voices, I am aware because in my head...a higher percentage of protagonists in news are men, some conscious. It's something I will draw people's attention to

5.5.2 Organisational standards

The researcher observed that *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* had certain organisational or newsroom commitments that also influenced the selection and rejection of a UGC for publication. These organisational commitments were informed by the credibility, the policies, newsroom culture, routines and orientation that distinguished each organisation.

5.5.2.1 The Importance of Credibility

Journalists in all selected newsrooms stated that they would not compromise on the credibility in the selection of stories that they accessed from user-generated content. Newsrooms' credibility among audiences served as a main influence for journalists not to compromise on the quality of content produced. Consequently, stories that did not conform to the credibility of *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* were rejected.

Citi FM journalists stated that audiences associated the organisation with credibility, hence audiences trusted *Citi FM* to broadcast only true and credible stories. Journalists further stated that the organisation was committed to maintaining their credibility among audiences. As a reporter at *Citi FM* stated:

Why should you sacrifice your credibility because you want to publish a story which is not true... we pride ourselves in the fact that people say that, 'if *Citi FM* has not published it, it is not true

Similarly, journalists at *Daily Graphic* stated that, they were the most esteemed newspaper in the Ghanaian community and this was a result of their constant production of credible news. A reporter *Daily Graphic* said this as follows:

People rate *Graphic* with very high esteem because of our standards, because of the quality of the stories we write, and the quality of journalists who work in *Graphic*

At *TV3*, journalists revealed that compromising on credibility had implications on the market share, legal issues, public ridicule and respectability of the organisation. A reporter at *TV3* expounded on this as follows:

Television is numbers, radio is numbers. If you lose your credibility over time, you lose the numbers. If you lose the numbers over time, nobody wants to advertise with you. Now if you lose the eyeballs, the earholes, nobody will want to do business with you because you don't have the audience... Two, are there implications? Yes, there are legal implications if the story involves... an individual or a company or an organisation and there is libel, there is slander, there is sedition, there are all those issues that come to play. If you are also not careful and you don't get your facts right, you could also be sued for even a billion cedis and where are you gonna get the money to pay for it? There is also the kind of burden that comes on your reporters and on your news anchors where people will ridicule them on social media and actually send damaging messages at them, hate them because the brand itself did not do what is right. So it has a certain ripple effect that hits them and those are some of the effects or repercussions that could come to you

5.5.2.2 Policies of the organisation

The researcher observed that the editorial or in-house policies, which included the mission statement, objectives, and ethics of the organisation, also guided journalists in all the newsrooms in the selection and rejection of user-generated content. Stories that were contrary to the policies of every organisation, were, therefore, rejected.

At *TV3*, these policies, which are also referred to as the Standard Operative Procedure (SOP), was documented into a book of about 60 to 80 pages.

5.5.2.3 Orientation of the organization

The researcher observed that *TV3* and *Daily Graphic* had distinct organisational orientations that also reflected in the selection and rejection of content. *Daily Graphic*, which identified as a state-owned organisation, as much as possible, refrained from publishing stories that created division or portrayed some conflict among the people. Journalists revealed that stories on issues such as chieftaincy disputes were not covered as much.

TV3, which also emphasized the culture of Ghana, typically rejected stories that they stated as contradictory to majority of Ghanaians' identification of culture. For this reason, journalists stated that the newsroom refrained from publishing LGBTQ+ stories as often, as a majority of the Ghanaian community did not identify with that culture.

The researcher further observed that all the newsrooms had a newsroom routine of ensuring every journalist was held accountable for the entire process of gatekeeping, as newsgathering, processing, and publication were done by both the editorial and production teams. Journalists at *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* revealed that story leads were first put on the *WhatsApp* page of each organisation, where selection and rejection started. After a story was selected, it proceeded to the newsroom's storyboard to be assigned to a journalist to pursue the story.

For *TV3* and *Citi FM*, a typical newsroom production team would comprise some selected newsroom journalists for a show or a news bulletin, headed by a lead producer who led the production team in discussions. While, the editorial team comprised the general manager, the news editor, and sub-editors headed by the acting editor, for *Daily Graphic*. Both production and editorial teams brainstormed on the selection and rejection of content and subsequently, discussed the feedback that was received after publication.

5.5.3 Personal values

Many of the journalists at *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* stated that their individual preferences for stories were shaped by ideologies, background, orientation, personalities, religion, experiences, and knowledge, and these factors could inadvertently influence the selection and rejection of news. All journalists added that the danger in applying their personal values to the selection and rejection of news could lead to a lot of biases, especially when those personal values conflicted with journalistic obligations. Journalists stated that they were guided by journalistic and organisational standards in news selection rather than their individual preferences.

For journalists who confirmed applying some personal values to the rejection of stories such as not covering the sexual lives of individuals and sexist stories, they added that these personal values were influenced by the ethical practices and professional standards of the profession. Many journalists insisted on gatekeeping being influenced by institutional factors rather than personal values to prevent biases, as no journalist was to work in isolation but decisions were made collectively as a team.

5.5.4. Legal implications

The study found that, some organisations rejected the publication of chieftaincy and LGBTQ+ content, as a result of possible legal issues. Chieftaincy issues could easily be sued, like other liable cases that prove a libel or slander, and the newsrooms under study avoided such contentious stories. A reporter from *Daily Graphic* revealed this:

Some stories are weird; we won't publish them. Somebody can say that 'Ei there is this chief, he is sleeping with the young girls. And last week, he was arrested, so government should call the chiefs to order' we will not do it. Because we can be sued. You know ignorance in the law court, is not an excuse. So we don't do those. We stay with development stories. Garbage, refuse, open defecation, assemblyman not performing, these are content we can publish

Furthermore, all the newsrooms under study revealed that since the LGBTQ+ community was not legalized in the country as yet, it was safe not to publish such stories often. Therefore, whether chieftaincy or LGBTQ+ stories, the legal implications that were followed by these categories of content made newsrooms wary in selecting such content for publication, and as much as possible, newsrooms avoided stories of such nature.

5.6 Summary

The study reported the accessing, processing and publishing of user-generated content in *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms. UGC was integrated into newsroom operations by accessing them through solicited and unsolicited means. Through the observation of newsroom routines and information received from journalists, the study found that, content that were sourced from ordinary citizens and newsmakers was were mostly development-oriented stories and human interest stories. The study also found that, the main processes UGC were subjected to in the newsrooms under study, as gatekeeping measures, were verification, moderation, training and message reconstruction. These processes were influenced and facilitated predominantly by factors such as professional standards, organisational standards, accessible software, and legal

implications. Consequently, UGC was processed into news stories and published on both the mainstream and online publication outlets of *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter, based on the objectives of the study which were, to investigate the process of gatekeeping UGC in three selected Ghanaian newsrooms and subsequently, the factors that influenced the processes. The discussions are made meaningfully by interpreting the findings as well as relating them to other similar studies that have been conducted on the subject of user-generated content. The discussions are also made to reflect the research questions that the study sought to investigate.

6.1 The processes of gatekeeping UGC in Ghanaian newsrooms

TV3, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms showed that processes of gatekeeping user-generated content mostly follow a progression which is patterned similarly as Wallace's (2018) contemporary gatekeeping model (2017) which includes the input, throughput and output stages. At the input stage, user-generated content was integrated in the three Ghanaian newsroom operations. The findings showed that beyond the integration of unsolicited content online into their newsroom operations, as previous studies (Banda, 2010; Deo-Silas, 2013; Owusu-Yeboah, 2015, Katachie, 2017) showed, the Ghanaian newsrooms under study also solicited for content for their mainstream broadcasts and publications. *TV3*'s "MTN video report", *Citi FM*'s "Citizen reporter" and *Daily Graphic*'s "Citizen iReporter" revealed that Ghanaian journalists solicited for content with the intention of providing citizens an opportunity to be a part of the newsgathering process, to help citizens be a part of the development of their society and to assist journalists in covering stories. Findings from *Daily Graphic*'s "Citizen iReporter" suggested that journalists' inability to cover

vast areas, is another reason for the inclusion of citizen journalists in the newsgathering process. This was similar to Channel's (2010) findings which revealed that journalists employed citizen journalists because they were unable to cover every story.

As some Ghanaian journalists further asserted, ordinary citizens should be given more opportunity to partake in the newsgathering processes than should newsmakers. The citizen journalism initiative by the Ghanaian newsrooms under study was consistent with other studies' findings that showed that journalists' integration of solicited content from audiences provided audiences an opportunity at civic participation (Armani, 2010; Storm, 2007; Palmer, 2012; Storck, 2014; Chu & Hung, 2016).

At the throughput stage, the main processes user-generated content were subjected to in the Ghanaian newsrooms that were observed. These processes are verification, moderation, training and message reconstruction. These processes were also identified in similar studies (Storm, 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2008, Paulussen & Ogille, 2008, Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) that investigated the processes user-generated content were subjected to in newsrooms.

At the output stage, the publishing of content revealed that the Ghanaian mainstream newsrooms that were examined published user-generated content through a converged media space as also identified in other studies (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Channel, 2010). Newsrooms published user-generated content on both their online and offline platforms to meet the online and offline media preferences of their audiences. Nonetheless, *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms published solicited content from citizen journalists only on their mainstream media, and published other forms of solicited content (such as comments from audiences) and unsolicited content on both mainstream and online outlets.

6.1.1 Verification

The Ghanaian newsrooms observed have shown that user-generated content is verified before published. This was evident in how *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* used all possible means of verifying content primarily as an obligation to their profession and to maintain the credibility of their organisations. The diverse means of verifying included personally contacting the generators of the content, other multiple sources and journalists going on the scene. This enabled these newsrooms to meet with the requirements of the profession which obligated them to “check, cross-check and check again”.

The Ghanaian newsrooms under study revealed that content was verified by contacting the generators of the content, similar to the findings of Storm (2007) which revealed that content generators provided detail to their content when contacted. For soliciting content, *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* journalists’ preference for *WhatsApp* was because *WhatsApp* was as an accessible medium to readily contact citizen journalists through audio calls, video calls and text messaging. The journalists interviewed across all selected newsrooms stated that *WhatsApp* was a preferred medium even for unsolicited content, as against *Facebook* and *Twitter* where generators usually delayed responses when contacted for verification.

The findings further revealed that the soliciting of development-oriented stories from citizen journalists did not only allow audiences to partake in the developmental progress of their communities but facilitated verification for *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic*. This is because, as some journalists stated, development-oriented stories were a genre of stories which were devoid of controversies, as opposed to some human interest stories. Moreover, development-oriented stories were easily verifiable as the videos or photos gave evidence to the situation being reported. Hence, the three Ghanaian newsrooms found development-oriented stories a safe genre of stories which were also easily verifiable by journalists.

The findings further showed that the soliciting of development stories for *TV3's* “MTN Video Report” *Citi FM's* “Citizen Reporters” and *Daily Graphic's* “Citizen iReporter” received from citizen journalists allowed citizens to identify directly with the news, as citizens represent and frame their community’s development challenges through their stories. This was similar to findings of Storm (2007), Armani (2010), Palmer (2012), Storck (2014) and Chu & Hung (2016) which revealed that local and international audiences have helped largely in addressing global concerns and in giving audiences the right representation and framing of their stories.

Findings also revealed that, consistent with professional journalistic requirements that the media be socially responsible for promoting development, *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* showed responsibility, by purposefully requesting for development stories from citizen journalists. As revealed by the journalists, these newsrooms contributed to Development Communication in Ghanaian communities as they supported the inclusion of all Ghanaians in contributing to participatory development in their communities. This is because, these citizens already had an awareness of their societal needs, independently reported on such issues, and consequently implored support from the government, interest groups, corporate businesses and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) through the media. This was especially so for *TV3's* “MTN Video Report” which had a primary goal to facilitate the participation of audiences in the newsgathering process, channeled towards ensuring collective societal growth, as identified by Storm (2007) who suggests that citizen journalism facilitates societal development.

6.1.2 Moderation

Similar to reviewed studies (Hermida & Thurman, 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Harrison, 2010; Cleary & Bloom, 2011; Singer, 2014), professional, organisational and legal considerations were principal in influencing the selected Ghanaian newsrooms’ considerations for moderation. The study found that these newsrooms monitored online comments from audiences by deleting,

hiding and blocking comments to remove inappropriate content. This was consistent with other studies' (Cleary & Bloom, 2011; Harrison, 2010) findings which showed that moderation was applied to online platforms to remove inappropriate content from audiences.

Further, the Ghanaian newsrooms under study showed that although online editors were responsible for moderating comments online, moderation was usually done by one online editor at a given time. This was contrary to Harrison's (2010) findings which revealed that moderation at the *BBC* was usually done by a group of moderators concurrently.

The findings further revealed that, the Ghanaian newsrooms under study moderated similar to Hermida and Thurman's (2007) reactive moderation, Harrison's (2010) post-moderation and Almaghlooth's (2013) post-production, which required that audiences' comments could be deleted, hidden or blocked only after they were posted online. Ghanaian online editors who were interviewed revealed that *Facebook* was strategic in facilitating monitoring of offensive words which were keyed into the "Keyword Moderation" and "Profanity Filter and Blocklist" algorithm.

Similar to Hermida & Thurman's (2008) findings, these Ghanaian online editors functioning as the sole moderators on these platforms were further tasked with moderating manually online given the limitations of *Facebook's* algorithm. Hermida & Thurman's (2008) study showed that there was a defect in the use of the software *Pluck*, which still necessitated journalists to manually moderate content and filter comments before publishing. Similarly, *Facebook's* algorithm was limited in detecting comments that did not explicitly have abusive words but were derogatory and offensive to other audiences.

The editors interviewed in the three Ghanaian newsrooms showed that they moderated solicited content in the form of comments from audiences online. This was evident in how *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* synchronised their social media handles with their websites to enable online editors have oversight of audience comments to facilitate gatekeeping on all online platforms.

The findings further revealed that as an obligation to their profession, online editors moderated comments carefully to avoid censorship and to preserve the audiences' right to freedom of expression.

6.1.3 Training of citizen journalists

The three Ghanaian newsrooms observed stated that they were deliberate in training generators of user-generated content, particularly citizen journalists that sent in solicited development-oriented stories. To ensure the credibility of the story, and the quality of video formats, professional journalists trained (formal and informal) these citizen journalists, similar to Paulussen & Ogille's (2008) findings which revealed that professional journalists trained amateur journalists. The findings revealed that, through training citizen journalists, these newsrooms stood a better chance of covering more stories, while including citizens in the newsgathering process and in societal change, as both worked together for mutually beneficial gains.

Although the training of citizen journalists ultimately enables these newsrooms in gatekeeping, it further provides an opportunity for them to invest in human capital. The unpaid-for knowledge, information, expertise, skills and professional guidance invested into these citizen journalists in producing quality and credible content nurtures possible professional journalists in these trainee citizen journalists- a human resource that will benefit both the Ghanaian media and society long term.

6.1.4 Message Reconstruction

An observation made in the Ghanaian newsrooms under study was that journalists did not merely replicate the UGC, they reconstructed the messages to reflect editorial standards. This presented a

clear distinction between how users produce news content and how journalists publish professionally processed news.

Similar to the findings in other studies (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2009; Shabir et al., 2015), *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* journalists interviewed were of the view that the process of gatekeeping was incomplete if the information received by newsrooms was not transformed into a news story for audiences, especially for mainstream publication. This is why, *TV3* and *Citi FM*'s weekday morning flagship shows (*TV3 New Day* and *Citi Breakfast Show*), and *Daily Graphic*'s Monday publication of “*Facebook Wall*”, which all had an integration of user-generated content in the form of solicited comments from audiences, were carefully reconstructed, preceded with caveats, disclaimers and attributions in the case of audience' subjective views and opinions on issues. And in the case of crime suspects, *Daily Graphic* resorted to cartooning the alleged persons.

The findings revealed that while these newsrooms did not want to misrepresent the original message of generators' content, their content had to necessarily be transformed to reflect the standard of news, editorially and professionally. Hence, these three newsrooms paid attention to transforming information into news; especially unsolicited content, and solicited content in the form of comments from audiences online. Particularly for solicited content in the form of comments from audiences, the message was reconstructed when the publication outlet was moving from online to mainstream.

6.2 The difference between Wallace Gatekeeping Model and Gatekeeping in Ghanaian newsrooms

The study's findings showed some differences between Wallace's (2018) contemporary gatekeeping model and gatekeeping as practiced in the Ghanaian newsrooms under study: specifically, verification, moderation, and training. Whereas Wallace (2018) stated that other gatekeepers such as strategic professionals, algorithms and individual amateurs were new

gatekeepers functioning independent of journalists, this study's findings showed that, the Ghanaian journalists interviewed did not function independently from these new gatekeepers but functioned in tandem with these new gatekeepers through a collaborative gatekeeping process. On whichever publication outlet, the Ghanaian newsrooms operated with a centralised mechanism thereby reinforcing their autonomy in controlling the process of news and its publication, and maintaining their traditional role as gatekeepers. This is similar to assertions by Shaw (2012) and Ahiabenu II *et al.* (2018) that journalists maintain their role as gatekeepers in spite of the rise of new gatekeepers.

Whereas Wallace's (2018) model shows that strategic professionals are new independent gatekeepers, the Ghanaian newsrooms under study have further shown that, particularly in verification, journalists employ strategic professionals (who are a category of newsmakers) as multiple sources in verifying the credibility of content with trusted and informed inputs for news content.

Likewise, in moderation, although Wallace's (2018) model showed algorithms as new independent gatekeepers, Ghanaian journalists in the newsrooms under study, worked together with *Facebook's* algorithm in filtering offensive and abusive comments from audiences on their online media.

Similarly, in training, while Wallace's (2018) model had individual amateurs as new independent gatekeepers, the Ghanaian journalists interviewed worked hand in hand with amateur individuals who identify as citizen journalists, through instructions and guidance to produce quality and credible news for audience consumption.

The findings of the study revealed that, although these new gatekeepers may function independently as gatekeepers in other contexts, these Ghanaian journalists showed how they integrated their diverse functionalities in a comprehensive gatekeeping process; at the same time, overseeing the entire process of gatekeeping in their capacity as gatekeepers and curators of news,

in accordance with Groshek & Tandoc's (2016) recommendation that journalists should be the sole curators of news. Furthermore, by integrating the use of technology and audiences in gatekeeping, Ghanaian journalists reinforced their hegemony of news, contrary to Bowman & Willis' (2005) assertion that journalists are being rivaled with the technology that serves them and the audience they serve.

6.3 The factors influencing gatekeeping UGC in Ghanaian newsrooms

TV3, Citi FM and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms, were influenced by the ethical and professional standards, their organisational objectives, and were facilitated with accessible software and *Facebook's* algorithm similar to findings from Shoemaker *et al.* (2001) in gatekeeping user-generated content. Additionally, these newsrooms that were observed were influenced by the legal implications of little or no gatekeeping, as well as certain cultural practices in the Ghanaian society, necessitating the gatekeeping of UGC. This settled other scholars' (Almaghlooth, 2013; Robert, 2015) claim of the possibility of other factors influencing gatekeeping depending on the context. Also, similar to other studies (Donohue *et al.*, 1989; Shoemaker *et al.*, 2001; Wallace, 2018), institutional factors, which comprise professional and organisational factors, were dominant in the decision making and selection criteria of UGC, influencing these Ghanaian newsrooms in gatekeeping. This was because, the newsrooms under study found institutional factors objective and a safe guideline, whereas personal factors tend to be subjective and blur the lines in the decision on what news is. Consequently, most personal factors of Ghanaian journalists interviewed are shaped from institutional factors based on the routine and experience such institutional factors impose on journalists, similar to Mitchelstein and Boczkowski's (2009), assertion. Their foremost obligation was to their profession than to their diversified and, in most cases, biased personal ideologies.

6.3.1 Professional standards

Based on the responses from journalists at *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic*, professional standards were a dominant factor for which these Ghanaian newsrooms were influenced, in the gatekeeping of user-generated content. This was similar to Hermida & Thurman's (2008) findings which stated that professional standards were the primary influence for gatekeeping.

Journalistic standards in Ghana stipulates that newsworthy content be “Checked, cross-checked and checked again” before publishing, which necessitates newsrooms to guarantee that. This has consequently made many Ghanaian journalists emphatic on these 3C's as a gatekeeping measure for the verification of UGC, from all the sources to be considered. This was particularly helpful in combating controversial human interest stories such as the widely circulated rumour-based arrest of Ibra on social media, later confirmed a hoax by *Daily Graphic* through verification. This was consistent with Silverman's (2015) findings, which showed that the media as gatekeepers, were pivotal in determining truth or falsehood in social discussions.

Again, these newsrooms' adherence to the ethics, principles, and guidelines provided by the GJA further helped in creating a major distinction between UGC and professional news in Ghana. For example, Ebony's mortuary photos which were circulating on social media were not included in any processed news item of Ebony's death by *TV3*. The exclusion of gory photos of deceased persons is one of the professional ethics which was applied to moderating the submissions of audiences online and in training citizen journalists to produce credible news content by *Citi FM*.

6.3.2 Organisational standards

Organisational standards influenced the gatekeeping of user-generated content in the Ghanaian newsrooms under study, showing a similitude in the operations of other newsrooms as studies (Hermida & Thurman, 2007; Harrison, 2010; Alhmaglooth, 2013; Tolmie et al., 2017) have shown.

Paulussen & Ogille's (2008) findings suggest, organisational standards dominate in the influence of gatekeeping in newsrooms. Similarly, in the Ghanaian newsrooms under study, the researcher observed that organisational standards were also one of the dominant factors based on the responses by journalists.

TV3, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic*'s organisational policies, principles, and culture, all compressed in their Standard of Procedure (SOP), have over time, grown to be the identity of the organisations. Taglines such as *Citi FM*'s “Relevant Radio, Always” and *Daily Graphic*'s “Truth and Accuracy... Everyday” further showed the principles these newsrooms were built on, and want to be identified with. Principles of inputting feedback from audiences, and values of credibility and relevance from *TV3*, *Citi FM*, and *Daily Graphic* obliged the verification of content. It comes as no surprise then that these media stations had the highest rates of viewership, listenership and readership respectively among English-speaking Ghanaian audiences due to their association with credibility.

6.3.3 Inadequate software

The findings revealed that many Ghanaian journalists interviewed were not aware of appropriate verification software tools or advanced technology to engage with content online. Some journalists who were aware also stated the constraints of finances in accessing these tools. However, for the few Ghanaian journalists who employed the most accessible software, this present study found that they were facilitated by *Facebook*'s algorithm for moderation and a few plagiarism checkers, location verifiers and *Adobe PhotoShop* to deal with the authenticity of posts online. The findings did not support other studies which have shown that there was use of advanced technology by other newsrooms to control the complexities of online audiences (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Channel, 2010; Singer, 2014; Almaghlooth, 2013; Tolmie *et al.*, 2017).

The study revealed that for the few journalists who used accessible software, *Google* and *Grammarly* aided Ghanaian journalists at *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* with checking if posts were plagiarised while *Google Maps* and *GeoTweet* were instrumental in helping journalists at *Citi FM* to verify the location of posts and tweets. Doctored photos, were also recognised by checking the metadata of photos and using *Adobe Photoshop* at *Daily Graphic*. The study's findings revealed that no advanced software was employed in verifying user-generated content in formats of audio in the three Ghanaian newsrooms observed.

Similar to Ahiabenu II *et al.* (2018) finding that Ghanaian newsrooms did not have advanced technology to combat the threat of fake news, misinformation and disinformation associated with UGC, this study attests that the Ghanaian newsrooms observed were not equipped with adequate advanced technology in the verification and moderation processes.

6.3.4 Personal standards

The expansion of newsroom activities to include more journalists and editors working collectively through teamwork to ensure objectivity and accountability rendered the initial concept of individual decision making in gatekeeping nearly irrelevant in the Ghanaian newsrooms under study. As a result, individual standards remain the least of factors influencing gatekeeping as journalists stated that it could lead to biases.

The findings further revealed that a few journalists, however, were persuaded of the objectivity of their standards and allowed their ideologies to feed into decision-making. This was similar to Channel (2010)'s findings which revealed that news selection was influenced by the editor's personal values and based on a subjective discretion of each editor. The study found that journalists' personal preferences of not covering the sexual lives of individuals and not covering sexist content were influenced by ethical and professional standards, as well as their organisational

standards. This was consistent with Mitchelstein & Boczkowski's (2009) assertion that the personal decision-making of journalists, is largely influenced by institutional factors such as journalistic standards and organisational standards.

TV3, Citi FM and Daily Graphic's journalists also showed a rejection of stories such as sex scandals and victimizing the LGBTQ+ communities despite the traffic those stories generated on social media in an era of cyber-bullying and an intrusion of people's private sexual lives and orientations. This further distinguished professionally packaged news content from social media buzz.

6.3.5. Legal implications

The findings revealed that gatekeeping processes in the newsrooms observed were influenced by legal implications. Although legal issues have not as yet been considered a prominent factor influencing gatekeeping (Shoemaker *et al.*, 2001), some studies (Hermida & Thurman, 2007; Cleary & Bloom, 2011; Singer, 2014) have shown that it remains a consideration in gatekeeping in some newsrooms, and this was evident in the Ghanaian newsrooms observed.

The findings revealed that legal consequences were an important consideration for newsrooms. They were among the reasons newsrooms would not compromise their credibility to publish or broadcast information that had not been verified. Journalists also revealed that, the integration of some audience comments into mainstream broadcasts and publications also had some legal implications for newsrooms. This was particularly evident in *TV3* and Mr. Agbesi Woyome's case. The study found that newsrooms were careful in integrating audience comments into mainstream broadcasts or publications. The study found evidence of this in some techniques newsrooms used in message reconstruction. Attributions, issuing of disclaimers and caveats were used in *TV3* and

Citi FM's morning flagship breakfast shows and news bulletins, as well as *Daily Graphic*'s "Facebook Wall" to precede the comments, submissions and opinions of audiences.

Also, the findings revealed that *Daily Graphic* was influenced by legal implications to review organisational policies to reflect in the cartooning of the mugshots of crime suspects. This was because legal consequences led to financial drawbacks for the organisations involved. For example, in the case of a legal pitfall, money must be involved in its resolution during court cases. Also, the escalation of such dangers would affect the credibility of organisations and subsequently a decline in viewership, listenership, and readership, thereby affecting sales and advertisers. The upshot of legal pitfalls is the loss of profit for these organisations, and this factor influenced gatekeeping decisions in these newsrooms as journalists carefully presented content for mainstream publications.

6.3.6 Cultural influences

The findings revealed that activities of *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* were influenced by societal norms. This was similar to Almaghlooth (2013) and Robert's (2015) findings which revealed that, newsroom activities were influenced by societal norms. The study found that these newsrooms observed were particular with verifying stories from relatives of a deceased as this was an effect of Ghanaian cultural norms. Therefore, beyond seeking to verify from a relative of a deceased as a key trustworthy source, the Ghanaian journalists interviewed underlined the Ghanaian customary principle of informing relatives of a deceased before publicising news of their death. The journalists stated that, in Ghana, as possibly in other contexts, death was a very sensitive issue and thus, the knowledge of relatives on the death were esteemed over the public interest of breaking the news. This confirms why, although the story of Komla Dumor and Ebony's deaths occurring in different years, had broken the Internet, *Citi FM* and *TV3* hesitated in publishing the stories till it was confirmed and verified from a relation of both Komla Dumor and Ebony.

The findings further revealed that, as the selection of user-generated content was dependent on the story's resonance with audiences, these newsrooms needed to publish UGC which resonated with the accepted cultural norms of the Ghanaian society. In light of this, *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms refrained from integrating UGC on the LGBTQ+ community as it was not yet legalised by the government and publicly accepted of the Ghanaian society. Nonetheless, these newsrooms covered victimising and atrocious stories of such persons as an obligation to their profession. They were however wary of giving prominence to such stories in their publications.

6.4 Summary

The study discussed the main processes *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* employed in gatekeeping user-generated content as well as the factors influencing these processes by highlighting their similarities and differences with other related studies. The findings also revealed the major distinction between Wallace's (2018) Gatekeeping model and gatekeeping practices in the Ghanaian newsrooms under study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings of the study. It also details the limitations of the study, makes some recommendations based on the study's findings and presents the final conclusion.

7.1 Summary of key findings

The study investigated the processes of gatekeeping user-generated content in *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsrooms, and the factors which influenced these processes.

Verification, moderation, training and message reconstruction were found to be the main processes of gatekeeping user-generated content in these newsrooms, consistent with other studies' findings. The Ghanaian newsrooms under study verified information from content generators and multiple sources, as well as deploying journalists to verify from the scene of the said incident. The study also found that online editors of these newsrooms were moderators on the organisation's social media and websites. They monitored online audience comments to remove inappropriate content facilitated by *Facebook's* "Keyword Moderation" and "Profanity Filter and Blocklist" algorithm. Findings also show that *Citi FM* and *TV3* trained citizen journalists on news reporting techniques. The study discovered that these three newsrooms transformed user-generated content to suit professional and organisational standards in the way the messages were presented to the public through attributions, caveats and disclaimers. The findings revealed that these processes were used to control the effect of unfiltered UGC on the society.

Even though the study aimed at exploring the functionality of only journalists as gatekeepers, it found a major difference between Wallace Gatekeeping model (2018) and the processes of gatekeeping in these Ghanaian newsrooms. Whereas Wallace (2018) identifies four gatekeepers

(journalists, strategic professionals, amateur individuals and algorithms) functioning independent from each other, the Ghanaian journalists under study employed strategic professionals, amateur individuals and algorithms to facilitate the gatekeeping processes; in their capacity as the principal gatekeepers of news.

Furthermore, beyond controlling the threats of unfiltered UGC on audiences, these processes had the potential of contributing to a larger objective of societal development in Ghana, that is, both human and infrastructural. Findings revealed that the training of citizen journalists by professional journalists was an investment in potential professional journalists for the media and society, while the provision of development-oriented stories by citizen journalists provided an opportunity for citizens to contribute to the developmental progress of their communities.

The study also revealed the factors which influence these processes; and prevalent among them was ethical and professional standards. Nonetheless, organisational standards, a few journalists' personal standards (which were predicated on professional and organisational standards), legal implications and cultural norms also influenced the processes of gatekeeping. The findings also showed that *Facebook's* algorithm facilitated moderation for online editors whereas a few accessible software and algorithm facilitated the processes of verification. However, consistent with Ahiabenu II *et al.* (2018), the study found that these Ghanaian newsrooms were not equipped with the appropriate technological tools for verification and moderation to fight some of the increasing threats of user-generated content such as fake news and misinformation.

7.2 Limitations of the study

The study had some limitations. Firstly, there were a number of media houses in Ghana that studies (Banda, 2010; Deo-Silas, 2013; Owusu-Yeboah, 2015, Katachie, 2017) have shown to integrate user-generated content in their newsroom operations. However, this study sampled three media

houses due to time and resources. Although the findings were indicative of what may be occurring in Ghanaian newsrooms, they are not generalisable to all newsrooms in Ghana.

Additionally, the researcher recognised that the study's findings may have been influenced by the relatively short period of observation for a month as some studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011) have stated. Consequently, a more prolonged study period may have expanded newsrooms choice of processes or factors, as the findings may have increased.

Finally, the study was limited by the subjectivity associated with qualitative method. Although the researcher was careful to avoid biases associated with the answering of questions from journalists or the analysis of findings from the interviews and observations, the researcher, nonetheless, notes the inevitability of biases that may either stem from the interviewees or the researcher.

7.3 Recommendations

The study showed citizen journalism as a tool for Development Communication by the Ghanaian newsrooms under study. Therefore, future studies looking to study the integration of UGC in Ghanaian newsrooms could explore the relationship between citizen journalism and Development Communication in Ghana or the impact of citizen journalism on human and infrastructural development as facilitated by Ghanaian newsrooms.

Furthermore, as the study found no evidence of the use of advanced technology in controlling online threats, there may be a need for Ghanaian newsrooms (that are not) to be equipped with and trained to use technologies, for their verification or moderation processes. In view of the growing menace of unfiltered UGC on the society the study recommends that Ghanaian newsrooms engage with advanced and appropriate technology beyond the convenient and accessible software or journalistic instincts in verifying and moderating online content.

Lastly, *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* offer citizens an opportunity to contribute development-oriented stories from their communities which usually highlight a need for infrastructure. This is a great avenue for the government, investors, interest groups, corporate businesses and NGOs who would want to fund community projects. Therefore, the study recommends that such groups liaise with these newsrooms to identify the specific areas and communities that are deprived of the needed infrastructure.

7.4 Conclusion

The study investigated the processes involved in gatekeeping user-generated content in Ghanaian newsroom operations, as well as the factors influencing these processes. By observing *TV3*, *Citi FM* and *Daily Graphic* newsroom practices over a period of one month, and interviewing seven journalists sampled from each newsroom, the processes and factors influencing the processes were identified, described and analysed accordingly based on recurring themes using Wallace's contemporary gatekeeping model.

The integration of user-generated content in the Ghanaian newsrooms observed was revealed. The study revealed that beyond solicited and unsolicited UGC from social media, mainly *Facebook* and *Twitter*, as earlier studies have shown, the Ghanaian newsrooms observed integrated solicited UGC in the form of development-oriented stories from citizen journalists. This was as a major feature in their mainstream news bulletins and publications, that is, *TV3*'s "MTN video report", *Citi FM*'s "Citizen Reporter" and *Daily Graphic*'s "Citizen iReporter". Furthermore, the integration of audience comments from social media for mainstream publications was evident in *TV3*'s "New Day", *Citi FM*'s "Citi Breakfast Show" and *Daily Graphic*'s "Facebook Wall" in the form of comments from audiences.

The findings revealed that verification, moderation, training and message reconstruction were the main gatekeeping processes in the Ghanaian newsrooms under study. In addition, the study provided evidence of factors which influenced these processes. Ethical and professional standards, organisational standards, legal implications and cultural influences dominated these factors. Furthermore, *Facebook's* algorithm facilitated moderation for online editors' and a few accessible software such as *Grammarly* and *Google* helped journalists to verify plagiarised content; *GeoTweet* and *Google Maps* helped journalists to identify the location of posts and *Adobe PhotoShop* and the metadata of photos helped journalists to verify doctored photos. Findings revealed that, the Ghanaian newsrooms under study are not as yet, equipped with advanced technology in combating the effects of unfiltered user-generated content on the society.

Theoretically, findings suggest that Ghanaian journalists did not function independently from the new digital gatekeepers but showed how they incorporate the diverse functionalities of these new gatekeepers into their gatekeeping practices. By this, Ghanaian journalists have maintained their hegemony as the sole gatekeepers of news. Therefore, the findings of this study did not only provide insight into the gatekeeping processes of UGC in the Ghanaian newsrooms observed, but they may point to how some journalists may be maintaining their hegemony of news despite the rise of digital threats and audiences on the media landscape.

Findings revealed that development-oriented stories from citizen journalists was a means of enabling citizens to partake in development progress of their communities and enabling the appropriate authorities to address the society's infrastructural needs. Also, the training of citizen journalists by professional journalists towards the production of quality and credible news for audience consumption, was an investment in these amateur journalists who were potential professional journalists. Again, the study provides insight into how gatekeeping UGC in

newsrooms may contribute to a larger objective of societal development specifically in terrains that need further human and infrastructural development.

REFERENCES

- Ahiabenu II, K., Ofosu-Peasah, G., & Sam, J. (2018). Media Perspectives on Fake News in Ghana. *PenPlusBytes*, Retrieved December 11, 2018, from [http:// penplusbytes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FAKE-NEWS-STUDY.pdf](http://penplusbytes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FAKE-NEWS-STUDY.pdf)
- Almaghlooth, A. (2014). *The relevance of gatekeeping in the process of contemporary news creation and circulation in Saudi Arabia* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2014). University of Salford, Manchester, United Kingdom.
- Banda, F. (2010). *Citizen Journalism & Democracy in Africa: An Exploratory Study*. Grahamstown, Eastern Cape: Highway Africa.
- Barnes, C. (2012). Citizen journalism vs. traditional journalism: A case for collaboration. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 58(2-3), 16-27.
- Bass, A. Z. (1969). Refining the gatekeeper concept: A UN radio case study. *Journalism quarterly*, 46(1), 69-72.
- Bernard, H. R. (1994). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bowman, S., & Willis, C. (2005). The future is here, but do news media companies see it?. *Nieman Reports*, 59(4), 6.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230.
- Brown, R. M. (1979). The gatekeeper reassessed: A return to Lewin. *Journalism Quarterly*, 59(3), 595-601, 679.
- Bruns, A. (2003). Gatewatching, not gatekeeping: Collaborative online news. *Media International Australia*, 107(1), 31-44.
- Bruns, A. (2005). *Gatewatching collaborative online news production* (Vol. 26). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to produsage* (Vol. 45). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bruns, A. (2012). Journalists and Twitter: How Australian News Organisations Adapt to a New Medium. *Media International Australia*, 144(1), 97-107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878x1214400114>.
- Bruns, A. (2018). *Gatewatching and news curation: Journalism, social media, and the public sphere* (*Digital Formations, Volume 113*). Peter Lang Publishing.

- Bruns, A., & Schmidt, J. (2011). Producers: A closer look at continuing developments. *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*, 17(1), 3-7.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2011.563626>.
- Calcutt, A., & Hammond, P. (2011). *Journalism studies: A critical introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Channel, A. (2010). Gatekeeping and citizen journalism: A qualitative examination of participatory newsgathering. Retrieved November 3, 2017, from <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/1598/>.
- Chin-Fook, L., & Simmonds, H. (2011). Redefining gatekeeping theory for a digital generation. *The McMaster Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 7-34.
- Chung, D. S. (2007). Profits and perils: Online news producers' perceptions of interactivity and uses of interactive features. *Convergence*, 13(1), 43-61.
- Cleary, J., & Bloom, T. (2011). Gatekeeping at the Portal. *Electronic News*, 5(2), 93-111.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1931243111408389>.
- Coddington, M. (2014). Clarifying Journalism's Quantitative Turn. *Digital Journalism*, 3(3), 331-348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.976400>.
- Cover, R. (2006). Audience interactive: Interactive media, narrative control and reconceiving audience history. *New media & society*, 8(1), 139-158.
- Cramer, J. M., Michael, M., & Iorio, S. H. (2004). Qualitative Research in Journalism: Taking It to the Streets.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: a balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2018-000057>
- DeMers, J. (2013). How social media is supporting a fundamental shift in journalism. *Huffington Post*.
- Denzin N. K., Lincoln Y. S. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In Denzin N. K., Lincoln Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.): 1-28. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Deo-Silas, K. (2013). *Newsroom Journalists' Use of Social Media in Ghana* (Unpublished master's dissertation), University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana.

- DeWalt, K. M., DeWalt, B. R., & Wayland, C. B. (1998). Participant observation. *Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology*, 259-300.
- Dimmick, J. (1974). The Gate-Keeper: An Uncertain Theory. *Journalism Monograph* No. 37.
- Dimitrov, R. (2014). Do social media spell the end of journalism as a profession? *Global Media Journal Australian Edition*, Vol. 8, Issue 1. *Global Media Journal Australian Edition*. 8. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.2497.6009>.
- Donohue, G. A., Olien, C. N., & Tichenor, P. J. (1989). Structure and Constraints on Community Newspaper Gatekeepers. *Journalism Quarterly*, 66(4), 807-845. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769908906600405>.
- Elliott, R. (2018). Ghana Media Measurement Report: Top TV, Radio, and Print Outlets in 2017. Retrieved February 9, 2018 from <https://www.geopoll.com/blog/ghana-media-measurement-report-top-tv-radio-print-outlets-2017/>.
- Emery, M., & Emery, E. (1996). *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Erlandson, D. A. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ghana Statistical Services. (2012). Ghana Statistical Services. Retrieved July 29, 2017, from <http://statsghana.gov.gh/>
- Gieber, W. (1956). Across the Desk: A Study of 16 Telegraph Editors. *Journalism Quarterly*, 33(4), 423-432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769905603300401>.
- Gillmor, D. (2004). Imagining tomorrow's news. *Interactions*, 11(2), 58. <https://doi.org/10.1145/971258.971278>.
- Glickman, L., & Fingerhut, J. (2011). User-generated content: Recent developments in Canada and the US. *Internet and E-Commerce Law in Canada*, 12 (6), 49-76.
- Goode, L. (2009). Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New media & society*, 11(8), 1287-1305.
- Gordon, J. (2007). The mobile phone and the public sphere: Mobile phone usage in three critical situations. *Convergence*, 13(3), 307-319.
- Groshek, J., & Tandoc, E. (2016). The affordance effect. *Proceedings of the 7th 2016 International Conference on Social Media & Society - SMSociety 16*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2930971.2930993>.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(163-194), 105.

- Van der Haak, B., Parks, M., & Castells, M. (2012). The future of journalism: Networked journalism. *International journal of communication*, 6, 16.
- Harrison, J. (2010). User-generated content and gatekeeping at the BBC hub. *Journalism studies*, 11(2), 243-256.
- Hayes, A. S., Singer, J. B., & Ceppos, J. (2007). Shifting roles, enduring values: The credible journalist in a digital age. *Journal of mass media ethics*, 22(4), 262-279.
- Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2007). A clash of cultures: The integration of user Generated content within professional journalistic frameworks. In *Ponencia presentada en la conferencia "The Future of Newspapers"*. Cardiff, Wales.
- Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2008). A clash of cultures: The integration of user-generated content within professional journalistic frameworks at British newspaper websites. *Journalism practice*, 2(3), 343-356.
- Katachie, S. (2017). *The Inter-Media Agenda-Setting influence of Twitter on traditional media In Ghana during the 2016 Ghanaian Elections* (Unpublished master's dissertation). University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana.
- Kawulich, B. B. (2005, May). Participant observation as a data collection method. In *Forum qualitative sozialforschung/forum: Qualitative social research* (Vol. 6, No. 2).
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lasorsa, D. L., Lewis, S. C., & Holton, A. E. (2012). Normalizing Twitter. *Journalism Studies*, 13(1), 19-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670x.2011.571825>.
- Lindlof, Thomas R. (1995) *Qualitative Research Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mitchelstein, E., & Boczkowski, P. J. (2009). Between tradition and change: A review of recent research on online news production. *Journalism*, 10(5), 562-586.
- Maykut, P. S., & Morehouse, R. E. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide* (Vol. 6). Psychology Press.
- Nah, S., & Chung, D. (2009). Rating citizen journalists versus pros: Editors' views. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 30(2), 71-83.
- Nah, S., Namkoong, K., Record, R., & Van Stee, S. K. (2017). Citizen journalism practice increases civic participation. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 38(1), 62-78.

- Newman, N. (2009, January 01). The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism. Retrieved June 11, 2017, from <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:a980df14-1b49-401b-a136-78d47ab76cdc>.
- Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence Based Nursing*, 18(2), 34-35. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054>.
- O'reilly, T. (2005). Web 2.0: Compact definition? Retrieved September 11, 2017, from <http://radar.oreilly.com/2005/10/web-20-compact-definition.html>.
- Owusu-Yeboah, B. (2015). *Adoption of user generated content (UGC) on some Ghanaian news websites* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana.
- Palmer, M. (2012). Editorials and the Power of Media: interweaving of socio-cultural identities. *Journalism Studies*, 13(3), 474-475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670x.2012.662413>.
- Paulussen, S., & Harder, R. A. (2014). Social Media References in Newspapers. *Journalism Practice*, 8(5), 542-551. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.894327>.
- Paulussen, S., & Ugille, P. (2008). User generated content in the newsroom: Professional and organisational constraints on participatory journalism. *Westminster papers in communication & culture*, 5(2).
- Pavlik, J. V. (2001). Journalism and new media. <https://doi.org/10.7312/pavl11482>.
- Purcell, K., Rainie, L., Mitchell, A., Rosenstiel, T., & Olmstead, K. (2010). Understanding the participatory news consumer. *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, 1, 19-21.
- Reese, S. D., & Ballinger, J. (2001). The roots of a sociology of news: Remembering Mr. Gates and social control in the newsroom. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(4), 641-658.
- Roberts, C. (2005). Gatekeeping theory: An evolution. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228891703_Gatekeeping_theory_An_evolution.
- Rodriguez, M. N. (2012). Comparative Models of Cooperative Journalism.
- Rogers, R. (2019). *Changing Times: Quality for Humans in a Digital Age*. [online] Dl.acm.org. Available at: <https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=3165232> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2019].
- Rosen, J. (2019). *Google's Gatekeepers*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/magazine/30google-t.html> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2019].
- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., ... & Jinks, C. (2011). Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & quantity*, 52(4), 1893-1907.

- Schifferes, S., Newman, N., Thurman, N., Corney, D., Göker, A., & Martin, C. (2014). Identifying and verifying news through social media: Developing a user-centred tool for professional journalists. *Digital journalism*, 2(3), 406-418.
- Shabir, G., Safdar, G., Imran, M., Mumtaz, A., & Anjum, A. A. (2015). Process of Gate Keeping in Media: From Old Trend to New. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n1s1p588>.
- Shaw, A. (2012). Centralized and decentralized gatekeeping in an open online collective. *Politics & Society*, 40(3), 349-388.
- Shoemaker, P. J. (1991). *Communication concepts 3: Gatekeeping*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Shoemaker, P. J., Eichholz, M., Kim, E., & Wrigley, B. (2001). Individual and routine forces in gatekeeping. *Journalism & mass communication quarterly*, 78(2), 233-246.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. (2009). *Gatekeeping theory*. Routledge.
- Shoemaker, P. J., Vos, T. P., & Reese, S. D. (2009). Journalists as Gatekeepers: The Handbook of Journalism Studies: Taylor & Francis Group. Retrieved from <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780203877685/chapters/10.4324/9780203877685-14>.
- Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Singer, J. B. (2006). Partnerships and Public Service: Normative Issues for Journalists in Converged Newsrooms. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 21(1), 30-53. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327728jmme2101_3.
- Singer, J. B. (2011). "Journalism in a Network." In *Managing Media Work* (M. Deuze, Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Singer, J. B. (2013). User-generated visibility: Secondary gatekeeping in a shared media space. *New Media & Society*, 16(1), 55-73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813477833>.
- Singer, J. B. (2014). User-generated visibility: Secondary gatekeeping in a shared media space. *New media & society*, 16(1), 55-73.
- Singer, J. B., & Ashman, I. (2009). "Comment Is Free, but Facts Are Sacred": User-generated Content and Ethical Constructs at the Guardian. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24(1), 3-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08900520802644345>.
- Snider, D. M. (1967). A Theoretical Analysis And Experimental Confirmation Of The Optimally Loaded And Overdriven Rf Power Amplifier. <https://doi.org/10.21236/ad0647799>.

- Soroka, S. N. (2016). Gatekeeping and the Negativity Bias. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.43>.
- Stassen, W. (2010). Your news in 140 characters : Exploring the role of social media in journalism. Retrieved from https://journals.co.za/content/glomed_africa/4/1/EJC34933.
- Storck, M. (2014). Streaming the Syrian War: A case study of the partnership between professional and citizen journalists in the Syrian Conflict.
- Scott, J. T. (2005). Rousseau's Anti–Agenda-Setting Agenda and Contemporary Democratic Theory. *American Political Science Review*, 99(1), 137-144.
- Storm, E. (2007). The endurance of gatekeeping in an evolving newsroom: A multimethod study of web-generated user content. *International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA*.
- Tolmie, P., Procter, R., Randall, D. W., Rouncefield, M., Burger, C., Wong Sak Hoi, G., & Liakata, M. (2017, May). Supporting the use of user generated content in journalistic practice. In *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 3632-3644). ACM.
- Tomchak, A., & McDonald, C. (2014). #BBCTrending: Syrian 'hero boy' video faked by Norwegian director. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-30057401>
- Tutheridge, G. (2017). What is the role of gatekeeping journalists in today's media environment? Retrieved January 6, 2018, from <https://medium.com/@gabrielltutheridge/what-is-the-role-of-gatekeeping-journalists-in-today-s-media-environment-2034a30ba850>.
- Ugland, E., Henderson, J. (2007) Who Is a Journalist and Why Does it Matter? Disentangling the Legal and Ethical Arguments. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 22(4), 241-261
- Vickery, G. and Wunsch-Vincent, S. (2019). *Participative Web and User-Created Content: Web 2.0 Wikis and Social Networking*. *Dl.acm.org*. Retrieved February 17, 2019, from <https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1554640>.
- Vos, T. P. (2015). Revisiting gatekeeping theory during a time of transition. In *Gatekeeping in transition* (pp. 17-38). Routledge.
- Wallace, J. (2018). Modelling contemporary gatekeeping: The rise of individuals, algorithms and platforms in digital news dissemination. *Digital Journalism*, 6(3), 274-293.
- Watson, J. (2008). *Media communication: An introduction to theory and process*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

- Weaver, D. H., Beam, R. A., Brownlee, B. J., Voakes, P. S., & Wilhoit, C. G. (2007). *The American journalist in the 21st century: U.S. news people at the dawn of a new millennium*. Mahwah (N.J.): L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Westley, B. H., & Maclean, M. S. (1957). A Conceptual Model for Communications Research. *Journalism Quarterly*, 34(1), 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769905703400103>.
- White, D. M. (1950). The “gate keeper”: A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Bulletin*, 27(4), 383-390.
- Williams, B. A., & Carpini, M. X. (2000). Unchained reaction. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 1(1), 61-85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490000100113>.
- Wimmer, D. R., & Dominick, R. J. (2011). Qualitative research methods. *Mass media research: An introduction*, 9, 114-154.
- Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2011). Mass media research: An introduction, International Edition. *United Kingdom: Wadsworth Cengage Learning*.
- Zelizer, B. (1993). Journalists as interpretive communities. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 10(3), 219-237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039309366865>.

APPENDIX

OBSERVATION GUIDE

The researcher will generally observe how UGC is integrated in the newsroom, the factors that influence the gatekeeping of UGC in the newsroom and the elements that characterize gatekeeping of the content. That is, the decision-making process, the selection process, the transformation of messages, the measures content is subjected to, and how and where the content is published.

The researcher will observe:

1. The use of UGC

- the types of content the newsroom considers as UGC
- how the newsroom accesses UGC – solicited or unsolicited?
- the types of UGC that is used most in the newsroom (eg citizen journalism)
- the sources of UGC (eg. social media, emails)
- the forms of UGC (eg. texts, photos, videos)
- how UGC is described
- how it is considered and used in their work- a primary or secondary news item?
- the nature of the UGC- hard news or soft news?
- which journalists use UGC -Sports, business, lifestyle, political, health?
- which journalists use UGC more
- if there is a set process or system in place for collecting UGC? Example a hub for UGC?
- the visible attitudes of journalists and editors in handling UGC

2. The process of gatekeeping

- which UGC is considered as news over the others received
- which platform is used more for publishing UGC-online or mainstream media?
- if the content selected for online spaces are different from the ones selected for mainstream media
- if the selection is done by one person or a group
- if UGC is edited or it is published as received or found and why
- how text, photos and videos are selected and edited for publication
- how content is checked for accuracy- by a software or personal contact of the contributor?
- what content is not selected for publication and why

3. Factors influencing gatekeeping

- if individual values and opinions of journalists and editors affect the selection of UGC. If there are, which?
- the organization's culture which affects the use of UGC, that is, newsroom routines, deadlines, and the organization's policies, identity and values.
- which professional ethics and editorial standards apply to the selection and use of UGC. Which ones do they seem most committed to?
- if the newsroom has access to software that enables content to be verified and checked. If there are, which and how is it used?
- if there are other reasons that are considered before the use of UGC and why?

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The researcher will purposively interview journalists and editors that use UGC in their work based on observations made.

The use of UGC

1. What types of content do you consider as UGC?
2. Do you purposefully ask for UGC to be sent or you use what you find online? (solicited or unsolicited)
3. What types of UGC do you use? Which ones are used most?
4. Where do you get most of your UGC from? (sources such as social media or footages sent through emails)
5. Do you consider UGC as:

primary news or secondary news? Or is it complementary to your work?
6. What is the nature of the UGC you often receive? (Is it hard news such as political or financial or soft news such as lifestyle?)
7. Which UGC do you prefer to use? (the hard news or soft news), and why?
8. Is there an in-house system that guides how you search for UGC?
9. How do you use UGC in your work?

The process of gatekeeping

7. Which UGC do you consider newsworthy over the others? Why?
8. Which platforms do you publish more of UGC? Your social media accounts, websites or mainstream media? What?

9. Is there a difference in what UGC you select for online audiences and the ones you select for mainstream media audiences? Why?

10. What are the main challenges with using UGC?

11. Which UGC is selected and edited, and which ones are not?

12. How do you select and edit text, photos and videos for publication?

13. How do you check content for accuracy- by a software or personal contact of the contributor?

14. Which content would you typically reject for publication?

Factors influencing gatekeeping

15. Do you have personal values and opinions that guide you in selecting a particular UGC? If there are, what are they? Can you give instances when that happened?

16. Does your organization's culture affect the use of UGC?

Newsroom routines, deadlines, policies, guidelines, identity and values of the organization.

17. What professional ethics and editorial standards that permit or prohibit what kinds of UGC you use?

18. Do you have software that enable content to be verified and checked. If there are, which? And how do you use them? Is it difficult or easy to use?

19. Are other reasons that you consider before you use UGC and why?

ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)

P. O. Box LG 571, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No.....

5th November, 2018

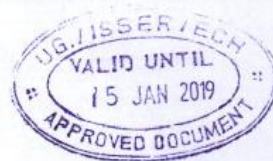
Miss Maxine Gloria Danso
Department of Communication Studies
University of Ghana
Legon, Accra

Dear Miss Danso,

ECH 158/17-18: THE INTEGRATION AND GATEKEEPING OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT (UGC) IN GHANANIAN NEWSROOMS: A STUDY OF TV3, CITIFM AND DAILY GRAPHIC

This is to advise you that the above reference study has been presented to the Ethics Committee for the Humanities for a full board review and the following actions taken subject to the conditions and explanation provided below:

Expiry Date: 15/01/19
On Agenda for: Initial Submission
Date of Submission: 14/19/18
ECH Action: Approved
Reporting: Quarterly



Please accept my congratulations.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. C. Charles Mate-Kole
ECH Vice Chair

CC: Dr. Margaret I. Amoakohene, Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana

Tel: + 233-303933866

Email: ech@ug.edu.gh