


**NEWSROOM PRACTICES OF A STATE-OWNED  
DAILY NEWSPAPER: A CASE STUDY OF THE  
*EVENING NEWS***



**BY  
DOREEN HAMMOND**

**A dissertation presented to the School of  
Communication Studies, University of Ghana,  
Legon. In partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the award of the Master of Arts Degree in  
Communication Studies**

**APRIL 2004**

**DECLARATION**


This project was carried out at the School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon under the supervision of Dr. Audrey Gadzekpo.

With the exception of the work of other authors, which has been duly cited and acknowledged, this work is a result of my own research.

Doreen Hammond  
(Student)

  
-----  
(Signature)

Dr. Audrey Gadzekpo  
(Supervisor)

  
-----  
(Signature)

**DEDICATION**

**TO MY CHILDREN; SAMILIA, ANIELA AND ALVIN AND IN MEMORY OF  
MAA.**

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I was very fortunate to have the assistance of a knowledgeable and patient supervisor, Dr. Audrey Gadzekpo, whose guidance enabled me to finish this work. My gratitude also goes to the Director of the School of Communication Studies, Professor Kwasi Ansu-Kyeremeh for his words of encouragement that gave me the urge to go on.

I would like to thank the staff of the *Evening News* newsroom for their support. To the News Editor, Mr. Ken Nunoo and the Deputy Editor of the paper, Mr. Charles Neequaye, I would like to express gratitude for their role as informants.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Mr. John Ackom-Asante, Deputy Editor of the *Spectator*, for remaining a source of inspiration. To Mr. Dennis Vormawor, Dzifa Hanyabui and Dora Anang, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for their assistance in the completion of this work.

#### ABSTRACT

This is an ethnographic study of newsroom practices at the *Evening News*, one of the three state-owned newspapers produced by the New Times Corporation. The study combined the methodology of participant observation and in-depth interviews to explore the newsroom practices of the paper.

The study found that the newsroom of the *Evening News* is quite unconventional. The paper does not have a sub-desk and the pages are not planned by journalists. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is hardly used and has had no impact on newsroom culture. With this state of affairs, the news production process is rather cumbersome with the copy going back and forth for editing and proofs.

The unavailability of adequate transportation also presented a major challenge to the staff of the newsroom in carrying out their traditional role of newsgathering.

The study concludes that resources available to the newsroom influenced the practices of journalists working in the newsroom. In spite of journalists' individual and professional values, what became news was what was more likely to sell the paper. But even more significant was that what became news was what could be conveniently gathered in the light of resource constraints.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Declaration	I
Dedication	II
Acknowledgement	III
Abstract	IV
Table of Contents	V
List of Tables	VI
<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	1
Problem Statement	7
Objectives of Study	8
Significance of Study	9
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>10</b>
Theoretical Framework	10
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
Literature Review	17
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>25</b>
Methodology	25
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>29</b>
Findings	29
<b>Chapter Six</b>	<b>49</b>
Conclusions and Recommendations	49

<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix (Interview Guide)</b>	<b>57</b>

## **LIST OF TABLES AND CHARTS**

### **Table**

<b>5.1 Organisational Structure</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>5.2 Roles And Responsibilities at the <i>Evening News</i></b>	<b>31</b>
<b>5.3 News Production Processes at the <i>Evening News</i></b>	<b>42</b>

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

At the core of every newspaper organisation is the newsroom which acts as the nerve centre of the production of the newspaper. In order to understand the culture of the newsroom today, there is the need to understand the historical development of the newsroom.

Originally, the term referred to a public room where newspapers were read. An example was the kind of room in which patrons of hotels read newspapers (Nerone and Barnhurst, 2002). The term "newsroom" was used in the second half of the nineteenth century when editorial work became separated from mechanical work.

Before the development of the newsroom, the chief figure in the production of the newspaper was the printer. He selected the content, and also wrote some of this content himself. The printer, with assistance from a few workers, set the type, pressed the pages, distributed the paper and managed the subscription list. He was also responsible for managing the advertising accounts, running other printing jobs and sometimes a bookshop on the side (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2002).

The gradual shift from the newspaper as a printer's paper to the newspaper as an editor's paper was marked by a revolution, which demanded that the newspaper be produced to energise and support politics (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2002). Party activists who were not necessarily trained in printing took over as editors of party papers. They wrote the editorials, and selected material from other newspapers for reproduction in their papers to support their party line. By

the end of the nineteenth century, editorial personnel had their own machine to work with – the typewriter. Before the introduction of the typewriter editorial personnel used loose newsprint for note taking and composition enabling them to move around, within the press house. The implication of the typewriter was that they had to be anchored to table space (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2002). As a result, a bank of typewriters on long tables shared by many news workers was the typical characteristic of the newsroom in the industrial age (Hardt and Brennen, 1999). The shift from the printer's newspaper to the editor's newspaper and the introduction of the typewriter to the work of editorial personnel produced what we now know as the newsroom.

The newsroom has remained the nerve centre of any newspaper. It is responsible for the planning, gathering and selection of news for publication. Practices in the newsroom may vary from one newsroom to the other, depending on the mission or policy of the newspaper. For this reason, the culture in newsrooms tends to vary.

Altheide (1978) defines media culture as the symbols and routines, which media people share, use and re-affirm in their work. In spite of these common symbols and routines shared, every media organisation is different. These differences are based on the policies of the organisation, which also influence its practices or procedures. Though, sometimes unwritten, the policies determine the principles and plan of action, which constitute the working conditions and the environment in the newsroom. Most of the time, reporters learn these while on the job and are not schooled on policies before employment.

Practice is commonly defined as the usual way something is done by a specified group or at a specified place or time. The resources available to the newsroom for example, would determine how news is gathered, planned and published and then influence practices in the newsroom, consequently shaping the character of

the final product, which is the newspaper. If, for example, the newsroom has computers, reporters are likely to use them to perform their traditional roles of newsgathering and news writing. This dissertation is an attempt at understanding the culture of Ghanaian newspapers by observing the practices at the newsroom of the *Evening News*.

### **THE EVENING NEWS**

The *Evening News* is one of eight state-owned newspapers in the country. It is published by the New Times Corporation (NTC). The NTC has two other publications, the *Spectator* which is a weekly paper basically aimed at entertaining readers and the *Ghanaian Times*, a national daily aimed at providing general news and information. The *Evening News*, on the other hand, is a political newspaper aimed at providing readers with news on political party activities and national politics in general.

The *Evening News* was first established as a political newspaper by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) in 1948, making it one of the oldest newspapers still in existence in Ghana. It has gone through different transformations throughout its chequered history; these changes have been significantly tied to the various political fortunes of the country.

During colonial rule in the Gold Coast, Dr Kwame Nkrumah established the paper as the mouth-piece of the Convention People's Party (CPP) and it "proved an invaluable ally in the fight for independence" (Ainslie, 1996: 58). The maiden issue of the newspaper sold out quickly. According to Smerin (1987:41) "crowds gathered outside the editorial offices to obtain copies of the latest issue". The newspaper had several mottos, which spurred people into action. Among them were, "We have the right to govern ourselves" and "We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquility". "Self-Government now" became the

most popular slogan of the paper and the rallying call for independence throughout the country.

During that period, the *Accra Evening News* was set by hand, and was rich in text; but the quality of the paper was poor as was print quality. It had pages of Ghanaian language text such as Ga, Ewe, Twi, Fante and Hausa (Asante, 1996). Its policy was to fight for independence, and this it did by, among others, exposing and criticizing the colonial rule. It also devoted its pages to Kwame Nkrumah, whose activities involved the persistent demand for self-government, under the auspices of the Convention Peoples' Party.

The establishment of the *Accra Evening News* opened another historical phase of journalism in Ghana. According to Asante (1996:5), Nkrumah established other papers when he realised that the *Accra Evening News* had become an overnight success. These papers included the *Morning Telegraph* in Sekondi-Takoradi in January 1949 and the *Cape Coast Daily Mail*. All these papers had the same objective of fighting for the country's independence.

Nkrumah's persistent demands for "self-government now" got him in trouble with the law on several occasions. In January 1950, two years after the establishment of the *Evening News*, Nkrumah was arrested and imprisoned for three years by the colonial government for inciting a strike and for publishing sedition. The offices of the *Evening News* were subsequently closed down under a state of Emergency Act by the Governor (Nkrumah, 1974:52).

Nkrumah was released from prison, after serving only 14 months of his three-year sentence because his party, the CPP, had won an overwhelming majority in the general elections and had to form a government. He resumed the publication of the *Accra Evening News*. After independence he established a modern press known as the Guinea Press Limited in 1958 with funds provided by the National

Industrial Development Corporation and in collaboration with local businessmen. The Guinea press became the publisher of *the Accra Evening News*. This move changed the status of the paper and some other CPP newspapers from private to state-owned.

From 1948 to 1968 when the papers' publication is thought to have finally ceased, the name of the paper changed from *Accra Evening News* to the *Ghana Evening News* before assuming the name *Evening News* (Jones-Quartey, 1975:112). The exact reason for the discontinuation of the publication in 1968 is not clear but sometime after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966; the newspaper went out of circulation. Over the years a number of attempts have been made at re-establishing the *Evening News* with varying degrees of success. One such attempt was made when the *Peoples' Evening News*, an independent daily, appeared on the newsstand in June 1979 (Asante, 1996:62). The paper's status changed from being a daily to a fortnightly newspaper barely a year after its existence, due to logistical and other problems. It is not clear when this paper's publication stopped but it is likely that it went down with other independent newspapers at the time, which were refused the supply of newsprint because they were critical of the government.

After a long hiatus, the *Evening News* was re-launched on Friday, November 5, 1999. It is the only afternoon daily newspaper and is distributed in the capital city, Accra, and its environs. The *Evening News* has as its motto, "Truth well Told". The maiden issue of this latest version of the paper indicated that the paper would provide the reader with something in hand by noon to go through the rest of the day after reading the morning newspapers. It also stated a rather ambitious mission that it will search for the political and social emancipation of the black race in general while preserving the peace and fighting for economic freedom not only for Ghana but the whole African continent. This mission seems

a hangover from the past and is similar to Nkrumah's political ambition of seeking the total liberation of the African continent.

From an impressive circulation figure of 16,000 when it was re-launched in 1999 to 9,000 in 2001, the paper's circulation has dwindled to a mere 4,000 copies today (the time of study). This situation has been attributed to a non-aggressive marketing strategy and the delay in circulating the paper to other areas outside Accra. There has also been a change in editorial leadership, and staff strength is now smaller because of the non-replacement of a number of reporters who have been on a long leave. The New Times Corporation, the paper's parent company, has also experienced changes in management and this may account for the state of affairs at the *Evening News*.

Another contributing factor to the poor circulating figures of the paper may be the change in the political climate in the country. The *Evening News* was re-launched at a time when the country was preparing for the December 2000 elections. The election results proclaimed Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party as President. He therefore took over from Ft. Lt. J.J. Rawlings who had ruled the country as the Chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council and President of the NDC for almost 20 years. The newspapers produced by the New Times Corporation were for most part of this 20-year rule perceived as the mouth piece of Rawlings' regime/government and therefore not patronised by most readers who dissented against this regime. The *Evening News* has remained on the newsstand for almost four years now with no significant break in circulation. One of its difficulties has been that of keeping to a fixed time of coming out. One day it is out as early as noon, another day it comes as late as 4p.m.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Newsroom practices are likely to differ from one newsroom to the other. In her Graduate Diploma project, this researcher studied students' perception of the *Evening News*, using students of the Ghana Institute of Journalism as a case study. Among the findings was that the language used by the paper was easy to understand, and that the paper was sensational. Most significant, however, was the finding that students did not rely on the paper for political news even though the paper considers itself a political paper.

This dissertation studies the *Evening News* further in an attempt to understand what shapes the content of the newspaper. It sought to find out how the newsroom was organised and it explored the gatekeeping processes that determined the contents of the newspaper. The news production procedures, editorial philosophy of the paper and the various roles played by the staff were of particular interest to this research.

The traditional role of the journalist involves the gathering of news, news writing editing and planning. But these journalistic functions are carried out in different ways, depending on the culture of a media organisation, its mission and editorial philosophy. The kind of resources available would also determine the practices in the organisation in general and the newsroom in particular.

This study sought to find out how the staff of the *Evening News* newsroom operate in view of the rapid increase in the range of Information and Communication Technologies available in the last few decades. The study looked at the kind of resources available to the reporters in carrying out their traditional role and the main sources of news relied upon by journalists. The dynamics between journalists working in the newsroom as they produce the paper was explored.

It is known that journalists work around the clock in an attempt to carry out their traditional role of planning, gathering and selecting news for the public.

The study is exploratory and attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What shapes the political character of the paper?
2. What shapes news judgment?
3. How does personal politics affect the political tone of the newspaper and stories selected?
4. How do journalists strive to maintain the news values of objectivity, fairness and balance?
5. What are the gatekeeping processes in the newsroom?
6. How are press releases and other unsolicited information sent to the newsroom dealt with?
7. What roles do journalists in the newsroom play in the newsgathering, news selection process and news editing?
8. How do resources available affect the way journalists carry out their traditional roles?
9. To what extent do journalists depend on sources for news and how do they check their credibility?
10. How are ethical and other decisions pertaining to the content of the newspaper arrived at?

#### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

The main objective of this study was to examine the culture and practices of the staff in the newsroom, which shape the final product – the *Evening News*. Related to this is the fact that there has been a rapid development of technology in recent years, never available before and capable of facilitating the work of journalists. Are these resources available to journalists in the newsroom of the

*Evening News?* How are journalists using these resources to carry out their traditional practices in the newsroom? Is there more efficiency with the introduction of computers?

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This work is a departure from previous studies in Ghana which have mainly focused on audience research, including newspaper readership surveys, and the analysis of content of newspapers. Few studies have paid attention to the practices that culminate in the final product – the newspaper. It is expected that findings would contribute to the body of knowledge on newsroom culture and practices and provide information about news production processes in Ghana.

#### **DEFINITION OF TERM**

**Newsroom Practices:** the usual procedures journalists employ in the newsroom which culminates in the production of the newspaper.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Theoretical Framework

This study will be informed by five theories of communication and media practice. They are the theories of story selection, sources, gatekeeping, agenda setting and diffusion of innovation. These theories underpin the objectives of the study by providing a framework for understanding what shapes the political character of the newspaper and influences on story selection. The study will however rely more on the theories of story selection, gatekeeping and agenda setting because they are more relevant to the study.

#### Theories of Story Selection

Gans (1979:78-79) outlined four theories explaining how and why stories are selected by news organisations. One theory is journalist-centred: it refers to the historically popular process of shaping news by the professional judgment of journalists. The second theory is "organisational". It posits that the routinisation of newsgathering is influenced by the organisational requirements of the employers of journalists. Some organisational theories focus on the news firm and emphasise commercial imperatives; others are more concerned with the news organisations themselves and look at how their structures and division of labour affect story selection. For example a news story may be published not because it is newsworthy but because of financial gains for the news firm. Also, at each stage in the gate keeping process a story may be edited or even spiked at editorial conference. The third theory is event-centred and is based on the mirror theory. This theory proposes that events determine the selection of stories and journalists hold a mirror to them reflecting their image to the audience. The fourth theory explains story selection with forces outside the news organisation. It refers to the notion that one or more of several outside and sometimes

abstract forces determine what the message will be and how it will be used. These forces include technological, economic, ideological influences and the cultural context. It also considers that the news is shaped by the sources that journalists rely on for tip-offs or information.

### **The Theory of Gatekeeping**

One of the more common theories in mass communication posits the journalist as a "gatekeeper". The term gatekeeper originated from Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, and was expanded into the communication field by David Manning White in 1950 (Zhou: 2001). Since then, it has been frequently used in studying the mass communication process, especially with regard to any action involving choosing or rejecting potential material for publication.

White (Zhou: 2001) studied the choices made by a wire service editor at a small Midwestern newspaper. The wire service editor, Mr. Gates, selected a relatively limited number of stories for publication and rejected the rest based on what he wanted the community to hear as a fact and only those events which the newsman, as a representative of his culture, believed to be true. White found that the organisational routines of the mass media affected the kind of stories chosen. For instance, very newsworthy stories filed late in the evening, were less likely to be used because of sheer lack of space. So what appears as news often involves pragmatic issues such as what can be finished by a deadline (Zhou: 2001). White also found that the wire service editor consciously looked for stories slanted to conform to the newspapers' editorial policies.

Subsequent studies which followed White's research have shown that the journalist's self-perception as the person who decides what people need to know is deeply ingrained (Singer, 1997). Janowitz (1975) has suggested that the identification and dissemination of what is worth knowing is the journalist's most

basic and most important task in a democratic society in which information plays a central role. The routines of journalism and news production push certain stories into the spotlight and others to the periphery.

A study by Singer (1997) showed that people inside the newsroom are modifying their definition of the "gatekeeper" to incorporate notions of both quality control and sense-making. Specifically, they see their role as credible interpreters of an unprecedented volume of available information as fundamental to their value and even their survival in a new media environment; an environment in which the computer via the internet makes easily accessible limitless information. Singer's findings are in line with a survey by Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), who found that journalists continue to see their primary role as interpreters, rather than mere gatherers and disseminators, of information.

Singer's expanded notion of the gatekeeper's fundamental function in a technologically assisted newsroom helps to inform questions raised by computers in the newsroom of the *Evening News*.

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

Related to the concept of gatekeeping is the agenda setting theory. The media uses gatekeeping and agenda setting to control access to news, information and entertainment (Wilson,1993). Wilson (1993) defines the theory of agenda-setting as the process whereby the mass media determine what we think and worry about. The media does this by determining what will be news and what won't. The agenda setting theory states that the media are not always successful at telling us what to think, but they are successful at telling us what to think about (McCombs and Shaw,1973). According to Wilson (1993:17):

Professional communicators working for the mass media set the news and information agenda for us. If they determine that something isn't

important, it most likely won't be, because it will receive very little, if any, media attention. And of course the reverse is true.

This theory explains why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. But more importantly and relevant to the study of newsroom practices, the agenda setting theory explains how the practices of journalists result in setting the agenda. The theory has explanatory power because it explains why most people prioritise the same issues as important and explains that dominant media messages that they are exposed to influence what finally becomes the agenda.

#### **THE THEORY OF SOURCES**

The gatekeeping and agenda setting functions of the media require the use of sources by journalists. The value of sources to reporters has been established as invaluable by various researchers. According to Mencher, "The source is the reporter's lifeblood. Without access to information through the source, the reporter cannot function" (Mencher, 1997: 309).

Gans (1979) theorises that news is shaped by the sources on which a newsroom relies. Newsrooms enjoy a steady flow of information from their sources on a regular and timely basis (Reese, 1991). Sources not only provide newsrooms with information but also make the job of delivering a daily news product achievable. It is virtually impossible to cover the world, state and even local news from one location without relying on credible sources. Gans refers to the relationship between the media and their sources as a dance in which, more often than not, "sources do the leading" (Gans, 1980:116).

Berkowitz (1991) states that a key concept to understand is that newsrooms' cost and time constraints have forced the use of material from sources. The

practice of using sources has become so much a routine that journalists' take it for granted that newscasts should be created by sifting through the day's information from sources. The source however has to be credible to be relied on by journalists. Sources that have provided incorrect or useless information in the past might be purposively overlooked (Weaver & Elliot, 1986). Also sources that are perceived as powerful and having influence in a community have a better chance of getting their information into a newscast (Shoemaker, 1991). Eventually, sources help to shape the news and what the audience hears or reads (Schrum & O'Guinn, 1993).

Beach and Berkowitz (1993) found that much of journalistic activity involves routine work processes built on a regular pool of news sources. They found that although these sources are composed largely of officials in government and business, journalists also become familiar with other people who can provide information for a news story.

#### **DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION**

The theory of diffusion of innovation was most directly applied to communication studies by Rogers (1995) who described it as a process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time. Rogers, as well as other researchers who have built on this theory, have dealt with it in relation to the spread of change through the social system. If we consider the newsroom as a social system and the introduction of computers and other technology to the newsroom as innovations then the theory of diffusion of innovation is appropriate for the study of practices in the newsroom in relation to the use of computers.

Rogers (1995) theorised that an innovation should be perceived to possess five different characteristics to affect the rate of its adoption. These characteristics

are "relative advantage", "compatibility", "complexity", "divisibility" and "communicability".

Relative advantage expresses the extent to which a new product is better than the one it is replacing. In exploring the practices of journalists therefore, this study addresses whether the introduction of new technology is seen as better than what formerly pertained. Of particular interest is whether new technology has resulted in journalists working with more speed and accuracy and consequently being more efficient.

Compatibility refers to the fact that no matter how superior an innovation is, it will not be successful if it does not take into consideration local values and customs of the adopters. Compatibility is the level at which an innovation fits into the specific society. The smoother the innovation fits into the culture, the faster the rate of adoption. Of interest therefore is how compatible new technologies such as computers are to journalists in the newsroom.

Complexity is the extent of difficulty an adopter has in understanding and using an innovation. It is natural to think that the harder an innovation is to use, or perceived to be hard to use, the less likely that an adopter would be able to use it. A modern example would be the Internet. Although the Internet is easy to use and enhances information, it could be intimidating to someone who has never used the computer.

Divisibility refers to the ability of the consumer to give the innovation a try before deciding whether to use it or not. In this direction, it would be interesting to find out if journalists in the newsroom have had the chance to use computers.

Communicability has to do with the notion that when an innovation is not able to solve the problem of the adopter, it will not diffuse quickly through society, as compared to an innovation which proves beneficial.

Rogers (1995) also considered the role of opinion leaders in the diffusion of innovation. Opinion leaders are individuals in a social system that others come to for information and guidance. The interest here therefore would be to find out who the opinion leaders are in the newsroom and their influence on other journalists in the newsroom. With these theories as a guiding frame, I now examine what has been found by researchers who have studied various aspects of media and newsroom culture.

### CHAPTER THREE LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines some of the studies relating to the practice of journalism especially in the newsroom. Much of this literature is American, with a few from the United Kingdom. Very little has been published about journalistic practices in Ghanaian newsrooms.

#### **ETHICS**

Ethics is important in every profession. It is commonly defined as standards of conduct and moral judgment and therefore guides professional decision making and behaviour. In the case of journalists, ethics plays a crucial role in the news selection process. Many news organisations offer no ethics protocol, perhaps operating under the theory that because ethics is taught in journalism school there is no need to introduce formal guidelines in the newsroom (Arant and Anderson, 2000). Folkerts et al. (1998) define ethics as standards of conduct and moral judgment. They note that moral judgment is difficult to define because it requires judging the "goodness or badness" of human behaviour and character. They note that even though news reporters and editors claim to adhere to standards of truth without economic considerations, research has shown that economics and politics have often dictated news content. The authors note that ethical standards are intrinsically related to the political and cultural milieu in which the media operate. In spite of the debate about ethical decision making the few fundamental standards agreed upon by most individuals and groups include no compromise on accuracy, fairness, balance, accurate representation and truth (Folkerts et al, 1998).

Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) in a study of the ethics of various reporting practices in two surveys conducted a decade apart found that there were disagreements about the ethics of newsgathering and reporting practices. Some of the

journalists they interviewed, for instance, said that it was acceptable to use unauthorised business and government documents, while others disagreed. They concluded that individual differences, backgrounds, values, and perceptions strongly influenced responses to the questions posed since there was no consensus among the journalists on what was ethical and what was not. Reuss (1997:44) agrees with this finding and states that "individual differences, backgrounds, values, and perceptions strongly influence the decisions journalists make as they cover the news". But their values are not all it takes to produce the news; their values are influenced by the overall values of the media organisation that they work for and the social, economic, and political forces within the environment that they work (Gordon, 1997).

Gordon and Kittross (1997) note that the hallmarks of a profession is that it has a code of ethics and the power to enforce it. Reuss (1997:57) argues "that media codes of ethics are impotent, and too often they are facades that imply ethical behaviour". But Gordon (1997: 61) contends that "even if code of ethics cannot be enforced, they serve an important purpose by setting standards against which conduct can be measured and evaluated".

Like other professions, journalists in Ghana who are members of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) have a code of ethics contained in a handbook to guide their practice. Among the guidelines in the code is the requirement for the journalist "to write and report the truth bearing in mind his/her duty to serve the public" (Ghana Journalists Association Hand book, 2003:27). The handbook also states that the public has the right to unbiased, accurate, balanced and comprehensive information as well as to express themselves freely through the media. Journalists are also bound to protect confidential sources of information, make adequate inquiries about a story before publication and cross-check their facts. There is an Ethics Committee, set up by the GJA, "to resolve grievances of members and deal with complaints form the public" and to ensure that high

ethical standards are maintained in the practice of journalism in Ghana" ( Ghana Journalists Association Handbook,2003: 32).

### **OBJECTIVITY AS ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Phillips(1978) in a study of how journalists gather and process news in a daily newspaper, two commercial radio stations and a commercial television station in America found that the journalistic notion of objectivity boiled down to a set of practice and principles. She found that they were a set of canons, based on vague notions of balance, fairness, lack of bias, accuracy and neutrality in newsgathering and editing.

On objectivity, Tuchman (1972) notes that objectivity refers to a set of work rituals that help news organisations to meet deadlines and avoid libel suits. News workers therefore learn to follow certain strategies to produce what they call objective stories. On the contrary, Gans (1980) found, in his study of two evening television network organisations and at the *Newsweek* and *Time* that few of the journalists had conscious values. He found that journalists sought to exclude conscious values by seeking to be objective, by disregarding the implications of their stories, and by ejecting ideology. Gans concluded that rituals do not provide guidelines either for the selection of stories or the facts that go with them. Journalists, when gathering news, try to be detached and when selecting it, try to ignore the consequences of who it might harm (Gans, 1980:183).

### **NEWS VALUES**

Apart from ethical values, news values also influence the practice of journalism. The journalist or an editor decides what's newsworthy using a set of news values, not an instinct, but a deeply internalised set of news values that are common to most journalists. Applegate (1996) notes that any newsworthy event needs to have some intrinsic characteristics known as news values. These values

are what journalists consider in deciding what news is. There are different models of news values. They include: conflict, progress and disaster, consequence, eminence/prominence, novelty, timeliness, proximity, and sex. Sometimes what makes news is determined by a combination of these news values and not a single one.

Golding (1998:250) who studied the news media and the management of change argues that:

"far from being spontaneous reactions to random events, news is selected, shaped and structured according to a range of ideological conventions, institutional practices and assumptions about the audience, as well as the more obvious practical considerations".

Golding (1998:253) also found that:

News values are used in two ways. They are criteria of selection from material available to the newsroom of those items worthy of inclusion in the final production. Secondly, news values are guidelines for the presentation of items suggesting what to emphasise, what to omit and where to give priority in the preparation of items for presentation to the audience. News values are thus the working rules, comprising a corpus of occupational lore which implicitly explains and guides newsroom practice.

Schlesinger (1989:47) also describes the media as "... a system of work, operating with a determinate set of routines". Similarly, ethnographic researchers have found that journalists develop their work routines and practices over a long period, moulding them around the restraints of time, resources and technology (Tuchman, 1978:120-121; Gans, 1979; White 1950).

Clelland and Ostroff (1988) discovered that journalists considered the newsroom to be a reporter's shop and that the news director operates the newsroom like a

newspaper, stressing on writing skills, and criticising the copy until it meets the organisation's stand.

#### **EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY**

The editorial philosophy or policy of a news organisation also influences the practices of ordinary journalists who work with the paper. Denkabe and Gadzekpo (1996) carried out in-depth interviews with some editors of Ghanaian newspapers on their editorial philosophy. They quote the then editor of the state owned *Ghanaian Times* as saying that the editorial policy "depends". Denkabe and Gadzekpo (1996: 39) found that the *Ghanaian Times* considered its primary responsibility to be to educate people and generally to support the national programme, and anything that went into developing a nation. The editor of the paper said that there were news items, which the paper did not use because "we are obliged by our perception of the national interest not to cause unrest and uneasiness". The editor of the paper thought that since "government" had ownership of the paper it was obliged to support government programmes and if that support happened to be political support for government then "so be it". This ideology of the editor influenced the culture of the newsroom of the *Ghanaian Times* at that time and what was finally printed. In accordance with this philosophy it was more likely that the agenda set by stories covered and selected for publication (gatekeeping) were favourable to government and in support of government programmes.

The editorial policy of a newspaper also influences the practices of ordinary journalists who work with the paper. Denkabe and Gadzekpo (1996:50) note that journalists "would like to see the gatekeeping processes of their news organisations tightened". It was felt that this together with continuous in-house and outside training would improve the quality of their output.

The gatekeeping processes of a newsroom are also influenced by choices and not decisions. Sigel (1973:2) notes "most news results from choice, not decisions". He states that the stories are the choices of many decision makers. These choices, according to Sigel (1973), are the result of internal politics, particularly on large papers. The final gatekeeper strives for ideal balance among the contributing editors. Gans (1979: 90) has similar views as Sigel. He notes that,

the people involved in story selection can be viewed as participants in a quasi- commercial transaction...Journalists operate in a supply- and-demand situation.

Whitney and Becker (1982) tie the gatekeeping function of journalists to the agenda setting concept, saying that news editors of the media choose their stories in proportion to the ratio in which they appear on the news service wires in a mixed pattern designed by wire-service editors.

## **RESOURCES AND OUTPUT**

The type of resources available to the newsroom also has an impact on output. Journalists have used telephones, shortwave radio, fax machines, and other new

information-gathering technologies to improve their work and to resolve some of the difficulties of gathering information that have emerged during the past century (Garrison, 1999). Such technology-based resources have helped to increase speed and sometimes the accuracy of information being reported, but this has not been trouble-free. For example, sources on telephone may not be who they profess to be and human sources could use these technologies to pass on untruthful information to the newsroom. New technologies such as cellular phones often provide poor connections, and radio communication could also be hampered by noise. Garrison (1992) notes that faxes widely used in newsrooms during the past two decades, could be garbled or reproduced so poorly as to render them unreadable. They note that in spite of this, the benefits have seemed to overshadow the problems.

More recently, the phenomenon of computer-assisted reporting in contemporary newsrooms is emerging because of the use of the Internet. Kaye and Medoff (1999) note that the latest information technology, centred on the world wide network of computer systems of the Internet, has been an asset to most journalists who have employed it. Reddick and King (1997) found that growing numbers of journalists used the world wide web as a reporting tool with considerable enthusiasm. Garrison (1999) states that among the most appealing reasons for the use of the Internet/computer is its scope and depth of information as well as the speed at which information may be retrieved. Ward and Hansen (1997) also found that resources found on the Internet often enhanced the coverage of breaking news stories such as an airline or weather disaster.

Journalists use online resources to background stories, identify sources, to check or verify facts, to read their competition, obtain information about current events and to identify story ideas (Ross and Middleberg, 1997). Callahan (1997) found that while the Internet and world wide web are valuable newsgathering tools,

finding information can be a problem because of some failures of the technology it relies on. Such problems make its use a problem for journalists on deadline.

Technophobia has been determined to be another concern for the adoption of computers (Singer, Tharp and Haruta, 1998). Research has shown that as much as 85 percent of American adults may have some form of technophobia (Hayes, 1997). Technophobes, according to Garrison (1998), often try to get their assigned work completed with minimal interaction with a computer, an online research service, e-mail, a fax machine, voice mail, or any electronic devices or services. He notes that while the numbers of technophobes in American newsrooms may not be as high, the levels of computer skills of many journalists remain at writing and editing with a word processor or creating artwork with a graphics programme.

This finding is similar to that of McKercher (1994) who in a survey of two large Canadian daily newspapers examined the practices of 30 journalists in their use of computers as part of their work and its effect on their traditional roles. The study found that the main use of computers was as electronic typewriters and as devices to check the electronic clipping files. McKercher (1994) concluded that small, but growing groups of reporters at both newspapers she studied were using computers for communications, research and organisation in their reporting and regarded these activities as representing new techniques and reporting tasks. Helle (2000), however, notes that even though the typewriter, the telephone and the computer have changed the work of journalists, there is still little empirical research on what has actually changed in newsrooms and what role technology has played in these changes.

CHAPTER FOUR  
METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the newsroom of the *Evening News* located at the New Times Corporation, Accra North Industrial Area from June 9, 2003 to July 10, 2003. It was chosen because the researcher could easily gain access into the newsroom.

This is an ethnographic study aimed at exploring the newsroom practices of the *Evening News*. In mass communication studies, ethnographic field research has become the standard procedure used to study the working of media institutions Newbold *et al.* (2002). This approach, according to Newbold *et al.* (2002:73), "is a form of qualitative research which allows the researcher to take part in the situations to be studied". The ethnographic approach was deemed appropriate because the study was exploratory and enabled the researcher to determine the ideas, habits, ways and action patterns of the *Evening News* newsroom.

Ethnographic research offers an orientation to understanding the process and structure of a social setting and employs research techniques consistent with this orientation. The role of the ethnographer "is to make inferences about what people know by listening carefully to what they say and by observing behaviour" (Spradley 1980 : 11).

Specifically, therefore the ethnographic methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews were used. The participatory approach allowed the researcher "to experience directly, to get the feel of what events are like, and to record her own perceptions" (Spradley 1980:52). This triangulation of participant observation and in-depth interviews helped the researcher to gain an additional perspective on data collected. The overt participant observation technique was used. The researcher gained access to the newsroom by asking permission from the Managing Director of the New Times Corporation to do an "internship" for the period of the study. This allowed the researcher to capture the normal flow of events without trying to control the extraneous variables. With regard to the validity of information garnered using participant observation, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) state that there is a high degree of internal validity inherent in ethnographic research. They note that participant observation provides the opportunity "for continual data analysis and comparison to refine constructs and to ensure the match between scientific categories and participant reality" (Goetz and Le Compte 1984: 221).

The in-depth interviews were necessary, as Denkabe and Gadzekpo (1996:14) put it, "to probe deeply for an understanding of the attitudes". The interviews were unstructured and sought to discover the experiences of the informants on their practices in the newsroom. The interviews were also essential in probing the educational backgrounds of the journalists under study. The Deputy Editor,

Mr. Charles Neequaye and the News Editor, Mr. Ken Nunoo, were interviewed because they were considered key informants around whom work in the newsroom revolved. The interviews were held on different dates, July 3, 2003, and July 4, 2003, respectively, at the convenience of the informants and close to the end of the observations made in the newsroom, to seek explanations for some of the phenomenon observed. For example, after noticing that the telephone was locked up in a box, the interview enabled the researcher to find out why. The observations were recorded.

#### **DATA COLLECTION**

The researcher was present in the newsroom for a period of one month (June 9- July 10, 2003) between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. each working day. Journalists reported for work everyday except on Saturdays. On Sundays, the editor and the deputy editor do not report for work because of the unavailability of a vehicle to convey them from their respective homes to the workplace.

The researcher recorded observations in newsroom in a notebook. Two people were interviewed; the Deputy Editor and the News Editor because they were found to be the key people around whom activities in the newsroom revolved. The News Editor was the manager of the news desk and sometimes covered assignments like the other journalists. The Deputy Editor had to give his final assent before the paper could be printed. The interviews were conducted close to the end of the participant observation in order to enable the researcher to find explanations for some of the observations made. The informants were interviewed separately on July 3, 2003 and July 4, 2003 with an interview guide framed around the research questions.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data was analysed by identifying the basic components of newsroom practices. Dominant themes that emerged from the interviews and the participant observation the newsroom are presented in chapter five in the form of detailed descriptions. The descriptions were placed in context so that meanings could be inferred. Tables and charts have been used in the presentation of the findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS

#### THE ORGANISATION OF THE NEWSROOM

Ten people make up the *Evening News* team at the New Times Corporation. The Editor, Mr. Edward Abi-George, was the head of the newsroom. The next in the hierarchy was the Deputy Editor, Mr. Charles Neequaye. They had separate offices. Next in the hierarchy were the various sectional editors, the political editor, Mr. Gyamfi Boateng, who was based in the newsroom, the features editor, Mr. Frank Asmah and the foreign editor, Miss Abigail Acquaye whose offices were outside the newsroom. They were all editorial staff. Miss Acquaye was the only female journalist working with the *Evening News*. There were five reporters who worked in the newsroom. They were Messrs. James Addy, the parliamentary correspondent, Samuel Amoako, presidential correspondent, and Ian Mortey, Samuel Duodu and Clement Adzei Boye, general assignment reporters.

Chart 4.1 on page 31 explains the organisational structure of the *Evening News*.

Table 4.2 explains the roles and responsibilities of the various staff of the newsroom of the *Evening News*.

**CHART 5.1 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE *EVENING NEWS***

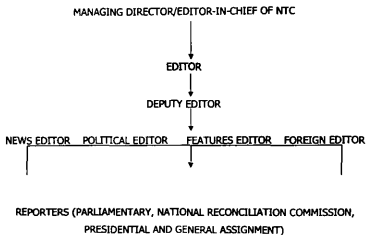


TABLE 5.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AT THE *EVENING NEWS*

EDITOR	Has total responsibility for the contents of the newspaper, writes editorials, chairs editorial conferences and has the final say on what goes in or stays out of the paper.
DEPUTY EDITOR	Writes editorials when the editor is absent, proof-reads the dummy before final printing, attends editorial conferences, oversees the use of the mobile phone available for the reporters.
POLITICAL EDITOR	Responsible for the contents of the political page, newsgathering and editing of stories for the page. Attends editorial conferences and takes part in the selection of stories for the paper.
FEATURES EDITOR	Selects and edits feature stories, writes feature stories, attends editorial conferences and takes part in the selection of stories for the paper.
FOREIGN EDITOR	Responsible for the contents of the foreign page, edits, and writes articles for the page. Downloads stories from the Internet and the Ghana News Agency Website for the page
NEWS EDITOR	Manager of the news desk, assigns reporters to stories, receives news releases and invitations to cover assignments, rewrites stories and selects stories for conference. He is one of the key people in the gatekeeping process and agenda setting function of the paper.
REPORTERS	News gathering and writing, covering general and specialised assignments and rewriting press releases.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE NEWSROOM**

The newsroom had 11 tables and 13 chairs arranged in the shape of a Square. There was the picture of the President of Ghana, Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor hanging on the wall and over the head of the News Editor. The room was fully air-conditioned. The floor was covered with an old brown carpet. Apart from the news editor's desk which was covered with all kinds of papers and books, the other tables were uncluttered. The journalists sat at fixed places to work. They kept keys to their desk drawers in which they kept their documents.

The newsroom was often noisy and busy because of the conversations, and the frequent entry and exit of visitors, and the constant ringing of the telephone. The television and the radio set were often switched on simultaneously, but the sound of one of them was always muted in favour of the other. The usual dress code for men was long sleeved shirts with or without a necktie. The conventional dress culture on Fridays was African print, tie and dye or batik. This, according to the Deputy Editor was the idea of the Managing Director, supported by management.

There were different levels of relationships among staff of the newsroom. The reporters related more freely with the news editor and the deputy editor than they did with the editor. Perhaps, this was because they saw the news editor as more of a colleague than they saw the editor, who was quite elderly. The conversation was often more informal among the reporters and the news editor than it was with the editor whom they called "nuumoi" (a Ga word which means the old man).

Reporters typically reported for work around 8 a.m. except when their first assignment was close to their homes and they found it better to go directly there than to come to the office to be conveyed by the editorial vehicle. Between 10 a.m. and noon the newsroom was very busy; it was a time when preparations

were made to send the paper to bed between 12.30 p.m. By 5 p.m. the newsroom was virtually empty of reporters. Their absence from the office sometimes meant that they were on assignment, gathering information to write stories the next day.

### **RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE NEWSROOM**

The newsroom had one telephone line which doubled as a fax number. The phone was locked up in a box as the news editor, Mr. Ken Nunoo explained, "to prevent it from being misused". But there was also one mobile phone which was kept by the deputy editor. He made it available to reporters on some very special occasions when the newsroom thought it needed a quicker relay of information to beat the deadline of going to bed. For example, the reporter at the proceedings of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), a commission set up by the government to listen and document human rights abuses by past governments and regimes, was given the mobile phone. Otherwise all reporters had to come back to the newsroom from wherever they covered their assignments to write their stories. Another option available to them was to fax their stories.

There was only one dictionary in the newsroom but journalists also had access to other dictionaries in the corporation's library situated a few metres outside the newsroom. Also available to journalists were other reference materials such as the encyclopaedia Britannica and Americana in the library. The library also has various newspaper clippings of stories from other local newspapers especially the chain of newspapers of the Graphic Communication Group. Journalists used these clippings to background their stories and sometimes check for names and designations of officials. Often, they preferred to ask each other or phone their colleagues in the newsrooms of the *Spectator* or the *Ghanaian Times* to make such enquiries.

The newsroom had a television and a radio set. Most of the time, the radio is tuned to Gold F.M in the morning for the station's newspaper review programme. The news editor explained that he sometimes received information which he used as tip-offs for follow ups to stories. He said the one o'clock news on Uniq F.M and the Joy F.M 12 o'clock news was often listened to in the afternoon to keep abreast of happenings.

The newsroom was assigned one vehicle – a blue pick-up, – which transported all reporters to assignments, picked up the news editor to work and run any other errand which the transport officer of the whole corporation, (NTC) deemed necessary. The news editor seemed to have more control over the use of the vehicle than the editor and his deputy. The driver of the vehicle sought permission from the news editor before any movement of the vehicle once he was in the office. The reporters, some of whom did not have cars, used taxis and other means of public transport to assignments and back.

## COMPUTERS

Computers are known to have changed the way things were done in the newsroom. They have contributed to speed and efficiency in news gathering, editing, reporting and even printing. There was only one computer, which was not in working condition, sitting on one of the tables in the newsroom of the *Evening News*. Journalists did not type, they hand-wrote stories. They did not even have typewriters with which to type their stories even if they wanted to type. After writing, they handed their stories over to the news editor in the handwritten form and he also edited them in long-hand before handing them over to typesetters in a room nearby for typesetting. Apart from the news editor, the features, foreign and political editors who were quite conversant with the use of computers, the other journalists were not. They however used the e-mail services on the Internet but did so outside the corporation.

### **THE USE OF THE INTERNET**

Even though, the paper used stories downloaded from the Internet, it was cumbersome to get such stories. This was because the three newspapers in the newspaper chain, the *Ghanaian Times*, the *Spectator* and the *Evening News* shared one computer for that purpose. This computer was located in the newsroom of the *Ghanaian Times* and only particular reporters and the information technology specialist were allowed to use it. A structure which looked more like a cage had been built around the computer on which the Internet could be accessed. This meant that in the culture of the *Evening News*, there was nothing like computer assisted newsgathering and no possibility to independently search for background information via the Internet or to double check facts despite the fact that leading newspapers in the country were on line.

### **PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION**

The editor of the *Evening News* did not have any formal training in journalism. Apart from his secondary education to the ordinary level he had attended a number of workshops and seminars on journalism. He learned his trade on the job and had been practicing as a journalist for over 30 years. Apart from the features editor who held a first degree from the University of Cape Coast, all the other editors and reporters held diplomas from the Ghana Institute of Journalism. The deputy editor, features editor, political editor and the foreign editor had been working as journalists for between 10-20 years. The news editor had a working experience of four years, while the parliamentary correspondent had a working experience of more than 10 years. The other general assignment reporters had a working experience of three years each. The foreign editor, news editor and the parliamentary correspondent were pursuing degree programmes at the University of Ghana.

## **NEWS PHILOSOPHY**

Due to its focus on politics and the business of governance, what became news, to a large extent, was determined even before the event was covered or the interview of sources for stories were conducted. The news editor placed a premium on assigning reporters to assignments which were to him political in nature, before considering other activities which were not obviously political on face value. The diary and the assignment schedule, sometimes referred to as the roster, played an important role in this consideration. The diary contained a recording of the time and venue of particular events, and sometimes the name of the reporter assigned to the story. What eventually became news could therefore be planned before hand or not.

The Deputy Editor of the *Evening News*, Mr. Charles Neequaye, saw the paper's coverage of political party activities as part of what determined the character of the paper. To him, exposing the ills of political and government officials was another activity which shaped the political character of the paper and also attracted readers. He said that the paper also strived to put political leaders on their toes by holding them to their words and promises.

*The Evening News*, as first established, was political in nature and we are continuing the tradition. The difference is that it is no longer the mouth-piece of a particular political party nor devoted to propagating the ideals of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, he said.

## **NEWS VALUES**

A number of factors determined what got published in the paper and what did not. The news editor's discretion was one of the important factors. He assigned reporters to events that had been booked in the diary and any other event which

he thought would be of news value to the paper. So the news editor's gatekeeping activity of deciding what to cover in the first place and what not to cover was a step in the determining what became news since what he did not ask to be covered did not become news. He made this decision by looking at how "big" the event was likely to be and how prominent, regarding the kind of personality/personalities likely to attend the function and its political significance.

"For interviews we fall on experts in our field of interest and naturally people who are knowledgeable on the subject matter", he said.

According to him, "impact" and "interest" were major news values which determined what got into the paper. Explaining further, the news editor, said that the interest of the readers was always considered paramount. He said that since the readers bought the paper to give the corporation revenue "we publish what they are interested in". He however said that whatever was published in the interest of the reader should not be libellous.

The news editor explained that conflicts and controversies were also very much of interest to the readers. "We also consider those who have placed adverts in our paper, cover them and give them publicity", he said. The idea behind this practice was revenue for the corporation.

Journalists in the newsroom however relied on the general news values of impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, the bizarre and currency in deciding if an event or idea was newsworthy or worth following up for a story.

#### **THE GATEKEEPING PROCESSES IN THE NEWSROOM**

Through the decisions they made at conference, it was observed that editors were an important part of the gatekeeping process. But gatekeeping constantly took place in the newsroom itself. The reporter's decision on how to cover a

story was part of the gatekeeping process in the newsroom. The reporter decided where the emphasis should be by choosing the lead, the personalities to quote and even the number of paragraphs to give each speaker. The reporter could even decide not to include some detail in his /her story because he/she found it unacceptable or against his/ or her values. The reporter could decide to exclude from the story what he felt did not conform to his own values and that of the organisation. But the news editor's decision on what to cover and what not to influenced what was finally published and what was kept out.

The news editor's choice of stories for conference was another gatekeeping role observed. The news editor's choice of stories for conference set the agenda for what the editors deliberated on. If he did not take the story to conference it did not get voted on for use in the paper, particularly the front page.

The decisions at conferences were a major gatekeeping function observed. The deputy editor mentioned "conference" decisions as one of the deciding factors that influenced what got into the paper. Conference was a meeting attended by the various section editors and the editor of the paper to select and deliberate on stories for the front pages of the paper. It was also a forum for the appraisal of the newspaper of the previous day. The meeting also planned for the next day's production.

The various editors attended two conferences in the day. One of the conferences was held in the morning (before the printing of the paper), and another was held late in the afternoon (after the paper had been printed). Both conferences were chaired by the editor and convened by the news editor. At the morning conferences, usually held at about 9.30 a.m., the news editor read out stories which he considered good for the front page. On the average, he read out four stories at the conference. The editors then decided which story should lead the page and the second lead story. They then selected the kind of photographs they

thought were suitable to go with the stories. The photographs were supplied by the Group Photo Editor, Alhaji Dan Collison, who also provided photographs to the two other newspapers in the chain, the *Spectator* and the *Ghanaian Times*.

The deputy editor explained in the interview that depending on the number of good stories available, a third story could be selected for the front page. The maximum number of stories for the page were three, while the usual were two. The conferences therefore provided the forum for the discussion of the stories for the front page in detail. The angle of the story, which involved where the slant should be and which parts of the story to delete, were discussed.

In effect, the stories were edited for accuracy, fairness and balance. Also, the stories were tested for libel and consequence. Conference discussed the stories paying attention to libellous material in the story. The story was also shaped to conform to the political focus of the paper and the overall organisational stand of the New Times Corporation. The editors voted on which stories to use, but if there was a lack of agreement, the editor who chaired the conference had the final say. Headlines for the stories were also suggested and decided at the conference.

The editor, Mr. Abi George, explained that he sometimes had to exercise such "veto powers" because "it is my name which is in the imprint I am fully responsible for whatever appears in print".

Stories which were not used were sometimes used for the inside pages or kept for the next day, especially if they were exclusive to the paper. In fact, the stories for the inside pages were on most occasions set the previous day to the publication of the paper. This was done to beat the deadline of coming out by 1p.m.

The editorial, which is the position of the paper on a particular issue, was written by the editor. If the editor was unavailable, the deputy editor wrote the editorial. The deputy editor explained that topics chosen for the editorials were mostly topical and was what the editor saw as a subject of national interest. The editorials of the *Evening News* were therefore not always based on stories reported by the paper.

It could be based on stories in other newspapers such as our sister papers the *Ghanaian Times* or the *Spectator* or even the *Daily Graphic*, and the electronic media, he said.

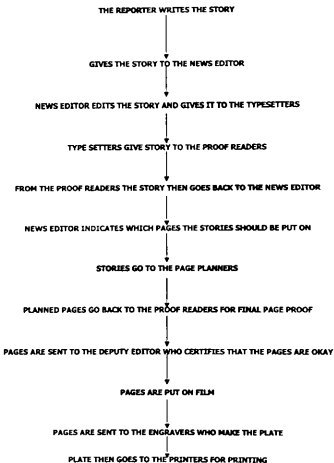
The newsroom of the *Evening News* was quite unconventional. For example, the newsroom did not have a sub-desk. The deputy editor explained that this was because of the overall financial constraints of the corporation. Since the re-launch of the *Evening News*, the corporation had not been able to hire the necessary staff to create a sub-desk, which was an integral part of newsrooms. For him, the normal process that a story should go through was from the reporter to the news editor, to the editorial conference and to the sub-desk before proof-reading. He said that there was the need to establish a sub-desk as a matter of urgency.

There were two female graduates from the University of Cape Coast who proof-read the paper after they had been type set and looked through by the news editor. The proofreaders often conferred with the deputy editor for clarity in the meanings of sentences and words in the context in which they were meant. The proofreaders looked through the planned dummies and the page was certified by the deputy editor before it finally went for printing.

The pages of the *Evening News* were planned by typesetters who had been trained to plan the pages on the computer. They were not journalists. They

planned the pages in a way that they thought suitable. Sometimes, headlines were transposed and pictures were placed in such a way that they carried the wrong caption. If the proofreaders or the editors found a mistake while proof-reading the pages, they directed the typesetters to effect the necessary correction; otherwise the paper was produced with the mistake.

**CHART 5. 3. NEWS PRODUCTION PROCESS OF THE *EVENING NEWS***



## **HOW RESOURCES AVAILABLE AFFECT THE WAY JOURNALISTS CARRY OUT THEIR TRADITIONAL ROLES**

Computers have revolutionised the news business all over the world. They have affected news production procedures, providing multiple sources for information even though authentication of information from the Internet is sometimes a problem.

Journalists at the *Evening News* did not use computers in the production of their stories. They used the pen and paper in writing their stories and passed it on to the news editor for editing. The news editor then sent the stories to another room for typesetting. The hand-written stories sometimes went back and forth when the typesetters were unable to decipher the handwriting of the reporters. They brought the hand-written stories to the newsroom to ask for clarification from the reporters who wrote the story or asked the news editor who edited the story. So typically a news story going back and forth took about three hours. Journalists of the *Evening News* could therefore not do computer assisted newsgathering and reporting which was necessary to attain the values of timeliness and speed in journalism.

The availability of the telephone, though only one, was of great importance to the newsroom. The reporters used the telephone to contact their sources on a regular basis, for tip-offs and other information on stories. Sources also called the newsroom to give tip-offs for stories. They either called the news editor or particular reporters with whom they already had a rapport. There was a notebook into which a recording of telephone numbers, of various institutions, private and state-owned were recorded. The names and telephone numbers of some political figures and sources that the newsroom relied on for information were also recorded in this book for easy reference.

In spite of the availability of the dictionary, it seemed that the reporters preferred to ask their colleagues for the correct spelling of words to looking it up in the dictionary.

There were neither written down style guides nor written down editorial policies for reference; the reporter learnt on the job what to do and what not to do. The various editors of the various sections and conference proceedings make sure that unwritten policies and style rules were adhered to.

### **THE USE OF SOURCES**

Sources are critical to the newsroom. It was observed that the newsroom kept a host of them. They were predominantly officialdom. They included political party officials, members of parliament, the police officers and government officials. Individual reporters also kept their own sources, whose identities were not always known to the news editor. It was common to hear the phrase "let me call my man," when a reporter wanted the permission from the news editor to use the telephone, which was kept under lock and key, to contact a source.

The radio was observed as a very important source of information to the newsroom. The news editor monitored some radio stations, especially JOY F.M for information on current events. He sometimes used the information from the radio to write stories and either gave credit to the radio station or used the information as a tip-off to which he assigned a reporter to further investigate. The radio also provided a source for crosschecking news stories written by the reporters. The news editor sometimes listened to the radio to find out if the facts in a story as written by the *Evening News* reporter were similar. On June 11, 2003, for example, when the reporter covering the sittings of the National Reconciliation Commission failed to ask for the age of a witness, who fell unconscious while testifying at the commission and later died in hospital, the

news editor filled the gap by listening in to Joy F.M and using the age used in their story. He did not cross-check this information received from Joy F.M. The GTV television station also served a similar purpose but not as much as the radio stations did.

Another source for the newsroom was press releases: Some of them came by fax and others were delivered by hand. Any reporter in the newsroom could receive a press release and hand it over to the news editor for further direction. If the news editor found the press release suitable for a news story, he either rewrote it himself or gave it to any reporter to rewrite into a news story. If it turned out to be an invitation for the coverage of an event, either a reporter or the news editor entered it in the assignment book. News stories written from press releases went through the same procedure as other news stories generated by the reporters in the newsroom.

The Internet also served as a major source of getting stories to fill the pages of the paper. Stories were downloaded from the Internet and re-written on a regular basis, especially for the foreign pages of the newspaper. The usual sites browsed for this purpose were [ghanaweb.com](http://ghanaweb.com), [bbc.com.uk](http://bbc.com.uk), [cnn.com](http://cnn.com), [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com) and the GNA. The essence of the re-writes was to edit and localise the contents. For example, the story on the conviction in the U.S.A. of the daughter of the former deputy Minister of Finance was pulled off the Internet by a reporter on the *Ghanaian Times* who saw it and thought it would make a good story for the *Evening News*. It was re-written by the deputy editor of the paper.

The credibility of sources was of great importance to the newsroom. To the deputy editor,

"a paper which is not credible is not worth being on the newsstand. So even after we receive information, we cross-check the information received from the appropriate quarters before it gets into print. Once readers begin to doubt your credibility you are in

trouble. If you publish stories which often turn out to be false, then you are in for it because gradually they will refuse to buy your paper. Our motto, truth well told is our guiding principle”.

The *Evening News* newsroom relied more on known sources and were sceptical about information being provided by first-timers. In any of these cases the information was checked from other sources, mostly “officialdom”. According to the news editor, the police stations, political parties, National Reconciliation Commission, parliament and the various ministries were big sources of news to the *Evening News*.

#### **HOW ETHICAL DECISIONS ARE ARRIVED AT**

Every profession is governed by some ethics and so is journalism. Ethical decisions in the newsroom were made by considering whether a story could be the cause of a legal action against the paper. The primary concern of the editor was libel. In some cases, the use of a question mark in the headline was considered a safety valve. For example, in the Wednesday, July 2, 2003 issue of the *Evening News*, a speculative story on Dr. Charles Wereko-Brobby, the Chief Executive of the Volta River Authority, was carried. The story quoted reliable sources as indicating that the Chief Executive of the VRA who stepped aside for investigations to be conducted into allegations of impropriety against him was likely to return to the VRA and continue holding his post. In order to play it safe, the headline used was a question. The headline read “Wereko-Brobby Going Back?” This was done to prevent any crisis of credibility just in case the Chief Executive did not return to office.

There was no occasion when journalists discussed how the parties in the story would feel about a publication. For the news editor and the deputy editor, the interest of the public was what mattered; the public needed to know and the

*Evening News* had to provide information of public interest irrespective of how the parties involved will feel.

From conversations at the conferences, it was realised that the zeal to increase sales was also a factor. Stories, especially those for the front pages of the paper, and headlines given those stories were chosen with the aim of attracting readers to buy and subsequently generate money for the corporation.

Another way that the newsroom tried to resolve ethical issues was by striving to give the story balance, by interviewing all parties for their sides to a story. For example, a story presented at the conference, alleging that the Minister of Education was involved in a deal with some printers was rejected because it did not include the side of the Minister in question. It was conference decision that the reporter went back to the ministry for the Minister's reaction before publication, even though the reporter claimed that all efforts to reach him had proved futile. "Please try and get his side, I don't want trouble we need to get his side", the editor remarked.

To the news editor and the deputy editor, it was difficult to achieve objectivity. The best the reporter could do to achieve objectivity was to write devoid of personal opinion once it was a news story.

The reporter should keep himself out of the story. The use of adjectives also creates a problem for the achievement of objectivity in a news story.

Another ethical subject, which was a source of debate among journalists and the public, was the collection of inducement in the course of journalistic duty. This form of incentive was known as "solidarity" among journalists.

The deputy editor and the news editor saw the taking of solidarity as a problem. They were of the view that it was unethical to take a bribe or a gift in order to

influence a story but if the gift was offered with "no strings attached then you can take it", he said. They thought that asking for "solidarity" was very wrong and unethical.

### **CONFLICT IN THE NEWSROOM**

The general relationship among staff in the newsroom was good, making the sharing of information easy and providing a relaxed atmosphere for work. But there were conflicts too.

One source of conflict in the newsroom was when the news editor assigned reporters on the duty roster or "schedule" in their absence. The reporters were sometimes unhappy because they said that if they did not know the details of what they were supposed to do, they looked stupid at the assignment. And they also complained that assigning them without their knowledge created some inconvenience for them when they were chasing their own stories at the same time. This situation sometimes brought about little quarrels and heated arguments in the newsroom.

Another source of conflict was the locking of the phone. The reporters felt reluctant to ask for the key because of the questions that went with asking for the key. "Are you making an official or private call?" the news editor will often ask. So reporters preferred not to ask for the key and carried out assignments in a lackadaisical manner. They did not make any effort to reach the source at all.

The deputy editor often complained about eating in the newsroom. He preferred that reporters ate at the canteen but the reporters saw nothing wrong with eating in the newsroom. Their attitude was that it did not matter; moreover they did not like the canteen because it was dirty. They found it convenient to drink a beverage with some bread and attend to duties at the same time. The reporters thought that the deputy editor was being just fussy.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings from the participant observation and the in-depth interviews give a broad picture of the practices in the newsroom of the *Evening News*. The analysis of the data suggests that the newsroom of the *Evening News* is challenged by a number of problems. The problems include the lack of computers, the absence of a sub-desk, and inadequate transportation for newsgathering, reference materials and telephone facilities.

The absence of computers in the newsroom for journalists to use creates the problem of the copy going back and forth for typesetting, editing and proof-reading. This delays the production of the paper and partly accounts for the paper's constant late appearance on the newsstands. The absence of computers shows that the newsroom of the *Evening News* is unconventional. This is because contrary to the general trend of computer-assisted reporting in modern newsrooms, the newsroom of the *Evening News* remains traditional. It is rather interesting that a newsroom that thrives on the news value of novelty has not adopted an innovation such as the computer which could make its work easier.

The sub-desk is a crucial component of newsrooms because sub-editors check and edit texts before the dummy goes for proof-reading. They also plan the pages of the newspaper. The newsroom of the *Evening News* therefore needs a sub-desk to prevent errors such as the transposition of headlines and captions. There seems therefore to be the need for a sub-desk in the newsroom of the *Evening News*. But the planning of pages by typesetters who are not journalists depicts, perhaps, an emerging trend of the modification of the roles of journalists in view of the introduction of computers for the planning of pages. Sub-editors who were responsible for the planning of pages and the final editing of the copy

with the use of paper, rulers, pens and pencils now share this role with others who are not even staff of the newsroom. Gradually, sub editors who wielded a lot of power because of their ability to axe stories at will in order to fit stories into the dummy space have this power being challenged.

The use of the radio to cross-check or verify stories poses a problem of lack of professionalism. This is because even though the radio provides information, the information may not be accurate. There is therefore the need for the newsroom to adopt a more acceptable and authentic way of verifying information rather than depending on radio. Also, the preference of journalists in the newsroom, to ask their colleagues for the spelling of words rather than looking it up themselves in the dictionary should be discouraged. Journalists should be encouraged to use dictionaries and other language aids as a matter of routine. This calls for the provision of more dictionaries in the newsroom.

Transport is invaluable to the business of newsgathering. The journalist needs to be on the scene, and timely too, if s/he is to present the news as it happens, how it happens and where it happens. The journalist also needs transport to reach sources to be able to gather information. The unavailability of adequate transportation for newsgathering therefore presents a big challenge for the news value of timeliness in news reporting, and also defeats the purpose of getting information out before the morning newspapers do. Other newspapers, which are better equipped, are likely to beat the *Evening News* to it. The management of the New Times Corporation therefore needs to provide more vehicles to improve upon efficiency in newsgathering and motivate journalists to go out and gather news comfortably.

The findings also suggest that practices in the newsroom are guided by ethical considerations. However, staying out of court underpins the concern to remain ethical more than any other reason.

The newsroom is male-dominated: only one female against nine males. This means that the decisions that go into the production of the paper are male-dominated decisions. Even though the deputy editor explains that this gender imbalance is not deliberate, it would be interesting to find out the underlying cause of this gender imbalance and how this affects decision making in the newsroom about what finally gets into print.

Finally, the *Evening News* needs to do scientific research to find out the cause of its dwindling circulation figures. The deputy editor said that the paper had not done any readership survey. This means that what the paper publishes as interesting to its readers is what is imagined and not what is based on the results of research.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ainslie, R. (1996). *The Press in Africa: Communications past and present*. New York: Walker.
- Altheide, D.L. (1978). "RTNA News Award Judging and Media Culture". *Journalism Quarterly*. Vol.55 (1) 164-167.
- Applegate, E., (1996). *Print and Broadcast Journalism*. London. Praeger.
- Arant, D., & Anderson.J.Q. (2000, August). *Online Media Ethics: A Survey of U.S. Daily Newspaper Editors*. Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Convention, Phoenix. Available: <http://www.elo.edu/andersj/online.html>. Accessed on 30/7/2003.
- Asante, C. E (1996). *The Press in Ghana: Problems and Prospects*. Maryland.University Press of America,Inc.
- Berkowitz, D. (1991). "Assessing Forces in the Selection of Local Television News". *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 35, 245-251.
- Callahan, C., (1997, April) "The Cyberspace Advantage," *American Journalism Review*, 19(3), 38-39.
- Clelland L.G., and Ostroff D.H., (1988). Satellite News gathering and News Department Operation. *Journalism Quarterly*. Vol. 65 (4) Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Baltimore. 946.
- Denkabe A. and Gadzekpo, A., (1996). *What is fit To Print? Language of The Press In Ghana*. Ghana: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Folkerts, J., et al (1998). *The Media in Your Life: An Introduction to Mass Communication*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gans, H. (1980). *Deciding what's News. A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Vintage.
- Gans, H., (1979). *Deciding what News is: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, News Week and Time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Garrison, B., (1999, March 5-6). *Journalists' Perceptions of Online Information-Gathering Problems*. Paper presented to the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, South-East

Colloquium, Lexington, Ky.

Garrison, B., (1992). *Professional News Reporting*, Hillsdale,N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Garrison. B., (1998, August). *Computer-Assisted Reporting*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Mahwah,New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

*Ghana Journalists Association Handbook*. (July,2003). Gold-Type Press

Goetz,J.P. and Le Compte, M.D (1984). *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*. Orlando Florida: Academic Press Inc.

Golding, P. (1998). *The Missing Dimensions — News Media and Management of Change*. In O' Sullivan, T., and Jewkes. T. (eds) *The Media Studies Reader*. London: Arnold.

Gordon. A .D., & Kitross. M.J., eds. (1997). *Controversies in Media Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.New York: Longman.

Hardt, H., and Brennen (1999). *Newswork, history, and photographic evidence; A visual analysis of a 1930s newsroom*. In Brennen and Hardt, *Picturing the past: Media, History, and photography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Helle M., (2000). "Disturbances and Contradictions as Tools for Understanding Work in the Newsroom". *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems*, 12:81-114

Janowitz, M., (1975). Professional Models in Journalism: The Gatekeeper and the Advocate". *Journalism Quarterly*, 52(4), 618-626, 662.

Jones-Quartey, K.A.B (1974). *History of the Ghana Press, 1822-1970*. Accra. Ghana: Information Services Department.

Kaye, B.K.,and Medoff,N.J. (1999). *The World Wide Web: A Mass Communication Perspective*, California: Mayfield Publishing.

McCombs, M., and Shaw, D.L (1973). "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37, 62-75

Mckercher, C., (1994). *Computers and Reporters: "Newsroom Practices at Two Canadian Daily Newspapers"*. Vancouver: *Canadian Journal of Communication*. Vol. 20, No.2.

Mencher, M., (1997). *News Reporting and Writing*, 7th ed., Brown & Benchmark, Madison, Wis.

Nerone, J., and Barnhurst, K.G. (2002). *US Newspaper Types, the Newsroom, and the Division of Labor, 1750-2000*. Paper presented at the Association for Media and Communication Researchers (IMCR) Biennial Conference in Barcelona, Spain.

Newbold, C., et al (eds)(2000). *The Media Book*. London: Arnold.

Nkrumah, K. (1974). *PANAF Great Lives*. London: Panaf books.

Phillips, E. B., (1978). *Journalistic Versus Social Science Perspectives on Objectivity* In Hirsch P. et al (eds.) *Methodological Strategies for Communication Research*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Reddick, R. and King, E (1997). *The Online Journalist: Using the Internet and Other Electronic Resources*. Fortworth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Reese, S.D. (1991). "Setting the Media's Agenda: A Power Balance Perspective". In J.A. Anderson(Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 14*, 309-340 . Newbury Park CA: Sage.

Reuss, C., *Individual Autonomy And Ethical Decisions*. In Gordon . A.D., And Kitross M.J., (eds). *Controversies in Media Ethics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition , New York: Longman.

Rogers, E.M (1995). *Diffusion of Innovations*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York : The Free Press.

Ross, Steven and Middleberg, D. (1998, November 11). *Media In Cyberspace Study: 1997 Fourth Annual National Survey*, available: <http://mediasource.com/intro.htm>. Accessed on 13/8/2003.

Schlesinger, P., (1989). *Putting Reality Together*. New York: Routledge.

Schrum, L.J., & O'Guinn, T.C. (1993). *Processes and Effects in the Construction of Social Reality*. *Communication Research*, 11, 323-340.

Shoemaker, P.J. (1991). *Communication Concepts 3. Gatekeeping*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sigel, L. V., (1973). *Reporters and Officials: The Organisation of Newsmaking*. Lexington: D. C Health & Co., 2,

Singer, J.B., (1997). *Still Guarding the Gate? The Newspaper journalist's role in an online World. Convergence. The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 3(1):72-89.

Singer, J.B., Tharp, M.P., and Haruta, A. (1998, August). "Superstars or Second-Class Citizens: Management And Staffing Issues Affecting Newspapers' Online Journalists" Unpublished Paper Presented to the Newspaper Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Baltimore.

Smertin. Y. (1987). *Kwame Nkrumah*. New York: Africana.

Spradley,J.(1980). *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Tuchman, G., (1972). "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination Newsmen's Notion of Objectivity". *American Journal of Sociology*, 77, 660-679.

Tuchman, G., (1978). *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press.

Ward, J., and Hansen, K.A (1997). *Search Strategies in Mass Communication*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., New York: Longman.

Weaver, D.H., and Wilhoit, G.C. (1996). *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S News People at the End of an Era*. Mahway, NJ:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Weaver,D., & Elliot, S.N (1986). "Who Sets the Agenda for the Media? A Study of Local Agenda Building". *Journalism Quarterly*, 62, 87-94.

White, D.M., (1950). "The Gatekeeper": A Case Study in the Selection of News. *Journalism Quarterly* 27: 383-390.

Whitney, D. Charles and Becker, Lee B. (1982) "Keeping the Gates" for the Gatekeepers: the Effects of Wire News". *Journalism Quarterly*, 59, 60-65.

Wilson L.R.S., (1993). *Mass Media / Mass Culture: An Introduction*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill,Inc.

Zhou X., (2001). *Gatekeeper, Gatekeeping, and News Selection*. Available:

<http://web.utk.edu/~xzhou/15567Paper/qatetheory.htm>, accessed on 7/15/2003

## Appendix 1

### THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **NEWSROOM PRACTICES OF A STATE-OWNED DAILY NEWSPAPER: THE *EVENING NEWS***

##### **STAFF PROFILE**

1. How many reporters do you have in the newsroom?
2. What is the educational background of your staff?
3. Where were they trained as journalists?
4. How long have they worked as journalists?
5. Please describe your organisational structure.

##### **ABOUT THE NEWSPAPER**

6. What is the editorial policy of the *Evening News*?
7. What shapes the political character of the paper?
8. How do journalists strive to maintain the news values of objectivity, fairness and balance?
9. Who makes the final editorial decisions?
10. What are some of the procedures in the newsroom with regards to newsgathering?
11. What are some of the problems faced by the newsroom?
12. What resources are available to reporters in the newsroom to aid in news gathering, news reporting and editing?
13. Of what use are computers to the newsroom?

14. Has the introduction of computers contributed to efficiency in the newsroom?
15. Are journalists comfortable with the introduction of computers to the newsroom?
16. Who are some of the major sources for stories in the newsroom?
17. What are some of the sources of news to the paper?
18. How do you check the credibility of your sources for news?
19. What array of technology is available to the newsroom?
20. How are ethical decisions arrived at?
21. How are news releases sent to the newsroom, dealt with?
22. What determines what gets in and out of the paper?