

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
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**MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND MEDIA FREEDOM: IMPLICATIONS FOR  
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE UNDER GHANA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Mohammed Shamsudeen Shardow, do hereby declare that except for references to other peoples work which have been duly cited, this dissertation, titled “**Media ownership and media freedom: implication for democratic governance under Ghana’s Forth Republic**” is my own original work and that it has not been presented in whole or part for any degree at this University or elsewhere.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of media ownership structure on media independence and its implication for democratic governance. Two publicly-owned newspapers and two privately-owned newspapers with different political affiliations were used as a case study. Qualitative case study approach was deemed as appropriate method for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the four newspapers and journalists interviewed for the analysis. The study found out that the structure of the media ownership affected the watchdog role of the media studied. Contrary to constitutional guarantees of media independence, the study showed that journalists working in the state-owned media are prevented from exercising their watchdog role on top functionaries of whichever political party happened to be in power. Unlike the public media, the private media appear to have a different modus operandi; the main issue for them is whether their paper is aligned to the watchdog target or not. The study found out that they are unimpeded in exercising their watchdog functions if the target is a rival to their owners political camp, and they exercise their watchdog role whether the target of the investigations is in government or not. On the other hand when the target happens to be in the same camp as that of their owners, they appeared constraint in exercising their investigative role. The study also found out that the difference between the two ownership structures (public and private) in terms of ability to perform watchdog functions on government is marginal.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Almighty Allah, my sole provider and sustainer. It is also dedicated to my parents: my dad, Benjamin Essah Shardow (May Allah have mercy on him), who passed on, while I was in the middle of this work; and my mum, Zara Akuyea Addy, for their great support and encouragement in my academic pursuit.



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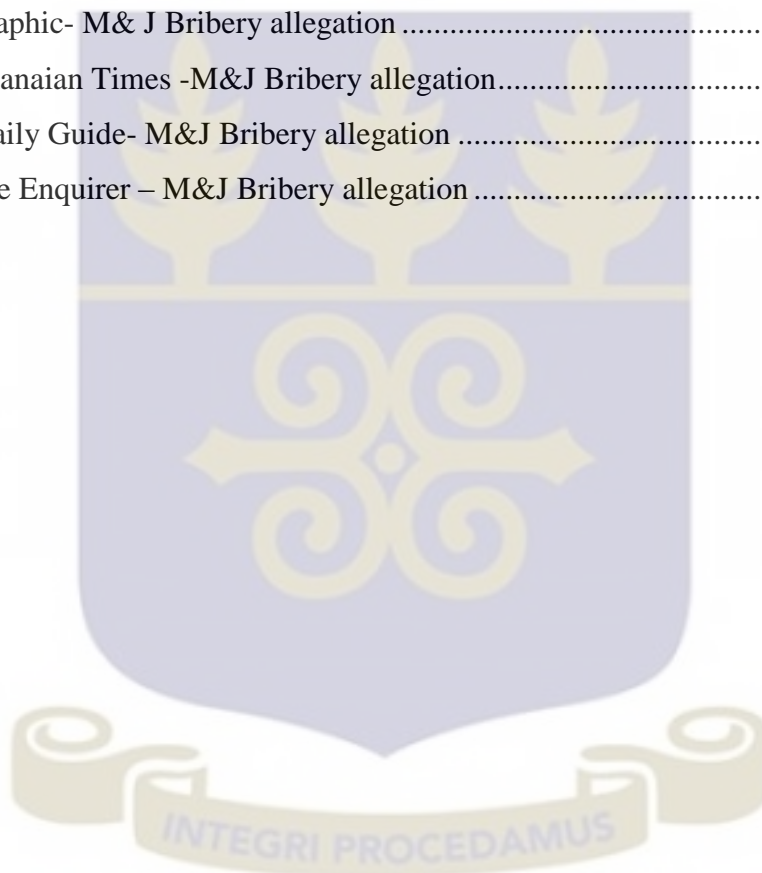
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## ACRONYMS

CDD	-	Centre for Democratic Development
CPP	-	Conventions People Party
CHRAJ	-	Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice
GJA	-	Ghana Journalists Association
IFIs	-	International Financial Institutions
IMF	-	International Monetary Fund and
MFWA	-	Media Foundation for West Africa
NCA	-	National Communications Authority
NDC	-	National Democratic Congress
NMC	-	National Media Commission
OECD	-	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
NPP	-	New Patriotic Party
PRINPAG	-	Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana
ICCPR,	-	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	-	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ACHPR	-	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.
PNDC	-	Provisional National Defence Council
UN	-	United Nations
UNESCO	-	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 1.0 Background to the study

If Africans realized the need for a free, independent and vibrant media that will ensure proper functioning of democracy, then that realization came in the early 1990s during what is now known as the continent's second liberation struggle (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Karikari, 1993). It was during that period that almost all African countries, including Ghana, adopted multi-party constitutions with elaborate provisions that recognize and promote pluralistic independent media to give space to diverse voices and check government excesses (Tettey, 2001).

Indeed, free and pluralistic media do not only empower citizens but also serve as a check on government, and further foster transparency and accountability (Berger, 2009; Arowolo, & Aluko, 2012). In the struggle for democratization, the media played an immeasurable role. Hence Kasoma (2000: 1) concluded that "the rebirth of Africa's democracy could not have been possible without the pressure that the press (media), particularly the independent media, exerted on the political power brokers."

Prior to 1990's, African leaders had argued that a free and independent media was a luxury that fledgling African States with weak economies could ill afford. African governments therefore exercised absolute control over the media, invariably state-owned, with little or no room for alternative views (Ogbondah, 1994 cited in Gadzekpo 1998; Ansah, 1988). While supporters of state-owned media believed that this type of control would help in accelerating socio-economic development in African countries, it has become apparent after three decades that the socio-economic development of most African countries was rather unimpressive. State interference of the media instead of being a catalyst for development has been misused

to protect politicians at the expense of the population (Berger 2011; Ninsin, 1998; Ansah, 1988). These interferences include indirect state/government restrictions, management as well as predominant pattern of control of the media (Boafo n.d cited in Ochilo, 1993). For example, African journalists working with media critical of governments are often denied the opportunity or discriminated against when it comes to travelling with high government officials, while those seen as sympathetic to government are often favoured (Hasty,2005).

Along this realisation, came the political reforms in the soviet bloc countries in the late 80's. These events bolstered local campaigns for freedom of speech. For Africa especially, these developments were formally given expression in the Windhoek Declaration on media freedom.

It was this observation that many political scientists and other scholars including Ninsin (2006); Ansah (1992 cited in Ochilo, 1993) advocated an independent media in the liberal democracy model. According to Graber, the media in a liberal democratic order, have four roles, namely,; (1) provide a forum for discussion of diverse and often conflicting ideas; (2) give voice to public opinion; (3) serve as the citizens' eyes and ears to survey the political scene and the performance of politicians and (4) act as a public watchdog that barks loudly when it encounters misbehaviour, corruption and abuse of power by public officials (Graber, 2002, p. 143).

While the media in Africa including Ghana score fairly on Graber's first two criteria, their ability to act as an effective watchdog in exposing, criticizing and scrutinizing the activities of government has come under question (Gadzekpo, 2008).

Convinced that an independent and pluralistic media would contribute to the process of establishing open and stable democratic societies, ) African journalists under the auspices of the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO adopted press freedom principles in 1991. The principles were later endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference. A decade after the declaration, the African Charter on Broadcasting was also adopted to address specific issues related to broadcasting. Subsequently, the date of the Declaration, May 3, was passed as World Press Freedom Day (Berger, 2011; Mastrangelo, & Loncarevic, 2004).

The content of the declaration which is the basis for Article 1 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Berger, 2007, p.165) states:

*“Freedom of expression and information including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other form of communication, including and across frontiers, is a fundamental and inalienable human right and indispensable component of democracy. ”*

It was in this atmosphere that Ghana's Fourth Republic was ushered in. Today, Ghana is seen as an “embodiment of a successful case of democratic consolidation” in Africa, after having held relatively five successful multiparty elections (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009).

In the lifetime of the Fourth Republic two important milestones occurred that also affected and enhanced media freedoms and independence. The first was that the change of government in 2001 brought about decriminalization of speech and expression following the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law. The second change in 2010 was the introduction of a

Media Development Fund with the objective of supporting both state and private media institutions.

Today, Ghana has a vibrant pluralistic media. From a situation of having zero political print or electronic media in 1992, the country now boasts of over 466 registered newspapers, magazines, and journals; 286 FM radio stations; and 28 free-to-air/subscription television stations registered in the country. Additionally, there are other multimedia outlets including online newspapers, news portals and websites run by the traditional and non-traditional media (IREX 2012).

Indeed, the framers of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution ensured elaborate provisions on media freedom (Kumado, 1999) for the media to play an effective watchdog role on governments and citizens. As Afari-Gyan (1998) and Kumado (1999) emphasize, the new Constitution removed arbitrary barriers and impediments (government ownership, prohibition of censorship etc) to free flow of information to ensure that the media can perform their role without any interference.

With the new progressive constitutional provisions and subsequent law reforms by successive governments, the development of the media landscape in Ghana is characterised by the proliferation of media outlets with diverse interests. Ghana is thus generally considered as a democracy with the freest media in Africa (Freedom House, 2012; Berger, 2007).

## **1.1 Problem statement**

Ghana's 1992 Constitution in broad terms anticipated an independent media that is free, reliable, editorially and financially independent and professional so that they can act as a

watchdog and uphold democratic principles of accountability (Ansah, 1991; Kumado, 1999). Accordingly, the constitution provided elaborate constitutional guarantees which, according to (Ampaw, 2004) have been generally more respected in practice than any other constitution in the history of Ghana. These developments effectively reduced government monopoly and control of the media.

Despite the removal of government monopoly and control, many of the media are owned by politicians. It is also a fact that government still has some level of control over the state-owned TV station and two of the newspapers with wide circulation. As a result, government and political forces have been accused of using the media to pursue their own parochial interests (Gadzekpo, 2002). Such situations, Schedler (2002) and other scholars have argued, undermine media's independence to prosecute their watchdog function. What is even more worrying is the fact that the media regulatory body, the NMC has not been able to deal effectively with the situation (Ansah, 1996). As such, the role of the media in effectively holding government accountable to citizens has increasingly come under question.

The media's watchdog role under Ghana's Fourth Republic cannot be overemphasised enough. However, not much work (in terms of empirical research) has been done in Ghana. Most of the literatures available were scholarly opinion pieces, newspaper articles, civil society and anecdotal reports. However, there are few existing studies which include *The Press in Ghana: "Problems and Prospects"* by C Asante 1996; *"The Press and Political Culture in Ghana"* by Jennifer Hasty and Samuel Kafewo's *Ghana Research Findings and Conclusions in African Media Development Initiative*. London: BBC World Service Trust (2006). Even with these examples, it came out clearly that most of the works were done by non-Ghanaian scholars who arguably lacked the right indigenous perceptual apparatus in

examining the Ghanaian experience. Asante's work also did not touch on the Fourth Republic. It examined the relationship between the press and government in Ghana from 1822 to 1992.

This study therefore attempts to fill this gap by looking beyond the direct control of the media by government. It will also look at the link between media ownership and media behaviour with reference to their watchdog role over government actions. In other words, we investigate whether or not and to what extent and effect the political leanings of the ownership of media organizations have influence over the media watchdog role.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

The work employs the social responsibility theory of the press popularised by Siebert et al (1956) in their seminal work, *Four Theories of the Press*. The theory, which has been favoured by most third world democracies, is based on the premise that there is societal obligation on the media to serve the public good, rather than the interests of owners or funders (Nerone, 1995; Picard, 1985). As Purvis (2001, p. 343) emphasized, the "theory holds that media has a responsibility to society to help preserve democracy by properly informing the public and by responding to society's needs".

### **1.2.1 Strengths**

The theory views media ownership as "public trust or stewardship"; rather than "unlimited private franchise" (McQuail, 2006, p.171). It considers ownership as private but as Karikari (1999) explained further, editorial content of the media under this theory must necessarily be of the public interest. At the same time, the theory advocates for the media to be financially self-sufficient so as to be free from pressures of special interests (Siebert et al, as cited in Gunarante and Hasim, 1996). Unlike the Libertarian view of the press, the social

responsibility theory perceives freedom of expression as a “moral right” rather than an absolute “natural right” and therefore places an obligation on the media to help society by watching over prevailing social standards of morality.

The theory as explained by Gunarante and Hasim (1996) does not regard the State or government as chief enemy of the media; it rather sees a role for the state. According to them, the theory has an obligation to help prevent abuse of power by the media. The means of ensuring compliance with this obligation can either be through professional self-regulation or public intervention or both (Nerone, 1995).

Norendensteng (2006) for example, advocates a more “interventionist expression of the responsibility tradition in the form of press subsidies and laws to ensure diversity or innovation, as well as the founding of publicly owned media, especially public service broadcasting”(p. 41).

### **1.2.2 Weaknesses**

Like any other social science theory, the social responsibility theory has been subjected to several criticisms. According to Ochilo (1993) the wholesale adoption of the theory by African countries were misplaced because most of the media in many African countries have tended to fall in the authoritarian category. Others have posed questions as to who should see to it that the media act in a socially responsible manner and how decisions should be made as to what is or is not a significant opinion worthy of media space or time (Severin & Tankard, 2001).

### 1.2.3 Applicability

Still, this study employs the social responsibility theory because this theory is reflected in the critical roles and functions of the media as embodied in the 1992 Constitution, the fundamental law of Ghana.

For instance, the theory holds that the media are free but have an obligation to serve the public good; and that the State has a responsibility to protect the interest of the public. This aspect has been taken care of, by Article 165 of the 1992 Constitution which confers on the NMC, power to ensure that the media discharge their watchdog function effectively.

Based on the social responsibility principle that the media is a public trust, we investigate (I) how the media is exercising this trust in terms of its watchdog functions over government, in other words, we investigate the extent to which the media are able to perform their watchdog functions in accordance with Article 162(6) of the Constitution which requires the media to “uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people of Ghana” (Republic of Ghana, 1992), and (ii) whether the type of ownership of media has any role in this?

### 1.3 Research questions

In an attempt to understand and deal with the issues outlined in the problem statement above, we posed the central question which seeks to find out how much freedom the media in Ghana has in the performance of their watchdog role over government? To answer the central question, we try to find responses to the following:

1. What is the ownership structure of the media in Ghana?
2. Does ownership structure affect the watchdog role of the media in Ghana?

3. In what ways is the effect of private ownership of the media different from that of state ownership in terms of their watchdog performance on government?
4. In what ways, if any, does the ownership structure impinge on media freedom?

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The main objective of the study is to identify the nature of media ownership and how this affects media freedom in terms of the media's ability to play its watchdog role over government.

Specifically, we:

1. Examine the structure of media ownership and how it affects press freedom in Ghana's Fourth Republic;
2. Compare how state and private media perform their watchdog role;
3. Identify the political conditions under which the media operates and how these affect the performance of the media watchdog role over government; and
4. Recommend ways in which the structure of media ownership can be reformed to enhance media independence and freedom.

#### **1.5 Hypothesis**

The study is premised on the assumption that the nature of media ownership affects the media in the performance of their watchdog function in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

#### **1.6 Significance of the study**

Democracy includes a lot of elements but in this study the primary concern is one of these, namely, a free and independent media, which is considered one of the sure ways to promote human development (Abdellatif, 2003). A free and independent media hold public officials accountable on behalf of citizens. This study intends to add to the scant body of knowledge

on challenges of the media in Ghana as far as ownership and control is concerned. It would attempt to provide evidence-based findings and recommendations on the media for all stakeholders, including media owners, journalists and policy makers.

## **1.7 Clarification of concepts**

This section is devoted to explaining concepts and terms used in the study.

### **1.7.1 Media**

As Kumado (1999) notes the 1992 Constitution defines media as tools or transmission belts for our ideas and suppliers of our basic need for information. The term media therefore refers to facilities/tools that convey information from a source to a recipient. They include newspapers, television and radio, internet or the new media. In this study, the newspaper is used interchangeably with the media or the press. The study is concerned with political newspapers, and not with specialized publications such as newsletters etc. For the purpose of this work, newspapers are those that perform “a watchdog of government in all its forms, promoting transparency in public life and public scrutiny of those with power through exposing corruption, maladministration and corporate wrongdoing”(Pérez Tornero, 2008, p.3). State media and public media are also used interchangeably in this study.

### **1.7.2 Democratic governance**

Democratic governance has been defined by different scholars to mean different things. To understand democratic governance, we first of all explain democracy and then governance, and then established their relationship. Democracy is basically defined in this work as

democratic rule. Democratic rule refers to the procedural aspect of democracy. A procedural democracy is essentially the result of competition between parties in an electoral system.

For example, Schumpeter defines it 'as the institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a comprehensive struggle for the peoples' vote'(Schumpeter, 1943 cited in Pereira, 2000, p.). Huntington (1991 cited in Rozumilowicz, 2002) further built on this definition by classifying democracy 'as a political system in which the most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote'.

Governance as an art and manner of governing has its historical roots in thirteenth century Europe. But hardly was it used until the World Bank and other International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) revived it and reviewed its meaning to reflect current reality.

Since then, the expression of "good" and "poor" governance has become the stock in trade of scholars of political scientists in particular, and social science in general (Guseva et al, 2008;Chowdhury & Skarstedt, 2005).

Good governance is characterized by participatory, transparent and accountable, effective and equitable rule; and it promotes the rule of law (Abdellatif, 2003). According to the (DFID ,2006 cited in Abdellatif, 2003) , the meaning of good governance goes beyond the term "government" but covers political parties, parliament, the judiciary, the media as well as civil society. For them, good governance is about how citizens, leaders, and public institutions relate to each other in order to make change happen in response to the interest of citizens.

For UNDP, good governance and democratic governance are inseparable. And that ‘good governance’ is ‘democratic governance’ from the human development perspective. Scholars such as Cheema & Maguire (2002) agreed with the UNDP and have further defined it as authority of the government that is based on the will of the people and is responsive to them.

For Abdellatif (2003) democratic governance is broader than both democracy and governance. According to him, democratic governance incorporates both good governance and democracy but emphasizes the need to secure political and civil rights and freedoms as human rights, and also ensure participation of people and accountability of decision makers.

In this study, we adopt a definition of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contained in the UNDP Human Development Report, 2002. It defines democratic governance as a combination of good governance for development, democratic processes and institutions, and are concerned with the securing of political and civil rights and freedoms as human rights.

Good governance includes:

- i. People having a say in decisions that affect their lives.
- ii. People having the ability to hold decision-makers accountable.

We focus on the following attributes of democratic governance as described above – namely, watchdog role (accountability) and press freedom. We examine these two indicators in relation to media ownership and the performance of its watchdog role.

### 1.7.2.1 Watchdog role/Accountability

As explained above, accountability is central to democratic governance. According to DFID accountability is the ability of citizens, civil society, and the private sector to scrutinize public institutions and governments and to hold them to account. This ability includes, ultimately, the opportunity to change leaders by democratic means (DFID, 2006 cited in Abdellatif, 2003).

Schedler (1999) denotes two forms of the accountability concept. These are answerability which holds that office holders have an obligation to inform, explain and justify their actions to electorates and enforceability that refers to the capacity of state institutions to monitor and sanction office holders who have acted beyond their public duties so that unpopular policies & abuses of power can be challenged and reversed. Key to answerability form is the performance of the daily watchdog functions of the media over the actions of state officials. As Tettey (2006) argues due to the reality that citizens cannot monitor government officials on daily basis, responsibility for doing this has fallen to the media.

‘Central to this media role is the belief that journalists should carry out an investigative and watchdog role on behalf of the public’ (Waisbord 2000 cited in Jibril 2013). Political accountability can be achieved when the media equip citizens with quality information on a government’s performance to empower them to either maintain or vote government out (Netanel, 2001).

Indeed liberal theorists have long argued that the existence of unfettered and independent press is essential in the process of democratization (Whitten-Woodring, 2009). Independent media enhances the exercise of the right of freedom of expression, thought and conscience strengthens the responsiveness and accountability of government to its citizens and provides a

pluralist platform and a channel of political expression for a multiplicity of groups and interests.

According to Milton (cited in Tettey, 2001) ‘a free press advances the cause of democracy by performing watchdog functions over governments thereby putting the latter in check from abusing public office for personal gain and from abuse of the citizenry’ (p.7).

Scholars have argued that officials react to media reportage with the assumption that it reflects public opinion. Public officials might alter their conduct out of concern that their conduct would come under press scrutiny. Thus, the mere presence of the media helps check public and private power. At times, of course, officials simply try to cover-up illicit activity (Bennett & Serrin, 2005). According to Jebril (2013) watchdog journalism finds expression in an objective, factual, and critical reporting style. Playing this role is described by scholars as playing the watchdog role on government on behalf of citizens.

#### **1.7.2.2 Press freedom**

The guarantee of freedom of expression and information is recognized as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948, the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. In particular, Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Press freedom has become deeply rooted in both democratic theory and practice since the 17th century. This is because it does not only provide free access and exchange of information; it also ensures publicity and openness which safeguards the rights of citizens (Coronel, 2002; McConnell & Becker, 2002).

Curran distinguishes between classical liberal from the radical democratic perspectives on press freedom. While the classical liberal school focuses on the freedom of the media to publish or broadcast materials they please, the radical democratic perspective emphasizes on how the media can mediate between all groups in society (Curran, 1996 cited in Becker, English & Vlad, 2010).

What is media freedom then? There is raging scholarly debate in the communication and political sciences as to what constitutes media freedom.

There is the normative model of free press that views media freedom as insulating the media from government regulation and control that would suggest censorship or limits on the freedom to disseminate information, news, and opinion. In addition, the media should have economic and political independence, access to channels for a plurality of voices, and provide a benefit to audience (McQuail, 2005, p. 556).

Another scholar, Lowenstein (1970) argued that press freedom prevails when the media have full independence. His definition of full independence is the ability of the media to be highly critical of everybody especially governments without fear of intimidation, except for minimal libel and obscenity laws (Lowenstein, 1970 cited in Becker, English & Vlad, 2010)

Weaver on his part identified three elements of press freedom: the relative absence of government restraints on the media, the relative absence of non-governmental restraints and

the existence of conditions to free dissemination of diverse ideas and opinions to large audiences (Weaver cited in cited in Becker, English & Vlad, 2010).

Picard (1985) distinguished between negative and positive press freedom. Negative press freedom rules out any government actions in relation to the press, leaving it to the free market and maintaining the pure principle of freedom to the maximum extent, whatever the consequences.

The model of negative freedom is represented by the First Amendment to the US Constitution (1791) which states that "Congress shall make no law...abridging freedom of speech, or press..." (Werhan, 2004).

The Ghana Constitution in Article 164 (3) also states

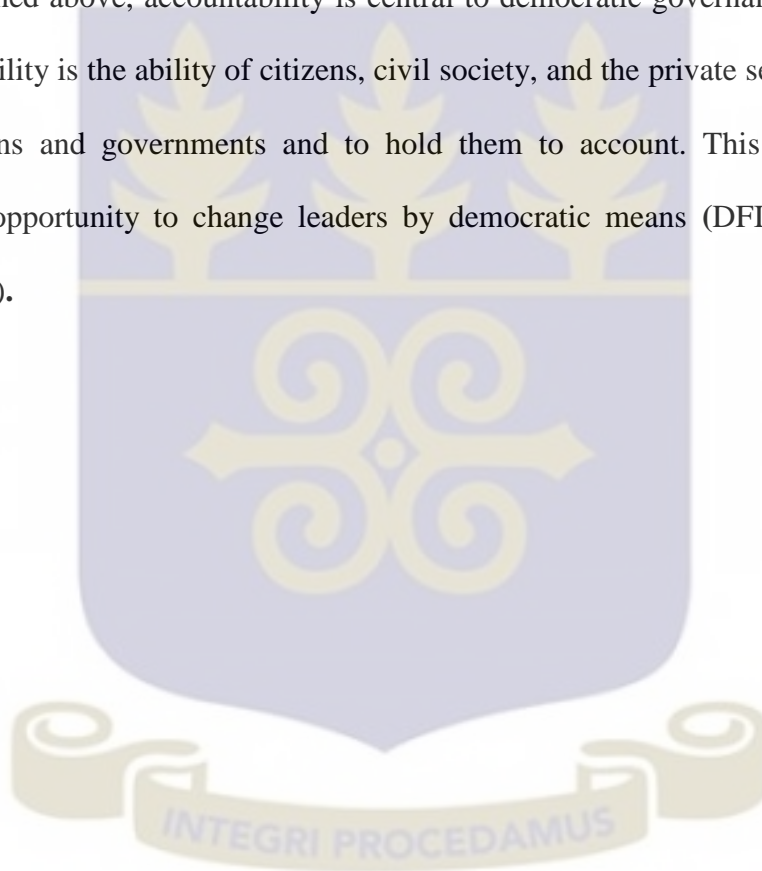
“There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information.”

The positive notion of press freedom is more concerned with the practical realization of the goals noted above and with limiting the harm done by unrestrained market forces. According to Picard (1985, p.49) "Positive press freedom is intended to promote the free flow of diverse ideas and public debate by removing and guarding against barriers to that flow".

In this study, we adopt the definition by Ansah (1991) on freedom of the press, which is “freedom to disseminate information and ideas through the mass media without government restrictions. A free press system is expected to provide a factual account of what is happening

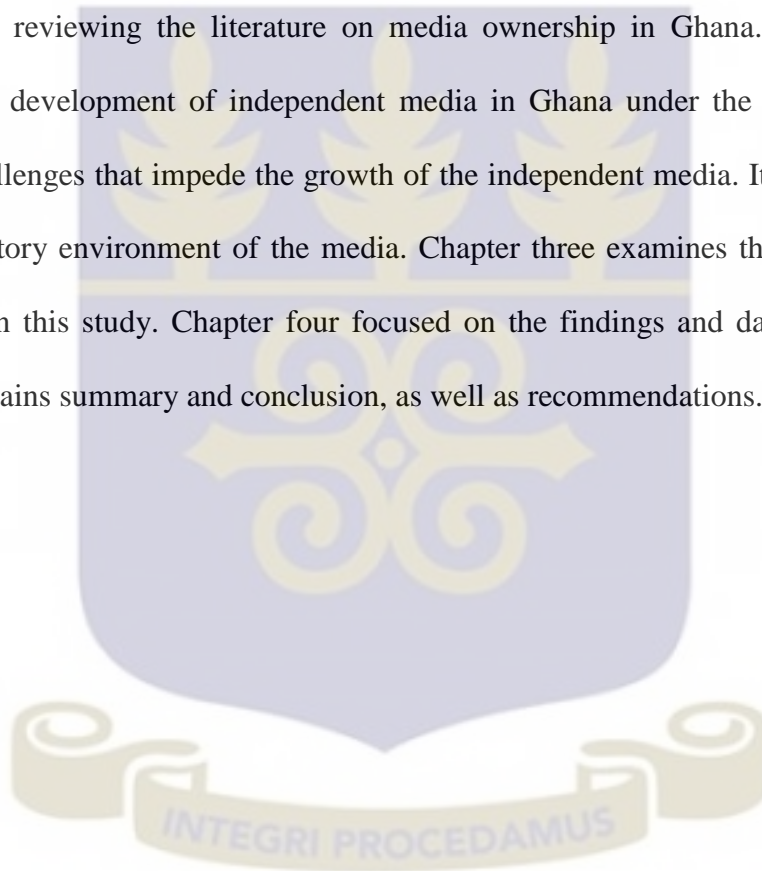
in society and to present, analyse and clarify the goals and values of society; it should also provide a forum for exchange of comments and criticisms of the nation's affairs thus serving a watchdog dog of people's rights"(Ansah, 1991,p. 3).

From Ansah's definition, we can deduce that there is freedom of the press if there is absence of direct and indirect control of the media by both government and other actors. There is no self-censorship, no repressive legislation, and a multiplicity of ownership and diversity of news. As explained above, accountability is central to democratic governance. According to DFID accountability is the ability of citizens, civil society, and the private sector to scrutinize public institutions and governments and to hold them to account. This ability includes, ultimately, the opportunity to change leaders by democratic means (DFID, 2006 cited in Abdellatif, 2003).



## **1.8 Organization of the study**

This work is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is mainly concerned with the purpose of the study, giving historical overview, introducing the proposed study as well as the theoretical framework. Chapter two follows with the literature review. The review touches on key theories of media ownership including both neo-liberal and neo-Marxist theories of media ownership. It focuses on theories such as the public interest, public choice, neo-Marxist and media pluralistic perspectives of media ownership. Empirical studies were also reviewed before reviewing the literature on media ownership in Ghana. It discussed the overview of the development of independent media in Ghana under the Fourth Republic, highlighting challenges that impede the growth of the independent media. It also looks at the legal and regulatory environment of the media. Chapter three examines the methodological approach used in this study. Chapter four focused on the findings and data analysis while chapter five contains summary and conclusion, as well as recommendations.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction of the chapter**

This chapter reviews relevant literatures of basic concepts that underpin the study. The discourse examines theories and studies on the nature of media ownership and its impact on media independence. The chapter reviewed both neo-liberal and neo-Marxist theories of media ownership. It also looked at political economy theories of the mass media including those of public interest and neo-Marxism. The review also covered pluralistic perspectives or public choice of media ownership as well as the consequence on media ownership on media independence. Empirical studies on media ownership and control in Ghana and elsewhere were also touched on. It also discussed the overview of the development of independent media in Ghana under the Fourth Republic, focusing on challenges that are impeding the growth of the independent media. It also looked at the legal and regulatory environment under which the media operates and finally, media and state relationship are also examined.

#### **2.1 Media ownership: a theoretical note**

One of the most pertinent debates in the latter half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century was over who should control the media. The obvious questions that flowed from the debates are: How much control, if any should any individual or entity has? And whose interests should guide the media's work? In the ideological battle between the Western and the Eastern blocs, the issue was used as a propaganda tool to demonstrate each side's superiority.

Theorists have had divergent views about these very important questions posed above. A major component of the debate had to do with the role of the State as far as the regulation of the media is concerned. Theorists belonging to the public interests or Pigouvian tradition

believe that there is a need for state ownership of media (Djankov et. al, 2002; Lesoon and Coyne, 2005). Others such as the liberal pluralists and the public choice theorists see government involvement as a dangerous development that should be discouraged and avoided (Curran, 2000).

According to the public interest or Pigouvian theorists, information is a public good; as such, if the media is left in the hands of the private sector alone, it may suffer from problems of under provision(Djankov et. al, 2002; Lesoon and Coyne, 2005; McQuail, 2005). Public good principles demand that information should be served to everybody including the poor and marginalized who cannot afford it. Secondly, public good theorists argue that the private media are driven by profit incentives to sensationalize the news. Therefore, they argued that the private media maybe more inclined to entertain than inform consumers; they would pander to the mundane desires of the public, thus helping to mould a petty and less knowledgeable public – a deficiency they argue, the State-owned media may remedy. Finally, State-media ownership can be less biased, more accurate and public interest-focused (Lesoon and Coyne, 2005).

Lesoon and Coyne(2005) argue that although, the public interest or the Pigouvian economists do not necessarily endorse State ownership of mass media, several sociological theories of the media point to similar problems associated with leaving the media in the hands of the market.

Similar to the public interest school, is Marxian and neo-Marxist theory. The main argument of Marxian political economists is that the economic base of any society constitutes the superstructure of media, i.e. media ownership is linked to societal power and this power bloc

somehow governs the construction of media content in terms of its commercial and ideological interests (Curran et al. 1982 cited in Herkman, 2004).

For the Marxian and neo-Marxian theorists, the media owners indirectly control their journalists and managers who cannot assert their editorial independence due to fear over job security. These journalists and managers seek to attract advertisers and audiences by publishing content suitable to advertisers including attempting to satisfy the prurient taste of audiences (Branston and Stafford, 2006).

Gurevitch *et. al* summarized the theory as follows: “*Marxists view capitalist society as being one of class domination; the media are seen as part of an ideological arena in which various class views are fought out, although within the context of the dominance of certain classes; ultimate control is increasingly concentrated in monopoly capital*”. Expanding on this, Gurevitch *et. al* continued that “*media professionals, while enjoying the illusion of autonomy, are socialized into and internalize the norms of the dominant culture; the media taken as a whole, relay interpretive frameworks consonant with the interests of the dominant classes, and media audiences*” and that this results in the media, “*sometimes negotiating and contesting these frameworks, lack ready access to alternative meaning systems that would enable them to reject the definitions offered by the media in favor of consistently oppositional definitions*”(Gurevitch et al. 1982:1).

The Liberal Pluralist Theory approach however presents a strong criticism against State intervention and supports a media that is free from all interests be it government or even legislative oversight. For them, the press is supposed to be watchdog of the government and inform citizens of government policies and actions. Curran (2000 cited in Bassey, 2006) notes that the media can be viewed in liberal theory as an agency of information and debate that

facilitates the functioning of democracy. It also provides a channel between government and the people in political discussion and debate on issues that affect the state.

The liberal pluralists' perspective is associated with democratic liberal tradition which views humans as free, and having the right to self-determination. For them democracy as an ideology promotes social and political conditions in which people can exercise choice and become freer (Chandler, 2001). As Fourie (2001), puts it is an:

*“Opportunities to cast off repressive measures imposed by bad governments, to have regular elections, where free choice of representation may be exercised, and to gain knowledge about alternatives and discuss these freely and openly. So the mass media has responsibility of providing citizens with the necessary information so that they can take informed decisions”.*

Therefore, media pluralism and access to information are central in democracy. The media should be able to provide information without any restrictions to the citizens and should be able to compete in a free market.

As Gurevitch *et al.* put it:

Pluralists see society as a complex of competing groups and interests, none of them predominant all of the time. Media organizations are seen as bounded organizational systems, enjoying an important degree of autonomy from the state, political parties and institutionalized pressure groups. Control of the media is said to be in the hands of an autonomous managerial elite who allow a considerable degree of flexibility to media professionals. A basic symmetry is seen to exist between media institutions and their audiences, since in McQuail's words the 'relationship is generally entered into voluntarily and on apparently equal terms'... and audiences are seen as capable of manipulating the media in an infinite variety of ways according to their prior needs

and dispositions, and as having access to what Halloran calls 'the plural values of society' enabling them to 'conform, accommodate, challenge or reject'. (Gurevitch *et al.* 1982: 1)

Pluralists argue that it is practically impossible for owners to interfere with the content of the media because their businesses are economically far too complex for them to regularly interfere in the day-to-day management of content. For instance, they point out that a significant share of the media market in Britain is taken up by public service broadcasters (PSB), i.e. media outlets controlled by the State such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). According to them, the BBC has a legal obligation to inform, to educate and to ensure that all programming is pluralistic and diverse, i.e. that all sections of society are catered for. On media professionalism, pluralists stress that the professionalism of journalists and editors also constrains the power of owners (Lesoon and Coyne, 2005; Hitchens, 1994).

## **2.2 Studies on media ownership structure**

Four main media ownership structures have been identified in the academic literature. They are commercial, non-profit, public and community media (McQuail, 2005; Rennie, 2006).

The first category, commercial media refers to those media that are independently owned, for-profit, and funded mostly from advertising and sales. They range in size from international conglomerates to small local outlets. They are mostly owned by individuals, corporations and families. As McQuail (2005) defines it, commercial media could be public or private, a large media chain or conglomerate or a small independent body. Although it is mostly privately-owned, it could be also owned by government as can be found in most new democratic countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The second category found in the literature is public media. This ownership type, he argues, comes in various forms ranging from direct State administration to elaborate and diversified constructions designed to maximize the independence of decision-making about content (McQuail, 2005). Two types of ownership of public media exist in the literature. They are the public service media model and the state-owned model.

The first model is not directly controlled by government; there is often an intermediary in the form of regulators or parliament or board of directors with no specific allegiance to government. The state-owned media is controlled and funded by the state (taxpayers) and may be more or less focused on the public good, but is sometimes simply a mouthpiece for the government of the day.

The last category is the non-profit. According to McQuail (2005) it is a type of ownership structure that could be a 'neutral trust' designed to safeguard the independence of media operations or bodies with special cultural or social trust tasks such as political parties, and religious bodies among others. Party or politician-owned media cover a range of different types of mass media created and financed by parties; these outlets range from small party propaganda sheets to media owned by rich politico-business people.

A fourth media ownership touted by some theorists as suitable for developing or third world countries is the community media. Scholars such as Rennie (2006) have isolated this as another form of media ownership. In Ghana, the NMC identifies it as the third type of media ownership. The community media is supposed to be owned by the community and funded by their contribution either through cash or, expertise. This type of media ownership is not common in the world (Alhassan, 2005). Although there are no community newspapers in Ghana, there exists a number of rural and community radio stations. The few community radio stations are grouped together under the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN).

### **2.3 Consequences of media ownership for media independence**

Some scholars argue that media independence can be influenced by media owners who resource or finance the media directly (Herman and Chomsky 2006; McQuail, 2005 and Netanel, 2001). In a study on the relationship between media ownership and editorial content in Kenya, Okech (2008) found a strong correlation between editorial lines of the two major daily newspapers in the country and to ownership influences in most cases.

Across the globe, media ownership has been subject of contention. In America and other western countries, there are regulations in place to prevent over concentration of media in a few hands. However, studies suggest that the number of companies controlling media globally have shrunk significantly. This phenomenon is concentrating the source of news and information in the hands of a powerful few thus increasing the risk of media manipulation. Bagdikian (2004) gives a clearer picture of this in America. According his study, 50 corporations in 1983 controlled the vast majority of news media outlets in America, but by 2004, media ownership was concentrated in only seven corporations.

Similarly, Curran and Seaton (2003) note that ownership of newspapers in Britain has always been concentrated in the hands of a few powerful 'press barons.' Such a situation, they could distort the democratic functions of the media as these vested interests interfere with the vision of the media practitioners. For example, in 1937 four men owned nearly one in every two national and local daily newspapers sold.

Many other writers have focused on the potential harms that may result from concentrated media ownership, including the abuse of political power by media owners or the underrepresentation of some significant viewpoints. For instance, Baker (2006) argues that if there is media concentration in democratic societies, they would allow the media ownership

to be dispersed but concentrated in the hands of few owners who may likely favour interests such as political and profits at the expense of giving quality information to the citizenry. Although McQuail (2005) finds no problem with the various ownership entities, he cautioned “ownership matters when the media is owned by a media tycoon or mogul, because they take interest in editorial policy”. He argued that media ownership can influence media performance and the extent to which media organizations could claim to exercise autonomy in relation to their owners and other economic agencies in their environment. McQuail argues that as the funding agent has a particular set of objectives including political ones, the media so funded must bend towards the achievement of such goals.

Democratic values then cease to become objective constructs and become subject to the political inclinations of media organizations and their owners and major advertisers. It is a classic case of “who pays the piper, calls the tune.” Altschull 1984 was more categorical with an assumption that media reflect the ideology of those who finance them. He proposed a framework in which he outlines four sources of media support; (1) under the “official” pattern, media are controlled by the state (such as in many Communist countries), (2) in the “commercial” pattern, media reflect the ideology of advertisers and their media-owning allies, (3) under the “interest” pattern, media content reflects the ideology of the financing group, such as a political party or religious group, and (4) in the “informal” pattern, content reflects the goals of individual contributors who want to promote their views. The mix of these financing patterns varies from country to country and over time within countries (Altschull 1984 cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

In modern times, media owners have more subtle ways of influencing the editorial content of their media houses. One scholar described the situation thus: "while claims of direct censorship can often be denied or possibly substantiated in some situations, it is still difficult

to separate editorial policies from ownership connections, no matter who makes the decisions" (Wasko 2001 cited in Herkman, 2004). On their part, Golding and Murdock, argue that the relationship between media ownership and media control is sometimes an indirect and mediated one (Golding and Murdock, 1991).

Ownership influences on media content were more direct in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Netanel (2001), party affiliated newspapers dominated the American landscape through much of the first half of the nineteenth century. Newspaper editors, she said regularly received government appointments and subsidies. Newspapers favoured by those in power also received lucrative government contracts, including those for printing laws and government documents.

#### **2.4 Government ownership versus private ownership**

Netanel argues that government subsidy provides an opportunity for media to avoid biases inherent in reliance on advertising and the market for financial sustenance. As such government-funded media can be an important component of the system of free expression. They can serve both to engender public discourse that is not skewed to the wealthy and provide a forum for minority views that receive little play in commercial media.

However, she further argues, there several incidents of governments including the democratic ones, seeking to use the power of the purse to extract influence over the content of state-funded media. Netanel insisted that "ideologically driven opposition newspaper would act as a more vigorous watchdog against the government and party in power ..." In other words that the closer a newspaper is to a government, the less likely they may performed the watchdog function against government. Again, she emphasizes that in such situation, those parties become "government press" and that at the very least, and press liberty is compromised and

favour of power is essential to the support of the editors.” But once in power, those critics used the very same tools to reward their loyal supporters and curry favour with newspaper.

The problem with such development, she claimed is with the difficulty of setting rational, neutral criteria for the distribution of government subsidies to the press. In addition, state efforts to insulate state-funded broadcasters from government and political party interference have proven to be only partly successful. In some instances, public broadcasters’ internal supervisory organs have become politicized along party lines. Additionally, political pressures constrain public broadcasters from taking controversial positions or even tackling controversial issues.

In their study, Djankov et al (2002) discovered that government ownership hurts democracy. They argue that the governments owned the press –not to improve the performance of economic and political systems, but to improve upon their own chances of staying in power. Government ownership of the media, they say, is detrimental to economic, political and most strikingly social outcomes. They sum up their argument by urging increasing private ownership of the media through privatization or the encouragement of entry to advance a variety of political and economic goals, and especially the social needs of the poor.

Leaving the media in private hands does not however provide the perfect remedy. According to Paye (1996), owners of large media organizations seek public policies of particular concern to themselves by making campaign contributions, doing favours for politicians, or lobbying just like other interest groups. This is done through an indirect approach of using their publications or broadcasts to try and change beliefs and policy preferences of most and /or elite audiences, which would presumably affect subsequent policy decisions. This indirect approach might be especially attractive to media organizations because of their special position as key disseminators of political information.

To understand the influence on media ownership and media content, Paye stresses that , “there is the need to know what sorts of issues the media is discussing, also who drives the process (owners, managers or journalists) and acting upon what motives (economic self-interest, values, ideology, protest or norms) and with what degree of consciousness. By what mechanisms the action of many individuals, co-workers are coordinated (ownership interference, managerial interference, selective recruitments, internalised norms or routines?”. In emerging democracies there are numerous instances where state and private ownership co-exist, but in their work on the Romanian media landscape, Leeson and Coyne (2005) identified five means of media manipulation in both ownership structures. The first is *direct control over outlets ownership*. In this context the media is owned by the State and are therefore entirely controlled by the government of the day. They argued that the State owned media outlets have a strong incentive to avoid being critical of the government in power. Furthermore, as State owned enterprises, these outlets are run exclusively by government appointed directors who determine both the stories that will be covered as well as the light in which these stories will be conveyed. Politicians in power thus choose directors and editors that will do their bidding, creating heavily biased news.

Closely related to direct State ownership of media outlets is the *ownership of outlets by incumbent politicians*. This phenomenon, they note, has become known as “Berlusconisation”. A practice named after former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who is also a prominent media mogul. The practice refers to the vesting of media ownership and a political office in the same individual. Although in this case, outlets are technically in the hands of private owners, they are not acquired and operated for the purposes of profit. Instead they are acquired to manipulate information reaching the public. In many instances, these outlets are not even self-sustaining: they are cross subsidized by their owners with other businesses that generate profit. Politicians find it worthwhile to keep these media sources

operating, despite the fact that they often generate monetary losses, because of their ability to control information reaching the public.

The third means of control is *Indirect Control via State Owned Media Infrastructure*. Leeson and Coyne (2005) argue that if media outlets are privately owned but vital means of production and distribution are monopolized by the State, government's control over the media remains strong. In Romania, they found that State ownership of media related infrastructure is one indirect method government uses to manipulate the media. The government's monopoly on newsprint gives it direct control over which private newspapers would be able to operate, and through this indirect means control the content of reported news.

The fourth strategy Leeson and Coyne (2005) identified is *indirect control via financial pressure*. In this means of control, government creates an environment in which most private media outlets depend financially upon the State. In such circumstances, the media cannot be independent of government. For the media to remain in business, it ought to stay on the good side of those who wield political power.

The last strategy of media manipulation is entry through licensing. The government resorts to the broadcasting regulator, in the Romanian case, the National Council of Broadcasting which has absolute power to grant or revoke media's permission to broadcast at any time. Through the agency of the state licensing authority therefore, government contrives to exercise control over media organizations.

Mungiu-Pippidi (2008) in a wider study of the media in post-communist European countries concluded that the media have not become independent in spite of democratic reforms. They have been captured by vested interests of both State and non-State actors. She identified

some of the features of a captured media as concentrated, non-transparent ownership of media outlets; important political actors controlling the media; strong linkage between media and political elites; and infiltration of the media by secret services. According to her, capture is evident in an environment where a large sector of non-viable or non-profitable media lives on covert sponsorship. Such situations, Mungiu-Pippidi maintains, distort the democratic role function of the media. “Captured media outlets exist to trade influence and manipulate information rather than to inform the public, a phenomenon hard to fit into the classic government-perpetrator and media-victim paradigm”, she stressed.

In a similar vein, Corneo (2006) emphasized that captured media seriously distort collective decisions, colluding with interest groups including government in order to influence the public opinion. According to him, the increase in the concentration of firm ownership makes the occurrence of media bias more likely. Petrova (2008) also added that such media provide a convenient means for manipulating public opinion, even when voters understand that the media can be biased.

With specific reference to the media’s watchdog role on government, Houston et al (2011) argue that the only way the media could fight corruption is when its members have incentive to do so. According to them, political pressure might reduce the media’s incentive to discuss and report in order to promote accountability. This type of political pressure depends on the extent to which the media is politically controlled, captured or repressed through a variety of government actions.

In the view of Besley and Pratt (2006), free media if not captured ensures political accountability and helps the population to make informed choices during elections.. They conclude that media capture has two major negative effects on the well-being of citizens.

First, where the media is captured, the grabbing hand of the State will tend to engage in more rent extraction because political actors are less concerned that they will be caught by the public. Second, where government controls the media there will be less political turnover because voters will be unable to punish elected officials due to a lack of information about their ineffectiveness.

Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien argue when media are captured, journalists or their media no longer became watchdogs but guard dogs or lapdogs. As guard dogs they serve as “as a sentry not for the community as a whole, but for those particular groups who have the power and influence to create and control their own security systems”. As lapdogs, they are completely submissive to authority and lack independent power. Such media are oblivious of any other interests except those of powerful groups, and frame all issues according to the perspectives of the highest powers in the system (Donohue et al., 1995 cited in Watson & Hill, 2012).

## **2.5 Media ownership and control in Ghana**

The last twenty years have been the best for the media in Ghana in terms of favourable political conditions in playing their watchdog role over government and other powerful interests in society (Kumado 1999, Gadzekpo, 2002). This positive development is as a result of the return to democratic rule in Ghana, after so many years of authoritarian rule that had negatively impacted on the growth of independent democratic institutions, including the media (Ninsin, 1998).

Many scholars including Ansah 1991 have argued that the advent of the Fourth Republic saw the subsequent proliferation of private media, both print and electronic, to serve as the

mouthpiece of the opposition and provide a necessary counterpoise to the hitherto overwhelming weight of the state-owned media.

Noticeably, the state media lost their dominance and influence as a result of these new developments in the early years of the Fourth Republic. As Ayee( 2007); Agyeman-Duah, (2006); Ampaw, 2004 and Karikari (1998 )note, the country's political leadership had lost its monopoly over the media due to the emergence of the private and diverse media. Ayee argues that the private media largely served as alternative media outlets to the government-controlled state-owned media and provided avenues for opposition parties and other groups to criticize the regime of Rawlings.

Indeed, the media's watchdog role during this period, according to Ampaw (2004) and Agyeman-Duah (2006) was felt soon after the transition from military dictatorship to multi-party politics (1992 to 2000). Despite these positive reviews of the emergence of new era of the media, scholars have noted overtime that that media both public and private have yet to fulfil the expectations of the early welcome. Indeed Gadzekpo (2002) and others have noted however that, the expectations of the framers of the Constitution have not been sustained.

Several factors ranging from ownership to unprofessionalism have been identified as accounting for the failure of the media to sustain the watchdog functions on government in particular. First of all, as stated above, the 1992 Constitution provided elaborate provisions including Article 164(4) which guaranteed the freedom of the media to report freely without fear of harassment and intimidation from government or its agencies. However, it appears the legal and regulatory framework put in place did not contain mechanisms to safeguard the independent media from the monopolistic tendencies of businessmen or

politicians. Largely, the ownership of the private media has been divided along the political traditions with most of them either supporting government or opposition party lines (Hasty 2005, Gadzekpo, 2008; Kafewo, 2006).

Most of the media, especially newspapers, rely on sponsorship of politicians, whose aim is to use the media as a vehicle for attaining political power. Gadzekpo (2002) argues that the media industry, especially newspapers had been established to cater for the interest of their owners who are mostly politicians or “pseudo journalists”.

Similarly, a media scholar, Gyan-Apenteng, emphasizing this point, describes the Ghanaian private media in the 2008 Media Sustainability Index Report, outlets as or “the political wing of businesses or the playthings for the rich and fame-seekers” (IREX, 2008).

Owusu (2012, p. 71) sums up the state of the private media in the following paragraph: *“The media in Ghana are clearly in a kind of tug of war mainly for political benefit and expediency as they try to outdo one another. Some journalists worked according to the dictates of politicians and political parties, instead of the public good. This must be the main reason why some of the publications are guilty of regular violation of the Code of Ethics of journalists...”*

This problem is not exclusive to Ghana, Dare (1996 cited in Tettey,2001) puts it, media in Africa today, “operates for most part as an instrumental press that tends to espouse causes that advance the interests of its proprietors or their ethnic groups, often times with scant regard to public interest. This situation makes it safer to refer to the independent media in Africa as “private media” Tettey (2001).

The issue of unprofessionalism has been identified as a major constraint for the African media. The unprofessionalism that characterises the media on the continent is likened by Tettey to that of America in the 1940s which necessitated the setting up of the Commission on Freedom of the Press (Tettey, 2006).

They have been accused of professional recklessness such as misleading front page headlines, inaccurate news articles and untruthful reports (Gadzekpo, 2008). The problem has been attributed to the euphoria over the new-found freedom in Africa, following the return to multiparty rule (Tettey, 2006). This euphoria implanted in the journalists and media personnel a false impression that they could write and say anything, blatantly ignoring ethical principles of fairness, accuracy, and truth. (Kasoma 1997 cited in Phiri, 1999 ; Tettey, 2006).

(Kasoma 1997 cited in Phiri, 1999 ) on his part, identified other practices as journalists wrongly perceiving themselves as opposition elements to the ruling government, thus undermining journalistic ethics. Such situations portray journalists as “irresponsible, self-serving, unaccountable and a threat to the credibility and sustenance of the democratic process. According to (Mupfurutsa) ‘the media has [sic] become the object of public and government outrage . . . Journalism has been equated with uncivilized political propaganda and criticized for its bias, irresponsible and unethical behaviour” (Mupfurutsa 1999 cited in Tettey, 2006).

Government officials take advantage of this professional flaw to justify limitations on press freedom. In the first term of President Rawlings’ government (1992-1996), the private media assumed the role of opposition when the opposition boycotted New Patriotic Party boycotted Parliament (Karikari, 1998).

In 2009, for instance, a damning confession of unprofessionalism was made by an editor of the privately owned the *New Punch* newspaper, Ebenezer Ato Sam. He confessed to a number of Accra-based radio stations that some stories he had written about President Mills, the then opposition National Democratic Congress candidate, were pure fabrications intended to undermine his chances in the 2008 elections. Early on, the same Sam had been dismissed from the *Daily Guide* newspaper together with another editor for allegedly demanding bribe from the National Security Advisor at the time to set up their own newspapers.

Another unethical practice is what has become known as “brown envelope journalism”. This is the practice where journalists are paid by their news sources, particularly politicians, who want to influence how they handle the news. It has become a common occurrence in many countries including Ghana, a country deeply immersed in corruption and patron-client networks, where compromising reporters and editors and undermining the independence of the media are common (Skjerdal, 2010, p.369).

Beyond the challenges of unethical practise is low investment constraint on the privately-owned media in Ghana. Generally, while the state-owned media may be said to operate in a more efficient manner, the same cannot be said of the privately-owned media. The latter, especially the newspapers, have over the years struggled to survive. Right from 1992, there has been little investment in the newspaper industry.

According to the Media Sustainability Report: “Most of them operate on a shoestring budget and do not often hire staff for the business, preferring family and political allies” (IREX, 2012, p). This phenomenon is not recent. As Ansah (1996) reported, most of early newspapers that emerged after the ban on newspaper publication were either aborted before publication or died soon after the first few issues. The situation became so alarming that in

2009, Haruna Attah, publisher and editor of the privately-owned *The Mail* newspaper, passionately called on corporate organizations in the country to support the private media to promote democracy. He stressed that “You build a borehole there; you build a maternity ward there but also help democracy to grow. And for democracy to grow the media is very important and when democracy grows and there is stability, your businesses are also stable and you make the profit. If that is done, then we can start weeding out poor quality media” (MFWA, 2010).

Regarding conditions of service, the situation is depressing; most journalists in the country are often poorly paid and not all of them have formal employment contracts with their media organisations. A study by the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (IREX, 2012) revealed that some journalists received a paltry sum of GHS 20 (about US \$12) as monthly salary. These circumstances, according Gadzekpo (2008) often render journalists susceptible to bribery and self-censorship.

In terms of training and capacity building, there exists also, at least a dozen media/communication and journalism training institutions in the country, including the graduate School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana, the Ghana Institute of Journalism, African University College of Communications, National Film and Television Institute, Manifold Academy, Jayee Professional Institute, among others. In addition, a number of professional groupings and institutions organize short courses in journalism with a view to honing the skills of practicing journalists and young graduates seeking careers in the profession. In addition to formal training, journalists participate in frequent seminars on professional, political, and social issues. A German Foundation, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) is especially committed to educating Ghanaian media to contribute to democracy and

development. To this end, it has sponsored a host of capacity-building programmes for media houses and personnel.

On the whole, some efforts have been made by governments in the Fourth Republic to promote independent media. However, these gestures are not always altruistic but an attempt to further expand their control and influence over the media. A notable example is the creation of a Media Development Fund with a proposed seed capital of GH¢ 2,000,000. In the 2013 budget, the government announced a GH¢1 million MDF, but there is no evidence of the operationalization of the Fund. It is important to note that the government resisted civil society calls for an independent body to administer the fund. The Minister of Information claimed that the MDF budget money for the year 2011 was used to purchase laptops for journalists. Government says 950 laptops were procured with the money and distributed to some media institutions including the GJA, PRINPAG, Information Service Department and Ghana News Agency (GNA, 2013).

Notwithstanding the above circumstances that the independent media finds itself, there appears to be a glimmer of hope. Scholars such as Gyimah-Boadi (2010) have identified media outlets, such as *Joy FM* radio station and the *Public Agenda* newspaper that are performing the watchdog functions on government.

## **2.6 Legal and regulatory framework**

This section introduces the legal and regulatory environment in which the media in Ghana operates. It first of all examines the legal environment and concludes with the regulatory environment.

### 2.6.1 Legal environment

According to Kumado (1999: 99), the legal and regulatory framework for the Ghanaian media is largely influenced by international instruments as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of United Nations General Assembly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). All these treaties recognise media freedom as a universal right.

Article 9 Clause 1 and 2 of the ACHPR Charter for instance states that:

- Every individual shall have the right to receive information ;
- Every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinion within the law.

Many of these rights including free expression or the free flow, expression, and dissemination of news and opinions which support the watchdog role of the media are recognised in Ghana's Constitution (Berger, 2007: Kumado, 1999). For example, Article 21 (1) (a) provides the universal right of “freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media.”

Other provisions such as Article 4) states that the rights of “editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media must be protected from control or interference by government and they shall neither be penalised nor harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications”.

There have been several efforts to give meaning to the constitutional provisions and to bring media practice in the country up to international standards. A notable example is the repeal of

the Criminal and Seditious Libel Law. Prior to its repeal, the law had been used to send a number of journalists to prison.

Nevertheless, there have been some attempts to stifle the independent and critical media. For instance, the Kufuor government was accused of attempting to reintroduce the Criminal Libel law in another form with the Defamation Act amendment in 2006. In a critique, an Accra-based media watchdog, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) said the amendment subtly sought to criminalize speech and undermine freedom of expression.

In MFWA's words:

“As the critique ... points out, the Defamation Bill seeks to take away from the people with the left hand what the NPP government gave with the right. .... Or it may be that the government has found the boldness of the media in Ghana, which sometimes borders on recklessness, too much to stomach and therefore finds the need to limit free expression through the mechanism of a restrictive civil defamation law. Added to all these, however, is the state's need to limit public scrutiny (Ampaw, 2008:2).

Beyond the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law, media freedom is threatened by some of the laws that are still in the statute books; especially section 208 (1) of the Criminal Code of 1960 (Act 29). This section states that:

“Any person who publishes or reproduces any statement, rumour or report which is likely to cause fear and alarm to the public or disturb the public peace, knowing or having reason to believe that the statement, rumour or report is false is guilty of a misdemeanour.”

Under the Mills administration, a number of citizens including journalists were threatened with this law. Two editors were charged under this section in 2011. The two, Enmil Ashon, former editor of the state-owned *Ghanaian Times* newspaper and Ato Kwamena Dadzie, a

former acting news editor of Accra-based *Joy FM* had carried reports which were critical of government. In the case of Dadzie, he had sanctioned the broadcast of a news item alleging death threats against unnamed executives of the Ghana Real Estates Developers Association (GREDA) over the multi-billion housing loan agreement between Government of Ghana and a Korean Construction Firm (MFWA, 2010). However, following public outcry, the cases were dropped.

Another problem facing the media is the difficulty in accessing public information in Ghana. The Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill has been in parliament for over a decade now but passing the Bill into law has eluded media personnel and the Ghanaian citizenry. Right to Information Coalition, a civil society organisation, advocating for the passage of the FOI law, has accused the government of inserting clauses that would defeat the purpose of the bill if it is passed into law.

### **2.6.2 Regulatory environment**

In line with its objective of promoting accountability while protecting media freedom, the 1992 Constitution advocates self-regulation by which the media voluntarily commit themselves to uphold a code of ethics that they themselves have drafted ( Kumado,1999) . By this the framework frowns on outside regulation. It requires the independent media to accept their share of responsibility for the quality of public discourse in the nation, while fully preserving their editorial autonomy. By promoting standards, self-regulation helps maintain the media's credibility with the public. This is particularly welcome in new democracies, most of which are also new to an independent press. Media self-regulation helps convince the public that the free media are not irresponsible. At the same time, self-regulation protects the

right of journalists to be independent, and to be judged for professional blunder not by the people in power, but by their colleagues.

There exist institutions that regulate the media in Ghana. The NMC and National Communications Authority (NCA) constitute the two main state media regulatory bodies in Ghana. The latter institution is constituted by bodies such as the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Private Newspaper Publishers Association (PRINPAG), Editors Forum of Ghana and the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA). These bodies help in various ways to promote the independence of the press and media professionalism in Ghana. However, decisions of these bodies are not binding on their members.

#### **2.6.2.1 State regulatory bodies**

As noted above, the NMC and the NCA are the two media regulatory bodies in Ghana. The NMC and NCA are independent statutory bodies. While the NMC deals mainly with media content of both print and electronic media, the NCA is mainly responsible for frequency regulation and infrastructure development of the electronic media. The Constitution established the NMC under Articles 166 and 167 to ensure the freedom and independence of the mass media and also serve as a check on any attempt by the government to control, direct or manipulate the mass media.

The NMC is made up of ten representatives from civil society organisations and five members each nominated by parliament and the president. The commission's main task is to appoint the boards of state-owned media. The appointments are made on the basis of nominations solicited from organisations represented on the NMC.

In spite of these constitutional guarantees, there have been overt and covert attempts to muzzle the NMC and prevent it from performing its mandate. For instance, in the early years of the Fourth Republic, the NMC members were refused entry into their own premises for

daring to challenge the government as to the period of its tenure. The premises of the Commission were sealed for more than a year. The government also refused to swear in the second Commissioners into office (Ayebofo, 2003).

Before then the NDC had clandestinely arrogated to themselves, the authority to appoint its first Executive Secretary and thereby have control over it (Karikari, 1998: 182). The NMC was allowed to appoint Chief Executive Officers of the state-owned media almost 7 years into the fourth Republic. This was after the Supreme Court had declared as null and void all the appointments made by the government. The Supreme Court ruling enhanced the independence and professionalism of the media (Ampaw, 2004: CDD, 2008). The NMC has the crucial mandate of enhancing media independence but over the years, the Commission itself has not had the necessary support to perform its function.

For its part, the NCA was established by an Act of Parliament (Act 524) on December 30, 1996 (i) to promote broadcast pluralism, (ii) to oversee the allocation, administration and utilisation of the country's frequency spectrum, and (iii) to ensure that, as far as practicable and reasonably necessary, communication services satisfy demand throughout Ghana. The NCA also continued to allocate frequencies and grant licenses for the operation of radio, television, telephone and other telecommunications services in the country.

The authority is governed by a board, composed of a chairperson and six others, appointed by the President in consultation with the Council of State" (NCA, 2007). However, observers have noted that the NCA which operates under the Ministry of Communication and directly under the Minister of Communication, who is responsible to the President, cannot be independent. For instance, a key function of the NMC to allocate frequencies to potential

radio stations has been given to the NCA. The Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) expressed their dissatisfaction with the slow administrative process an applicant has to endure being granted a frequency. The organisation laments that some community radio stations have had to wait for as long as 6 years before being granted a licence. The lack of openness and transparency in the licensing process has also been widely criticized, including the NCA's failure to publish on its website regulations clarifying the licensing application and approval processes. The NCA's practices under the current legislation are clearly in breach of international law. In a statement, a London-based free expression organization, ARTICLE 19 urged the NCA to recognize that community radios are an important means of community participation, not only in the media, but also in the decision-making process in a variety of issues of public interest.

#### **2.6.2.2 Private regulatory bodies**

The second category is constituted by bodies such as the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) representing members of the journalism profession. The GJA is the oldest and appears to be relatively more effective in enhancing media practice. The GJA, set up in 1949, has been promoting professional practices and representing the interests of its members from both state and privately-owned media. In addition to the GJA, there are several other associations of media and communication practitioners, promoting their members' interest. These include the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG), Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA), Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) and the Editors Forum of Ghana. These bodies by their mandate help in various ways to promote the independence of the media and professionalism in Ghana. In Ghana, there is no law stipulating any conditions for citizens to practice as journalists and there are no laws that

make it obligatory for the media and media practitioners to join any professional associations such as the GJA.

In response to changes in the political landscape, GJA ratified its Code of Ethics in 1994. The 17-point Code of Ethics has since provided guidelines on the rights and responsibilities of journalists. However, as alluded to earlier, the framers of the Constitution, desiring the media to perform their role without fear, provided what Kumado (1999) described as “non-confrontational mechanisms” such as rejoinder and Complaints Settlement Committee of the NMC. Additionally, there is also the Ethics Committee of GJA. However, the regulatory bodies have no power to sanction the media. Their decisions are not binding on their members. Not every journalist in Ghana belongs to the GJA. For example, on October 6, 2005, the Ghana News Agency reported the Northern Regional Branch of the GJA as having expressed dismay at the manner in which charlatans parading as freelance journalists have invaded the profession in the region (MFWA, 2008).

Over time though, many scholars including Karikari (1998), Hasty (2005:2006) Gadzekpo (2002; 2008) and (Ampaw, 2004) have expressed doubts over whether this development has actually resulted in a vibrant free and independent media playing an effective watchdog role. Karikari (1998) observed earlier that the Ghanaian media were yet to establish themselves as independent entities that can hold government accountable without looking over their shoulders. He further points out that structurally media ownership remained largely the same. “The media remain in the hands of government and political forces (with rival partisan interests) with very few truly disinterested players genuinely pursuing the public good without compromises”, he stressed. According to him, the reason why the then ruling NDC

under the Ex- President Rawlings did not find it necessary investing in newspapers was because the party had control of the State-owned media.

On his part, Amihere (1996) argued that the government still had a firm grip on the media and exploited its incumbent advantage by denying segments of society, particularly the political opposition, access to the state media. He recalled how the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) was compelled to sue the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation in 1993 at the Supreme Court in a bid to force the state broadcaster to accord them the same opportunity as they did to the ruling NDC to present its views on the 1993 budget.

Smith and Temin (2001) cited a highly tendentious publication in the *Daily Graphic*; under the guise of public education on how to thumbprint the ballot paper; the daily on two occasions published a picture of the ballot with a thumbprint next to the column with NDC candidate. Though this was a sharp deviation from the norm where imaginary symbols are created for electoral education purposes, the editor of the paper, Elvis Aryeh, stoutly defended the action, declaring that the newspaper existed to promote policies of the government.

Explaining why such practices continue, Gadzekpo (2002, 2008) and Kafewo (2006) state that despite political liberalization and constitutional guarantees, government maintains a strong grip on the State-owned media because there is no clear distinction between the State and government. Gadzekpo reveals that government controls the media by planting stories and editorials in the media houses. Government also provides monthly subsidies in the form of subvention to *GBC* and *GNA*.

However Gadzekpo concedes that the country has made significant strides since the return to constitutional rule, but adds that the Fourth Republic is still haunted by the ghost of the past. She argues that the habit of governmental interference which is inherited from decades of State domination is still proving difficult to break. Hasty (2005) found in her ethnographic study of journalism practice in the Daily Graphic that government indirectly control the state-owned media by suppressing dissenting views and opposition views in the guise of newspaper's house style (P.47). She further accused the Graphic newspaper of "state accumulation, populist morality and benevolent patronage (p 47).

Another study by Kafewo (2006) showed that the State-owned media were always pro-government on any issue. On those media they could not control, Karikari claimed that the Rawlings government did not hide its desire to continue suppressing despite the return to constitutional rule. It made every effort to undermine the independent media by resorting to more indirect techniques of control including the use of the courts to prevent the newspapers from publishing allegations of corruption and human rights abuse against the regime. The NDC civilian administration delayed in establishing the National Media Commission (NMC); and when the PNDC passed a decree (PNDC Law 299), it arrogated to itself the power to appoint the Executive Secretary of the NMC.

Ayee (2007) point out that the relationship between the NDC government and media worsened especially when the private media and the mouthpieces of the opposition turned a blinding spotlight on the government and exposed its shortcomings, a new phenomenon to a powerful institution that hitherto had seemed flawless and unassailable.

Karikari observes for instance that a great number of the journalists in the private media tested the limits of journalistic ethics as they went into overdrive with a critical, polemic and combative approach, publishing everything that exposed the regime's undemocratic practices. Indeed, they backed the opposition firmly and campaigned for them. Some of them went as far as conducting fake opinion polls as a propaganda tool for the opposition.

Ampaw (2004) recounts that during the transition from military to civilian rule (1992 to 2000), the private media who took up their watchdog responsibility of holding government accountable, exposing fraud and official corruption as well as the abuse of power, were met with repressive responses, like the way the colonialists pursued the African freedom fighters in the colonial era.

“Assessing the media after ten years of liberalization, Gadzekpo (2008), notes that the private media which had been vibrant in their watchdog function were now being accused of being in bed with government. Gadzekpo claims that government does not control only the State-owned media but has also extended its influence to the private media in a subtle form notably through their proprietors, thereby curtailing their watchdog function. This, she said, had undermined professionalism and also dealt a blow to the media's capacity to contribute adequately to enhancing democracy in the country.

Kafewo (2006) found out that although most of the media houses were independent of government, many of them have certain political affiliations, which have resulted in the media dividing into two camps - either in support of the government or the opposition. As a result it is very easy to predict the stand that a particular paper would take on any national issue. Most of the newspapers have become mouthpieces of their political owners

Indeed, Gadzekpo (2007) asserts the political objectives of the media seem to outweigh their social function such that media outlets appear politics-obsessed; focused on politicians instead of holding all categories of public officers accountable. According to her, sections of the media have been captured by the rich and powerful elites in politics who do not want their affairs to be critically examined and reported. These powerful elites have also divided the media in general into two camps – pro-NDC and pro-NPP.

There is the viewpoint though that the State-owned media could perform in a politically neutral manner when given the right operational environment (Karikari 1998) citing the *Daily Graphic* and *Spectator* newspapers as examples, he points out that immediately the country came under democratic rule, the *Daily Graphic* started covering the views and activities of the opposition.

Karikari (1989) argues further that since there is no policy on ownership and operations of the media, the same politicians who are to be monitored by the media, may secretly, sometimes even openly, own and control media outlets, thus blunting the edge of potential media criticism against them or their political parties. According to him, if this should continue, the media would be in the hands of a few individuals. Again, in the midst of media pluralism without a policy, the various mass media would set and “define objectives according to the differing, even conflicting, conception of what constitutes the (national) interest”. Karikari, writing in defence of public media, recommends an ownership that would be public with average individuals owning shares so that appointment of management and heads of the media would be done by the general assembly of shareholders.

Gadzekpo (1998) identifies a number of critical obstacles in the way of the independent media. For fear of victimization, media personnel working for the State media, simply chronicle government propaganda and fail to criticize it, she states. This situation undermines democracy by preventing the unmasking of corruption, abuse of power and inept policies. The situation, she asserts, generates weak self-esteem among journalists and perpetuates a sense of insecurity and instability among citizens who know that the information they are being fed cannot be independently verified.

## **2.7 Media- state relationship**

Graber (1997), Herman and Chomsky (2004) and Low (2005), among others, argue that there is a symbiotic relationship between media and politics. As Graber (1997) explains, the media in America influence government while government affect media through ownership regulations, First Amendment rules as well as through libel cases. The media, on its part, shapes the government *through influencing public opinion*, muckraking as well as through the exercise of their watchdog responsibilities. This relationship, according to Lewin (2004) creates cynicisms and suspicions between government and the media. For him, government and the media are intimately connected in many ways – governments need the media because the latter provide one of the main ways in which governments communicate with the public. At the same time, many politicians and their staff do not have a very favourable view of what the media do. “While some understand the job that reporters and editors do, others may see media people as biased, ignorant, lazy, or sometimes all three. Some politicians and civil servants believe that they cannot get fair coverage of their work because the media are biased against them, either on partisan grounds or out of a simple dislike for anything to do with government”.

Herman and Chomsky (2004) do not share this view. In their work: *“Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media”*, they argue that the media is dependent on powerful government sources out of economic need because information from government were often less expensive and reliable. Thus the media is the effective means for government propaganda.

This, according to them, undermines the notion of free press, objectivity and the fourth state ideal. Low (2005) confirms Chomsky and Herman’s assertion. He invoked the Noelle-Neumann concept of the spiral of silence to buttress his point. According to the theory, journalists build predetermined public opinion by deliberately sidelining sources and views from their readers, listeners or viewers that they do not share or like. Schudson (2002) on the other hand, argues that media in modern politics are controlled by the state “either directly serving as the voice of a party or relied for economic survival on the legal advertising and government printing contracts of local, state, and federal governments when the right party took power”. This control, he notes, has been described by Cook (1998) as “subsidized press”. Schudson further observes that the media in some countries are either “state-controlled or state-directed, self-conscious organs of propaganda” adding that in Europe, the United States, and Japan, the media are formally insulated from state control. “In the United States, fewer and fewer corporations control more and more of the news media. Major media conglomerates control more and more of the world’s media. Where media are not controlled by corporations, they are generally voices of the state. Dominant media, whether commercial or state-sponsored, typically reinforce political understandings that reinforce the views of political elites”.

O’ Mahony (1976), on his part, argues that freedom of the press is not only the absence of certain kinds of formal controls such as repressive laws and government interventions.

According to him, such a narrow definition neglects the whole range of informal controls which makes the fabric of every society. To him, such forms of control come from economic pressures, especially advertisers and from monopolistic tendencies. And it involves the “greatest possible freedom of expression for those who write and prepare newspaper”.

He continues that the mere fact that the media could decide what to publish or broadcast and what to leave out shows that they are in a position of power arguing further that if the media is even considered as a “neutral channel of communication, the partiality or bias of an editor can influence the content of the media.

The editor or the publisher could and does emphasize a particular viewpoint, or suppress one with which he strongly disagrees. He said for the media to remain independent, it should not serve as conduit pipe for information which government wants to publish. He employed Northcliffe’s definition of news as “information which someone wants to suppress and all others are advertising”. He concludes that the justification for press freedom is that the media should hold government accountable to the people by reporting, interpreting, and criticizing its actions. The media should work only in the interest of the public by effectively carrying out investigations but that media which carry out such investigations would never be popular with politicians or the police or the judiciary or company boards.

Besley and Pratt (2006) argue that governments all over the world influence media content by maintaining a cozy relationship with them. Citing the case of Russia, they observe that while all national broadcasters are owned by State-owned companies, most newspapers are in the hands of small number wealthy individuals who are vulnerable to political pressure. At its worst, such a system enables a regime to develop a centralized information strategy that amounts to a modern form of propaganda, whereby all important media are speaking with

similar vocabulary, demonizing the same enemies, and presenting the same arguments in support of the leadership's actions.

Most of the captured media, according to them, do not make financial profit from sales, subscriptions or advertising but profits from government. Profits from Government are various. They could be defined as monetary payments (bribes). They could be subtle and indirect forms of influence such as administrative decisions or legislative intervention that benefit a firm controlled by the media owner. In such situations, the media affects information disseminated to the voters and therefore there is a link between media capture and accountability. According to them, the only condition in which the media can thrive is where there exists a large number of independent newspapers (media against government), and where government finds it difficult to buy out all the media. Similarly when it bribes few media to suppress information, the commercial revenue of the other outlets goes up because they face less competition on the commercial side.

Asante (1996) Karikari (1995) and Amoakohene (2007) have argued that in the history of Ghana, relations between the mass media and government have varied from regime to regime. Various governments have tended to excessively control the media and to use them largely as the mouthpiece for propagating their political agenda.

According Ansu-Kyeremeh(2007), under the guise of national security, the government stifled the media in the name of national security. Karikari claims that there is the tendency for various regimes to maintain a docile state-owned media and muzzle the independent press. As a result, the media have suffered several consequences in the past in their relationship with government. Journalists of the state-owned media suffer dismissal,

retirement, suspension and replacement of editors. In the case of the private media, banning, detention, and repressive legislation have been used by governments to silence them.

Karikari (1998) further points out that governments both military and civilian have weakened the media either through direct or indirect control. He observes that independence and post-independence leaders have at certain periods introduced interventionists' policies resulting in the death of all independent newspapers with the exception of religious newspapers which were not political in nature.

He cites the *Ashanti Pioneer* as the only independent political newspaper which remained in existence for a long time in spite of several banning orders, censorship, libel suits, detention as well as exile of its editors. Amoakohene (2008) on her part stressed that relations were most sour under the regime of Nkrumah and especially during the unconstitutional regimes of military dictators such as Acheampong and Rawlings. Even at onset of the Fourth Republic, the NDC government attempted to a constitutional control of the media contrary to the 1992 Constitution's unambiguous provisions barring governmental control and censorship of the media. The NDC unsuccessfully attempted using the first parliament where they had an overwhelming majority to amend the Constitution and institute legal ways of curbing the independent media. In his inaugural speech as the first elected president of the Fourth Republic, Rawlings proposed the amendment of the section of the constitution which deals with the composition of NMC to expand its membership. The constitution empowers the new Parliament to establish the NMC within six months of the constitution coming into force. Yet, the first parliament did not enact the law until after 7 months later and another ten months before the NMC was inaugurated. The PNDC had, before the November-December elections, passed a decree (PNDC Law 299, 1992) empowering itself to appoint the executive secretary

of the NMC, which it did on January 6, a day before it dissolved itself paving the way for the inauguration of Fourth Republic.

On the state owned-media, the regime usurped the function of the NMC to appoint the heads and editors of the various state-owned media. In the case of the *Daily Graphic*, few days before the constitution came into force, the Board of Directors of Graphic Corporation, publishers of the *Daily Graphic* appointed Elvis Aryeh, press secretary of Rawlings as the new editor. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the *Daily Graphic* portrayed Rawlings as a charismatic hero of national development in front-page stories celebrating the commissioning of a multitude of government projects, including roads, bridges, particularly in rural areas. These stories often featured large colour photos of Rawlings as an action figure, planting trees and clearing gutters.

Earlier, the state-owned media marginalized the activities of the opposition parties as if they never existed. And this compelled the opposition to seek redress in the court for an interpretation of the relevant constitutional provisions.

More than a decade after the returned to constitutional rule, Hasty (2006) found out that despite the new era, journalists working in the *Daily Graphic* appear to have lost their editorial independence. In that study, she found out that journalists working with the newspaper were often “under pressure to give favourable publicity to the state; but that pressure is exercised through a set of cultural understandings in such a way that journalists do not recognize themselves as mere puppets of propaganda” (ibid, p. 17). Hasty quoted a *Graphic* journalist as saying: ‘the Minister attracts more attention. At certain times, you go

for an assignment and the Minister might not make the big news. But the reporter will try to get something from him to start the story” (ibid, 17).

A subsequent spate of civil libel cases brought by former public officials and private citizens against media outlets with cripplingly high fines—often in excess of US\$100,000—took the place of criminal defamation charges.

According to Kuenyehia (cited in Ampaw, 2004) between within a period of four years (1993-1997) there were as many as 107 defamation suits against the independent media. Of this 34 were by ministers and other high ranking public officials and party functionaries. What was more worrying were eagerness with which the courts handed down “crippling awards of damages against the media”.

There were also citation of contempt as well criminal libel prosecution that saw some journalists been sent to prison. The situation became so alarming that two Chief Justices had cause to complain about this worrying trend, advising the parties to avail themselves of the mediation and settlement machinery of the NMC. Editors from the *Free Press* and *New Statesman* had reportedly been sent death threats from the NDC for criticizing the regime.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the neo-liberal and neo-Marxist theories of media ownership. It brought out arguments of theories who believed that the best way of the media playing its watchdog role on government was for media ownership to be in the private hands against arguments of other scholars who believed that state ownership on the certain conditions provide the best tools for the media to exercise its watchdog function over government.

What also came up in this review is that neither private nor state ownership offers a fool proof route for a perfect watchdog over government for the media. Instead it is useful to look beyond these categories to the ways in which ownership of whichever kind can be directed to ensure an independent media that is able to live up its fourth estate expectation without fear or favour.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the overall study design and data collection methods as well as data analysis. It also highlights scope and philosophical orientation. Furthermore, the justification for the data collection methods is discussed.

#### **3.1 Scope of the study**

The study examines newspapers that have been covering politics and governance issues in Ghana since 2005, to determine their watchdog function. It is focused on two crucial periods in the Fourth Republic during which important political and institutional changes took place that affected the role and performance of the media in significant ways. The eight years study period starts from the second term of President John Kufuor (2004-2008) and ends with the first term of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) under President John Mills (2008-2012).

The study focused on newspapers because, in Ghana, although the circulation of newspapers has dwindled in the last two decades, they continue to have strong impact and great influence on broadcast (television and radio) news agendas (FES, 2011). Newspapers also play an important agenda-setting role for social media platforms.

The study compares state and privately-owned newspapers in the performance of their watchdog functions. However, only newspapers that have covered political news since 2005 were included in the study sample (See below for a list of selected newspapers).

### **3.2 Research paradigm**

This study employs qualitative case study involving documentary reviews, content analysis and interviews. In qualitative studies, people's experiences and beliefs influence the way they act and the way they do things including conducting research (Creswell, 2013). This study addresses this shortfall by using interpretive paradigm. The paradigm allows for a richer understanding of the subject participants by emphasizing an understanding and interpretation of the subjective experiences of the participants involved in a study (Creswell, 2009). In this work, the researcher constructs meaning based on his experiences and perceptions and those of the respondents about the issue being researched.

### **3.3 Research design**

This section provides a framework for the use of qualitative method to collect data on media ownership, independence and their implications for democratic governance. The study employed collective case study design with multiple-method namely, content analysis, in-depth interviews and review of relevant documents. According to Creswell (2013, p. 97), "case study research is qualitative approach in which an investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information ...)

However, Kohlbacher (2006) argues that case studies can utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods in the data collection process. This study employs qualitative methods to address the research objectives; the multiple case study design or collective case study investigates several cases to gain insight into a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell, 2013 observe, data in case studies are largely drawn from documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, audio visuals etc. In this work, data collected were through interviews and review of documents.

### **3.4 Population and Sample**

In order to gain multiple perspectives on media ownership, media independence and democratic governance, the study investigated four selected newspapers with different ownership structures on their watchdog performance on government. This study also conducted in depth interviews with selected key officials of the four newspapers to ascertain the conditions under which their newspapers performed their watchdog role on government.

The following sections justify the selection of cases.

#### **3.4.1 Selection of government allegations**

Two allegations against government-Ghana Telecom-Vodafone (GTV) Sale Controversy in 2008 and Mabey & Johnson (M&J) Bribery Scandal in 2009 were purposively chosen over other allegations because they were straightforward cases and considerable numbers of stories were found for analysis. *The cases are briefly summarised below.*

#### **3.4.2 GT- Vodafone sale controversy**

The Kufuor administration in July 2008 sold 70 per cent of Ghana Telecom stake to a British telecom giant, Vodafone BV. The deal generated serious controversy after the then Minority in Parliament, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) accused the government of underhand dealings. Other opposition parties and civil society groups also joined the fray in attacking the deal. While some leading members of the opposition Convention People's Party (CPP) brought a legal action against the deal, the NDC made it a campaign promise of probing the sale. Indeed the NDC instituted a probe into the matter in 2009, after winning power in 2008. Subsequently, an inter-ministerial committee was set to probe the sale. The Committee in 2009 released its report and claimed that most of the terms of the sale agreement with Vodafone were "inimical to Ghana's interest" (Vodafone Report, 2009).

### **3.4.3 Mabey and Johnson Bribery allegation**

A British court on September 25, 2009 convicted officials of Mabey and Johnson, a British engineering firm for allegedly paying bribes to some Ghanaian government officials for the award of road contracts in Ghana in the 1990s. At the time the news broke, some of the suspects were still occupying public office as ministers and heads of government institutions. Those in public office were Dr George Sipa-Adjah Yankey, Minister of Health and Alhaji Amadu Seidu, a Minister of State at the Presidency. The rest were Dr Ato Quarshie, former Works and Housing Minister, Mr. Kwame Peprah, Board Chairman of Social Security and National Trust (SSNIT) and Edward Lord-Attivor, former Chairman of the Inter-city Transport Corporation. The firm is said to have paid £470,000 in bribes to win contracts in Ghana. The two ministers, Dr Yankey and Alhaji Amadu were forced to resign. Subsequently, the Mills administration requested the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), to conduct investigations into the matter.

### **3.5 Selection of newspapers**

The first step in this study was to determine which newspapers to select for the study. Since this work is interested in measuring media ownership, media independence and their implications for democratic governance, it was necessary to use this method to get a reliable sample for study.

Over 450 newspapers have registered with the media regulator, NMC (NMC, 2014). However, not all of them appear on the newsstands regularly. Some of the newspapers appear or disappear on the newsstands depending on the political season (Quayson-Sackey, 2004).

This study therefore utilized criterion sampling, one of the 16 types of purposive sampling techniques outlined by Patton (1990) to select the newspapers for study. This technique

involved selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance in relationship with the study objectives.

The study therefore set the following criteria:

1. Newspapers which have been in existence since or before 2005.
2. Newspapers that have actively reported on politics and governance issues during the study period.
3. Equal selection of newspapers having public and private ownership structures.

Two publicly-owned newspapers *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times*; and two privately-owned newspapers *Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer* were selected in line with the above criteria. Below are brief historical backgrounds of the selected newspapers.

### **3.5.1 Daily Graphic**

The *Daily Graphic* is state-owned and the largest as well as the oldest newspaper in the country. It is owned by the Graphic Communications Group Ltd (GCGL) and was established in 1950 in the then Gold Coast by the Daily Mirror Group in the United Kingdom, whose head was Cecil King Jnr. Its original name was West African Graphic Company Limited.

The first issue of the *Daily Graphic* was published on October 2, 1950. It was followed in 1953 with the weekly Sunday Mirror, now called *The Mirror*. After independence in 1957 the government of Ghana acquired the company and changed its name to Ghana Graphic Company Ltd. In 1962, the Government of Ghana acquired the company by an Act of Parliament and turned it into a statutory corporation in 1971 by the Graphic Corporation Instrument, 1971, LI 709, in accordance with the Statutory Corporations Act, 1964 (Act 232).

The company therefore became known as Graphic Corporation. In 1999, the company took advantage of the Statutory Corporations (Conversion to Companies) Act, 1993, Act 461, to change from a sub vented public corporation to an autonomous public limited liability company under the companies Code, 1963, Act 179. This resulted in the renaming of the company as the Graphic Communications Group Ltd, its current name. (<http://graphic.com.gh/>)

### **3.5.2 Ghanaian Times**

The New Times Corporation is an organization established in 1957 by the first President, Dr Kwame Nkrumah and named Guinea Press Limited. By Legislative Instrument of Incorporation in 1971, the Guinea Press was turned into a Corporation and renamed The New Times Corporation. The first publications in the early part of 1958 were ‘Ghana Star,’ ‘Ghanaian Times,’ and ‘Evening News.’ To these, were later added the ‘Weekly Spectator’ and a monthly magazine called the ‘Ghanaian’.

The New Times Corporation now has the *Ghanaian Times* as a daily newspaper with the *Weekly Spectator* and the *Sporting Times* as weeklies. Through its wide circulation the press is able to feed both the urban and rural population with information on the country’s economic, social, political and development programmes.

The efficient coverage of the New Educational Policy, the Economic Recovery Programme, the evolving Democratic process, culminating in the Consultative Assembly and other public and private events are among the achievements of the press, especially since the acquisition of the new electronic Web Offset machine in 1988. This machine was the first in West Africa.

### **3.5.3 Daily Guide**

The *Daily Guide* is published by Western Publications Ltd, an Accra-based biggest privately-owned press house in Ghana. The newspaper started in 1983 as a sports paper during the military era of the PNDC where political newspapers were not allowed. The owner is Freddie Blay, a vice chairman of the opposition NPP. According to Daily Guide, their mission is to promote democracy in Ghana through objective and creative journalism which will inform, entertain and educate their readers. This press house also publishes 4 additional newspapers which focus on business, the youth, entertainment and current affairs. It is a rapidly growing newspaper with an increased monthly circulation and improved content. It currently employs over 100 staff. ([www.Dailyguideghana.com](http://www.Dailyguideghana.com))

### **3.5.4 The Enquirer**

The Enquirer on the hand is published by Focal Media Group, a company owned by Raymond Archer, a journalist who is aligned to the ruling NDC government. It was launched in 2005. Currently, there is litigation over its ownership. Alfred Agbesi Woyome, an NDC financier and businessman, is claiming to be part owner of the newspaper. The matter is still pending in court.

### **3.6 Selection of respondents**

Eight journalists (editors and senior political reporters) of the four newspapers were purposively interviewed to ascertain the conditions under which they performed the watchdog functions on government. The combination of editors and reporters, who were directly involved in day to day production of news in their organization was aimed at getting information from as many angles as possible.

### 3.7. Data collection methods

#### 3.7.1 Secondary data

Secondary data was collected from existing documents such as newspapers, reports, books and articles. Data on the National Media Policy and other related literatures were collected to help address the research question on media ownership structure.

This method was chosen because information on newspaper ownership is directly documented. Without reviewing such documents, proper analysis would not be possible. Documentary review was used to supplement in-depth-interviews and content analysis. The Inter-Ministerial Report on GT-V Sale and court documents on M&J were downloaded from various websites. Newspaper articles on the cases under study were also collected from the libraries of Balme and School of Communications Studies, of the University of Ghana; Ghana Institute of Journalism; Ghana International Press Centre and Centre for Democratic Development (CDD). It took a period of three weeks for the relevant newspaper articles to be collected.

In all 131 news articles were found on the two cases from the period the news broke until official probes were instituted into the two allegations. The GT-V case spanned from 2008 to 2009; Twenty six (26) articles on this were found in the *Daily Guide*; *Daily Graphic* had 23 stories, *Ghanaian Times* had 17 and *The Enquirer*, 12 stories.

On the M&J issue (2009 to 2011), again *Daily Guide* had 24 news stories, *Graphic* had 16 while *The Ghanaian Times* and *The Enquirer* newspapers had 7 (seven) news stories each.

In all, 72 news articles were analysed, editorials were left out because not all the newspapers wrote editorials on the two cases. (See Table 3.1 below for the breakdown of the stories that were analysed. Details of the stories analysed can be found in Appendix A).

**Table 3. 1 Summary of stories analysed on the two cases**

Newspaper	News Articles	
	GT-V	M&J
<b>Graphic</b>	12	7
<b>Times</b>	12	7
<b>Daily Guide</b>	12	7
<b>Enquirer</b>	12	7
<b>Total</b>	48	28

**Field Data, 2014****3.7.2 Primary data**

The primary data collected for this study was in-depth interviews with senior journalists of the four newspapers selected. In all the study was able to hold interviews with three editors and three senior reporters. According to Boyce and Neale (2006, p. 3), "in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on particular idea, program(me), or situation".

This technique is useful for the study because it "provides context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the program (me) and why" (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 3). The in-depth interview was deemed relevant to this study because the method is characterized by openness and flexibility. The intention was to let the respondents speak freely about political conditions under which they work. Semi-structured interview guide was used in collecting information from editors and senior reporters of the newspapers.

The journalists were interviewed based on their availability and their positions in the newspapers (The list of journalists interviewed is given in Table 3.2 below).

**Table 3. 2: List of interviewees.**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Staff Position</b>
Ghanaian Times	Editor
Ghanaian Times	Senior Reporter
The Enquirer	Supervising Editor
Daily Graphic	Senior Reporter
Daily Guide	Editor
Daily Guide	Senior Reporter

Four of the interviews were recorded on tape by the researcher. Two of the journalists, however, refused to have their interviews recorded. The researcher subsequently transcribed the audio responses into text; the other two were recorded by hand. Responses of the interviews were analysed. Averagely, each interview lasted for about 45 minutes. All interviews, except two, were conducted at workplaces and desks of the respective journalists.

A data triangulation to corroborate secondary and primary data to enhance data quality was adopted in this study. This approach is deemed best so as to provide a reliable data. Three sources of data were used in this study. As Stake (1994 cited in [Anastas, 2013](#)) argues:

“Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen.”

The study utilized documentary reviews including websites to corroborate primary data to provide a broader perspective of media and democratic governance in the Fourth Republic. All the information was collected concurrently.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

Content analysis was employed as an analytical tool in analyzing the newspaper articles in this study. Content analysis is an established research method that has been used in various

areas of social science, including business since the middle of the last century (Neuendorf, 2002). Krippendorff (2012) defines the technique as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p.24).

This study employed content analysis to determine whether ownership structure influences the performance of media in their watchdog function in respect of the two allegations of corruption against government. The text of the four selected newspapers-*Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times*, *The Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer* were analysed through qualitative content analysis, since it was one of the most realistic ways of determining the watchdog performance of the media.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p.1278) have defined qualitative content analysis "as a method of research for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns". Patton (2002) explained further that qualitative content interpretation or analysis is based on three aspects: (1) making obvious, or confirming what is already known about the subject (2) making the obvious dubious, or identifying misconceptions and (3) making the hidden obvious, or discovering important things that have not yet been illuminated by others.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identified three types of qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed and summative. In conventional content analysis, categories emerge out of the analysis rather than through preconceived categories being imposed on the data. Directed content analysis involves the application of conceptual categories to a new context. Summative content analysis involves the counting of words or content and the interpretation of that quantification.

The summative approach is deemed appropriate for this study because it is used for identifying patterns and context and could also be used for comparison of content of publications (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), this approach is used to analyze manuscripts such as newspapers, books and reports.

In this study, summative content analysis approach was used to determine how the four newspapers performed their watchdog function in respect of their ownership structure. According to them, data analysis, in this approach, starts with either computer assisted or manual search. It then follows with a count of pages that covered specific cases, followed by descriptions and interpretations, including evaluating the quality of content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

A summative approach to qualitative content has certain advantages. It is an unobtrusive and non-reactive way to study the phenomenon of interest which means that, unlike interviewing or participant observation, it does not interfere with the research results (Babbie, 1992 cited in Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

### **3.8.1 Unit of analysis**

According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), unit of analysis in qualitative content analysis are themes and not words, sentences, or paragraphs. They explained further that these themes could be “expressed in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire document.” And that thus, you might assign a code to a text chunk of any size, as long as that chunk represents a single theme or issue of relevance to your research question(s). The unit of analysis in this study is news articles published on the two cases (p.3.)

### 3.8.2 Coding Procedure

Again, Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) elaborated that “categories and a coding scheme can be derived from three sources: the data, previous related studies, and theories” (p. 3).

In this study, five indicators were used to measure watchdog performance of the newspapers. Three of the indicators were based on categorization of media watchdog function by Jebril (2013). They were: objectivity, factuality and critical coverage. News prominence as well as sources of information was also used.

### 3.8.3 Defining variables

The watchdog function is supported when the four newspapers (a) cover the controversy objectively (b) publish factual stories (c) cover the controversy critically (d) publish the story on a front-page and e) use more sources other than government. The variables together measure the strength of a newspaper’s watchdog function.

#### 3.8.3.1 Objectivity

Objectivity was defined in this study as:

- Absence of decided views, expression or strong feelings;
- Absence of personal or organizational interests; and
- Presenting all sides of an argument fairly.

Thus objectivity was coded as:

- ✓ objective
- ✓ not objective
- ✓ neutral.

### 3.8.3.2 Factuality

Factuality was also measured as:

- Use of verifiable sources, in the case where anonymous sources are cited a lot of background information should be given ;
- Putting voices against each other.

Factuality was coded:

- ✓ factual
- ✓ not factual
- ✓ neutral.

### 3.8.3.3 Critical Coverage

The Critical Coverage variable was measured in two ways:

- Stories skeptical toward all sides;
- Critical of government.

Critical Coverage was coded:

- ✓ critical
- ✓ not critical
- ✓ Neutral.

### 3.8.3.4 Prominence

Prominence was measured as the importance the newspapers placed on the allegations by giving it a prominent position in newspaper. A story is assessed as very important to the newspaper when it is published on the front-page. It was important when carried it at the back page and least important when it is buried in the inside pages.

Front-page stories were defined as all stories carry on the front page including those published inside or on the back pages but advertised on the front-page.

Back Pages stories are those carried on the back page.

And Inside pages are stories carried on the inside pages.

### **3.8.3.5 Use of sources**

There were three indicators in measuring sources of information in this study. They are Government sources, opposition sources and independent sources of information.

- Government sources means information from elected officials including ministers, state agencies etc
- Opposition- opposition political parties, opposition official's spokesperson etc.
- Other sources- Civil society, academicians, experts etc.

Analysis of the data in the content analysis was carried out with the assistance of the SPSS Software and Microsoft Excel.

### **3.8.4 Primary Data analysis**

Analysis for the qualitative in-depth interview was done through generating themes emerging from the interviews. The themes were based on the research objectives.

### **3.8.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics in qualitative research is very essential. From the start of this work up to its end, ethics has been given due consideration. Walliman (2006) has defined ethics as “the rules of conduct in research” (p.148).

The following ethical norms served as guide in data collection and analysis: The ethical issue of informed consent was considered. Israel and Hay (2006) state that “informed consent means that participants need first to comprehend and second to agree voluntarily to the nature of the research and their role within it”(p.61).

The respondents were informed about the research through telephone requests. Therein, they were informed by letters that the research was being conducted solely for academic purposes. Participants whose responses were recorded were also informed prior to the commencement of the research. They willingly consented to have their views recorded. All the participants were assured of confidentiality. This was done to protect them. Hence, to ensure that the principles of anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, there was no collection of personal information on the participants (Steinar, 1996).

### **3.9 Study limitations**

As the number of interviewees were few and purposively chosen, results may reflect some biases and subjective opinions of the journalists’ interviewed. The interview results were the only primary data collected for this thesis, interviewing six journalists, as stated earlier might be limited. Besides, relying on secondary data also has the disadvantage that the data might have been collected for specific purposes that probably differ from the study's objectives.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the findings based on the review of documents, content analysis and in-depth interviews that were used to gather data on media ownership and independence, and how they affect the media's watchdog role. The chapter is organized into three sections based on the objectives of the study. The first section discusses the ownership structure of media in Ghana; the second focuses on the results of the content analysis and the third presents findings from the interviews.

Findings:

Four research questions were raised at the beginning of the study. These are:

1. What is the ownership structure of the media in Ghana?
2. Does the ownership structure affect the watchdog role of the media in Ghana?
3. In what ways is the effect of private ownership on the media's watchdog role different from that of state ownership?
4. How (or in what ways) does the ownership structure impinge on media freedom in Ghana?

Findings from the review of various documents on the subject were used to answer the first research question: 'What is the ownership structure of the media in Ghana?'

#### **4.1 Structure of Media Ownership in Ghana**

##### **4.1.1 Introduction**

This section presents the results of the ownership structures of public and private from documentary reviews and interviews.

#### 4.1.2 Public media ownership structure

With regard to the ownership structure of the four selected newspapers- *Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times*, *Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer*, the overall objective was to find out whether or not the structure hampered or facilitated the newspapers' ability to be critical of government on particular allegations where issues of government accountability to the public was concerned. Among documents reviewed by the study were policy documents such as the National Media Policy and the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. The NMC places all media- print, broadcasting, film and wire service-into three working categories: public, commercial and community. The study used the NMC's categorization of different types of media ownership in Ghana.

The 1992's Constitution gives the media a responsibility to assist in making government accountable to the people. In Article 162(5) it is stated:

*All agencies of the mass media shall, at all times, be free to uphold the principles, provisions and objectives of this Constitution, and shall uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana.*

Besides, the NMC, a creature of the Constitution also regards all media and media services as a public trust and therefore holds that public interest shall be paramount in the operation of all media (NMC, n.d). Public media refers to media funded at least partially out of general public revenues (NMC, n.d). Article 163 of the 1992 Constitution insulates the public media from the power or the government of the day. Public print media in Ghana consist of two dailies, the *Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times* as well as weeklies including *The Mirror*, *Graphic Business* and *Graphic Showbiz* that belong to the Graphic Communications Group Limited and *The Spectator* and *Times Sports* which belong to the New Times Corporation.

Until 1999, the Graphic Communications Group Limited and the New Times Corporation were 100 % state-owned under an Instrument of Incorporation – Act 363, 1971. However, the Graphic Group became a limited liability company after having taken advantage of Act 461 of 1993, which enables statutory corporations to transform themselves into autonomous bodies under the Companies Code, 1963, Act 179. The *Ghanaian Times* is still 100 percent state-owned.

Public media in Ghana are under constitutional obligation to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana (Article 162(5)). The two newspapers are run by a managing director and an 8-member board appointed by the NMC for a period of six years. This is a novelty of the 1992 Constitution which seeks to insulate state-owned media from government control. This was deliberately stated in the constitution because of the past cases of government interference in the day-to-day operations of the state media (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Karikari, 1998).

To avoid a repetition of instances of government interference with editorial independence, the 1992 Constitution gave the power to appoint the chief executives of state media to the NMC. Editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications” (Republic of Ghana, 1992 Article 162 Clause 4).

This provision notwithstanding, there have been anecdotes and reported instances of governments’ continuing interference in state media operations (Hasty, 2006: CDD, 2000).

In an opinion, an ex- journalist and a former staff member of the *Daily Graphic* , who was one time critical of government in the aftermath of the murder of the Dagbon King, Yaa Naa in 2002, wrote that “*gagging orders from the NPP government were smuggled into Graphic Communications Group Limited and I was forbidden from speaking on radio or any other medium apart from the Daily Graphic where Mr. Boadu-Ayebofo, as an editor, exercised an unfettered right to edit whatever I wrote*” (Fuseini, 2012). Similarly, during the early years of the Fourth Republic, a TV show hosted by Kwaku Sakyi Addo, a popular journalist on GTV was taken off air reportedly on the orders of government (Tettey, 2001).

This practice is not new to Ghana’s Fourth Republic; considering that widespread political patronage in the appointment of key officials into public office persists. As Kopecký (2011) confirms, governments have been circumventing the laid down process of appointments into public office in favour of partisan interests. Governments have reportedly even attempted to dominate or have control of the NMC by trying to get people sympathetic to their cause to become members. There are no criteria in terms of the political affiliations to become one of the 18 commissioners but Karikari (1998) even cites the PNDC’s passing of a decree (PNDC Law 299, 1992) empowering itself to appoint an Executive Secretary of the yet-to-be- created NMC as an attempt to influence its composition.

Further down the road, contradictions within the NMC were demonstrated dramatically when in response to labour agitations in the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the NMC set up a committee to investigate the issue. But the then Director of GBC, Ms. Eva Lokko blatantly refused to cooperate with the committee and the NMC could not do anything about it (Boadu-Ayebofo, 2010; CDD, 2008).

As far the state-owned media is concerned, there was the observation that a great number of Ghanaian journalists score poorly on ethics (Diedong, 2006; CDD, 2008). When one adds this background to government's desire to manipulate media for partisan gain, the precariousness of media independence becomes obvious. Also the partisanship at the national level appears to also reflect in the newsrooms of the state-media. For example, journalists who identify with either of the two major parties interpret victory of the major parties as their chance to secure superior positions over their counterparts (Hasty, 2005). Interviews by the study also confirmed that there is partisanship.

#### **4.1.3 Private media ownership structure**

The NMC identifies the second media ownership type as the private media. Media in this category are financed mostly by their owners - individuals, families, or groups. Most of the privately-owned media are commercial; they rely on advertisement from government and other business entities. The ownership structure of the private media in Ghana is varied. While there is no direct party ownership of newspapers, most of the newspapers are aligned to one political party or the other (Kafewo, 2006, p.23). Gadzekpo (2002, p. 16) concludes that “many papers seem to have been set up primarily to act as mouthpieces for their owners’ political views”. Consequently, on any national subject, it is easy to predict the stand a particular newspaper will take (Kafewo, 2006, Quayson-Sackey, 2004; Gadzekpo, 2008). Most of them are sole proprietorship; the proprietor is often a “pseudo-politician operating under the guise of a journalist. The proprietor is often the editor-in-chief, sub-editor as well as financial manager among other responsibilities” (IREX, 2012, p.180). This description by IREX is apt description of *Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer* newspapers. While the *Daily Guide* is owned by a vice chairman of the NPP and managed by his wife who is also a leading member of the NPP and close friend of former President Kufuor and currently, the NPP’s

presidential candidate, Nana Akufo Addo, the publisher of *The Enquirer* is, on the other hand, an NDC sympathizer whose paper was established with funds from leading NDC members (Interview with The Enquirer editor, 2014).

As a result, there is no proper governing structure to foster professionalism and accountability (Gadzekpo, 2002, p.7). The duties of the other staff, if there are any, are not well defined (ibid). Journalists of the privately-owned newspapers are mostly stringers and not permanent staff (Gadzekpo, 2002, p.7; IREX, 20008).

#### **4.2 Effect of ownership structure and watchdog role of the media studied**

In the analysis below we would see how the ownership of the structures outlined above affects the newspapers in the performance of their watchdog role on government. As stated earlier, two of the selected newspapers were publicly –owned newspapers and two privately-owned newspapers - one pro-NDC and one pro-NPP. Twelve stories from each of the four selected newspapers were on the Ghana Telecom Vodafone Sale Controversy (GT-V) and seven each on the corruption allegations made by the senior staff of the British Engineering firm, Mabey and Johnson (M&J) published by the same four newspapers were examined.

In all, content analysis of 76 stories were done to bring out the latent dimensions of the publications in order to answer research questions 2 and 3 which are: (I) Does the ownership structure affect the watchdog role of the media in Ghana? (ii) In what ways is the effect of private ownership of the media different from that of state ownership?

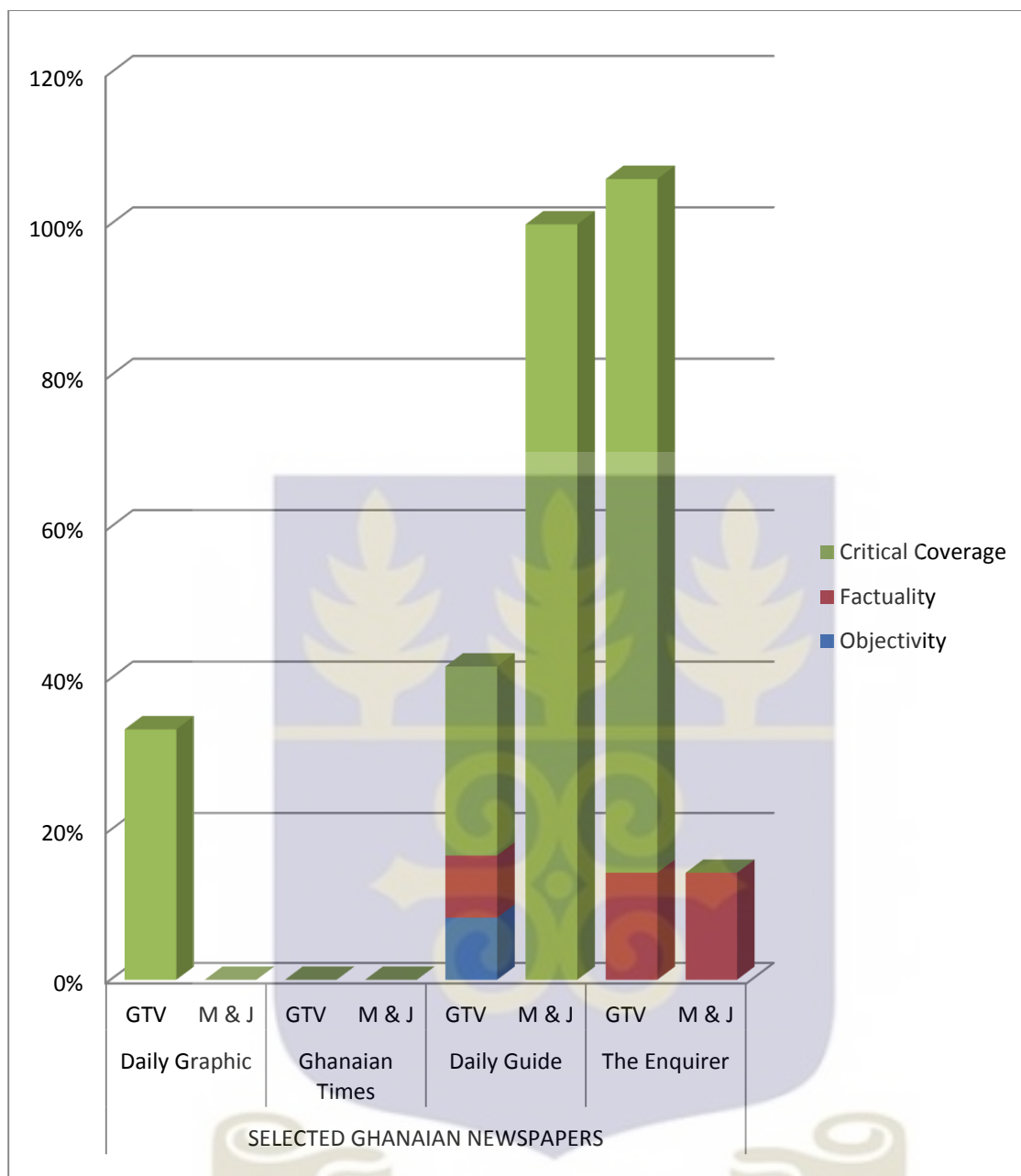
A purposive sample of 76 articles on the GT-V sale controversy and M&J Bribery allegations, from the four selected newspapers, was analysed qualitatively to contrast how government was portrayed.

Five variables were used in measuring the watchdog function. Three of the conceptualizations were based on Jibril (2011)'s criteria: objectivity, factuality, and critical coverage. The other two were prominence and news sources (Netanel, 2001; Coronel, 2010).

To determine the objectivity, factuality and critical coverage, the 76 news articles were coded into three categories. For instance, in the case of objectivity, it was: a. objective b. not objective and c. neutral. Objectivity was defined as: absence of decided interests, expression or strong feelings; absence of personal or organizational bias and presenting all sides of an argument fairly. Factuality was based on the use of verifiable sources; in cases where there are anonymous sources, a lot of background information should be given and putting voices against each other. The critical coverage variable was measured in two ways: as stories that were sceptical toward all sides including government.

According to this study, the strength of the media's watchdog function is supported when a newspaper covers objectively, factually and critically the 76 news articles. Additionally, news prominence and news sources were used to answer research question 3. News prominence was measured as front-page, back page and inside while, news sources were measured using government, opposition and independent sources (See Methodology in Chapter 3).

Based on this I did frequency counts and percentages of watchdog role. The following tables show the frequencies of watchdog performance according to the above mentioned variables.



**Fig 4. 1 : Overall Performance Of Watchdog Role Of The Newspapers**

As can be observed from Figure 4.1 above, ownership of the newspapers had strong influence on the content of the four newspapers on the coverage of GT-V and M&J allegations that were reviewed in this study. For instance, the GT-V Sale Controversy broke out in 2008 during the second tenure of President John Agyekum Kufour-led NPP government, and was later revisited by the NDC-led government of President Mills' administration in 2009; we

saw that three of the newspapers, the *Graphic*, the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Daily Guide* were mild in their reports on government. *The Enquirer* was the only newspaper which was very critical of the deal. A similar but different trend was witnessed in the M&J issue.

#### 4.2.1 Objectivity

All the four newspapers (*Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times*, *Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer*) fell short of meeting the objectivity criterion set up by this work, namely: *the absence of decided views, expression or strong feelings separating; absence of personal or organizational interest and presenting all sides of an argument fairly*. As can be observed from figure 4.1, objectivity as a watchdog variable, appears to be an exception. Of the 76 articles (48 on GT-V and 28 M&J) the two public newspapers- *Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* scored no marks in terms of objectivity in both cases. However, the privately-owned newspapers also scored low marks. While *Daily Guide* scored 8.3% and 0% respectively in the GT-V and M&J cases, *The Enquirer* on the other hand scored 14.3% in GT-V and 0% in M&J.

#### 4.2.2 Factuality

Analysing factuality (use of verifiable sources, in using anonymous sources of information should be given; putting voices against each other) as a measure of the media's watchdog role in the two allegations, we observed that there were no scores on factuality in the two publicly-owned newspapers: *Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times*. However, the privately owned newspapers recorded some percentages, albeit low. In the GT-V case, *The Enquirer* recorded a slightly higher figure, i.e. 14.3% compared to 8.3% of the *Daily Guide*. However, in the M&J case, both of them scored 0%.

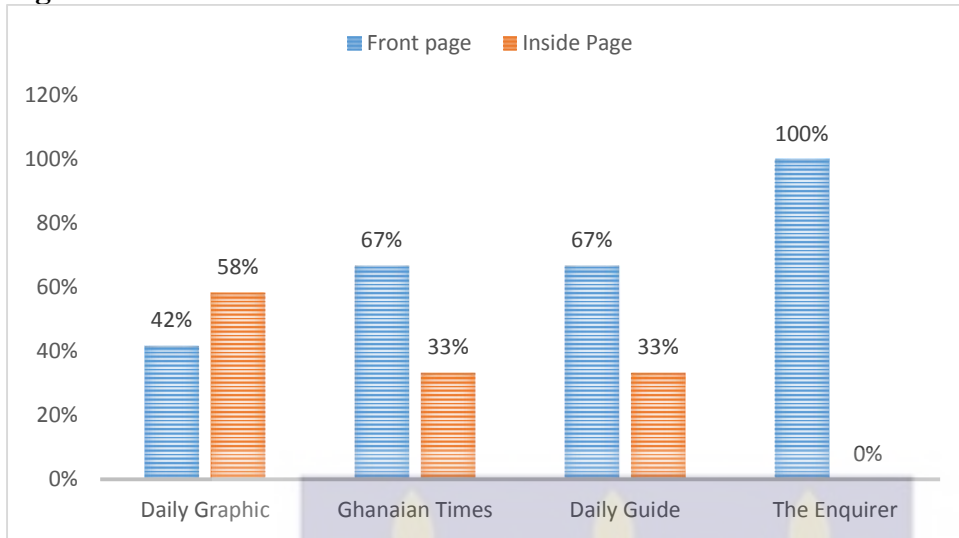
### 4.2.3 Critical coverage

Critical coverage (*News stories must be sceptical toward all sides; adversarial (aggressive) government*), *Daily Graphic* recorded 33.3% of critical coverage in the GT-V case. However, it scored 0% in the M&J case. The *Ghanaian Times* on the other hand scored 0% in both cases. In the case of the privately-owned newspapers, there were different but similar patterns in terms of critical coverage. *Daily Guide* recorded 25% in the GT-V deal and 100% in the M&J case, while *The Enquirer* recorded 91.7% in the case of GT-V and 0% in M&J.

Another measure of watchdog role of the media is prominence. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 below show the page placement of articles on GT-Vodafone sale controversy that were reviewed in this study. The study measured the level of prominence via placements in specific pages of the four newspapers. Options in this category included front page, back page, and inside pages. Majority of the twenty four stories by the two state-owned media, *Ghanaian Times* and *Graphic* on the GT-V sale were published in the inside pages. *Ghanaian Times* placed 67% of the news article on the front-page, while the *Graphic* placed only 42% on the front-pages. Similarly, in the M&J case, majority of the fourteen stories analysed in the two state-owned media were from the inside pages.



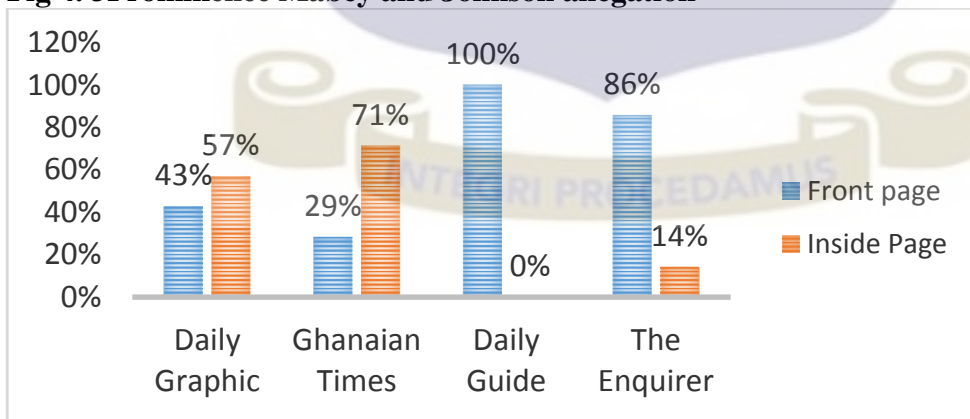
**Fig 4. 2Prominence GT-Vodafone**



#### 4.2.4 Prominence

The privately-owned newspapers, *Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer*, on the other hand published majority of the GT-V and M&J stories on their front-pages. On the other hand, *The Enquirer* newspaper placed all the 12 (100%) stories on the front-page; *Daily Guide* placed 67% of the stories on the front-page.

**Fig 4. 3Prominence Mabey and Johnson allegation**



#### 4.2.5 Use of sources

Another variable I measured is the ‘source’ of the GT-V and M&J stories published in the sampled newspapers. This was done to examine the sources of stories they published. As Table 9 shows clearly, out of a total of 78 stories, there were as many as 69 sources. Of the 69 sources, as many as, 48 came from government and opposition sources. However, the majority of information was from government sources for all the newspapers

**Table 4. 1Sources of coverage**

<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Total sources</b>	<b>Government</b>	<b>Opposition</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>State-owned</b>	28	12	7	9
<b>Privately-owned</b>	41	21	8	12

It is evident from the 1992 Constitution and Social Responsibility Theory of the press used in this study that, the media both public and private, have the responsibility to vigorously pursue a watchdog role over government (McQuail, 2006; Karikari, 1999). However, the findings shown in figure 4.1 below appear to be contrary to the expectations of the Constitution and also not consistent with the theory. The findings raised doubts about expectations of the framers of the Constitution which was largely influenced by the Social responsibility theory. The public newspapers appear not to have served the interest of the public in issues under investigations and weakened the claim that the media is a public trust which must serve the public interest. The finding has, however, validated observation of the public media in America by Netanel (2001) that the public media often avoids controversial stories or issues, especially those that are critical of government and its officials. Similarly, although government has no direct role in the day-to-day operations of the public media, there is evidence observed from the ownership structures analysis in Section (4.2) that governments

have indirect way of manipulating the public media. As Netanel explained on the public media, government exerts pressure on the editors of the public media to avoid controversial issues. She argues further that partisanship among journalists in the public media also prevents them from reporting critically on government. This has been confirmed by Kafewo (2006) in his study on the state-owned media and their reportage on government. According to him, the state media have always been pro-government on all issues. The editor of the *Ghanaian Times* confirmed this when he said in an interview that '*the objective of the Ghanaian Times is to publish news to inform the public particularly about what government is doing for the people and get feedback for government*'.

Again from the perspective of the social responsibility theory, the media is also expected to represent the diversity of cultures they represent, and should have high standards for professionalism, truth, and accuracy (McQuail, 2005) Example of this in the Ghanaian Constitution is the set up of the NMC and the self-regulation enforcement mechanism prescribed. However, from content analysis and documentary review, again the media also failed to protect the interest of the public in the two cases reviewed. The two newspapers with differing political viewpoints performed a similar but different pattern of coverage of the governments of NPP and NDC. This notwithstanding the fact that the *Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer* thrive on sales; their modus operandi were not directly influenced by the two governments.

#### 4.2.6 Analysis of individual newspapers as watchdog on GT-V coverage

*The result of Graphic coverage of the GT-V Sale controversy is shown in Table 4.1 below*

**Table 4.2 Graphic GT-V coverage**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	0%	83.3%	16.7%
Factuality	0%	83.3%	16.7%
Critical	33.3%	41.7%	25.0%

Source: Field Data, 2014

The options within this category were news stories that the newspaper carried from 2008 to 2009. Of the twelve stories analysed, the newspaper recorded 0% in both objectivity and factuality. However, it scored 30% in critical coverage.

Table 4.3 below shows the coverage rate of the GT-V Sale by the *Ghanaian Times*.

**Table 4.3 Ghanaian Times GT-V coverage**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	0	75.0%	25.0%
Factuality	0	75.0%	25.0%
Critical	0	91.7%	8.3%

Source: Field Data, 2014

It can be observed from Table 4.2 above that out of the 12 news articles I reviewed, the newspaper scored 0% on all the three criteria - namely, objectivity, factuality and critical coverage.

The analysis also revealed that out of the 12 news stories the *Daily Guide* scored 8.3% each in two of the three criteria, objectivity and factuality. The newspaper scored 25.0% in critical coverage. This is shown in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4 Daily Guide GT-V coverage**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	8.3%	83.3%	8.3%
Factuality	8.3%	83.3%	8.3%
Critical	25.0%	58.3%	16.7%

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 4.5 below shows the percentages of *The Enquirer* newspaper's coverage of the GT-V Sale controversy that rocked the country from 2008 to 2009. Again, the variables measured are objectivity, factuality and critical coverage. Of the twelve stories that were reviewed in the newspaper, *The Enquirer* scored 0% each in two of the three criteria, objectivity and factuality. The newspaper however scored a whopping 91.7% on critical coverage.

**Table 4.5 The Enquirer GT-V coverage**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	0	91.7%	8.3%
Factuality	0	91.7%	8.3%
Critical	91.7%	0	8.3%

Source: Field Data, 2014

It can be seen from the tables above that *The Enquirer* scored very highly on critical coverage variable but zero on objectivity and factuality.

Individual newspapers performance regarding the M&J allegations

Table 4.6 below shows the percentages of the *Graphic* newspaper's coverage of the M&J bribery allegations that rocked the country in 2009. The variables measured are objectivity, factuality and critical coverage. Of the twelve stories that were reviewed in the news

regarding the GT-V sale controversy, *Graphic* scored 0% in objectivity, factuality and critical coverage.

**Table 4.6 Graphic- M& J Bribery allegation**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	0	57.1%	42.9%
Factuality	0	57.1%	42.9%
Critical	0	57.1%	42.9%

Source: Field Data, 2014

It can be observed from Table 4.6 below that of the seven stories that were reviewed in the newspaper, *Ghanaian Times* scored 0% in all the three criteria- objectivity and factuality and critical coverage.

**Table 4.7 Ghanaian Times -M&J Bribery allegation**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	0	51.7%	42.9%
Factuality	0	51.7%	42.9%
Critical	0	85.7%	14.3%

Source: Field Data, 2014

The *Daily Graphic* scored 0% in two of the three criteria, objectivity and factuality, but scored a whopping 100% in critical coverage. The result is shown in Table 4.7 below.

**Table 4.8 Daily Guide- M&J Bribery allegation**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	0	85.7%	14.3%
Factuality	0	85.7%	14.3%
Critical	100%	0	0

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 4.9 below shows the percentages of *The Enquirer's* coverage of the M&J bribery allegations measured on the basis of objectivity, factuality and critical coverage. Of the seven stories that were reviewed, *The Enquirer* scored 14% in two of the three criteria, objectivity and critical coverage. It, however, scored 0% on factuality.

**Table 4.9 The Enquirer – M&J Bribery allegation**

	Yes	No	Neutral
Objectivity	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%
Factuality	0	71.4%	28.6%
Critical	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%

**Source: Field Data, 2014**

In a pluralistic media environment such as Ghana, the expectation is that the two privately-owned/commercial newspapers may provide alternative news to the public and may compete for revenue from circulation and advertisements. However, that appeared not be the situation.

In the analysis, *Daily Guide* is perceived to be a pro-NPP newspaper, thus recording a very low percentage of 25% in terms of criticism of government regarding the GT-V controversy which was largely unfavourable to the NPP administration. However, the same *Daily Guide* was very active in terms of critical coverage of the M&J case which was unfavourable to the NDC. This means that *Daily Guide's* mild criticism of government in the GT-V case is the result of its close relationship with the NPP government (Kafewo, 2006, 2014). The 25% critical coverage that *Daily Guide* recorded in the GT-V case does not correspond with the paper's own claim of bringing alternative news to readers (Field Data, 2014).

Similarly, the high percentage margin for *Daily Guide* for its critical coverage of the M&J case could be attributed to its opposition to the NDC government. Commercial reason could

explain *Daily Guide's* 14.3% of objectivity in the GT-V case. As its editor said in an interview, “*the strength of the Daily Guide is not advertising but content... it is about news content, timely report ... we are known for that*”.

In its coverage of the GT-V case, *The Enquirer* appears to show some semblance of how a newspaper must work in the interest of the public. For instance, on critical coverage, the newspaper recorded a whopping 91.7%. However, it recorded 0% in the M&J case. Also, the high percentage margin for *The Enquirer* in terms of critical coverage can only be attributed to the oppositional relationship that exists between *The Enquirer* newspaper and NPP government which was in power when the news broke. Since *The Enquirer* is perceived to be pro-NDC, ordinarily, one would have expected that *The Enquirer* which has been aggressive in the coverage of the GT-V case to record 100%, in terms of critical coverage. However, this was not so. This might be due to the fact that some of the stories analysed were not damaging to the image of the NPP which was then in opposition.

Again the findings of the private media also ran contrary to the expectations of the social responsibility theory that private newspapers may serve the interest of the public. The findings of the two privately-owned newspapers are consistent with another observation of Netanel (2001) that the closer a newspaper is to a government; the less likely it will perform its watchdog function against that government. The findings also support Kafewo's 2006 study that newspapers in Ghana, in terms of editorial opinions are divided into two camps.

On prominence, it emerged that the public newspapers did not give the allegations the required prominence. The bulk of the stories from the two newspapers were found mostly in the inside pages. As far as this study is concerned, it could be seen that the two state-owned

newspapers considered the cases under study as not important enough to take their front pages.

On sources, it would seem that by comparison the privately-owned newspapers go beyond just reporting from one source to multiple sources. As *The Enquirer* editor explains “*If we get the lead that there is a scandal, we do our investigations by ensuring that we get all sides of the issue before coming out with what we think is a balanced story.*”

Indeed, all the four newspapers rely heavily on official sources and definitions of situations.

On the whole, from documentary review and the subsequent content analysis, it appeared that the public newspapers *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times*, on one hand behaved as lapdogs of a government. A lapdog news media, according to Bagdikian (1987) displays lack of independent power, being reliant upon government, corporate and elite sources for both information and economic support.

The private media - *Daily Guide* and *The Enquirer* newspapers, on the other hand, might have played a role similar to what has been described by Donohue Tichenor and Olien (2006) as guard dog. A guard dog newspaper is one that does not operate for the public as a whole, but for groups that have sufficient power and influence. The coverage of the two newspapers could be seen in this context; the newspapers could be serving the interest of the NPP and NDC governments which they respectively appear to be very close to.

### **4.3. Political conditions under which the media perform their watchdog functions in Ghana**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction**

To further explore the political conditions and their effects on the newspapers' watchdog performance, six (6) journalists were interviewed, three of whom were editors. They were interviewed on the conditions under which they performed their watchdog functions. A number of issues were discussed among which were: (1) Government/owners interference in news production; (2) Financial viability and watchdog role and (3) Desire to report corruption.

#### **4.3.2 Government/owners interference in news production**

In interviews with the journalists, the editors said there were no direct intervention in their role in the day-to-day news production but some of the reporters I interviewed said that the first thing they consider before writing a story is whether the story would see the light of day, suggesting some amount of self-censorship in their approach to reporting. The editor of the *Ghanaian Times*, when asked about the interference in his work noted that: “*No one directs anyone as to what to do [but] I, as an editor have a gatekeeping role*”. Asked directly how he sees the *Ghanaian Times*' watchdog role on government, he responded thus ‘*the objective of the Ghanaian Times is to publish news to inform the public particularly about what government is doing for the people and get feedback for government*’ .

However, one journalist from a state-owned newspaper said “*As far as I am concerned as a journalist [Daily Graphic], there is no need to be critical on an issue involving government because , the story may not likely be published and if it is even published it will be in the inside pages. In my years of working for Graphic, you need to take a favourable [government] angle to get a front page.*” The response of the reporter provides a good

explanation of why public newspapers scored low on critical coverage variables. This also confirms Hasty (2006, p. 14) study on the *Daily Graphic*.

Asked about whether newspapers (especially the state owned) are influenced directly or indirectly by the government in power, the journalists gave answers which on the surface may appear contradictory but upon reflection provides a good insight into the operations of the state-owned media, while the journalists said the government did not directly intervene in their operations, they added that the government has its own “representatives “(ie supporters)” in the newsroom. They further explained that journalists whose political parties go into opposition become inactive during this period but take on active roles once their professed political parties assumes power.

In the words of a journalist from *Ghanaian Times*: “ *depending on which government is in power, journalists who appear not to side with the government will not be active in editorial meetings or will not partake in (editorial) meetings at all. So, it becomes something like a field day for those who support government.*”

He continued that: “*we report mostly in favour of the ruling government, either NDC or NPP. They (journalists) get a lot of sponsorship from government. There is no way they can write or speak against them. Because the presidency sponsors you, you are forced to speak for them without criticism. I think it is natural because, you cannot bite the fingers that feed you*”. Indeed we have records in our history where governments have given political appointments to journalists deepening the reward and punishment scheme. Some journalists therefore have an extra incentive to toe a particular line. This trend appears to support Houston et al (2012’s) conclusion that the only way the media could perform their watchdog function is when their owners have the incentives to do so.

Another explanation given by the journalists working in the public media are the unwritten rules which guide their work. According to reporters, newsroom practices influence how they cover events including issues relating to corruption against government: “*We have our usual style of writing our articles and you need not change that way of writing*” the Graphic journalist said. The Ghanaian Times journalist also said: “*Normally... we only concentrate on angles that would be positive on the government*”.

The above assertion lends credence to Hasty’s observation in her study on the *Daily Graphic*. This indication *applies to the Ghanaian Times* as well. In that study, she found out that journalists working with the newspaper were often “under pressure to give favourable publicity to the state; but that pressure is exercised through a set of cultural understandings in such a way that journalists do not recognize themselves as mere puppets of propaganda” (ibid, p. 14). It also appears to support the argument put forward by Marxian political economic theorists that media owners indirectly control their journalists and managers who cannot assert their editorial independence for the sake of job security (Bagdikan, 1990; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Gramsci, 1987).

On the other hand, partisanship in the private media appears not to be an issue because most of the journalists generally support the ideologies of the parties or individuals that sponsor or own them. The editor of *The Enquirer*, for instance, remarked that: “*sometimes the publisher brings a topic and tells me to toe a certain line, because he who pays the piper calls the tune. We are employees and the publisher is our employer. So there have been situations where we had to follow his dictates*”.

#### 4.3.2 Financial viability and media watchdog performance

When the journalists were asked questions regarding the economic challenges they faced, they responded that financial viability was the main economic obstacle to the performance of their watchdog role. The interviewees further identified issues such as poor circulation, high cost of printing, lack of advertisements among many others as economic hindrances. These obstacles according to (Netanel, 2001 and Jibril, 2013) affect the media in two ways; first, it limits investigative reporting which is the heart of watchdog journalism and secondly, it renders the reportage less factual. In fact, two of the editors expressed their frustration at the inability sometimes to pursue investigations because of resource constraints.

The editor of *The Enquirer* opined: *“we have to move from the situation where politicians sponsor media houses to becoming a self-sustaining business; this would enhance our ability to play the watchdog role”*. He further acknowledged that reporting on government’s corrupt practices required some amount of financial resources. *“From my point of view, the economic threat is easily the biggest threat (to watchdog journalism in Ghana). Investigative stories involve a lot of money. It is also time consuming. In the past owners were more interested in investigative stories than today”*.

However, even though scholars such as Herman and Chomsky conclude that the fear of losing advertisement especially from governments causes editors and journalists not to investigate stories on government. The editors of the two sampled private papers indicated that this does not apply in their case.

As the editor of *The Enquirer* explains; *“the job of the newspaper is to tell the public what they need to know about government operations, whether, good or bad, so that they can hold government accountable. ... This work goes with money ... So governments don’t give money*

*to their opponents because that will mean that you are giving more ammunition to your opponent''.*

The editor of *Daily Guide* was also of the view that, *‘our newspapers survived through circulation. We don't need government adverts. Government is struggling with the little resources that they have. Fine, if we should get government advert... We will use it to further motivate our staff''.*

Beyond these views expressed is also the observation that newspapers which are unsympathetic to a particular political party appear to take their watchdog role over government more seriously when that party assumes power; such papers expect very little advertising support from government, anyway.

Nevertheless financial viability poses a strong challenge to newspapers or media organizations. It is difficult for financially strapped media houses to employ and maintain competent journalists. This is one reason why most of the employees of the private media in Ghana are either stringers or staff with poor salaries (IREX, 2011). The economic hindrances explained above according to the journalists I interviewed also force journalists to adopt political godfathers.

### **4.3.3 Desire to report Government corruption**

Regardless of ownership, all the journalists I interviewed recognized that reporting on corruption allegations against government and its officials is a prime responsibility of the media. However, the focus for the state-owned media appears to be different from that of the private media. It was observed from the interviews and content analysis that while the private media are more interested in allegations against government officials, the publicly-owned media mostly focuses on allegations against private individuals and high State officials who

are not political office holders. The *Ghanaian Times* journalist I interviewed said, news on corruption must come from sources such as state agencies, the courts and agencies such as the police etc. but did not place any emphasis on elected government officials. The *Ghanaian Times* editor confirmed this: *“Being a watchdog [on government] is just one role of the media and cannot take all the time of the media... We were the first to break the news of the policemen who were neglected by the police service...”*

The situation is different as far as the privately-owned newspapers were concerned. The editor of the *Daily Guide* newspaper explained that the private newspapers sell their newspapers if they anchor it on prominent personalities- particularly elected government officials. *“We are in the business of selling news. People love to read scandals involving government officials, they like it. So we are trying our best... to get (them) information. We pick intelligence report, do our best (to) reach (people) involved (for) more information”*

And in the words of *The Enquirer* editor: *“well, if we get the lead that there is a scandal, we do our investigations.... We listen to the radio programmes, the news reviews ... talk shows, there we can pick... find something that is newsworthy, or news being investigated”*.

What the editors of private media said in the interview appear to support the view point that readers expect newspapers to play a watchdog role over government and when they appear to do so the readers respond by buying the newspapers.

#### **4.4 Summary of Chapter**

These findings suggested that ownership impacts the watchdog role of the four newspapers studied. During interviews with journalists, some acknowledge this while others did not, yet the content analysis clearly established a relationship between ownership and watchdog role over government. Indeed, what the study revealed is aptly expressed in Altschull’s (1984,

p.254 cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996)'s observation that we should beyond mere ownership of the media to the correlation between content and the interests of those who finance the media is perhaps best suited understanding the workings of the state-media operations in Ghana. The study findings showed that ownership affects the media watchdog role through intangible factors such as assumed traditions, prospects of political reward, fear of job lost etc. On the difference between private and public watchdog performance findings, while none of the four newspapers scored above average on the five variables used to assess watchdog performance, yet the private media did very well especially on critical coverage variable with regard to particular stories. For example, the enquirer scored over 90% on the GT-V case while Daily Guide scored 25 on the same case. Interestingly, on M&J allegation, the Enquirer scored zero on critical coverage. These findings may appear a bit strange but they can easily be possible as a result of the ownership dynamics of the two newspapers. The Enquirer is NDC affiliated and is therefore clearly uncomfortable investigating the NDC, the same way as the Daily Guide appear uncomfortable investigating allegations that put the NPP in a bad light. Interviews with journalists of the two papers appear to support this observation.

On the other hand the weak performances of the public media on the watchdog role variables appear to stem from the indirect censorship atmosphere existing in the newsrooms of these papers as one journalist working in the public media said, we do not need to follow because "it would not see the light of day". In terms of the conditions under which the media perform their watchdog functions, the essence of the responses in the interviews clearly showed that they do not have complete independence to pursue their watchdog role over governments every time. The journalists' responses indicated that they are very much aware of newspapers political affiliations and directions and try to keep within that. Even though not all the editors were comfortable in their responses, responses from their reporters as well as the correlation

between their owners' preferences and the newspapers contents provided support for this observation. Another important factor that appears to hinder some of the newspapers from pursuing their watchdog role over government as effectively as they might want it is lack of resources. At least these are the views of some of the editors interviewed. It is also an observation of other scholars such as Gadzekpo, 2008. The next chapter which is Chapter five discusses the summary of the work, key findings, conclusion and recommendations of this study.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This is the final chapter of this thesis. It presents the summary of the study, key findings and conclusion. The chapter ends with recommendations for key stakeholders especially, policy makers.

#### 5.1 Summary

The purpose of this study was to probe some pertinent questions regarding media ownership structures and its impact on one of the media major democratic functions, i.e. the watchdog role over government. The study was triggered by accusations of bias against Ghanaian media, highly perceived as one of the freest in Africa. As noted by several scholars (Gadzekpo, 2008; Karikari, 2010), the media has been guilty of partisanship, unprofessionalism and even witnessed the phenomenon of politicians setting up and owning media establishments to pursue both business and political interests.

In the attempt to throw light on the issue, the study sought to answer the following questions: the ownership structure and its impact on the media's watchdog role over government; secondly, the differences in terms of how the two ownership structures performed their functions on government and lastly, the political conditions and how they affect the media in their watchdog performance.

From the findings, it emerged that the legal and regulatory framework of media freedom in Ghana is in line with the best international practices, the supreme law, that is, the 1992 Constitution which devotes a whole chapter to media development in Ghana. The chapter

seeks to insulate public media from government control and generally promote a liberal environment for media operations in Ghana for both public and private. Indeed, the Constitution, specifically enjoins the media to ensure government accountability. The Constitution also made room for the creation of the National Media Commission to serve as a buffer to prevent government interference in the media. The NMC is also in charge of appointing the board of directors and editors of state-owned media.

Yet over two decades after the coming into force of the Constitution, there is widespread concern that public media has not been wholly or fully free from government control and interference. The private media has been often liable to ethical lapses, partisanship and a number of unprofessional practices.

The study's findings appeared to confirm this. Through interviews with journalists; and content and documentary reviews, a strong correlation between ownership structures and the newspapers' ability to perform their watchdog functions could be deduced. Despite, constitutional provisions, journalists in the public media spoke as if the government was still in charge of the media while those in the private media admitted they have to promote their owners preferences. These were also confirmed by the content analysis.

Interestingly all the four newspapers scored below average on factuality, objectivity and news sources. These results buttress perceptions of unprofessionalism against the Ghanaian media.

With regard to private and public ownership and its impact on the ability to play the watchdog role, the study pointed to some interesting findings, As stated earlier the NMC has been put in charge of the public media but interviews with the journalists showed that they still see the government as the one with control over them. This has made them timid with regard to playing effective watchdog role on government. This is clearly illustrated in their

performances on variables of watchdog especially the critical coverage. The private media on the hand scored highly on the critical coverage variable with regard to particular allegations. Interviews with the journalists as well as documentary reviews explained the phenomenon. The allegations which gained critical coverage from the private press were those that put rivals of their preferred political parties in bad light. They however, appeared to lose their bite when the allegations are against their preferred political parties.

On paper, the country has one of the best regulatory environments for the independent media. However, as suggested by this study, there are number of factors both tangible and intangible which impede the media from exercising their watchdog role on government effectively.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This study explored the interplay between media ownership and its effect on the media's watchdog role over government actions and inactions. Analyses of the four newspapers selected for this study shed light on the pressures and the general challenges faced by journalists in Ghana.

The study established that legally, conditions of press freedom exist and there is no evidence of physical coercive measures to frighten journalists in their watchdog role over government. Also, the journalists interviewed demonstrated fair knowledge of what was expected of them as far as basic journalism skills were concerned, including the fact that they have a duty to play a watchdog role over government. Yet, some practices largely inhibited journalists' or media's ability to play their watchdog role effectively

### 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, we proposed the following recommendations to ensure that the media effectively discharge their watchdog role on government:

- There is the need for the National Media Commission (NMC), the constitutionally mandated body to protect and promote media freedom and development to be proactive and assert its mandate as a regulator, and a buffer against government interference in the media's work. .
- The Media Development Fund should be handled by the NMC or other independent body and not the Ministry of Information. This is to ensure that governments did not use it for their own purposes.
- Parliament should be thinking about setting a public trust which would be responsible for the entire financial needs of publicly-owned media, so as to further lessen government's control over public media. This trust could also support the development of the private media under well-defined rules and criteria.
- The study's findings of partisanship in both state-owned and private media signify a potential danger. There is the risk of the public losing trust in the media thereby undermining the media's ability to serve as an arbiter of public opinion and debate.
- To help address low professionalism, we recommend continuous education of journalists including publications of periodicals and journalism on the work of the media in Ghana.

#### 5.3.1 Recommendation for future studies

This study focused on the media's watchdog role over government. The result of the study clearly showed that the ownership structure defined not only as a state or private ownership but interests affected the way the media performed its watchdog role over government. The changing media landscape in Ghana with the private media becoming more influential points

therefore to the need to examine the watchdog role of the media over non-government actors such as opposition political parties, commercial entities, and even civil society organisations. Difficulties faced by the NMC as highlighted by the study also called for deeper examination of the workings of the NMC with the view of getting evidence of the exact factors that have prevented it from performing its role fully as an insulator of state media from government and also as a guardian of press freedom in Ghana



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Interview Guide

#### Questions for journalists

1. Do you think investigative stories are given less priority in your newspaper?
2. How often do you follow up your story to ensure it will be published?
3. Is there any reward for doing successful investigative story?
4. How supportive is your newspaper owner toward investigative reporting?
5. Do you think the owner is antagonistic toward investigative reporting?
6. Have you ever felt pressured(spoken or unspoken) from the owner not to antagonize government officials, politicians etc

#### Questions for editors

1. What are the goals and objectives of your newspaper as an organisation?
2. What is an approximate circulation of your newspaper?
3. As an editor how do you explain the newspaper's coverage of corruption in Ghana?
4. Does your newspaper have a code for reporting corruption allegations?
5. How do you ensure that all political corruption allegations receive equal treatment in your newspaper?
6. How do you decide which corruption story to pursue? What is the process?
7. Do you think some newspapers are becoming antagonistic toward investigative report and why?
8. Have you ever been victimised (spoken or unspoken) from the newspaper owner?
9. Is the freedom of the press enough to cover the corruption allegations against government?
10. Compare to ten years ago, do you think investigative reporting is better off or worse off?
11. How do you see your relationship with government? Adversarial? Symbiotic, both?
12. How optimistic are you about the future of watchdog reporting in Ghana. What do you see as its future in Ghana?
13. In what ways can the newspaper coverage of watchdog be improved?
- 14.

**Appendix 2 Daily Graphic News articles on -GT-V Vodafone**

News Article Headline	Date of Publication	Page on which news were published
1. The Proposed GT-Vodafone Deal – Minister dares critics	August 4, 2008	1
2. Stop the Sale-Says Former Director-General	August 4, 2008	1
3. CPP Gives alternative to sale of Ghana Telecom	August 6, 2008	15
4. Sale of Ghana Telecom-Debate gets more exciting		17
5. Sale of GT bad deal-Nduom	August 12, 2008	1
6. House Approves GT-Vodafone deal	August 15, 2008	1
7. GT-Vodafone Debate shameful	August 19, 2008	29
8. NDC clarifies position on GT Sale	August 19, 2008	29
9. Vodafone seals deal-settles 70% States in GT.	August 20, 2008	1
10. Vodafone assures GT-workers		10
11. Committee to look into Vodafone sale inaugurated	May 19, 2009	
12. Committee on Vodafone overstepped its remit	October 14, 2009	

**Appendix 3 The Enquirer news articles on –M&J bribery allegations**

News Article Headline	Date of Publication	Page on which news were published
1. Kangaroo Court cracks dirty whips	September 28,2009	1
2. The Mabey &Johnson Scandal: Preprah speaks. Exposes British SFO	October 2, 2010	1
3. Why I quit. I want to go and clear my name	October 12, 2009	1
4. Ahead of Monday’s Public Hearing on Mabey &Johnson Scandal-UK SFO man heckles CHRAJ	March 12, 2010	1
5. CHRAJ probes M&J today	March 15, 2010	1
6. The Mabey &Johnson Probe. Dr. Yankey: Hear Me or ...as he warns CHRAJ	April 7, 2011	1
7. The Mabey &Johnson Scandal: Nobody has been cleared	June 11, 2011	10

