



Baseline Study on Media Coverage of
Transparency &
Accountability
Issues in Ghana



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transparency and accountability
issues in Ghana**

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Executive summary



This study sought to assess the quantity and quality of transparency and accountability coverage by the Ghanaian media. Eleven media platforms from radio, TV, print and online media in the country were sampled and their content (news and talk shows) analyzed to gauge their coverage of transparency and accountability. The study employed two modes of inquiry. First, a content analysis technique was employed to understand how and to what extent the local media pay attention to issues of transparency and accountability. Next, we conducted a number of interviews with key informants from local media houses to understand the gatekeeping practices that surround coverage of transparency and accountability. A week's worth of content served the basis of coding on a number of variables including prominence, tone and quality of transparency and accountability coverage. Below, highlights of the study findings are presented in four sub- themes - quantity, quality, framing and gatekeeping.

Quantity

- There is an appreciable level of interest in transparency and accountability news albeit to varying degrees across media. Radio leads the pack in covering the subject.
- However, this interest appears to be superficial rather than

intentional given that transparency and accountability news is largely sourced from routinized (ready-made) sources such as press conferences. Relatively few transparency and accountability stories are borne out of journalists' initiative and investigations.

- Talk show content includes more transparency and accountability issues than news content

Quality

- Most transparency and accountability news follow the straight news format with little attempt to provide context or connect them to the bigger issues of which they are part.
- Most transparency and accountability news use simple rather than technical language. Where stories include technical terms, they were more likely to be explained than not.

Framing

- Stories on transparency and accountability are generally framed positively. They either signal a need for more transparency and accountability in governance or suggest that transparency and accountability are critical for development.
- Transparency and accountability stories are told mainly from the perspective of spokespersons to the exclusion of experts and members of the public whose experiences make the news more trustworthy and relatable for audiences.

Gatekeeping

- There seems to be a clear understanding of the concept of transparency and accountability, its intent and components among media personnel interviewed.
- There also appears to be consensus on the notion of the media as critical to achieving transparency and accountability in governance.
- **Key considerations for covering transparency and accountability include:**
 - The media's call to duty in holding duty bearers to account
 - The likelihood of generating audience interest
 - News values such as controversy and conflict
 - Among state-owned media, perceived linkages to government and fear of reprisal for generating negative publicity about political leadership.
- While the local media may not have dedicated transparency and accountability desks, attention to it is actioned under the rubric of investigative desks.
- There is some internal effort, within media organizations, to equip reporters with skills for effective coverage of transparency and accountability: However, journalists must, often, self-educate and improvise in improving their knowledge on transparency and accountability issues.

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- There is a clear gap in training to fill gaps in knowledge on transparency and accountability issues.

FULL REPORT



Baseline study on media coverage of transparency and accountability issues in Ghana

Introduction

Ghana's return to democratic rule in 1993 was heralded by provisions in the 1992 constitution that guaranteed the freedom and independence of the media. The intention behind this guarantee was to enable the media play its role of holding government accountable to the people of Ghana. As stated in Article 162 (5), all media agencies are free to “uphold the principles, provisions and objectives of this Constitution” and “uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana”. Premised on this constitutional guarantee, players in the Ghanaian media industry are often quick to comment on media's position as the fourth estate of the realm coming only after the executive, legislature and judiciary in its power and impact.

Alongside this is the oft-recalled suggestion that the media is the watch-dog of society with unique powers to hold duty bearers to account and to check abuse of power. While these are intuitively feasible claims given the constitutional guarantees, empirical evidence on how well the Ghanaian media does this is lacking. Thus it remains to be seen whether the Ghanaian media does, indeed, demonstrate an active interest in this watch-dog role.

By what they report and what they place emphasis on, the Ghanaian media can engender and shape public discourse on how to develop this country in a transparent and accountable manner. And often, the real impact of the media is felt through changes in aspects of policy and action with which the media takes issue. For instance in January 2018, barely a week after a local FM station (Citi FM) took issue with the Births and Deaths Registry's refusal to register local Ghanaian names, the ensuing public uproar and sustained coverage led to the Local Government Minister issuing a directive to the Registry to acknowledge such names.

This is how strong the media can be in holding duty bearers to account. But such effectiveness is only feasible on the condition that the media does display an interest in upholding transparency and accountability. If indeed, the media is the watch-dog of society and is keen on delivering to this expectation, then it should present the platform for mobilizing the citizenry to demand for transparency and accountability in governance. This study examines how well a sample of the local media does this. It assesses the extent and quality of coverage of transparency and accountability issues. Using measures borrowed from Transparency International, the study sought to understand the content of transparency and accountability news.

Methodology

Two modes of inquiry were combined in this study of how the local media covers transparency and accountability. A quantitative content analysis was used to examine quantity and quality of coverage while interviews

with key informants were used to gain insight into the considerations that go into how the media cover transparency and accountability.

For the content analysis, a sample of 11 media outlets representing the four main mass media (Radio, TV, Print and online) was selected for inclusion in the study. The choice of platforms was done, in collaboration with MFWA, informed by industry rankings by Geopoll¹. The selected media being the most consumed in the country, it is their coverage of transparency and accountability that has the opportunity for mileage in organizing public opinion on related matters.

The sample consisted of a week's (29th January-4th February 2018) worth of news and talk show content from the media outlets listed in Table 1. The week in question was chosen based on convenience rather than any considerations for events happening in the country that may have predisposed more or less media coverage of transparency and accountability issues. The idea was to gain a sense of coverage in a typical rather than special time context.

Trained research assistants were assigned to do live coding of data from the electronic media while the print content was coded upon publication. Assistants used a comprehensive coding guide in which each variable had been clearly explained and its various categories detailed for ease of identification. Variables coded addressed a number of concerns regarding themes, prominence, framing and general quality. To code for themes in transparency and accountability news, the study relied on the Transparency International's glossary² of themes in the transparency, accountability, anti-corruption eco-system. While the glossary is more expansive

than adopted in the study, consultations with the MWFA led to a pruning exercise to isolate those most relevant in the Ghanaian context

Table 1: Media included in sample

| Medium | Outlet | | Content coded |
|--------|----------|---|---|
| Radio | Peace FM | Private, most popular radio station; broadcasts in Akan | Kokrokoo Premo ato (noon news) Evening news (nnɔn nseɔ kase3bo) Saturday morning Hello FM show (Akoko abɔn) The platform (Mon, Wed 8-10pm) |
| | Adom FM | Second most popular radio station, broadcasts in Akan | Dwa so nsem (5:45am -10am) Kase3bo is tasty (12 -1pm) Naket kase3bo (6-7pm) Burning issues(Mon, Wed 8-10pm) |
| | Citi FM | Private, most popular English language radio | Citi CBS (6-10am) Citi Prime News (12-1pm) Eye witness news (5:30-7pm) Point Blank The Big issue (Saturdays) |
| | Joy FM | Private, second most popular English language radio | Super Morning Show (6-10 am) Mid-Day news (12 noon) Top story (5:30-6pm) News Night (6-7pm) Ghana connect (Friday 6pm) News File (Saturday, 9am) Sunday Edition: (Sunday 6pm) |

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| TV | UTV | Private, most popular TV station, broadcasts in Akan | Morning show Saturday morning show Mid-day news Evening news |
| | TV3 | Private, third most popular TV station, broadcasts in English | New day (morning including Saturdays) Mid-day news News 360 Agenda (Sundays 3-4pm) |
| Print | D a i l y Graphic | Public and most popular newspaper | All editorial content |
| | Daily Guide | Leading private newspaper. | All editorial content |
| Online | C i t i f m o n - l i n e . c o m | | All editorial content |
| | M y j o y o n - l i n e . c o m | | All editorial content |
| | G h a n a w e b . c o m | | All editorial content |

To code for prominence, sourcing and coverage quality variables, we relied on works by researchers at the Department of communication Studies of the University of Ghana³. For prominence, the study explores placement of story, whether it was headlined (for electronic media) and whether any artifacts were used to enhance its impact and attractiveness (e.g. visuals). Framing explored tone of story or attitude invoked in the reader whereas quality variables included source structure (single or multiple sourcing of information), source type (expert views or citizen views etc.) and story packaging (issue based or event based).

Table 2: Basic coding instrument (adapted for various media)

| | |
|-----|--|
| C1. | Story headline: Please quote the headline here |
| C2. | Placement of story – on which page does the story appear? 1. Front 2. Centre Spread 3. Back page 4. Other pages |
| C3. | Mode of generation: how does the reporter/writer seem to have gotten the information making up the story? 1. Routine: already-made news e.g. press releases, coverage of press conferences etc. 2. Enterprise: story from journalists' own initiative through interviews and other investigative means 3. A combination of routine and enterprise 4. Not Clear |
| C4 | Story format: What format is used to present the story? 1. Straight news: straightforward reporting of the events of the story without any attempt to provide context or links to the big picture issues they bring up. 2. Feature: though may be based on an event, here there should be an attempt to add more depth to the story by going beyond what happened to include background evidence and context. 3. Letters and opinions and rebuttals by members of the public 4. Editorial: the newspaper's position on an issue 5. Other |
| C5. | What is the main subject matter of the story? Which angle of transparency and accountability does it bother on? 1. Not related to transparency and accountability 2. Accountability: the idea that institutions and individuals must report their activities and execute their powers properly 3. Transparency: Characteristic of governments, companies, organizations and individuals of being open in the clear disclosure of information, rules, plans, processes and actions. 4. Bribery and corruption: Abusing power for private gain by offering, promising, giving, accepting or soliciting/extorting of advantage as an inducement for action. 5. National integrity systems: the systems for checking the causes of corruption e.g. parliamentary ratification of loans, special prosecutor, EOCO etc. 6. Procurement: A multi-step process of established procedures for acquiring goods and services by organizations 7. Whistleblowing: Making a disclosure in the public interest by an employee, director or external person, in an attempt to reveal neglect or abuses within the activities of an organization 8. Combinations of any of the above (specify in coding sheet) 9. Other |

| | |
|------|--|
| C6. | <p>Tone of story: generally, how is the story likely to leave the reader feeling about transparency and accountability?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. transparency and accountability are critical to national development 2. transparency and accountability mean little to national development 3. More of these stories can help improve transparency and accountability 4. Neutral 5. Other |
| C7. | <p>Prominence: Beyond the page on which the story appears, does it appear to be the biggest story? NB. Look at the headline size.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Page lead 2. Not page lead |
| C8. | <p>Enhancement: are there any accompaniments to the story which add to its effect?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Photographs 2. Illustrations: Charts/graphs/diagrams/cartoons 3. Combination of photos and illustrations 4. None |
| C9. | <p>Technical terms: Are there technical terms in the story and if yes have they been explained?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, explained 2. Yes, but not explained 3. No technical terms |
| C10. | <p>Source structure: generally, how many sources does the journalist/writer cite in the story?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Single human 2. Single documentary (e.g. reports) 3. Multiple human 4. Multiple documentary 5. Combination 6. No source |
| C11. | <p>Source attribution: In what way is the information in the story attributed to the source</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quoted 2. Paraphrased 3. Quoted and paraphrased. 4. Not applicable |
| C12. | <p>Source type: In what capacity does the main person to whom information is attributed speak in the story?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spokesperson: speaks on behalf of another person, group or organization 2. Expert: provides info or opinion based on specialist knowledge 3. Ordinary member of the public: provides information/opinion based on personal experience or witness accounts 4. Combination of roles 5. Not clear 6. Not applicable (in cases where non-human sources such as documents were cited) |

The unit of analysis for the study was individual stories carried in news bulletins, and topical issues tabled for discussion in talk shows. All stories were included irrespective of which segment of bulletins they belonged to. The only exceptions were stories appearing as foreign news. After reading/listening to/watching each story, research assistants coded relevant information using the following generic guide (which was tailored to fit the nuances of the various media).

Findings

How visible is transparency and accountability in the news?

Over a one week period, this study sought to estimate the volume of attention given transparency and accountability issues by the Ghanaian media. Across the four radio stations sampled, a total of 801 news stories broadcast were broadcast in the sampled bulletins. Of these, a little over half were on a subject matter unrelated to transparency and accountability. The TV evidence is slightly different in the margins of stories that addressed transparency and accountability issues.

Table 3: Coverage of transparency and accountability in the news

| Subject | Radio | | TV | | Newspaper | | Online | |
|---------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Not related | 435 | 54.3 | 194 | 61.8 | 377 | 76.8 | 338 | 91.6 |
| Accountability | 139 | 17.4 | 41 | 13.1 | 62 | 12.6 | 15 | 4.1 |
| Transparency | 103 | 12.9 | 48 | 15.3 | 14 | 2.9 | 3 | .8 |
| Bribery and corruption | 4 | .5 | 1 | .3 | 8 | 1.6 | --- | --- |
| Integrity systems | 4 | .5 | 2 | .6 | 3 | .6 | 1 | .3 |
| Procurement | 3 | .4 | --- | --- | 5 | 1.0 | --- | --- |
| Whistle blowing | | | | | 1 | .2 | --- | -- |
| Combination of any of the above | 65 | 8.1 | 28 | 8.9 | 21 | 4.3 | 12 | 3.3 |
| Other | 48 | 6.0 | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total | 801 | 100.0 | 314 | 100.0 | 491 | 100.0 | 369 | 100 |

On TV, the margins of transparency and accountability coverage appear to be significantly lower than that recorded for radio. Unlike radio where nearly half of the sampled news stories were on subjects related to transparency and accountability, the TV figure recorded is 38%. While itself not a bad volume of coverage, the figure remains markedly lower than radio coverage. Beyond this, the TV evidence follows the radio pattern by being predominantly about ‘transparency’ and accountability’ as individual sub-themes. Hardly any attention is paid to uncovering bribery and corruption or educating the public on integrity systems in the country.

The picture in the newspaper sample is even worse than it is with the TV sample. Up to 78% of the newspaper sample was unrelated to transparency and accountability. By far the worst performing medium when it comes to coverage of transparency and accountability issues appears to be the online media in the sample. Only eight percent of the total online sample was dedicated to such issues. That said, considering the myriad of

issues contesting for media attention (health, crime, sports, entertainment etc.), one may argue that with the exception of online news, it appears the levels of transparency and accountability content in the news of the sampled media is quite substantial and even impressive. In terms of the nuances in which aspects of the transparency and accountability spectrum covered in the news, we find very little variability. The attention seems to be focused directly on ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ as individual subjects with little room for other related issues. Thus, while this is in itself a critical development in the quest to serve as the public watch-dog, there appears to be a neglect of the equally important issues of bribery and corruption, integrity systems, procurement etc. Coverage that engages provisions for preventing poor leadership (e.g. legal frameworks) or that unearths examples of bad governance (e.g. through bribery, corruption, collusion and misapplication of procurement practices) remain largely ignored.

For the radio and TV samples, the study also examined how transparency and accountability content is reflected in the talk shows. As Table 4 shows below, talk shows provide even more opportunity mainstreaming transparency and accountability in public discourse. Unlike in news (Table 3) where news unrelated to transparency and accountability dominate content of all the sampled media, the talk show evidence demonstrates a clear bias in favour of the subject. At least 67% of the radio talk show content and 56% of the TV talk show content addressed matters related to transparency and accountability.

Table 4: transparency and accountability content in Talk shows

| Subject | Radio | | TV | |
|---------------------------------|------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Not related | 69 | 33.5 | 29 | 44.6 |
| Accountability | 54 | 26.2 | 10 | 15.4 |
| Transparency | 38 | 18.4 | 9 | 13.8 |
| Bribery and corruption | 3 | 1.5 | --- | --- |
| Integrity systems | 2 | 1.0 | 2 | 3.1 |
| Procurement | 2 | 1.0 | --- | --- |
| Whistle blowing | 1 | .5 | --- | --- |
| Combination of any of the above | 26 | 12.6 | 15 | 23.1 |
| Other | 11 | 5.3 | --- | --- |
| Total | 206 | 100.0 | 65 | 100.0 |

Beyond the coverage (or lack of it) of transparency and accountability issues, lies the related issue of whether they are given prominence in the news. To explore this question, we assessed the placement of transparency and accountability stories. For the electronic media, (radio, TV and online), we examined whether such stories were included in headlines while for newspapers we examined whether they appeared on the two most prominent pages (front and back). To gain a clear picture, this analysis focused only on stories related to the theme of transparency and accountability.

Table 5: Prominence of transparency and accountability in News and Talk shows

| | News content | | | Talk show content | | |
|------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Medium | Prominence variable | Freq. | % | Prominence variable | Freq. | % |
| Radio | <i>Headlined?</i> | | | <i>How prominent is the issue</i> | | |
| | Yes | 210 | 57.4 | Main issue under discussion | 85 | 62.0 |
| | No | 156 | 42.6 | Secondary issue | 37 | 27.0 |
| | Total | 366 | 100.0 | No attempt at prominence | 15 | 10.9 |
| | | | | Total | 137 | 100.0 |
| TV | <i>Headlined?</i> | | | <i>How prominent is the issue</i> | | |
| | Yes | 47 | 39.2 | Main issue under discussion | 20 | 55.6 |
| | No | 73 | 60.8 | Secondary issue | 9 | 25.0 |
| | Total | 120 | 100.0 | No attempt at prominence | 7 | 19.4 |
| | | | | Total | 36 | 100.0 |
| Newspaper | <i>Placement</i> | | | Not applicable | | |
| | Front | 14 | 12.3 | | | |
| | Spread | 5 | 4.4 | | | |
| | Back | 2 | 1.8 | | | |
| | Other | 93 | 81.6 | | | |
| | Total | 114 | 100.0 | | | |
| Online | <i>Headlined?</i> | | | Not applicable | | |
| | Yes | 21 | 67.7 | | | |
| | No | 10 | 32.3 | | | |
| | Total | 31 | 100.0 | | | |

Findings, as shown in Table 5, suggest that radio and the online media tend to give more prominence to transparency and accountability stories than do TV and newspapers (in that order). In fact, both online and on radio, more than half of such stories were included in bulletin headlines in sharp contrast to the newspaper sample in which only 18% made it to the prominent pages of the front, spread and back altogether. Given the relatively low volume of transparency and accountability stories in the online sample it is interesting the level of prominence such stories enjoy online.

On talk shows, however, transparency and accountability issues appear to enjoy prominence irrespective of the medium. This is because in both TV and radio talk show samples, such stories have more than a 50% chance of being headlined and being treated as a major issue for discussion by the amount of time dedicated to them.

Who is covering transparency and accountability?

The study finds that Citi FM leads the radio pack in the attention it gives to holding duty bearers accountable and demanding transparency in governance. As Table 6 shows, the majority of the Citi FM sample (41%) was accountability-related⁴. Coupled with news that addresses transparency, this figure rises to more than 60%. This is in sharp contrast to the other radio stations whose most predominant content was on issues unrelated to the subject. Across the three remaining radio stations (Joy FM, Peace FM and Adom FM), at least two-thirds of stories sampled had nothing to do with transparency and accountability.

A similar pattern of limited coverage of transparency and accountability replicates in the TV sample where most stories did not signal transparency and accountability. Between the two TV stations sampled, UTV appears to demonstrate a keener interest in transparency and accountability stories. As Table 6 shows, while over 70% of the TV3 sample was unrelated to transparency and accountability, the comparable UTV figure was far less (43%).

Sub-themes replicate the radio evidence of seeming neglect for covering bribery, integrity systems, procurement etc. For the UTV sample, the slight difference from the radio evidence is that neither of the dominant sub-themes, ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ is favoured over the other.

Relative to differences between the two sampled newspapers, it appears Daily Graphic devotes more attention to transparency and accountability than does the Daily Guide (albeit not to a very impressive extent). As in the cases of the other media, both newspapers display a bias in favour of ‘transparency’ issues to the neglect of the other relevant sub-themes. The online sample replicates this pattern.

Table 6: Individual radio stations and coverage of transparency and accountability in news

| Media organization | T&A subject matter | | | | | | | | | Total |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| | Not related | Accountability | Transparency | Bribery and corruption | Integrity systems | Procurement | Whistle blowing | Combination | Other | |
| Radio sample | | | | | | | | | | |
| Citi | 25 9.3% | 112 41.5% | 56 20.7% | 1 .4% | 1 .4% | 3 1.1% | | 26 9.6% | 46 17.0% | 270 100.0% |
| Joy | 135 74.6% | 26 14.4% | 8 4.4% | 3 1.7% | 3 1.7% | 0 .0% | | 5 2.8% | 1 .6% | 181 100.0% |
| Peace | 154 82.8% | 0 .0% | 5 2.7% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | | 27 14.5% | 0 .0% | 186 100.0% |
| Adom | 121 73.8% | 1 .6% | 34 20.7% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | | 7 4.3% | 1 .6% | 164 100.0% |
| Total | 435 54.3% | 139 17.4% | 103 12.9% | 4 .5% | 4 .5% | 3 .4% | | 65 8.1% | 48 6.0% | 801 100.0% |
| TV sample | | | | | | | | | | |
| TV3 | 133 77.3% | 9 5.2% | 16 9.3% | 1 .6% | 0 .0% | | | 13 7.6% | | 172 100.0% |
| UTV | 61 43.0% | 32 22.5% | 32 22.5% | 0 .0% | 2 1.4% | | | 15 10.6% | | 142 100.0% |
| Total | 194 61.8% | 41 13.1% | 48 15.3% | 1 .3% | 2 .6% | | | 28 8.9% | | 314 100.0% |
| Newspaper sample | | | | | | | | | | |
| Daily Graphic | 162 68.4% | 39 16.5% | 9 3.8% | 4 1.7% | 1 .4% | 4 1.7% | 0 .0% | 18 7.6% | | 237 100.0% |

| Media organization | T&A subject matter | | | | | | | | | Total |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| | Not related | Accountability | Transparency | Bribery and corruption | Integrity systems | Procurement | Whistle blowing | Combination | Other | |
| Radio sample | | | | | | | | | | |
| Citi | 25 9.3% | 112 41.5% | 56 20.7% | 1 .4% | 1 .4% | 3 1.1% | | 26 9.6% | 46 17.0% | 270 100.0% |
| Joy | 135 74.6% | 26 14.4% | 8 4.4% | 3 1.7% | 3 1.7% | 0 .0% | | 5 2.8% | 1 .6% | 181 100.0% |
| Peace | 154 82.8% | 0 .0% | 5 2.7% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | | 27 14.5% | 0 .0% | 186 100.0% |
| Adom | 121 73.8% | 1 .6% | 34 20.7% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | | 7 4.3% | 1 .6% | 164 100.0% |
| Total | 435 54.3% | 139 17.4% | 103 12.9% | 4 .5% | 4 .5% | 3 .4% | | 65 8.1% | 48 6.0% | 801 100.0% |
| Daily Guide | 215 84.6% | 23 9.1% | 5 2.0% | 4 1.6% | 2 .8% | 1 .4% | 1 .4% | 3 1.2% | | 254 100.0% |
| Total | 377 76.8% | 62 12.6% | 14 2.9% | 8 1.6% | 3 .6% | 5 1.0% | 1 .2% | 21 4.3% | | 491 100.0% |
| Online sample | | | | | | | | | | |
| Citifmon-line | 108 88.5% | 8 6.6% | 0 .0% | | 0 .0% | | | 6 4.9% | | 122 100.0% |
| Myjoyon-line | 140 94.6% | 3 2.0% | 2 1.4% | | 1 .7% | | | 2 1.4% | | 148 100.0% |
| Ghanaweb | 90 90.9% | 4 4.0% | 1 1.0% | | 0 .0% | | | 4 4.0% | | 99 100.0% |
| Total | 338 91.6% | 15 4.1% | 3 .8% | | 1 .3% | | | 12 3.3% | | 369 100.0% |

Quality of transparency and accountability coverage

Beyond understanding the breath of coverage of transparency and accountability, the study also sought to gauge the quality of such coverage. Various variables that address aspects of quality news reporting were explored to understand whether when the local media does attend to transparency and accountability it is done in a manner that enables the stories to be meaningful and make impact. For the purposes of isolating the true nature of the coverage of transparency and accountability in particular, the subsequent analysis focuses on only those stories that were related to transparency and accountability issues in news (N = 366 for radio; N = 120 for TV; N = 144 for newspaper; N = 31 for online) and in talk shows (N = 137 for radio; N = 36 for TV).

First, we sought to gauge the manner in which stories on transparency and accountability are sourced as an indicator of the interest demonstrated in them by the media. Enterprise news which is reporter-led has journalists (through interviews) exploring leads and angles to stories that may not otherwise come to light. This is contrast to routinely sourced news in which journalists receive news in ready-made form from news makers and news actors (e.g. through press conferences. When journalists initiate enterprise stories on transparency and accountability, therefore, it demonstrates their interest in generating news of relevant issues rather than waiting to be ‘served news stories’.

Table 7: Quality of transparency and accountability coverage in news

| Variable | Radio sample | | TV sample | | Newspaper sample | | Online sample | |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------|------------------|-------|---------------|---------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | Percent |
| Mode of generation | | | | | | | | |
| Routine | 245 | 66.9 | 91 | 75.8 | 64 | 56.1 | 18 | 58.1 |
| Enterprise | 48 | 13.1 | 17 | 14.2 | 10 | 8.8 | 8 | 25.8 |
| Combination | 73 | 19.9 | 12 | 10.0 | 11 | 9.6 | 5 | 16.1 |
| Not clear | --- | --- | --- | --- | 29 | 25.4 | --- | --- |
| Total | 366 | 100.0 | 120 | 100.0 | 114 | 100.0 | 31.0 | 100.0 |
| Presentation format | | | | | | | | |
| Straight News | 241 | 65.8 | 72 | 60.0 | 75 | 65.8 | 27 | 87.1 |
| Feature | 121 | 33.1 | 46 | 38.3 | 4 | 3.5 | 3 | 9.7 |
| Opinion | 4 | 1.1 | 2 | 1.7 | 33 | 29 | 1 | 3.2 |
| Other | --- | --- | --- | --- | 2 | 1.8 | --- | --- |
| Total | 366 | 100.0 | 120 | 100.0 | 114 | 100.0 | 31 | 100.0 |
| Technicalese | | | | | | | | |
| Yes, explained | 74 | 20.2 | 26 | 21.7 | 7 | 6.1 | 1 | 3.2 |
| Yes, not explained | 35 | 9.6 | 5 | 4.2 | 5 | 4.4 | 1 | 3.2 |
| No technical language | 257 | 70.2 | 89 | 74.2 | 102 | 89.5 | 29 | 93.5 |
| Total | 366 | 100.0 | 120 | 100.0 | 114 | 100.0 | 31 | 100.0 |

The study finds that the volume of transparency and accountability news sampled is mainly the result of ready-made news rather than the media’s own interest in devoting resources to cover them. Only 13% of the radio and 14% of the TV sample of transparency and accountability stories were produced out of journalists’ own initiative. In the newspaper sample only 9% of the transparency and accountability stories were the result of journalists’ initiative whereas the online sample had 26% generated through enterprise means (See Table 7).

Irrespective of how the information making a transparency and accountability story is sourced, journalists still have the opportunity to present it in a manner that enables the audience to engage the message from an analytical rather than merely informative point of view. When news is presented in a feature format, it is analytical and places the issues in context rather than merely providing the basics of the story with no attempt to contextualize or raise critical questions in the audience's minds.

Here too, findings show that most of the transparency and accountability stories sampled followed the basic (straight news) presentation format of answering the 5Ws and H. At least two-thirds of the radio, TV and newspaper samples followed the straight news format. What is surprising is the fact that the electronic media which tends to be time/space conscious appears to do more detailed analysis of transparency and accountability issues than the newspapers which are thought to be more receptive to longer text and analytical accounts.

The third quality variable assessed in the data addresses the use of technical language in transparency and accountability news in a manner that potentially interferes with the audience's ability to effectively engage with the content. For each transparency and accountability story, we assessed whether any technical terms were used and whether any attempt was made to explain them. As Table 6 shows, most transparency and accountability news did not include any technical terms. Where they did such terms were more likely to be explained than not. Across the media, the TV sample did a better job of explaining technical terms followed by radio, newspapers and online in that order.

With regards to the unique performances of the various media sampled, the study finds that the evidence on the over-reliance on routinely generated news replicates itself. Across the media organizations, we find a predominance of routine news. The comfort is that it appears that when transparency and accountability news comes to these media in ‘ready-made’ form, there is a relatively high likelihood that follow ups may be made through enterprise means to beef up the information received. This is because, with the exception of the local language stations and Daily Guide (Adom FM and UTV), all the media sampled recorded higher stories in the ‘combination’ (combining routine with enterprise) category than the uniquely enterprise stories category.

Table 8: Individual media and their generation of transparency and accountability stories

| Media organization | Mode of generation | | | Not clear | Total |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|--------|
| | Routine | Enterprise | Combination | | |
| Radio | | | | | |
| Citi | 172 | 31 | 42 | | 245 |
| | 70.2% | 12.7% | 17.1% | | 100.0% |
| Joy | 24 | 8 | 14 | | 46 |
| | 52.2% | 17.4% | 30.4% | | 100.0% |
| Peace | 14 | 5 | 13 | | 32 |
| | 43.8% | 15.6% | 40.6% | | 100.0% |
| Adom | 35 | 4 | 4 | | 43 |
| | 81.4% | 9.3% | 9.3% | | 100.0% |
| TV | | | | | |
| TV3 | 22 | 5 | 12 | | 39 |
| | 56.4% | 12.8% | 30.8% | | 100.0% |
| UTV | 69 | 12 | 0 | | 81 |
| | 85.2% | 14.8% | .0% | | 100.0% |
| Newspaper | | | | | |
| Daily Graphic | 41 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 75 |
| | 54.7% | 13.3% | 14.7% | 17.3% | 100.0% |
| Daily Guide | 23 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 39 |
| | 59.0% | .0% | .0% | 41.0% | 100.0% |
| Online | | | | | |
| Citifmonline | 6 | 5 | 3 | --- | 14 |
| | 42.9% | 35.7% | 21.4% | --- | 100.0% |
| Myjoyonline | 5 | 2 | 1 | --- | 8 |
| | 62.5% | 25.0% | 12.5% | --- | 100.0% |
| Ghanaweb | 7 | 1 | 1 | --- | 9 |
| | 77.8% | 11.1% | 11.1% | --- | 100.0% |
| Total | 18 | 8 | 5 | --- | 31 |
| | 58.1% | 25.8% | 16.1% | --- | 100.0% |
| | | | | | |

As expected, and as shown in Table 9 below, the individual media organizations sampled replicate the evidence on the over-reliance on the straight news format of delivery in the overall sample. With the exception of TV3 which presented most of its transparency and accountability stories as features, all other media organizations in the sample appear to merely present transparency and accountability stories as straight news.

Table 9: Individual media’s presentation of transparency and accountability stories

| Media organization | Presentation format | | | | Total |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| | Straight news | Feature | Opinion | Other | |
| Radio | | | | | |
| Citi | 133 54.3% | 110 44.9% | 2 .8% | --- | 245 100.0% |
| Joy | 37 80.4% | 8 17.4% | 1 2.2% | --- | 46 100.0% |
| Peace | 31 96.9% | 0 .0% | 1 3.1% | --- | 32 100.0% |
| Adom | 40 93.0% | 3 7% | --- | --- | 43 100.0% |
| TV | | | | | |
| TV3 | 15 38.5% | 22 56.4% | 2 5.1% | --- | 39 100.0% |
| UTV | 57 70.4% | 24 29.6% | --- | --- | 81 100.0% |
| Newspaper | | | | | |
| Daily Graphic | 52 69.3% | 4 5.3% | 17 22.6% | 2 2.7% | 75 100.0% |
| Daily Guide | 23 59.0% | --- | 16 41% | --- | 39 100.0% |
| Online | | | | | |
| Citifmonline | 12 85.7% | 2 14.3% | 0 .0% | | 14 100.0% |
| Myjoyonline | 7 87.5% | 1 12.5% | 0 .0% | | 8 100.0% |
| Ghanaweb | 8 88.9% | 0 .0% | 1 11.1% | | 9 100.0% |
| Total | 27 87.1% | 3 9.7% | 1 3.2% | | 31 100.0% |

Finally, on the tendency to have complex terminology associated with transparency and accountability news explained, it appears Adom FM does a better job of explaining technical terms when used in such news (Table 10). Across the media sampled, where technical terms were used, Adom FM appears to make more effort (than the other media) to offer explanations. While this may be because it broadcasts in Twi and therefore has more need to explain English concepts, the comparable evidence from the other local language stations (UTV and Peace FM) in the sample exonerates Adom FM from this argument. That said, it is generally commendable that the media sampled generally avoid using technical terms when covering transparency and accountability stories.

Table 10: Individual media and technical language in transparency and accountability stories

| Media organization | Presence of technical language in story | | | Total |
|--------------------|--|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| | Yes, explained | Yes, not explained | No technical language | |
| Radio | | | | |
| Citi | 51 20.8% | 18 7.3% | 176 71.8% | 245 100.0% |
| Joy | 1 2.2% | 14 30.4% | 31 67.4% | 46 100.0% |
| Peace | 0 .0% | 2 6.2% | 30 93.8% | 32 100.0% |
| Adom | 22 51.2% | 1 2.3% | 20 46.5% | 43 100.0% |
| TV | | | | |
| TV3 | 5 12.8% | 4 10.3% | 30 76.9% | 39 100.0% |
| UTV | 21 25.9% | 1 1.2% | 59 72.8% | 81 100.0% |
| Newspaper | | | | |
| Daily Graphic | 7 9.3% | 5 6.7% | 63 84.0% | 75 100.0% |
| Daily Guide | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 39 100.0% | 39 100.0% |
| Online | | | | |
| Citifmonline | 1 7.1% | 1 7.1% | 12 85.7% | 14 100.0% |
| Myjoyonline | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 8 100.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Ghanaweb | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 9 100.0% | 9 100.0% |
| Total | 1 3.2% | 1 3.2% | 29 93.5% | 31 100.0% |
| 25 | <i>Baseline study on media coverage of transparency and accountability issues in Ghana</i> | | | |

Framing of transparency and accountability issues

Beyond the media's ability to set the agenda on transparency and accountability issues by what they emphasize, the manner in which such stories are framed may also shape how the audience is invited to think about the issues raised. To explore this, we sought to find how the local media invite their audiences to engage transparency and accountability by the attitudes that stories convey.

First, we sought to find whether there is any attempt, in crafting transparency and accountability stories to invite public opinion to clamour for good governance and transparent and accountable leadership. We found that stories of transparency and accountability are generally framed positively. Across the samples, we found that stories either signal a need for more transparency and accountability or suggest that transparency and accountability is critical for development.

Figure 1: Tone in radio sample

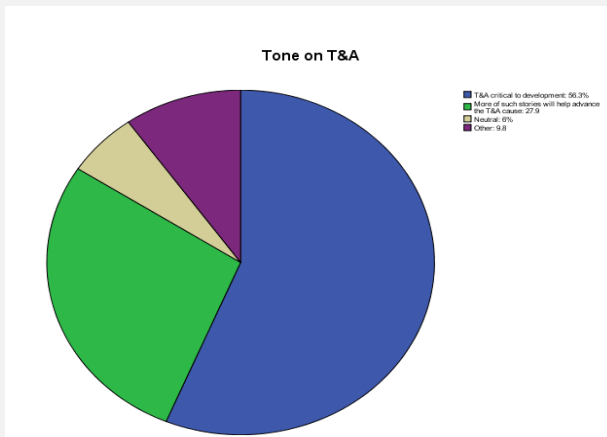


Figure 2: Tone in TV sample

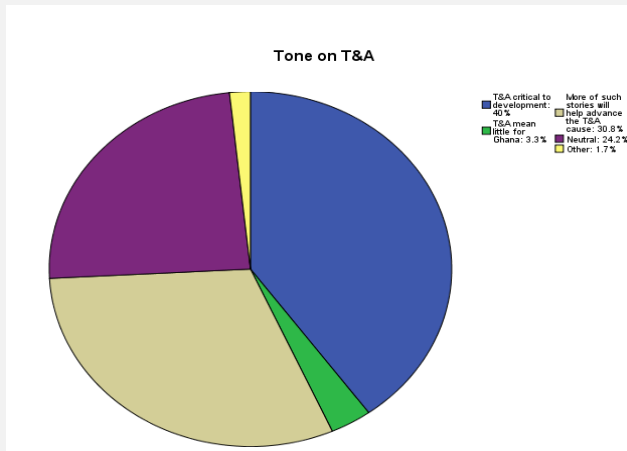


Figure 3: Tone in newspaper sample

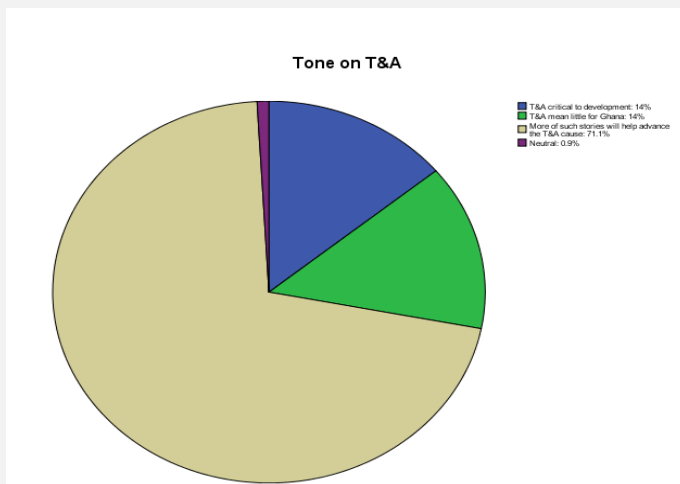
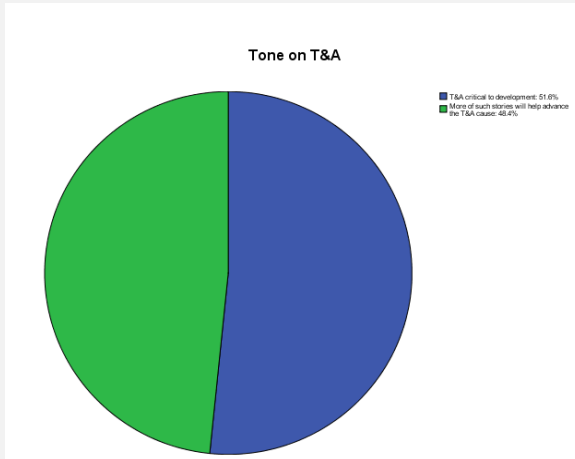


Figure 4: Tone in online samples



Another means by which the media frames stories is by the people who speak in the news. When experts speak on issues, they carry more weight than spokespersons of organizations who are thought to be championing parochial interests of their constituents. We explored who speaks in transparency and accountability news to establish whether stories are told in a manner that places value on what is said. The evidence shows that transparency and accountability stories are told mainly from the perspective of spokespersons. Across the media sampled, spokespersons sources dominate the news to the exclusion of experts and members of the public whose experiences also make the news real for audiences to relate with. That said, it appears radio accommodates more expert sources than the other media.

Table 11: Who speaks in transparency and accountability news?

| Variable | Radio sample | | TV sample | | Newspaper sample | | Online sample | |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------|------------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | | % | Freq. | % |
| Source type | | | | | | | | |
| Spokesperson | 177 | 48.4 | 63 | 52.5 | 48 | 42.1 | 8 | 25.8 |
| Expert | 91 | 24.9 | 14 | 11.7 | 9 | 7.9 | 4 | 12.9 |
| Ordinary member of public | 21 | 5.7 | 6 | 5.0 | 3 | 2.6 | 5 | 16.1 |
| Combination | 39 | 10.7 | 28 | 23.3 | 14 | 12.3 | 10 | 32.3 |
| Not clear | 26 | 7.1 | 1 | .8 | 28 | 24.6 | 4 | 12.9 |
| Not applicable (non-human) | 12 | 3.3 | 8 | 6.7 | 12 | 10.5 | --- | --- |
| Total | 366 | 100.0 | 120 | 100.0 | 114 | 100.0 | 31 | 100.0 |

Perspectives from media personnel

To understand the foundations of the nature of coverage given to transparency and accountability in the Ghanaian media, we interviewed six media personnel across the media sampled in this study. The consideration, here, was to gain insights into what pertains in the industry surrounding the specific medium rather than the individual media organizations. Accordingly, each of the media in the sample (Radio, TV, Newspaper and Online) was accounted for in the selection of key informants. The table below presents profiles of the key informants in the interviews.

Table 12: Profile of interviewees

| Key Informant | Media/Organization | Position |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| KI1 | Newspaper; Daily Graphic | Editor |
| KI2 | News Agency; Ghana news Agency | Editor |
| KI3 | TV; TV3 | Senior Broadcast Journalist |
| KI4 | Radio; Joy FM | Senior Broadcast Journalist |
| KI5 | Radio; Citi FM | Reporter; Sub-editor |
| KI6 | Online; myjoyonline.com | Journalist |
| Key: KI = Key Informant | | |

Primarily, the study sought to gauge practitioners' understanding of transparency and accountability as a means to exploring the perspective from which they report stories on the subject for the public. Generally, there appears to be convergence between informants' views and the meaning of transparency and accountability as defined, for instance, by Transparency International (TI). According to TI, accountability is when "individuals, agencies and organizations (public, private and civil society) are held responsible for reporting their activities and executing their powers properly". Transparency, on the other hand, is about "governments, companies, organizations and individuals...being open in the clear disclosure of information".

With regards to our informants' understanding of the concepts, we find that transparency and accountability is conceived as duty bearers opening up to public scrutiny on the understanding that power is held in trust for the public. Transparency is

“When governments speak the truth about governance... If it's 'A,' then the government tell you it is 'A.' and when you go and

find out, you'll realise it's 'A.'" (KI5).

A similar view is echoed by KI1 who explains that “there shouldn't be anything hidden...no amount of information should be hidden or kept away from the... let me say, as a journalist, from the prying eyes of the journalist”. Indeed, for true transparency in governance, there should be “no hidden agenda” (KI2) as the citizenry must be “updated on key government policies, programmes and even some of the certain sensitive issues in so far as, say, relating to contracts and the like” (KI3).

Similarly, and in agreement with the TI definition, accountability is when leaders “answer questions for ... actions and inactions irrespective of whatever project” (KI1). Where leaders are accountable, citizens should “be able to question government as to why certain policies are in place and why certain actions have been taken that everybody will be clear on it” (KI2). For instance,

when they say, they are going to reduce taxes, the promise they made that they were going to reduce taxes, they must go back to the people and tell them that yes, we said we were going to reduce taxes and these are the taxes that we have been able to reduce as we promised (KI5).

Clearly underlying the two concepts is the idea of a basic level of openness in how things are done and the readiness to account for things done. It is worthy to note, however, that beyond proffering these definitions, practitioners seem to equate them to corruption. For this reason, they easily resorted to corruption and anti-corruption as the key evidence of their transparency and accountability coverage. While this is not surprising, it

does, somehow, complicate the earlier finding on how little corruption coverage there is in and of itself.

We also find consensus on the notion of the media as critical to achieving transparency and accountability in governance. Across the interviews, opinions were foregrounded by the idea that it is the media that must secure a transparent and accountable government for the people. Perhaps this explains the substantial attention given to transparency and accountability related stories as discovered in the quantitative evidence presented earlier.

The media serves as the conveyor belt of whatever information, say, if parliament set up a bi-member ad hoc committee to investigate cash-for-seat saga, there are public sittings but of course, there must be the media which broadcasts it beyond what is happening at the committee level. The media also has the responsibility of going behind the scenes to fish out for additional information, asking the critical relevant questions ...it is not just the opposition party that puts the government of its toes, the media also sets the agenda to ensure that whichever government is in power, those in authority, political appointees are kept on their toes (KI3).

Beyond the media seeing coverage of transparency and accountability news as a call to duty, it appears also that the subject is imbued with news value. News about transparency and accountability issues sell and, therefore, can easily attract media attention to itself. As one informant explains,

Issues of transparency and accountability are of topmost priority because that is what the Ghanaian people want. That is what they want to hear. They want to see if governance or government is telling us, the entire citizen, the truth and I am part of the citizens so I would want to know, if indeed, the government is telling us the truth on some major aspects of the Ghanaian economy (KI5).

This is re-echoed by KI3 who explains that transparency and accountability stories are imbued with controversy which is a critical consideration in defining what makes news:

... it's rated much more highly and the reason is simply because usually the media is looking out for the controversial issues. Those areas are where the controversies come in and a lot of those really compelling stories are told. It is much more rated highly than those, say, social stories from my experience.

Also it appears that when doing transparency and accountability stories, a major consideration is how likely it is to generate audience interest. In this era of stiff competition, media organizations are constantly on the lookout for how to connect with audiences and get them to stay. This requires content that keeps the audience engaged and in enough suspense as to want to stay for more of details on issues of interest. Accordingly, the choice to publish a transparency and accountability story is one often informed by the potential to garner audience appeal and engagement.

It's one of the established pillars so we usually, fund it. We fund stories which are in line with issues of transparency and account-

ability... We usually realise that when we do, there is huge interest in it. And it's impactful. You can use whatever you expose or reveal to hold the authorities to act on it (KI4).

First of all, we look at public interest. Will this particular subject matter which bothers on transparency and accountability be of interest to our listeners, in general, to Ghanaians? Because we don't just get up and discuss issues. We look at the ones which will generate debate, which will be of interest to the Ghanaian people, which will be of interest to governments and expect results from it. So those are the considerations we put in place before we bring such issues for discussion (KI5)

Below, one informant recounts an example of how judgments about audience interest drives coverage of transparency and accountability issues.

I will give you a classical example, when we recently waged our war on GALAMSEY⁵... This is how it started. AAA⁶ and BBB⁷ travelled to the Eastern Region to go and do something personal. And on their way coming, they saw a lot of these GALAMSEY pits, destructions here and there, and they were like ah, what is this? So they later got to realize that this is what this whole GALAMSEY thing is all about. At first the Government has not even spoken about it yet. Akuffo-Addo⁸ had not even decided to wage a war against it yet. So we were like, Charlie, *let's put this thing on I am sure we'll get the results we need*. And when we started, it became a National issue. The president and the Government got involved and before we realized, the entire media landscape got involved (KI5).

While these considerations may be shared among practitioners, there may also be apprehensions about covering transparency and accountability

ity and holding leaders to task, at least from the perspective of some state media. For such media, it appears the consideration to cover such stories may also be informed by perceived linkages to government and fear of reprisal for generating negative publicity about political leadership.

... the first thing is that you'll think you're being paid by government and we carry out government's programmes and politics. We are the information arm of government so it's quite difficult for us to go out of our way to do transparency and accountability stories. And what we are comfortable doing is that when a research is carried out by a recognised institution, that one we have no problem to publish. Maybe CHRAJ has brought out a report about should I say corruption issues or accountability issues, we are able to publish... but when a reporter goes out of his way to bring a report that a government official... has done this or this we are a bit hesitant because then we have to ensure that whatever the reporter is telling us is the truth and it's not going to jeopardise anybody's work because it is the same source that we get our salary. So we are a bit hesitant in carrying out transparency and accountability stories (KI2).

As important as the subject of transparency and accountability appears to be to the media sampled, one may argue that the real show of this commitment lies not only in the actual coverage but, importantly, to the resources dedicated to mainstreaming it into the public discourse. To gauge how proactive the media is in holding duty bearers to task, the study also explored provisions within the sampled media organizations for ensuring that issues of transparency and accountability do come to the fore. Questions explored what internal arrangements exist for boosting journalists' interest in covering transparency and accountability, and for ensuring that when they do demonstrate such interest they are well equipped to do

so effectively.

We find that none of the media in the sample has a dedicated desk for ensuring sustained coverage of ‘Transparency and Accountability news’. However, this appears merely to be a gap that exists in name rather than in meaning. As it appears, the work is done under the rubric of an investigative desk, as seen from these suggestions below:

We have an investigative desk and we have a senior reporter because of the seriousness we attach to it. The status of the person has also been raised to that of an ...Assistant Editor and that enables the person to take part in Editorial Conferences so it’s a serious issue that we deal with (KI1).

I am a Senior Broadcast Journalist on the Investigative Desk supposed to produce one investigative piece every month. I am supposed to produce two exclusive features every month... In my case, every story you do, because it has to do with transparency and accountability, you are looking at exposing wrongdoing in the various sectors of society, be it corruption, abuse of power and other issues of rot. (KI4).

...a lot of resources channeled into those areas being exclusive stories and so in that regard, we have an investigative desk... the political desk collaborates with the investigative desk. ... I’ll say there is that commitment to to have those stories told (KI3).

In addition to having desks that address transparency and accountability stories through investigative reporting, there are also indications of some

limited internal effort to equip reporters with skills for effective coverage of transparency and accountability. This takes the form of internal briefings, document shares of say newly promulgated laws and, in some cases, training.

You must be an authority of a subject matter before you can come on air and speak on it or even interview people on it. I remember when the President signed the Bill on the Special Prosecutor, DDD⁵ gave everybody in the Newsroom a copy or the Bill to go and read. And we had a presentation on it, in which the CEO ... was sitting in this meeting and you are called randomly to summarize what is here, what is there and the likes... I've got the opportunity to read the entire 76-page Act of the Special Prosecutor (KI5).

We had access to it because we had the softcopies. Parliament's legal and constitutional committee plus the Public Affairs Department made softcopies available to our parliamentary correspondent so it was a PDF version that was put on our platform so we could study it as well (KI3).

In some cases, however, resource limitations and other reasons mean such opportunities are lacking. In such instances, the journalist is left to self-educate as well as resort to improvisations in providing effective coverage of transparency and accountability.

We need to even organize in-service trainings to bring our reporters up-to-date with what is going on and I can't remember the last time we held it... but to train journalists on how to gather

information on transparency and accountability and report it in a way that public will understand, I don't think we do that (KI2).

But in respect of training, if he has had any training basically, he has taken it on his own. But some of us have done some investigative reporting or studies while outside so we have some knowledge so certainly when he brings the story, some of us will look at it and raise all questions and make sure it meets the right standard before it is re-submitted to the Editorial Conference (KI1).

If the question is asked in the context of the company itself, then I will say "No." Just that in line with the ethics of our work, as a journalist you are supposed to get to know – get yourself acquainted with the relevant law and in the event your knowledge on specific laws is suspect, you can talk to people (KI6).

Externally (outside of the media organization), however, there seems to be opportunities geared towards this purpose as indicated in the interviews.

I quite remember there have been a number of experts who have given us trainings on Anti-Corruption related matters. Actually for those of us on the Investigative Desk, there have been times that we've been recommended for such trainings... The recent one that I attended was at GII and it has to do with how the Ghana-EOCO operate and how the Nigeria-EOCO operates and what makes the Nigeria one effective and then we shared the best practices and this was to enlighten us and strengthen our capacity in the fight against corruption (KI4).

I've also had the opportunity to be in a number of seminars and workshops on the Right to Information Bill organized by the CDD, the Coalition of the passage of this Bill... I've had the opportunity to sit in some of these workshops, fora and seminars of some of these laws (KI5).

In spite of such opportunity, there is scope for more training of media personnel. It appears that knowledge levels of legal and institutional frameworks governing transparency and accountability are quite low. While informants are generous in their perceptions of the relevance of self-education on such frameworks, it is surprising just how little they admit to knowing about same.

I have an idea about them but I've not really read to know what they entail... I've not had the opportunity to read it. I think it's a bit new so going forward we can still get it (KI2).

Frankly, in terms of reading, if I say I have read them, the way that will enhance or let me have a better understanding of the issues, I will say no but as for the Whistle Blowers' Act... some of us were also even involved in its discussion and the stakeholder processes before it was passed (KI1)

In fact, I haven't read the full law but I have read extracts of these laws in terms of the procurement one. I have a copy of the act so when I am doing a story linked to procurement, I make references. And the criminal, if you doing a story related to corruption, we usually pick references to it because you must defend why the story you are doing is bearing any wrongdoing or corruption. The only law I haven't referred to is the Anti-Money Laundering one (KI4).

To correct the challenges impeding extensive and effective coverage of transparency and accountability related issues, three main remedies were gleaned from the interviews. First is a recommendation for practitioners to improve the reading culture in the media. As realized, gaps in training require that journalists become inventive in improving their understanding of the issues in transparency and accountability in order to better cover them.

We need to read more. Even though we do the reading, we need to read more... the general advice to colleagues is that let's read more on the subject matter. Let's read more because I remember quite recently, the Media Foundation for West Africa came out with findings of the kinds of questions which were asked at by journalist at the Meet-the-Press, the President's media encounter. I was there and some of the questions our own colleagues asked leave much to be desired... You shrink in your seat and you ask yourself, seriously? What is lacking in the media space and especially among Ghanaian journalists is that we don't read (KI5).

Before you are employed, you are made to understand that it is part of your job to do research. You are also supposed to familiarize yourself with the various Act (KI4).

That said, there is a clear need for more training opportunities to complement journalists' self-initiated learning on 'transparency and accountability issues.

So there are so many things including more training. I think largely our ability to report on corruption stories or on any issues,

largely depends on the individual's effort to acquaint him or herself with the relevant law. But what if the person doesn't want to go through the stress to reading the relevant laws to understand which provisions is applicable in the story he/she is doing? It means that the person will do the story less of context and the reader too might be left with a narrow opportunity to arrive at a bad judgement. So more trainings... (KI6).

Besides this, and in the specific case of some state-owned media, attention needs to go to re-orienting minds to embrace coverage of 'transparency and accountability stories.

I think a lot of sensitization has to go in, to sensitize the journalist about the importance of transparency and then that 'fear' within the state-owned media as to cover transparency issues and put governments on its toes has to be erased. We have to be taught that we are doing this to help the public and the Ghanaian, per se, so that the development issues and the general well-being of the Ghanaian can improve. If we are able to put government on its toes and then, ensure that our resources are being used well, we would have more to cater for our schools, our hospitals, our roads... Most of the money is going into private pockets – if we are able to ensure monies are used judiciously... I think that will be good on our part. So the sensitization has to really improve (KI2).

... What we are trying to do is to conscientize our reporters. We make them understand that holding government accountable doesn't mean you are an enemy or an opposition journalist or whatever it is. Because as a state-owned newspaper, there has always been the perception that they are government press so whatever they do, it's like they are always touting the good deeds of

the government but if you were to do a content analysis of some of the stories that we have done under this current administration, which is just about a year old, you will see that there's been some stories and if you ask them, they will tell you they were uncomfortable with them because they felt that we were... so we try to get our journalists off that mind-set. Well, look do it and do it well for that is what you are being paid to do and that is your job and training as a journalist (K11).

Summary of key findings

This study examined, through a content analysis, the quantity and quality of coverage of transparency and accountability in the Ghanaian media. In addition, it draws from interviews with media practitioners (reporters and editors) to understand their perspectives on transparency and accountability as a means to understanding the factors that shape coverage of news of the subject. The major findings are summarized below:

- The sampled media display some appreciable level of interest in transparency and accountability news albeit to varying degrees. Radio leads the pack with over 45% of its content covering the subject. Considering the myriad of issues that compete for media attention it appears, with the exception of online news, the levels of transparency and accountability content in the news is quite substantial.
- There is little variability in the sub themes of transparency and accountability covered in media content; most news and talk show

content focuses on the individual sub themes of ‘transparency’, and ‘accountability’ to the neglect of others such as ‘bribery and corruption’, ‘procurement’ and national integrity systems.

- Talk show content demonstrates a bias in favour of transparency and accountability with at least 67% of the radio talk show content and 56% of the TV talk show content addressing related matters.
- Radio and online media give more prominence to transparency and accountability stories than TV and newspapers (in that order). More than half of the radio and online sample had stories which were included in headlines.
- Most transparency and accountability news result from ready-made information sources. With the exception of the online sample which had a quarter of stories being enterprise news, all other media had less than 15% stories being generated in this manner. While the bulk of the sample addresses transparency and accountability issues, the fact that such news is routinely generated means the media, by itself, may not be as interested as it seems in actively holding duty bearers to account and mobilizing the citizenry to demand better governance practices.

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- Most transparency and accountability news follow the straight news format with at least two-thirds of all samples irrespective of media following this format of presenting news without contextualization.
 - On the bright side, most transparency and accountability news uses simple rather than technical language. Where stories include technical terms, they were more likely to be explained than not.
 - Stories on transparency and accountability are generally framed positively. Across the samples, stories either signal a need for more transparency and accountability or suggest that transparency and accountability is critical for development.
 - Transparency and accountability stories are told mainly from the perspective of spokespersons to the exclusion of experts and members of the public whose experiences make the news more trustworthy and relatable for audiences.
 - There seems to be a clear understanding of the concept of transparency and accountability, its intent and components among the media personnel sampled for interviews.
 - There also appears to be consensus on the notion of the media as critical to achieving transparency and accountability in governance.

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- Considerations for covering transparency and accountability include:
 - The media's call to duty in holding duty bearers to account
 - The likelihood of generating audience interest
 - News values such as controversy and conflict
 - Among state-owned media, perceived linkages to government and fear of reprisal for generating negative publicity about political leadership.
 - While the local media may not have dedicated transparency and accountability desks, attention to it is actioned under the rubric of investigative desks.
 - There is some internal effort, within media organizations, to equip reporters with skills for effective coverage of transparency and accountability often in the form of internal briefings, document shares of newly promulgated laws and training.
 - Journalists are, sometimes, also left to self-educate and improvise in improving their knowledge on transparency and accountability issues. Yet, they admit to knowing relatively little about same.
 - There is a clear gap in training to fill this gap in knowledge on transparency and accountability issues.

Recommendation

The findings of the study bear one critical recommendation; there is a strong need to target more training opportunities to Ghanaian media. The recommendation is premised on two core issues identified in the study. Together, these gaps strongly signal a need for more training on the issues raised. First, there appears to be a clear interest in covering transparency and accountability news for consumption by the Ghanaian public. However, there are gaps in knowledge. Practitioners appear to be handicapped when it comes to their understanding of the legal and institutional frameworks available in the country to ensure good governance premised on transparency and accountability.

Secondly, the study identifies gaps in the quality of coverage which serve to deny the consuming public of well-developed stories that examine relevant critical issues. From news generation strategies, presentation formats, understanding of the varied sub-themes in transparency and accountability through to sources who speak in the news, a lot remains to position journalists and editors to better set the transparency and accountability agenda. It is with these in mind that the study strongly recommends training on transparency and accountability issues for practitioners in the local media scene. Such training should address the dual purposes of (a) building understanding on the transparency and accountability context of Ghana's governance system and (b) equipping practitioners with skills to be more intentional and analytical in how they source and generate news on relevant issues.

Notes

¹ GeoPoll is a provider of media rating services in Africa.

² <https://www.transparency.org/glossary>

³See Thompson, E. E., & Yeboah, A. A. (2013). Health information from elite to popular media: are Ghanaian media creating more space for health information/education? *Critical Arts*, 27(3), 370-385.

⁴At the time of coding, Citi FM was engaged in an expose on completed health facilities lying waste across the country.

While this may have inflated their content on transparency and accountability, it is, none the less, part of their bona-fide

content for which reason it was included in the sample

⁵ Local jargon for illegal mining

⁶Actual name provided edited out

⁷Actual name provided edited out

⁸President of the republic of Ghana at the time of interview



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