# MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND THE GHANAIAN YOUTH

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**Abstract**

Media portrayal of the youth in most societies, particularly Ghana, over the years has been one of controversy. The perception of the youth as being dangerous, reckless and posing a threat to the future of the nation has been the main driver for this study. Using a well-thought out objective and research questions, this paper has strived to tease out some useful understandings concerning notions of crime, violence, education and politics relative to the youth in Ghana as represented in the Ghanaian media/press. In these contested constructions, a well thought-out research methodology involving both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to address the issues framing the study. While the quantitative aspect used content analysis to help unpack statistical variables, the qualitative dimension involving textual analysis delved into aspects of literary deployments that provide ample testimony of the representations of the youth. The analysis indicated that images of youth involved in criminal activities were dominant in the media/press. Most of the images presented about young people are not just quantitatively dominated by a one-sided negative image of youth, but also to some degree, qualitatively exaggerated and misleading.

Keywords: Media/press, Representation, Young, Citizens, Youth

**Introduction**

This study investigates the representation of young people in two Ghanaian newspapers - *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* - in the run-up to and the aftermath of the 2008 Ghana's general election. To do this, the study used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method centred on content analysis, whereas critical discourse analysis was the focus of the qualitative research method. Using the systematic sampling method of data collection, the study accessed all articles published in the two newspapers during

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the stipulated period. This provided room for the quantification of a large number of articles for analysis, permeating a representative pattern and sample of the entire population, tied to the targeted questions of concern to the study. The critical questions that this study strived to address include the following:

a) What is the level of representation of young people in stories of the two newspapers over the research period?
b) What stories about young people dominate the two newspapers?
c) What kind of portrayal is dominant in the newspapers?
d) Is there any persistently prevalent imagery of young people in the newspapers?
e) What platforms are made available for young people to interact with the news media?

The Ghanaian media's twenty-five years marriage to democracy after the return to constitutional democracy in 1992 has been their liberalisation. This phenomenon has witnessed some form of segregation, mostly indicative of the manner in which news items appear in the media, particularly the print media (newspapers). These involve the state and private press. Writing about the state press, Jennifer Hasty, in her concurrent analysis of the private and state media in Ghana avers that it "is practised in a tightly regulated space largely within the domain of the state" (Hasty, 2005: 124). The private press, on the other hand, seem to be on a regular mission to unleash cynical attacks on the activities of government, scrutinise and criticise their policies and also expose wrongdoing, which would have been concealed by the state press. This practice is intensely made manifest when these media organisations are not aligned to or supportive of the ruling government. Curiously, several of these private media have some forms of association with various political parties and so tilt their stories to favour them. Consequently, citizens who declare openly, their connections with political parties are constructed in the news according to the political inclinations of the medium representing them. Such representations are mostly reflective of the overarching political leanings of the media owners. Explaining the practical trace of this style of reporting, Hasty (2005: 142), observes that unlike state journalists, private journalists in Ghana "escape the subtle mechanisms of state control and surveillance over their work while negotiating the different political and professional agendas of their editors who are more politically and professionally insulated."

Christened as the Fourth Estate by Edmund Burke (McQuail, 2005), the media are charged with the responsibility of giving a fair and unequivocal representation to all classes of people in society. Posing as a challenge, media practitioners are confronted with the construction of citizens' images in the news. Furthermore, being at the forefront of giving a voice to the voiceless and setting the agenda for the people, it means the news media are in charge of setting the tone for public debates and discussions about citizens and, in a way, decide how specific segments of the public should be seen and appreciated.

The Ghanaian press has been influential and instrumental in informing the "public about the youth" (Muncie, 1999: 9). The press instigates public attention towards young people by echoing specific labels and images attached to them, mostly based on prevailing social occurrences. Most press portrayals of the youth in Ghana appear to be mostly negative. Reporters sometimes do this by distorting or sensationalising news stories that have some connections with young people. Thus, the youth outlook assumes a very unfriendly social position, making the larger society associate mainly dangerous acts, fear, harm and pictures of social misfit with young people. Such descriptions, situations and constructions are seen differently in news stories, with images of young people generally characterised by the medium's ideological and political establishment.

Armed with this information, this study sets out to explore young people's engagement with the media/press. It, specifically, attempts to unravel the mystery involving the relationship between young people and the press in Ghana, based on their description, appearance and construction in newspapers in pre and post-election periods. This is to be done through a comparative analysis of youth stories recorded in two Ghanaian newspapers – the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide.* The *Daily Graphic* is a state-owned newspaper, arguably the most popular, widely read and highest circulating newspaper in the country. It is closely followed by the *Daily Guide,* which is a tabloid and the leading private newspaper, as noted by the 2007 African Media Development Initiative Report (AMDI, 2007). These two newspapers are selected for the study because of their eminent positions in the market and in particular due to their varied ownership and diverse style of reporting. The period under review covers two months before the 2008 election (**October** and **November** 2008) and two months after the same election (**January** and **February** 2009).

**Representation of citizens in the media**

The factors responsible for the success or otherwise of the individual could vary. Yet, their portrayal, either by the media or society in general, cannot be glossed over. This is predicated on the transformative power of the media to shape and mould behaviour, either positively or negatively. Observations made by academics and researchers have it that "media representations do not merely reflect the world but also construct our understandings of it" (cited in Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgenses, 2005: 8). The media can, thus, be seen as agents, responsible not only for the representation or reflection of public opinion, but also their construction (ibid).

The intensity of media reports about specific groups of citizens epitomizes the traits society brands that group with. In context, the social branding of citizens is "heavily dependent on the way they are represented in the news media" (Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgenses, 2005: 31). This signals the wider social significance that media representations have on societal dialectics of individuals and groups. Despite that, it is essential that the voices of citizens are represented in the media. And their representation for whatever motives must be seen as a conveyance of an incontestable integration into the democratic process (ibid). This level of integration must be synonymous with the roles they are expected to play as citizens in the democratic process.

And in furtherance of this, it must be noted that the media "do not simply reflect reality, but define it in a specific way" (Muncie, 1999: 10). The suspicion over media portrayal needs to alert its disciples to the dangers of its potency to make and unmake. In this case, while the media is seen as a "conduit for the transmission of certain meanings" (Bovil and Livingston, 1999: 2) and subsequently the "metaphor behind public concern over undesirable or harmful contents" (ibid: 2), citizens, undoubtedly, do not have control over the contents of the media, neither do they determine what is written about them.

In any case, citizens' interaction with the media, through the provision of a communicative space, is a healthy syndrome for any meaningful democracy. Therefore, there should be an available platform that could offer people the opportunity to respond or contribute to media discussions and debates. The comparative analysis of youth stories in the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* thus provide an evidential basis for the inclusion or alienation of young people in the contribution to issues of national concern. This participatory approach (Sparks,

2007) requires an equal opportunity and open access to the media, as it will provide people with a voice which actually addresses what it means to be part of the sort of social changes that they experience daily. But to be able to contribute to and deliberate meaningfully on debates in the media, citizens should be regarded as "rational, and knowledgeable, active and informed" (Cammaerts, 2007: 3).

Conversely, since media projections of young people seems to be largely those of trouble-makers and fun-driven beings, it is plausible they do not tightly fit into the category of rational, active and informed citizens, capable of contributing to issues of the national good (ibid). The spotlight on young people is, in view of their social propagations, oriented towards the development of strategies reserved for the redemption of their tattered images, which drives them to lean on their self-interests at the displeasure of issues of common good.

**The Sociology of Youth**
The term youth is a highly contested one. It "is far more complicated than a single word inevitably implies" (Miles, 2000: 1), depriving it of its propensity to be generalised. In this case, conceptualising the concept appears to be a struggle, as scholars and researchers, who have attempted to define it, have no option but offer different and contentious perspectives on what they think it entails. It is therefore difficult to come to terms with a unanimous acknowledgement of what it means to be a young person, particularly in this contemporary world, where there are tremendous changes in their lifestyles (ibid).

Congruent to these claims of diverse interpretations to its conception lies the sociology of youth, which presents an understanding, not only of what it means to be a young person, but also the extent to which social life has been ordered and how it has evolved over time. According to Miles (2000: 10), "youth becomes little more than a term describing an undifferentiated mass of people of similar age experiencing similar things." Based on this thought, the term should not be limited to the description of a group on the basis of age. In other words, age should not be the sole barometer with which youthfulness is measured. Arguments have it that though age gives a broad idea of the concept, it "cannot be a precise definition" (Coleman, 1992: 8). Therefore, it is empirical, on the basis of this arrangement, to state that "youth is related to age but not determined by it" (Miles, 2000: 11).

To further understand the sociology of youth, the territory of the concept should be extended to the "relationship to the latter stages of childhood and the early

stages of *adulthood*" (Cushion, 2006: 17). This stage of transition from childhood to adulthood offers the individual an opportunity to be better placed in society and "to be clear about when and how they should assume adult roles and responsibilities" (Coleman, 1992: 9). But, what first came to be known as the traditional "transition from childhood to adulthood" (Stefansson, 2009: 355) is short lived or better still has been submerged, preventing the accentuation of an obtrusive path for the perceived adult roles to be assumed.

Subsequent to this uncertainty, there is a multiple perception attributed to the youth outlook. And with their position not glaringly established within the "adult world" (Brown, 1998: 1), they are "always" (Thurlow, 2005: 1) seen as either "too young or too old" (ibid: 1). This pushes them into a flux, where they are "caught between adult mythologies of 'childhood innocence' and 'adult sophistication'" (ibid). For example, due to "the sorts of characteristics associated with them" (Miles 2000: 8), the dominant youth culture has fallen short of its accolade, in light of contemporary youthful behavioural demonstrations, ostensibly establishing a catalogue of "all social groups under the age of sixty" (ibid: 8) as youth. There seems to be no clear difference between the deeds of all classes of people under the age of sixty- they are considered similar, if not the same.

The controversial meaning underpinning this claim stems from the attribution of some expositions which are the preserve of adults, now embedded in the realm of the youth (ibid). This has compelled the adult world to establish the youth as too "old", due to their capability of venturing into areas particularly reserved for adults. For instance, in recent times, young people have sex, drink and have fun at very early stages; these were predominantly adult-centred exhibitions. Seen as "too young" on the other hand, they now spend a longer time in school for instance, in the course of which they still depend on their parents for support (Coleman, 1992).

According to some proponents of adolescence, it is a stage that should be described as one of "transition" (ibid: 10; Hill and Tisdall, 1997: 115). As Coleman (1992: 10) posits, the change, associated with adolescence, "results from the operation of a number of pressures." These pressures that he identifies as internal and external determine the failure or success of changing from childhood to adulthood. He views "psychological and emotional" aspects of the individual as the component of the internal, while he categorises the pressures that "originate from the peers, parents, teachers and society at large" (Coleman, 1992: 11) as

external. Drawing a line between the two, Coleman perceives the external pressures as being weightier than the internal in the transformation of the individual. He maintains that the external pressures serve as a catalyst that transit the "individual towards maturity at a faster rate" (ibid: 11).

**Young people and the Ghanaian media/press**
In any case, the Ghanaian media have been influential and instrumental in informing the "public about the youth" (Muncie, 1999: 9). As active players and "primary definers" (Hall et al., 1978: 58), they could be said to set the tone for public debates about the youth and in furtherance, instigate public attention towards them. This they do by echoing specific labels and images to be attached to the youth based on prevailing occurrences.

The media's interest in the youth must be seen to "represent a major investment for society" (McRossie, 1993, cited in Miles, 2000: 1). This explains society and the media's interest in the activities of young people. Young people act as a "barometer of social change" (Miles, 2000: 2) and as such, are the foremost concern of the dramatic transformations that affect modern society and their daily experiences.

Notwithstanding this situation and prelude of the youth culture as being negative, this traditional notion of the negative values in the media remain the foci in perpetuating such imageries. The notion is deepened by the belief that youth "is contemporaneously expected to be an age of deviance, disruption and wickedness" (Brown, 1998: 3). The behaviour of youths are pinned down by the media as those that are at serious odds with their purported role of acting as a vehicle for the transportation of societal values to other generations (Ibid).

Subjecting the contemporary youth pursuit to intellectual discourse, however, uproots the conviction that not every young person is expected to be a deviant (Wilson and Ashton, 2001). From their perspective, committing an offence is an inevitable aspect of the life of every young person. This does not mean that any young person who commits an offence, irrespective of the gravity, is out of control or a problem for society. The varied nature and the involvement of particular youths across different cultures/settings, in overt activities and at different times are expected to give rise to society's expectations of them. It is, therefore, best to distinguish between different group of offenders within these sub cultures, as opposed to the collective scrutiny of youth and the persistent view point that

"every young person who commits an offence is 'out of control' and a menace to society" (ibid: 67).

Towing the line of the regular style of report and depiction of young people, the Ghanaian media, through their interpretation of the actions of young people, often describe them as a "problem" (Brown, 1998: 1). By this descriptive labelling, it "increases the public perception that they are 'troublesome' and liable to succumb to the excesses of drug and alcohol dependency and, of course, violence" (Miles, 2000: 71), Such narratives and interpretations by the Ghanaian media have led to the harvesting of a substantial increase in the number of young people's engagement in acts that are incongruous with the expectations of society (ibid).

It is must be noted that not all youths can be engaged in acts that do not conform to societal norms and values. But the construction of young people in the Ghanaian media seems to portray them as a collective group, experiencing and/taking part in similar things. Most of these media representations are "not just quantitatively dominated by a one-sided image of youth, but that the image is qualitatively exaggerated and misleading" (Stefansson, 2009: 11). This revelation draws closer, the inferential claim that "the behaviour of a delinquent or anti-social fringe has unfortunately been extended to characterise their whole generation" (ibid: 10).

**Young people and the political process**
As observed by Coleman and Blumler (2009), media reports have revealed the dangerous tendency and unwillingness of most young people to take part in the political process. This is not surprising if analysed from the point of certain inhibiting factors and more particularly from the representations they receive in the media. There is a strong correlation to explain their disinterest in the political as a result of the "unease with contemporary democracy" (ibid, 2009: 2). As citizens, they feel "frustrated" (ibid) because they are not given the desired recognition as people who can contribute towards the growth of their societies (ibid).

Clearly, the feeling of seclusion and seemingly elusive alienation by the news media in not giving them a positive voice is partly responsible. The young, if we contextualise the position of Coleman and Blumler (ibid), expect the media to celebrate them as sources of news when their views are to be sought on issues of

crime, war, and perhaps on the economy. The absence of this recognition could be said to be responsible for the participatory political malaise- disinterest.

With this panic treatment of young people as non-citizens, instead of concentrating on issues of the general good, the youth are purported to give more prominence to trivial issues, which hold no promise of positive impact on their lives (Cushion, 2006). A clearly paradoxical situation, Cushion, in responding to this occurrence, posits that the youth are more associated with "leisure-based and consumer driven pursuits as opposed to the rights and responsibilities inherent in citizenship" (Cushion, 2006: 33).

The political debility identified among the youth is seen to be affecting the democratic process but to the benefit of other variables. Making reference to a study which saw most young people casting more votes in a reality television programme than in an election, Lewis et al (2005: 3) question the responsibility of the youth in relation to their participation in the democratic process in modern times. They write:

> If many young people are more interested in using their votes to take part in the reality TV shows than to elect the people who decide whether they are at war or peace, who make the laws that govern them and how public money should be spent, what is to become of democracy?

Generally, there has been a dramatic decrease in the participation of the public in elections in recent times, "particularly with respect to the involvement of young people" (Carter and Allan, 2005: 73). This finding by Carter and Allan (ibid) is very alarming indeed if the premise is accepted that the youth constitute the bulwark of the future of democracy in a fast democratising world.

**Research Methods**
The paper deploys appropriate research methods within the quantitative and qualitative fields for the study: content and textual analyses. The selection of methods for the study was informed by the aims of the research and "the nature of the enquiry and type of information required" (Henn, Weinstein and Foard, 2006: 20). The quantitative method in this study employed content analysis. The choice of quantitative method is of significance as it deals with statistical precision in research outcomes (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006: 50). It is complemented by the qualitative method, that is, textual analysis. The purpose is to add depth and to

plug gaps, which the quantitative approach is unable to deal with. Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006) argue that it helps to "overcome any deficiencies that may derive from a dependence upon any one particular single method" and overcome bias (ibid: 20). The textual analytical dimension, proceeding from Rosengren (1981) and Fairclough (1995) helped to explicate the written texts of the sampled newspapers' stories. The text concept, according to Rosengren (1981) is often restricted to "linguistic means of expression and written language" (ibid: 28). In settling on this method, I had in mind the application of analytical semantics. Analytical semantics, Rosengren argues, is very essential in dealing with analysed texts because the idea of "correct" interpretation of a text does not arise, but rather that which makes some "reasonable interpretations of a text" (ibid: 29). The argument, based on semantic presupposition, is that "language and thereby the text has an open structure, which always makes it possible to create new perspectives and new precisations of the text" (ibid). Fairclough (1995: 54-56) also argues for the use of language and communication in their socio-cultural context. In other words, language usage assists in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view. It must be noted that as a means of communication, texts play an important role in getting meanings across to an audience. Thus, focusing on it in this study led to underscoring the meaning underpinning the descriptions of and information on young people in the *Daily Guide* and *Daily Graphic.*

In all, six major areas were identified and integrated into the coding sheet: frequency for newspaper articles, types of articles, sources of stories, youth and politics, youth and education, youth and crime.

**Analysis and Findings**
This study investigated the representative pattern of young people in two Ghanaian newspapers - *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide,* two months before (October and November 2008) and two months after (January and February 2009) the December 2008 Ghanaian general election. This four-month period was chosen in order to be abreast of the roles, performances, constructions and discussions concerning young people in the press before and after the elections. After subjecting the stories to a critical scrutiny, two hundred and ninety one (291) of them were settled on for analysis.

The newspapers' banner headlines served as a motivating factor in the selection of stories, since that is the intersection point of the newspaper and the reader, trailed

by the relevance of the story to the research project. Most importantly, the headlines articulated a detailed clue of the interconnectedness between what was being looked for and the actual content of the newspaper. Table 1 synthesises what was found in the two newspapers.

**Table 1. Frequency for newspaper articles about young people covered by** *Daily Graphic* **and** *Daily Guide*

|  | October 2008 (Frequency) | November 2008 (Frequency) | January 2009 (Frequency) | February 2009 (Frequency) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Daily Guide* | 34 (37.7%) | 25 (27.7%) | 12 (13.3%) | 19 (21.1%) | 90 |
| *Daily Graphic* | 34 (16.9%) | 59 (29.3%) | 52 (25.8%) | 56 (27.8%) | 201 |
| Total | 68 | 84 | 64 | 75 | 291 |

**Table 1** is an interpretation of the number of articles on young people that found their way into the *Daily Guide* and *Daily Graphic,* before and after the 2008 Ghanaian general election. *Daily Guide* is a tabloid published throughout the week, except on Sundays. It is made up of a total of 32 pages on each of the days the paper appears on the news stand. *Daily Graphic,* on the other hand, is a broadsheet, with its publications, like Daily Guide, spanning the week, except Sundays. On Mondays, this newspaper comprises 64 pages due to the loads of advertisements and news stories they have at their disposal, prior to that day's publication. From Tuesday to Saturday, the paper has 56 pages.

As the contents of the Table above suggest, *Daily Guide* recorded a total of ninety (90) youth stories, 34, representing 37.7 percent in October; 25, representing 27.7 percent in November; 12, representing 13.3 percent in January and 19, representing 21.1 per cent in February. The whole coverage was a substantiation of intermittent representation. For instance, in October 2008, the first story appeared on the third day with the opening headline, **UCC Opens Snack Bar.** During this period, young people were reasonably represented. However, there were no stories reported on the 1st and 2nd day of that month.

In November, *Daily Guide* followed a similar pattern as that of its October version. This time, four stories appeared on the $1^{st}$ day, with the last story recorded on the $28^{th}$. There were no stories covered on the $2^{nd}$, $3^{rd}$, $9^{th}$, $10^{th}$, $14^{th}$, $15^{th}$, $16^{th}$, $17^{th}$, $22^{nd}$, $23^{rd}$, $24^{th}$, $29^{th}$ and $30^{th}$.

January was a "dead period" for youth stories in the newspaper. With its lowest recording of twelve stories, nothing more can be said of such an occurrence than that of a non-reasonable representation. For February, the coverage was abysmal, since the coverage did not follow any interesting pattern- the stories were roughly distributed. For instance, between $1^{st}$ and $19^{th}$ February, there were only three stories.

In *Daily Graphic's* report, there was devotion of a sizeable amount of space for the representation of young people. This is made manifest in its 201 stories covered within the four-month period- 34 (16.9 percent), 59 (29.3), 52 (25.8 percent) and 56 (27.8 percent) - signifying October, November, January and February respectively. The pattern of reporting was well-spread, an ascription of the regularity in the forms that the stories appeared. In October, for example, even though the newspaper had the least number of stories on young people, these stories were well set out. In other words, although youth stories did not simultaneously appear on the pages of the newspaper, on the whole, the coverage was such that the flow was incontestably reasonable. The first story during this month was reported on the $2^{nd}$, with the last one on the $31^{st}$.

The November edition of the newspaper had about five percent stories more than that of its October publication. There was a fair shape of youth construction during this period. Again, almost each day observed the presence of youth stories. Nevertheless, there was a fall in the coverage of youth stories in January after November, but the mould or appearance was orderly. With a two per cent increase after January, February also depicted a considerable representation of youth stories.

From the data generated, it is obvious that the co-existence and inter-reliant characteristics that permeate the precincts of young people and the press remains solid. That is, newspapers will not do without young people; neither can young people escape the attention of the media/press.

**Table 2: Types of articles recorded in the newspapers**

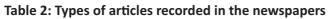|  | News | Feature articles | Editorial | Opinions/ comments/ letters-to the-editor | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Daily Guide* | 88 | - | - | 02 | 90 |
| *Daily Graphic* | 189 | 10 | 01 | 01 | 201 |
| Total | 277 | 10 | 01 | 03 | 291 |

Table 2 sought to trace the most prevailing form of youth representation in the two newspapers. News articles remained a clearly significant means of youth construction in the newspapers. **277** articles out of the total, 291, recorded during the period were news items; 10 were feature articles, all of which were reported by the *Daily Graphic;* one editorial, also carried by the *Daily Graphic* and finally 3 articles comprising opinions, comments/ and letters addressed to the editor.

From the data generated, there is confirmation to the effect that the newspapers do not designate any specific space or pages for the discussion or deliberation on matters that relate to young people. What should not be lost sight of is the fact that the feature articles, editorial and opinion and comment pieces that were seen in the papers were mostly in response to recurring and sensitive issues that had attracted heated public debates. With most of these debates at the initiation of the press, there is confirmation of Lewis et al.'s (2005: 8) point about the press being responsible, not only for the representation or reflection of public opinion, but also their construction.

**Table 3: Sources of the newspapers' articles**

|  | Youth | Politicians and government | Professional bodies | NGOs | Academics | Religious bodies | Journalists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Daily Guide* | 10 | 27 | 30 | 12 | 09 | 02 | 90 |
| *Daily Graphic* | 17 | 80 | 75 | 18 | 07 | 04 | 201 |
| Total | 27 | 107 | 105 | 30 | 16 | 06 | 291 |

The uncontested role "primary definers" (Hall et al., 1978: 58) play towards the integration of citizens into news items was the driving force for the inclusion of sources in the coding. As noted by Hall et al, primary definers are relied upon by citizens for expert knowledge, explanations and commentaries about unfolding events.

According to Table 3, the sources of youth stories in the two newspapers were drawn across the limits of young people themselves, politicians and government, professional bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics, religious bodies and journalists. On a purely statistical basis, it has been proven that journalists set the ball rolling on discussions about young people. As agenda setters, most of the journalistic discussions put up, centred on the old negative tags attached to the youth outlook through their engagement with socially unacceptable activities, mostly alternating between fun and trouble. This is not a surprise though, since from the literature review, Muncie (2004: 7) has indicated that the media/press have a dispensation for tagging young people with "images of dangerousness."

**Table 4: Youth and Politics**

|               | October | November | January | February | Total |
|---------------|---------|----------|---------|----------|-------|
| *Daily Guide* | 06      | 08       | 04      | 02       | 30    |
| *Daily Graphic* | 01    | 03       | 04      | 03       | 11    |
| Total         | 07      | 11       | 08      | 05       | 41    |

Throughout the period, the total number of stories in the two newspapers (41) concerning young people over the research period is enough to argue that the media do pay particular attention to that aspect of youth reporting. Apart from that, young people's willingness to be part of the process was insignificant. Their "unease with contemporary democracy" (Coleman and Blumler, 2009: 2) appears to be the major cause, intensified by their misrepresentation, even during the period. For youth stories that were able to catch the attention of the newspapers, special inferences are drawn from them. They span **politicians using the youth, in most cases students, as a vehicle to convey their political messages; young people themselves calling for peace, to authorities appealing to young people to eschew violence on the day of election.**

Interesting headlines that made the rounds during the period included the following:

- **JJ Brainwashes NDC Youth** (*Daily Guide,* November 4, 2008). JJ (Jerry John Rawlings) is a former President of the Republic of Ghana. He ruled the country from 1992 to 2000. He is identified with his unceasing politically-irritating talks. In the story with the above headline, the ex-president was denigrating the activities of the incumbent government and thus, appealed to the youth to stick to their positions of voting for his party.
- **NPP Advises Nima Youth** (*Daily Guide,* November 20, 2008). The New Patriotic Party (NPP) was concerned about constant violence looming in Nima, a suburb of the capital of the country, Accra. The anti-social behaviour of the youth of this area has always been of concern to the country. For instance, some of the major past electoral violence took place in that part of the country.
- **Frema Recruits Girls** (*Daily Guide,* November 18, 2008). In this story, a parliamentary candidate, Frema Osei-Opare, appealed to ladies of her Alma Mata, University of Ghana, to campaign and fight the course of the party to which she belonged- the New Patriotic Party (NPP).

Other headlines include the following:

- **Political violence Worrying** (*Daily Graphic,* November 10, 2008)
- **Jonah Urges youth to Ensure Violence-free election** (*Daily Graphic,* October 20, 2008);
- **Students must not allow politicians to use them** (*Daily Graphic,* October 22, 2008)

The varied coverage of youth by the two newspapers illustrates what the media/press are up to. Political representations of young persons, by this measurement, depend largely on the medium representing them. Daily Guide's headlines, for instance, are worrying. Unlike the Daily Graphic, the headlines put up by the Daily Guide are not in tandem with the generality of the picture painted in the actual stories. For instance, JJ Brain Washes NDC Youth was a non-deserving headline. The story was essentially about an appeal the ex-president was making to the youth to win their vote for his party.

Another story published on November 4, 2008, as reported by Razak Mardorgyz Abubakar and Vincent Kubi of the *Daily Guide,* saw school children of St. Mary's School in the Ashaiman, a suburb of the capital, Accra, march to the office of the Municipal Chief Executive of the area to present a petition to him, demanding that a peaceful election prevailed. **St. Mary's Preaches Peace** was the headline, which was followed up by this lead:

*Pupils of the St. Mary's International School in Ashaiman last Friday added their voice to call for peace in the December 7 polls.*

The first paragraph (lead) of the story elucidates the awareness of the youth themselves, towards the tendency of citizens to engage in certain unwanted activities that could mar the conduct of elections. The second paragraph soundly adds more depth. It states:

*In a seven-point petition presented to the Municipal Chief Executive, Albert Boakye Okyere, by Master Emmanuel Antwi, a class four pupil of the school, the children noted that the political landscape was polluted and thus called on politicians to shun provocative speeches on political platforms and rather have respect for their opponents.*

At this level, the youth have knowledge, albeit cautiously, of the attitude of politicians themselves in the interference of a violence-free election. The youth's concern towards the conduct of elections, which has their lives at stake, is legendary. Finally, *Daily Graphic,* as a way of showing youth involvement and interest in politics, covered a story in its October 31, 2008 edition, with the headline, **NOYONAA Launches Campaign.** The opening paragraph of the story reads:

*The Northern Youth for Nana Akufo-Addo (NOYONAA) has formally launched a campaign to win political power for the New Patriotic Party's (NPP's) presidential candidate in the three Northern regions*

The third paragraph of the story is worth examining:

*It was on the theme "Redefining the economy of the North, the Role of the Northern Youth under President Akufo-Addo.*

The central idea of this story gives the impression that young people are knowledgeable about certain roles that society ascribes to them, but would be willing and able to perform those roles under the auspices of their preferred choice of leadership.  In summary, per *Daily Guide*'s and *Daily Graphic*'s coverage of youth and politics, one basic observation was eminent: there was over-concentration of youth reports in negative aspects of politics than there were for the positives. The negative aspects entailed *minors making attempts to register in*

*order to vote, youth of some political parties attacking their political opponents,* among others. Minors might make various attempts to vote, since it has now come up that there is a dramatic decrease in the participation of the public in elections in recent times, "particularly with respect to the involvement of young people" (Carter and Allan 2005: 73).

**Table 5: Youth and Education**

|  | October | November | January | February | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Daily Guide* | 06 | 10 | - | 06 | 22 |
| *Daily Graphic* | 13 | 28 | 19 | 21 | 81 |
| Total | 19 | 38 | 19 | 27 | 103 |

Another key area that was brought under the spotlight during the period was education. The data presented above manifest that the media/press visualise education as a core component of young people's lives. Interestingly and unsurprisingly, the state-owned media (*Daily Graphic*) was on top of this aspect of reporting. It recorded 81 out of the 103 stories reported by the two newspapers on education. The coding in this section encircled politicians' pledges to young people in the area of education; government's satisfaction with education policies; successes chalked by young people in the education sector, students' matriculation and scholarship packages for students.

There were instances where, in their perceived pursuance of education, young people ended up falling on the wrong side of the law. Placed on record were examination malpractices; unfair means of gaining admission into tertiary institutions, which they did by doctoring their result slips; engaging in impersonations; and involvement in disruptive behaviours; among others. I refer to such negative stories, engaging young people with education, as "education crime", which are presently a simmering problem for the Ghanaian government. While most of the positive areas of youth and education reporting appeared important to the *Daily Graphic*, those that mainly portrayed young people as insincere, dishonest and morally weak were catalogued by the *Daily Guide*.

The *Daily Graphic* covered stories which were critical of young people in the education stories that it published in the pre and post-election periods. Some of its promising headlines involving **advice to students, sympathy for students,**

**complaints and suggestions** included the following:

- **622 Students matriculate at GCUC** (October 13, 2008). GCUC is an acronym for Garden City University College. It is a private university located in Kumasi, one of major cities in Ghana.
- **1,159 Students admitted to Greenhill College** (October 13, 2008)
- **Parents Complain about illegal fees** (November 17, 2008)
- **Empower girl-child through education** (November 17, 2008)
- **Desist from using fake documents** (January 23, 2009)
- **Bolga High School Students still at home** (January 23, 2009).

*Daily Guide* on the other hand, despite its insignificant amount of coverage, focused more on a bleak youth attitude in their engagement with education. Some of the headlines they maintained in their publications included the following:

- **Deaf Pupils Under Attack** (February 23, 2009)
- **Students Stone Teachers** (February 16, 2009)
- **Fake Student Nurse Arrested** (November 13, 2008)
- **Pupils Abandon School for Café** (November 19, 2008)
- **Tutor Remanded for Raping Student** (November 27, 2008)
- **Student in Court** (November 12, 2008)

As stated, the above headlines (not exhaustive) present young people in a bad taste. The headline, **Students Stone Teachers,** which was published in the February 16, 2009 edition of the newspaper, was a very controversial issue which attracted public debate for a long time. In the said story, Sarah Afful, a regional correspondent of the paper, reported that:

> *A peaceful demonstration being staged by teachers of the Effutu Secondary Technical School in the Central Region took a nasty turn when the students began throwing stones at them.*

The reporter continued:

> *The teachers who were protesting against the Head teacher, Rev. Dr. Araba Grahl, for failing to pay them their teaching allowances had to run to the staff common room for cover as the stones came flying at them.*

This story partly confirms a negative image that young people are associated with. In view of this, Sheila Brown's position on the description of youth as a "problem" for society, seen in the literature review (1998: 1), is not far from true. However, two stories that could be classified as positive on the educational aspect of youth presented in the *Daily Guide* are:

- **Scholarships for 35 Students** (November 4, 2008)
- **SHS Feeding Grant Inadequate** (November 5, 2008).

**Table 6a: Youth and crime**

|  | October | November | January | February | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Daily Guide* | 13 | 4 | 08 | 11 | 36 |
| *Daily Graphic* | 06 | 7 | 18 | 13 | 44 |
| Total | 19 | 11 | 26 | 24 | 80 |

Table 6a is symbolic of the youth-crime nexus. Both newspapers amassed eighty stories. *Daily Guide* collected 36 out of the 80, with 13 recorded in October; 4 in November; 8 in January and 11 in February. *Daily Graphic* had the higher number of crime stories, 44- 6 reports in October; 7 in November, 18 in January and 13 in February.

These were records of serious crime and violent stories that the newspapers had interests in. Rape (individual and gang), defilement, armed robbery, indecent assault, kidnap, among others, were some of the crimes that were linked to young people. These stories witnessed the construction of youth as either perpetrators or victims of crime, an impetus of Muncie's (1999: 10) argument that young people are either "dangerously criminal or naively vulnerable to physical attack."

**Table 6b: Victims or perpetrators of crime**

|  | Perpetrators | Victims | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Daily Guide* | 27 (75%) | 9 (25%) | 36 (100%) |
| *Daily Graphic* | 30 (68.1%) | 14 (31.8%) | 44 (100%) |
| Total | 57 | 23 | 80 |

As far as the findings of **table 6b** are concerned, of the 36 crime stories that appeared in the *Daily Guide,* 75 percent of them portrayed young people as perpetrators of crime, whereas 25 percent of them presented them as victims. For *Daily Graphic,* 30 articles (representing 68.1 percent) out of its 44 stories painted young people as perpetrators, while they were figured out in 14 other stories (representing 31.8 percent) as victims of crime.

This generally large coverage of crime stories by the newspapers is a demonstration of the newspapers' interest in matters of youth crime. And in view of the frequency, the newspapers would want us to believe that young people are capable of causing harm, than they could be harmed. Some crime stories that were captured by the newspapers included the following:

- **Boy, 18, Caught Red-Handed.** (Daily Guide, February 24, 2009)

The lead reads:

> An 18year old boy who stole various items from his neighbours and hid under their bed has been hauled to an Accra magistrate court and charged with two counts of unlawful entry and stealing.

The details of the story had it that the complainant in the case had asked her children to take care of her room for her to buy provisions to stock a store she owned. The accused, who lives in the same neighbourhood with the complainant, took advantage of her absence, entered her room, locked it inside and was undertaking his "duty". He was however unlucky as he was apprehended by the complainant upon her return home.

The next story, **Two Jailed for Gang Raping** (*Daily Graphic*, January 12, 2009) is intriguing. The opening paragraph: *The circuit Court has pronounced a 17-year jail term on two men for gang-raping a 13-year-old girl at Bremang, a suburb of Kumasi.* In the second paragraph: *The convicts, Nana Ankomah and Kwame Amponsah, aged 18 and 22, were sentenced to seven and ten years in jail respectively, after pleading guilty to the offence.* Using the age measurement of the study, it is obvious that this crime had young people both as victims and perpetrators of the crime.

Finally, another crime story that was committed by a young person with an adult

accomplice reads: *Seven Remanded in Custody for Rape: Seven persons who allegedly robbed and raped a German woman at the Tema Mighty Beach have been remanded in custody by the Tema Circuit Court. The accused aged between 18 and 27 pleaded not guilty to robbery, rape and indecent assault. They would re-appear on January 22.*

In the outline of the above headlines that mainly presented young people as perpetrators of crime, the intensity of the reports and the detailed description by the reporters in these stories are enough to situate the newspapers in respect of their concentration on unfavourable aspects of youth reporting. One depressing revelation deduced from the crime stories in the newspapers is the length and media attention that they received. It was realised from the table that crime stories in which young people were perpetrators were more detailed and in-depth than those that saw them as victims. For their influential and instrumental role in informing the "public about the youth" (Muncie, 1999: 9), the newspapers could be accused of celebrating the failures of young people than their successes and instances when they are prone to danger.

**Sensational Banner Headlines**
In their pursuit of presenting a certain image of the youth outlook to the general populace, newspapers could engage in the production of sensational banner headlines. There are different motives for this particular undertaking. There could be the motive of attracting readers to the paper, intentionally exaggerating for the purpose of enriching a long standing cynicism on the part of the writer or newspaper against an individual or group. Most of these headlines spark off panic and alarm in society. On purely comparative basis, there was no occurrence of sensational headline captured in the *Daily Graphic,* as opposed to the sufficiently large proportion that was seen in the *Daily Guide.*

Three of such stories are to be examined. The first of such stories was captioned: **NDC Thugs Beat Students** (November 12, 2008, front page). The opening paragraph of the story reads: *The ongoing voter transfer exercise took a nasty turn in Cape Coast when some heavily-built men, believed to be members of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), beat up some students who wanted to transfer their votes to the metropolis.* The headline of this story is clearly sensational. The caption and the lead of the story are in oppositional terms. While the headline suggests specificity, in view of the perpetrators of the act, the lead maintains some level of doubt, with its use of the expression, "believed to be

members of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC)." In furtherance, the lead tries to present the image of the supporters of the opposition in a distasteful fashion. This was just a mere occurrence that could be carried out by anybody. Interestingly, the students who were undergoing the exercise had not openly declared their support for any political party. The story continues:

> *Five Students had been rushed to the hospital by the time the Electoral Commission (EC) suspended the exercise, with the NDC macho men threatening mayhem.*

> *The macho men, supported by other NDC activists, invaded the offices of the Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly (CCMA) where the Electoral Commission (EC) had a centre for the transfer of votes, to prevent some of the students of the University of Cape Coast Polytechnic (C-poly) from transferring their votes to Cape Coast. The incident occurred when a group of students from UCC and C-poly were allegedly bused to the place to transfer their votes.*

By close examination, it is unsure whether the reporter was actually aware of the facts of the case. It was pointed out in the first paragraph that the perpetrators of the act were "believed" to be affiliated to the NDC but in the third paragraph, the reporter asserted that the "macho men" were "supported by other NDC activists", meaning this time, the political identity of the men had been confirmed This epitomizes the reporter's vested interest in an aspect of the issue.

The second story is headed: **NPP Woman Stabbed** (October 14, 2008, p2). According to the story, the woman was stabbed for singing **'Naa Nana Naa Shuo.'** Details of the story had it that a 23-year-old woman, who was singing the campaign song of the presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party in the 2008 general election, was stabbed in the abdomen by a man in her vicinity. The introduction of the story explains that:

> *Janet Nyankoah, 23, a resident of Kakasunaka No. 1, near Tema, last Wednesday narrowly escaped death after she was allegedly stabbed for singing the campaign song of the New Patriotic Party.*

> *The victim, who had a wound in her left abdomen, said the timely intervention of neighbours saved her life when Efo Yaw, the alleged assailant stabbed her after they had been separated from a scuffle.*

It is still unclear why one could be stabbed for merely singing a song of her political party. Paragraph five of the story, reveals the motive behind the attack:

> She said when they reached their neighbourhood at about 2030 hours, Yaw emerged from a kiosk and scolded them for making noise and disturbing him. This led to an argument and subsequently a scuffle between the victim and Yaw which attracted a lot of people to the scene.

The point here is that the actual cause of the action had been concealed in the story, while the headline painted an entirely different picture. To encapsulate, the victim (the young person) had been wrongly situated in the headline and the opening paragraph of the story.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Summarising, the issue of sensationalism, as identified in the news accounts of the *Daily Guide* is an apparent demonstration of the likely improper situation of young people within news stories of newspapers that have vested interests in certain areas and issues. From the scene captured here, the media's contributory role in demoralising young people cannot be miscalculated. Youth representation trends in modern-day media/press reporting before and after elections were the concerns of this study. Content and textual analyses were used as the methodological tools to explore this area of research. The findings and analysis of the research have largely dealt with, in distinctive proportions, the research questions proposed.

The level of youth representation in the media/press was a pertinent area of interest to this study. It was realised from the findings that there was a high coverage and representation of young people in the media. With 291 articles covered in four months, the media should be interested in activities of young people. Explaining why the media/press show delight in youth constructions, McRossie (1993, cited in Miles, 2000: 1) stated that it is because media/press are aware that young people "represent a major investment for society."

The point here is that with the somewhat apparent coverage of youth, the media are aware that young people are the future leaders and as such deserve such extensive coverage. It should be smartly mentioned that the direction of youth construction in the newspapers is important. As there was a consistent highlighting of negative over positive youth stories, stories on young people in the

Revelations from this study showed that the trend of youth reporting in newspapers is not getting any better, as the media/press' descriptions of youth are not divergent of what other researchers in this field have found. Researchers such as Brown (1998), observing the attitudes of youth, have argued that youth "is contemporaneously expected to be an age of deviance, disruption and wickedness" (Brown 1998: 3).

But as suggested in the literature review, when we subject this media definition of youth to an intellectual discourse, it would be ascertained that not every young person is expected to be a deviant (Wilson and Ashton, 2001). From these authors' perspective, committing an offence is an inevitable aspect of the life of every young person. However, the varied nature and the involvement of particular youths across different spheres, in overt activities and at different times are expected to give rise to society's expectations of them, as opposed to the attribution of torn characteristics to brandish the entire generation of youth.

The study has proven an insignificant coverage of youth engagement with politics. It does not really tell that young people are not interested in politics. Viewed from the discourse of responsibilities innate to citizenship and the nature of coverage, there was sufficient proof to reflect on young people as observers than participants of politics. The few stories that they featured in, some of which were analysed, explicitly exposed their interest and concern in matters of politics.

Unsurprisingly, images of youth involved in criminal activities were dominant in the newspapers. In the three areas of youth reporting that were put up in the coding, there were numerous criminal activities identified in all of them. All stories were not nonfactual though; most of the images presented about young people were "not just quantitatively dominated by a one-sided image of youth, but that the image is qualitatively exaggerated and misleading" (ibid).

Observably, the best thing that happened to young people during the four-month period was their placement as sources of news items in a few cases. No reasonable channels of communications had been availed to them to interact with the press. Both newspapers had no specific pages reserved for interactions with young people. This seems to explain scanty three stories recorded under opinions and comments column in both papers during that period. It therefore remains an issue that young people's relationship with the press, even in modern times is still a matter of 'don't call us, we'll call you' (Lewis, Inthorn and Jorgensen, 2005: 31)

In addition, the press' denial of young people reaching them is a conflicting situation of the feedback channel that is expected to exist between the press and their message recipients. Interestingly enough, compared to young people, older citizens were given logical amount of space to share their experiences and also respond to debates in the papers. By observing this, it would be a rational argument that the media deliberately deny the youth access to them.

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