

Media Framing of Media Regulators in Ghana: A Content Analysis of Selected News Articles on Four Ghanaian Online Newspapers

Authors : Elizabeth Owusu Asiamah

Abstract : The Ghanaian news media play a crucial role in shaping people's thinking patterns through the nature of the coverage they give to issues, events and personalities. Since the media do not work in a vacuum but within a broader spectrum, which is society, whatever stories they cover and the nature of frames used to narrate such stories go a long way to influence how citizens perceive issues in the country. Consequently, the National Media Commission and the National Communications Authority were instituted to monitor and direct the activities of the media to ensure professionalism that prioritizes society's interest over commercial interest. As the two media regulators go about their routine task of monitoring the operations of the media, they receive coverage from various media outlets (newspapers, radio, television and online). Some people believe that the kind of approach the regulators adopt depends on the nature of coverage the media give them in their reportage. This situation demands an investigation into how the media, regulated by these regulatory bodies, are representing the regulators in the public's eye and the issues arising from such coverage. Extant literature indicates that studies on media framing have centered on politics, environmental issues, public health issues, conflict and wars, etc. However, there appear to be no studies on media framing of media regulators, especially in the Ghanaian context. Since online newspapers have assumed more mainstream positions in the Ghanaian media and have attracted more audiences in recent times, this study investigates the nature of coverage given to media regulators by four purposively sampled online newspapers in Ghana. 96 news articles are extracted from the websites of the Daily Graphic, Ghanaian Times, Daily Guide and Chronicle newspapers within a five-year period to identify the prominence given to stories about the two media regulators and the frames used to narrate stories about them. Data collected are thematically analyzed through the lens of agenda-setting and media-framing theories. The findings of the study revealed that the two regulators were not given much coverage by way of frequency; however, much prominence was given to them in terms of enhancements such as images. The study further disclosed that most of the news articles framed the regulators as weak and incompetent, which is likely to affect how the public also views the regulators. The study concludes that since frames around the supportive nature of the regulators to issues of the media were not hammered by the online newspapers, the public will not perceive the regulators as playing their roles effectively. Thus, a need for more positive frames to be used to narrate stories about the National Media Commission and the National Communication Authority to promote a cordial relationship between the two institutions and a good image to the public.

Keywords : agenda setting, media framing, media regulators, online newspapers

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