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Political Communication and Public Relations in the Ghanaian Media: Building an Emotional Environment with Propaganda

James B. Abugre

Abstract Politician and managers of all types need to be able to communicate with their constituents successfully. Increasingly, they must communicate in both the ‘old’ and ‘new’ media using political communication and public relations to persuade their target audience. Political communication and public relations management describes the overall planning and execution of a political party’s communication strategy to its external and internal publics in order to achieve its goals. This chapter discusses how political parties in Ghana use publicity in the media to reach their political audience other than direct customer centred campaigns. Through a content analysis of the two major newspapers aligned to the two major political parties (NDC and NPP) in Ghana, this chapter defines and presents a multi-discourse perspective of political propaganda instead of political persuasions in political communication and public relations delivery. The study applied content

J.B. Abugre (✉)

University of Ghana Business School, Accra, Ghana

e-mail: jbabugre@ug.edu.gh

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analysis in its data analysis of the two major newspapers aligned to the philosophies of the two major parties in Ghana, National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party.

Keywords Public relations · Political communication · Negative communication · Press agency · Ghana · Political parties

Introduction

The importance of communication in facilitating relationships among people working together and among organizations and their audience has been acknowledged by many communication researchers (Abugre 2012; McNair 2003; Swanson and Nimmo 1990; Grunig 1979). Communication helps to explain reasons, methods and ideas of corporate administrators and political leaders to their audiences. The recognition of this significance has arisen from the understanding that political leaders and administrators can best influence their audiences through effective messaging and communication to accomplish their goals. While this political notion is positive in highlighting political communication (PC) and public relations (PR) of political leaders and their political parties, it appears Ghanaian politicians would want to take advantage of the existing media to persuade the electorates using all means including negative and prejudiced language. This, they resort to political communication that often incites the emotions of the electorate. Consequently, Asante (1996) contends that the Ghanaian press has greatly played a role in helping various politicians perpetuate their rule by manipulating the electorate even as they (politicians) become more unpopular. This has led to the prominence of political party communicators in the Ghanaian media landscape crisscrossing the various television and radio stations daily with the aim of enhancing their public relations and political communications using emotional descriptions. Emotions and political emotions are the symbolic manipulations of the electorate that politicians use to persuade the formers' feelings (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), and these appeals have become the hallmark

of political communication and public relations used in contemporary elections (Kaid and Johnston 2001).

Political communication is a process of sharing and transmitting information among party members and the general public through the news media. Swanson and Nimmo (1990) define political communications as the use of communication to influence the electorates on issues of a political party. Public relations, on the other hand, is an organized process of communication used as a response to or in the expectation of threats to organizational survival and growth within a political setting (Grunig 1992). It is the relationship between an organization and its key audience. Thus, public relations and political communication both serve as tools which political organizations or parties employ to facilitate their political activities and interest. For instance, in the field of communication, the theoretical development of political participation is centred on the influential role of informational media use and interpersonal discussion about politics (Gil de Zuniga 2002). Similarly, political scientist and psychologists have argued that emotions play a central role in reasoning of electorates, and have the likelihood of enhancing rationality and also of undermining it (Kinder 1994; Marcus 2000). Hence, political communication and public relations have become the core concepts of political knowledge in which the public is fed with political messages mostly through the media. Consequently, political parties and organizations in Ghana are increasingly using the media in various ways to project and enhance their strategies and political purposes. For this reason and in order to win political power, political parties in Ghana appear to engage in very aggressive and daily crusade which often rather turn into negative communication rather than positively using PC and PR to market their political messages.

The negative communication involves defamations, deceit and exaggerated promises all in a bid to persuade the electorate by appealing to their emotions instead of their reasoning. This sometimes creates an emotional political environment in the media landscape resulting in negative propaganda rather than the use of credible information in line with the news making role of the media as a representation of reality. This makes it difficult for the electorate to appreciate the value of the neutrality of the Ghanaian media and the practices of journalism. The

need to understand and appreciate what political communication and public relations truly represent is hampered by excessive misinformation through some media outlets aligned with the political parties. Thus, the quality of media and journalism practice produced in Ghana appears to be seen for its lack of social responsibility and commitment to the needs of society, and to the provision of access to all (Altschull 1984). Given that PC and PR are purposeful communication and actions which seek to influence, to build, and to maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics, it is important that this chapter provides the significant ways in which PC and PR have been used by the two dominant parties in Ghana namely, The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and The New Patriotic Party (NPP). Therefore, using empirical research, this chapter demonstrates how two newspapers aligned to NPP and NDC ‘The Daily Guide’ and ‘The Ghanaian Lens’ respectively, continuously turn PR and PC into negative communication by creating a tensed Ghanaian atmosphere of political uncertainty instead of an optimistic political environment to the readership. This is achieved through a thematic content analysis of the two newspapers over a period of time.

This chapter is organized as follows. The first part situates the context of the chapter by describing political communication and public relations. The second part looks at the media landscape and its political and informational role in Ghana. Next, a brief explanation of the approach to the empirical data gathered for the study is explained and subsequently, the results and discussion are presented.

The Nature of Political Communication (PC) and Public Relations (PR)

The success of any modern political community today depends on what the citizens and political party members wish to hear, share with political leaders and political organizations through communications. Accordingly, communication has become an asset that enables organizations and their publics to share knowledge with each other

and coordinate their tasks, by building and maintaining a viable relationship with the community (Abugre 2012). This has resulted in the news media generally taking centre stage in both popular and political explanations of public engagement as well as public disengagement. In fact, the media and press coverage affect the public on matters of political attitudes and behaviors through political communication and public relations. PR and PC are dimensions of communication that enable political organizations and their publics to share information and receive knowledge. Thus, McNair (2003) assert that political communication is the channel that should provide important and enlightening information to citizens on the nature of political processes. Similarly, Esser and D'Angelo (2006) are of the view that politicians should choose the path of constitutionally desirable principles and practices of communication and campaigning in present day democratic environment.

Many authors of public relations textbooks have ascribed various descriptions to the public relations environments. For example, Goldman (1948) describes two different eras in the history of public relations: the era of “the public be fooled”—press agency and “public be informed”—public information. Similarly, Cutlip et al. (2000) identified one-way and two-way communication types of public relations. Grunig (1979) remodelled the idea of one-way and two-way models of communication to include the purpose and direction of communication. He further used Thayer's (1968) concept of synchronic and diachronic approaches to communication to illustrate how political actors are able to persuade their audience using PR strategy. The concept of synchronic communication aims to synchronise the behavior of the public with that of the political organizations' behavior so that the latter's behavior does not interfere with that of the public. The diachronic communication is to negotiate what would be beneficial to the political organization and its public. Grunig and Hunt (1984) subsequently identified four models of public relations practices.

The first is press agency: they claimed that press agents of the mid-nineteenth century were the first full-time specialists to practice the press agency/publicity model of public relations. The second model according to Grunig and Hunt (1984) is the public information model

which was developed as a result of attacking corporations and government agencies. These organizations felt that they needed, in addition to the propaganda of press hired journalists or public relations practitioners, to explain their actions to counter the attacks by the media on them. These hired practitioners wrote only good things about their organizations. The third model is described as the two-way asymmetrical model. Grunig and Hunt (1984) assert that practitioners sought information from the public and also gave information out to the public from their organizations. The fourth model is described as the two-way symmetrical mode. In this model, practitioners believe in telling the truth by understanding the needs of the public as well as the public understanding the viewpoints of organizations or practitioners. They argued that the two-way symmetrical model makes use of scientific research and other forms of two-way communication. As a result of the above discussion, political communication and public relations are both channel styles in communication, and have become an intrinsic part of the political campaigns and political coverage of governance and policy-making (Esser and Spanier 2005). They have also become important media instruments of politics, emphasising the strategic nature of politics and communication by highlighting the role of persuasion in political discourse.

The Ghanaian Media Landscape

Ghana has one of the finest and most liberal media environments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Lenhardt et al. 2015). It has experienced more military dictatorship than civilian democratic rule since gaining political independence in 1957. The media have had to adapt to several political changes and has now become more stable, more plural and freer since the 1990s to date due to the legislation of the law of media pluralism enshrined in the 1992 constitution of Ghana. In fact, the renewal of the Ghanaian mass media culture has become an integral and indispensable part of the process of democratisation (Tettey 2001). Hence, Ayee (2001) affirms that the Ghanaian media have generally been influential in safeguarding Ghana's democratic principles by

Table 2.1 Current statistics of radio stations in the country

No.	Name of regions	Total no. authorised	Public	Public (foreign)	Community	Campus	Commercial	Total no. in operation	Total no. not in operation
1.	Ashanti	52	2	1	4	2	43	43	9
2.	Brong Ahafo	57	3	-	5	2	47	50	7
3.	Central	30	2	-	8	3	17	25	5
4.	Eastern	34	2	-	6	1	25	32	2
5.	Greater Accra	48	2	3	6	3	34	45	3
6.	Northern	40	7	-	12	1	20	24	16
7.	Upper East	16	2	-	4	1	9	12	4
8.	Upper West	16	2	-	8	1	5	9	7
9.	Volta	44	3	-	10	1	30	27	17
10.	Western	69	5	1	5	2	56	46	23
	Total	406	30	5	68	17	286	313	93

Source: National Communication Authority, 2015

Table 2.2 Current statistics of television stations in the country

No.	Type of television service	Total no. of authorised stations	Total no. of stations on air	Total no. of stations not on air
1.	Analogue terrestrial television	21	15	6
2.	Digital terrestrial pay television (service only)	1	1	0
3.	Digital terrestrial pay television (service and frequency)	4	4	0
4.	Digital terrestrial television (network only)	0	0	0
5.	Digital terrestrial free-to-air television programme channel	0	0	0
6.	Digital terrestrial radio service on TV multiplex	0	0	0
7.	Satellite television broadcasting (pay TV direct-to-home bouquet)	6	3	3
8.	Satellite television broadcasting (free-to-air direct-to-home bouquet)	6	1	5
9.	Satellite television broadcasting free-to-air direct-to-home single channel)	23	7	16
10.	Digital terrestrial television additional services (eg. Teletext, etc)	0	0	0
11.	Digital terrestrial mobile television service (stand-alone authorisation)	0	0	0
12.	Digital cable television	1	0	1
13.	Television over internet protocol (pay TV)	0	0	0
Total no. of authorised TV stations		62	30	32

Source: National Communication Authority, 2015

playing critical roles in both the historical and socio-political development of the Ghanaian political systems.

By 6 March 1957 when Ghana became an independent nation, only 11 newspapers were in production. These were Catholic Voice (established in 1926), Ashanti Pioneer (1939), Gold Coast Weekly Bulletin (1939–1940), Ashanti Times (1947), Ghana Evening News (1948), Daily Graphic (1950), Sunday Mirror (1954), Daily Mail (1955), Liberator (1955), West African Worker (1956) and New Nation (1956). There were only one television station and a national radio broadcasting station that is the state-owned broadcasting corporation, GBC Television and GBC Radio. Today, the media landscape has greatly changed with over 430 public and private radio stations dotted all over the country; over 20 TV stations mostly private ones apart from the GBC TV and several newspapers in production now than before. See the Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

Following the dominant paradigm of communication and development of nations (Schramm 1964), governments all over the world have considered radio and television as key media outlets for national development. This is particularly so in SSA countries after independence in the 1960s. Thus, the post-colonial rule in SSA nations is usually pursued by one-party systems using the rare and sparse media to create authoritarian governments and authoritarian press systems. The resultant political climate usually pushes journalists to align themselves with the government and other strong political parties as propagandists rather than serving their role as watchdogs over government actions and of peoples' rights (Ansah 1991). This explains why the 'Accra Evening News', established by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in September 1948 as the Convention Peoples' Party's mouthpiece played faithfully to that function. In fact, Dr. Nkrumah believed in the media's role as a persuasive frame that on establishing the Accra Evening News, he declared: "Personally, I failed to see how any liberation movement could possibly succeed without an effective means of broadcasting its policy to the rank and file of the people" (Nkrumah 1957, p. 76).

Political Media and the Use of Propaganda

Over the past few decades, greater parts of the Ghanaian media have sought to support and project the voices of some particular political parties. They have done so amidst a campaign environment in which sponsored campaign ads have become more and more negative (Fowler and Ridout 2011, 2013) playing mischief and propaganda rather than educating and informing the citizens through fair and neutral ways (McQuail 1992). The aims of these media are rather to use the mass media towards their preferences of political parties and to strengthen their desired party or candidate.

Propaganda is a contentious subject matter in the political arena with negative connotations. As a result, there are many definitions attributed to the word. Ellul (1968: 61) describes propaganda as:

A set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulation and incorporated in an organization.

For Jowett and O'Donnell (1992: 271), propaganda can be defined as:

The deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.

Propaganda in itself is not a bad thing when used positively, as it is a conventional communication product used by communicators to influence spectators and listeners. It has always existed and will always be with us (Jowett and O'Donnell 1992). However, when the press or people decide to employ it as a “disinformation” or a negative persuasive technique that is based on forgeries and staged events to harm the opposition and win the masses over, it becomes a bad thing. This is what is invented by the political press in Ghana. The aligned political media has perfected its reportage as an instrument of sensationalism in order to effectuate or galvanise support for their preferred political

parties. Hence, portions of the Ghanaian political media have from time to time come under criticisms by media analysts for fanning ethnic, religious, and above of all, political tensions in the country.

This chapter examines the way the Ghanaian media deliberately use propaganda to arouse public emotions in lieu of political communication and public relations that are based on developmental journalism.

Empirical Approach

Our data set draws on press publications of two private newspapers in circulation both in print and online. The main objective is to carry out a thematic content analysis of how these two newspapers (The Ghanaian Lens and The Daily Guide) in Ghana report key or important national issues differently over a specific period of time with limits to their verbal and written political rhetoric. Specifically, we focused on the language of reporting by these two newspapers and paying particular attention to their writing styles which are capable of whipping the emotions of the electorate. Table 2.3 presents a few examples of how the

Table 2.3 Samples of headline reporting by the two papers

Date	Newspaper	
	The Daily Guide	The Ghanaian Lens
7/01/16	NDC chases Bawumia (front page), story on page 3	Arrest Bawumia.....for falsifying electoral register—NDC (front page), story on page 4
8/01/16	Ghanaians reject Al-Qaeda terrorists, Page 5	Guantanamo suspects no threat to Ghana—Govt, Page 3
13/01/16	Gitmo terrorist were Al-Qaeda foot soldiers—Minister, Page 6	Gitmo duo: 'No need to panic—Hanna Tetteh, Page 4
15/01/16	Economic outlook still complicated—IMF, Page 11	IMF impressed with Ghana's economy but warns of risks, Page 7
	NPP Blasts EC, Page 2	EC's response on 76,000 Togolese mindboggling—NPP, Page 6
03/02/16	Create Jobs.....Italian PM tells Mahama (front page) story on page 2	President Mahama to EU: Create Jobs for African Youth.....To reduce migration to Europe (front page) story on page 3

two newspapers report and present the same news items to the electorate.

The choice of these two newspapers for this research is appropriate in the sense that ‘The Ghanaian Lens’ has always been the mouthpiece of the NDC Party, while ‘The Daily Guide’ has continuously served as the mouthpiece of the NPP Party. The two papers not only routinely propagate the messages of their political benefactors, but they consistently attack each other. Analysing the content through their transcripts is appropriate in communication research and reflects scholars’ interest in what the papers choose to talk about. This work, however, is concerned with the frequency and occasions of the style of news presentations made by these newspapers. A thematic content analysis was therefore used to gather information based on the objective of this work. A pile of the two newspapers spanning four months circulation yielded 30 pieces each that we used to collect the data. The data were then supplemented with radio messages grounded in the political rhetoric of politicians and their supporters to better understand the agenda-setting functions of the political press in building a tense Ghanaian environment with propaganda. Our analysis yielded three main key categories as follows:

- The nature and intensity of news reporting,
- The political alignment factor and its influence on reporting,
- Freedom of expression.

Results and Discussions

The study investigated the presentations of mass-mediated information on political reporting issues, and trends in news coverage and media content related to public concerns of the two newspapers aligned to the two major political parties in Ghana—NDC and NPP. The results showed carefully designed propaganda messages communicated through news stories to the general public that can steer public emotions. It was also noted that “Wireless” radio transmission was considered by the two major parties (NDC and NPP) to be the new medium for shaping public attitudes, perceptions and provoking public emotions through

call-ins. Consequently, every Saturday morning from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., the parties are fully represented in the two major talk-shows: 'Alhaji & Alhaji' by Radio Gold FM, and 'News File' by Joy FM Radio. These two talk-shows are very political in nature and almost serve as forum for political debate between the two parties in which their foot soldiers call in to reinforce the propaganda and steering further political emotions. Though the two FM stations are based in Accra—the capital city—broadcasting is diffused nationwide through interconnection of several affiliated FM stations of Radio Gold and Joy FM.

On the nature and intensity of their news reporting the findings showed that the two papers focused on the presidency and his government more than economic matters that would seem beneficial to the populace. Whilst the Daily Guide concentrated on a negative reportage on the government and the president, the Ghanaian Lens focused on praising and paying tribute to the president and what his government was doing. This depends on the period in which a political party is in power. So the table turns around if the opposing party wins political power. In fact, the nature and intensity of the two papers were based on strong language usage which seems to be whipping the sentiments of the audience. For instance, the constant use of unpleasant and unacceptable expressions in bold face and caps to demonstrate the intensity of their messages.

The distinction between the two newspapers was highlighted by their reporting styles focused on propaganda: the two papers both serve as propagators to their aligned political parties by exaggerating the good deeds of their parties and at the same time spewing negative and unsubstantiated reportage on their opposing political parties. The Ghanaian Lens' use of pleasant and reverent reportage on the NDC and its presidential candidate and very strong negative words on the NPP and its presidential candidate demonstrates the nature and character of its news reporting. Similarly, the Daily Guide's concentration on the use of negative headlines and satirical photographs in the forms of cartoons of key politicians of the NDC coupled with undesirable and discourteous language on the NDC's presidential candidate's family reveals the nature of its news reporting. In most cases, the cartoons are represented in a way that one can easily discern the political figures it characterises describing

them with innuendoes and detestable materials. Thus, the concentration of news reporting of the two papers was more of throwing salvos of innuendos at the opposing political party rather than engaging in developmental journalism.

On the political alignment of the two papers and how it influences their reporting, findings showed that political lineage dictated strongly the reporting styles of the two papers. The interest in partisan politics was illustrated by the number of positive news stories on the front-page editions dedicated to politics as compared to social and economic news. Whilst, most Ghanaian *Lens*' front page stories exemplified positive news stories about the NDC government's activities and putting next to negative news stories of the opposition NPP, the *Daily Guide* elaborated its front page stories on positive happenings of the NPP and contrasting them with negative incidents of the NDC. Strong political alignment of the media and press systems within a nation state means enhancing and persuading the ideologies of the political parties through framing and not paying attention to accuracy, objectivity, fairness and bias. This does not encourage developmental journalism, but rather a destructive media which may not be good for a developing nation.

On the freedom of expression, the Constitution of Ghana guarantees freedom and independence of the media (Article 162:1), disallows press censorship (Article 162:2), outlaws impediments on the media (Article 162:3) prohibits and controls interference or media harassment (Article 162:4). These provisions have allowed journalism and therefore the Ghanaian newspapers to enjoy a large amount of space to be critical and confrontational to political issues. Albeit the regulatory provision in the same constitution's guaranteeing privacy, libel and the intolerance of obscenity as checks and control of the Ghanaian media, the type of journalism evident in the coverage of the two newspapers appears more militant and shaping strong propaganda than developmental journalism. Aligning with the government and supporting all what it does without serious scrutiny, and equally, opposing the government and being hostile to all what it does without a serious examination are tantamount to 'a systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist' (Jowett and O'Donnell 1992). This kind

of journalism is counterproductive in emerging economies since most of their reportages are based on lack of evidence and negative news. Thus, their lack of credibility in serving as the fourth state of the realm intended to positively inform and educate the public.

According to McQuail (1992), the output of quality journalism and press is enshrined in measures like accuracy, factualness, completeness and impartiality. This is in dissonance with the findings of this work. The major findings show the lack of balance (that is impartiality and fairness to both sides), objectivity, bias, framing and news selection criterion of the two newspapers. The character of language and expression in the presentation of these newspapers, especially in their front pages, was modelled in persuasive propaganda associated with militant ideology rather than genuine political communication and public relations. The essence of political communication and public relations is to assist in the transmission of developmental communication rather than propagating negative emotional sentiments that can likely degenerate a nation into chaos.

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Author Biography

James B. Abugre is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Ghana Business School. His areas of expertise include Human Resource Management and Communication. James focuses on interaction of actors in resolving effective human resource development and management in institutions. He holds a Ph.D. in International Human Resource Management from Swansea University, UK.

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