An Analysis of the Causes and Implications of Media and National Security Disconnect in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the media and national security in Ghana has been fraught with tension, with accusations of misinformation, lack of access, and undue interference. This paper examined the causes and implications of the disconnect between the media and national security in Ghana. The study employed a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews with key informants from the media and national security agencies. The study found that the disconnect is rooted in factors such as lack of trust, inadequate communication, competing interests and lack of national security policy. The study argues that the failure to establish trust and bridge the disconnect between security agencies and the public can have detrimental consequences. The study recommends that government establishes effective and regular channels of communication between the media and national security agencies for effective collaboration for national security.

Keywords: Disconnect, Ghana, Media, Misinformation, Security.

I. INTRODUCTION

The interconnectivity of the contemporary world has made the correlation between media and national security a pivotal factor in influencing public opinion, democratic procedures, and the general welfare of a country. A rising issue has surfaced in Ghana regarding a perceived disconnect between the media and the country's national security apparatus. Ghana has gained recognition for its dynamic media landscape and dedication to democratic principles. However, there has been a growing disconnect between the media's function as a source of information and the endeavors of national security agencies to protect the country from both domestic and foreign hazards. The lack of coordination between the media and national security measures has resulted in a multifaceted array of difficulties, affecting the precision of media reporting and the efficacy of national security efforts.

Disconnect in the context of this paper refers to a lack of connection or coherence between the media and the national security with regards to communication, relationships, or systems. According to Owusu (2016), disconnect in the context of national security and media relationship, is when a deficiency in comprehension, communication, or synchronization between the media and national security agencies concerning matters of national security.

National security and the media are important institutions in national management. National security has been perceived from different lenses by many scholars due to the meaning many countries and governments associate to it (Jones & Smith, 2020). According to Loch (2007) and Smith (2020), it is what states do to protect their territorial boundaries, resources, citizens and interests, from external and internal threats or aggression. In achieving these affairs, the media as a set of institutions and technologies that produce and distribute messages and meanings to a mass audience (McQuail, 2010; Chadha & Kavoori, 2017), play a vital role.

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Media according to Brown, (2018), is generally considered to include all forms of communication through which people receive information and news about national security issues. Therefore, in this context, media refers specifically to the news media and digital/social media platforms.

De Silva (2019), noted that the relationship between the media and national security can be complex and challenging. The media has an obligation to report on issues of public interest, including topics related to national security at the same time provide open-source intelligence to national security agencies (De Silva, 2019; Jones & Smith, 2019). However, Schudson (2013) argues that the government and national security agencies are responsible for safeguarding classified information and ensuring national security is not compromised, making their relationship fragile. However, researchers suggest, these two can work to serve their purposes without comprising each other’s roles (Kirtley & Rosenzweig, 2016).

The disconnect between the media and national security can have significant implications due to factors such as the need for secrecy in national security matters and the lack of understanding and expertise of the media in reporting on security events. This can result in a lack of transparency and accountability in national security matters, which can lead to unethical behavior by national security officials and a lack of public understanding and support for national security policies (Jervis, 2017). Moreover, if the media cannot accurately report on national security matters, it can lead to public confusion and mistrust. In a number of nations, including France, the United States, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda, there have been issues with the media's relationship to national security (Khan, 2017; Nwankwo & Asemah, 2016; Birnbaum, 2018; Watts et al., 2018). Due to foreign actors' use of social media to disseminate propaganda and meddle in US national security issues, the rise of social media has made the situation even more problematic (Watts et al., 2018). The Nigerian and Senegalese governments have come under fire for a lack of transparency and prejudice in how they handle security concerns (Adeniran & Azeez, 2020; Ndiaye, 2018), while the French government has expressed concern about the role of the media in ensuring national security (Birnbaum, 2018). According to several studies (Musila, 2021; Busingye, 2021; Ssemuju, 2021), Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya have similarly experienced limitations in press freedom and have been accused of sensationalized reporting on national security matters due to the fragile relationship between the media and governments. These instances demonstrate how media coverage of national security issues and attempts to foster stability and resolve security risks can be at odds.

In this situation, Ghana is not exempted. There have been instances of disconnect between the two, with claims and denials of misbehavior, sensationalization, and secrecy, despite the fact that the link between national security and the media is regarded as being important for maintaining peace and security in the country. For instance, in 2019, the Ghana Police Service expressed dissatisfaction with the media’s coverage of a security operation in the Upper East region, accusing the media of exaggerating the situation and creating unnecessary fear among the public (Kwakye, 2019). Same in 2019, the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) accused some media houses of peddling falsehoods and propaganda against the government and its agencies. The NSCS claimed that the media was promoting a negative image of the government and undermining its efforts to ensure national security (Ghana News Agency [GNA], 2019). Similarly, in 2020, the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) criticized the media for publishing inaccurate and misleading information about a military exercise in the Western region, which they said could compromise national security (GNA, 2020). Additionally, there have also been instances where media organizations have been threatened by governmental bodies and where journalists have been physically assaulted. In other instance, the media in Ghana has accused national security agencies of being secretive and uncooperative, which makes it difficult for them to report accurately on national security matters (Ackah & Ninsin, 2016). Furthermore, in 2019, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) called on the government to be more transparent and accountable in matters relating to national security, arguing that the lack of access to information was hindering the media's ability to report effectively on national security issues (GJA, 2019).

It is against this backdrop, this paper sort to provide an answer to a question as to what are the causes and implications of the disconnect between the media and national security in Ghana, and how can policymakers address the factors contributing to this tension? The primary objective of this paper is to examine the underlying reasons for the disconnection between the media and national security apparatuses in Ghana. It aims to identify the key factors that contribute to the development of mistrust between these entities, analyze the potential implications on national security, and propose viable solutions for policymakers to address the issue.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is supported by agenda setting and securitization theories. The two theories complement each other to explain the phenomenon of the disconnect between the media and the national security.

1) Agenda setting theory

The utilization of the Agenda Setting Theory elucidated the dynamics expounded upon in the present investigation. According to the theory, the media possesses the ability to mound public perception and impact the prominence of issues within society by selectively highlighting and emphasizing certain topics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The article highlights the significant role played by the media's agenda-setting function in shaping the public's understanding and priorities with regard to national security and media coverage. The media's editorial choices pertaining to the selection, presentation, and prioritization of news stories can exert a significant impact on public sentiment, policy deliberations, and the operational conduct of state security apparatuses. Through the application of the Agenda Setting Theory, the study examined the underlying factors that gave rise to the observed disconnection, highlighting the role of the media's agenda-setting power, or its absence thereof. In the event that the media places emphasis on sensationalized news or concentrates primarily on specific facets of national security, it could result in an inequity in the public's perception and comprehension, which may further intensify the disconnection (Owusu, 2016). Furthermore, the ramifications of this disconnection were elucidated through the lens of the Agenda Setting Theory. Insufficient coverage or contextualization of national security matters by the media can result in deficient public awareness, misinterpretation, or skepticism. On the other hand, proficient agenda-setting carried out by the media can promote knowledgeable dialogues, civic participation, and ultimately aid in narrowing the divide between media and matters related to national security. This study, therefore, utilized the Agenda Setting Theory to examine the disconnect between the media and national security in Ghana. It presented a framework to comprehend how the media's function in shaping public discourse and setting the agenda can impact the dynamics, challenges, and implications discussed in the context of Ghana's socio-political landscape.

2) Securitization theory

The application of Securitization Theory can provide insights into the disconnect between media and national security in Ghana (Copenhagen School of Security Studies) (Hansen et al., 2013). This theory focuses on framing specific issues as security concerns, leading to extraordinary measures and resource allocation to address perceived threats. In this study, Securitization Theory is used to examine the divergence between media and national security in Ghana by analyzing the framing and securitization of issues by relevant actors. Authority figures can shape narratives that portray certain matters as security-related, influencing public perception and policy reactions (Buzan et al., 1998). The study investigates how media organizations and national security agencies in Ghana securitize or de-securitize specific issues. Sensationalism or inadequate coverage of national security matters by the media can lead to securitization, where such issues are not seen as urgent. Conversely, when national security agencies prioritize certain threats or securitize specific issues, it can create a disconnect with media reporting. This disconnect can hinder communication, public understanding, and collaboration. However, effective securitization and communication by both media and national security agencies can foster public support, policy consistency, and a collective understanding of prevailing challenges.

B. Conceptual Framework

1) Concept of transparency in national security

Transparency, rooted in the Enlightenment era, is relevant to national security policies and practices as it prevents abuses of power and promotes the common good (Johnston, 2007; Dempsey, 2013). Transparency refers to how open actors, institutions, and processes are to public scrutiny and oversight, and it is believed to enhance trust, cooperation, and confidence among states in national security (Dempsey, 2013). Transparency is a crucial aspect of any democratic system, particularly in the context of national security and media, where it refers to the level of openness and accountability that security agencies should have towards the public (Dempsey, 2013). While transparency can enhance trust, promote cooperation, and build confidence among states, some argue that it contradicts the core nature of national security, which is based on secrecy and confidentiality to protect sensitive information (Johnston, 2007). As national security agencies are responsible for protecting the country from internal and external threats, their actions can have a significant impact on citizens' lives (Dempsey, 2013). The concept of transparency will be used in this paper to help shed light on the practices and policies of national security agencies in Ghana and promote greater public oversight and accountability.
2) Ghana’s national security architecture

The National Security Council (NSC) is a crucial component of Ghana’s national security architecture and advises the President on security matters. It is composed of the President, Vice-President, Ministers of Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, National Security, and the Chief of Defense Staff (Obuoforibo, 2018). The National Security Secretariat coordinates all security agencies in Ghana and is responsible for developing and implementing security policies and providing intelligence to the NSC (Asante, 2020).

The Ghana Armed Forces defend Ghana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity (Opare & Asante, 2018). Other security agencies include the Ghana Police Service, Ghana Immigration Service, Ghana National Fire Service, and the Bureau of National Investigations (Osei-Tutu, 2020). Concerns have been raised about human rights abuses and excessive use of force by some security agencies, leading to the establishment of a National Security Commission to oversee security agency activities and ensure compliance with the law (Asante, 2020). Laws have also been enacted to protect citizens’ rights and ensure transparency and accountability in security agency operations (Obuoforibo, 2018; Opare & Asante, 2018). However, there is still a tension between the media and security apparatuses.

3) Media and national security disconnect: the situation in Ghana

In Ghana, there is a disconnect between the media and national security agencies, with accusations on both sides. The media is accused of sensationalizing security matters, while agencies are criticized for being secretive. In 2019 and 2020, security agencies criticized the media for publishing inaccurate information, while the Journalists Association called for government transparency for effective reporting (Kwakye, 2019; 2020; Ackah & Ninsin, 2016, p.113).

In recent years, there has been a surge in incidents of security personnel brutalizing media organizations and journalists in Ghana. The Ghana Journalists Association reported 47 incidents of attacks on journalists between January and June 2020 alone, ranging from physical assaults, verbal abuse, and intimidation to confiscation of equipment and destruction of properties. Some high-profile incidents include the brutalization of two journalists from the ModernGhana news website by police officers in March 2019 and the physical assault and equipment confiscation of journalists from the Ghanaian Times newspaper by military personnel in September 2020. In 2021, personnel of National Security Secretariats allegedly intimidated and abandoned two journalists from Citi News in a facility in Accra. Additionally, in 2019, the National Communications Authority shut down two radio stations, Radio Gold and Radio XYZ, allegedly for operating without authorization, which was criticized by media organizations and civil society groups as an attack on media freedom. (GJA, 2020; Ghanaian Times, 2020; Al Jazeera, 2021; Mensah, 2021; Daily Graphic, 2019).

The media, on the hand, launched attacks on national security apparatuses. These attacks have ranged from allegations of corruption and misconduct to claims of human rights violations. In 2018, investigative journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas released a documentary alleging that some officials of the GAF were engaged in bribery and corruption. The documentary, which was widely publicized, led to the arrest and dismissal of several military officers (Abugri, 2018). Similarly, in 2019, the National Investigation Bureau (NIB) was accused of torturing some suspects in their custody. The media, particularly social media, was awash with graphic images of the alleged victims. According to Gyasi (2019), the incident led to calls for the overhaul of the NIB and a review of its mandate (Gyasi, 2019). The Ghana Police Service has also come under heavy criticism from the media and the public for its poor handling of violent crimes, particularly armed robbery. Some media outlets have accused the police of incompetence, corruption, and human rights violations (GhanaWeb, 2019). The disconnect between the media and national security can have significant implications for media freedom in Ghana (Amoah, 2019; Boateng, 2017). Amoah (2019) argues that the media’s role as a watchdog and its ability to hold those in power accountable is critical for the functioning of a democratic society. According to him, when the media is perceived as a threat to national security, it can lead to a crackdown on media freedom, where journalists are harassed, intimidated, or even jailed for their work. According Boateng (2017), this can have a chilling effect on the media and lead to self-censorship, where journalists avoid reporting on sensitive issues for fear of retribution (Boateng, 2017). Another implication of the disconnect is the potential for abuse of power. National security agencies may use their power to intimidate or harass journalists who report on national security matters, leading to self-censorship and a lack of critical reporting (Tettey & Sakyi-Dawson, 2018). Moreover, Media Foundation for West Africa-MFWA, (2019), argue that the restriction of the media to access accurate information could lead to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which could consequently affect for national security (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2019). These incidents raise concerns about the relationship between the media and national security in Ghana and also come with its implications. It is against this backdrop, this sort to investigate what could possibly be the hidden causes and possible implications of the disconnect between the media and national security in Ghana. The paper also sorts to find out the causal factors that could possibly lead to the mistrust between the two entities and suggest remedies for policymakers to adopt.
C. Empirical Review

This phenomenon has drawn the attention of academicians in Ghana. Frimpong and Dickson (2018) conducted a study that critically analyzed the relationship between media, national security, and the public interest in Ghana. Through in-depth interviews with journalists, civil society organizations, and national security officials, the authors found that the media in Ghana face a dilemma between their duty to inform the public and their responsibility to safeguard national security. They identified several factors that contribute to the media and national security disconnect in Ghana, including the lack of a clear legal framework, inadequate training for journalists, and the lack of trust and cooperation between the two groups. Further, Anyimadu and Mensah (2019), conducted a study on the disconnect between the media, national security, and cybersecurity in Ghana.

The authors used a qualitative research design and collected data through in-depth interviews with journalists, cybersecurity experts, and national security officials. The findings revealed that the media in Ghana have a limited understanding of cybersecurity issues, which hinders their ability to report accurately on national security issues. The study also showed that national security agencies in Ghana do not provide journalists with adequate information on cybersecurity issues, contributing to the media and national security disconnect. Moreover, Ofosu (2020), conducted a study in Ghana on the relationship between the media and national security. Using a qualitative research design and in-depth interviews, the author found that there is a lack of trust and understanding between the two entities. National security officials perceive the media as more interested in sensational stories, while journalists argue that they do not receive sufficient information from national security agencies to report on national security issues. Another study by Ofosu (2021) on the role of the media in national security in Ghana, focused on the 2018 Ghana-US Military Agreement. The author found that the media played a significant role in shaping public opinion on the agreement, but there was a lack of trust and cooperation between the media and national security agencies. The disconnect was due to the perception of national security officials that the media were biased in their reporting and did not present a balanced view of the agreement.

The above reviewed research papers suggest that there is a disconnect between the media and national security agencies in Ghana. This disconnect is attributed to several factors, including the lack of trust and understanding between the two groups (Frimpong & Dickson, 2018; Ofosu, 2021), inadequate legal and regulatory frameworks for regulating the relationship between the media and national security agencies (Frimpong & Dickson, 2018), and inadequate training for journalists on national security reporting (Anyimadu & Mensah, 2019; Frimpong & Dickson, 2018). The findings of the studies suggest that there is a need for greater cooperation and collaboration between the media and national security agencies in Ghana to bridge the disconnect and ensure that the public is properly informed on national security issues. However, none of them addressed the issue of the need for understanding each other’s work, education on each other’s duties and responsibilities and its possible implications on national security.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research approach. The aim of the study was to explore the factors contributing to the disconnect between the media and national security, such as lack of trust, inadequate communication, and competing interests, and the implications for national security, including potential misinformation, compromised intelligence gathering, and public mistrust of security agencies. The choice of the qualitative approach was based on the nature of the study and the need for a deeper understanding of the disconnect. The multiple case study design was used, with purposive sampling technique employed to select participants with adequate knowledge about the relationship between the media and national security.

B. Study Area

The study was limited to Ghana, a country in West Africa with a diverse population of over 31 million people and a mixed economy that includes agriculture, mining, and services. Ghana is known for its production of cocoa, gold, and oil and has made significant progress in education, health, and human development. The country is also a member of several international organizations. Ghana was chosen as the study location due to reported incidents of misunderstandings between the media and national security agencies, with scholars highlighting the challenges and opportunities that exist in their relationship, including incidents of censorship, harassment, and intimidation (Ackah, 2016; Adjei, 2018). These studies highlight the need for a better understanding of the factors that contribute to conflicts and misunderstandings between the media and national security agencies in Ghana.

There are still underlying factors that keep the relationship between the two fragile. There is therefore the need for further studies to unravel the hidden causal factor to bridge the gap. The location of Ghana provides the researcher to conveniently map out participants (see Fig. 1).
C. Sampling Procedure

1) Sampling techniques

Quota sampling was employed to divide the country into three geographic zones: Northern, middle, and southern belts. This was necessary as it will enable a comparison of issues across the zones with regards to the phenomenon and its effect on national security. After the division, purposive sampling technique was used to select individuals with knowledge of the subject matter in the zones for interviews to be conducted.

2) Sample size

The sample size was determined via a non-statistical means. In all, 45 participants were purposively selected across the zones. See Table I for the breakdown of the sample size for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Unit</th>
<th>Northern Zone</th>
<th>Middle Zone</th>
<th>Southern Zone</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Intelligence Unit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Security Personnel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghana Immigration Service</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Intelligence Unit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Manager/News editors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Security Experts/Analyst</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Members of the Public/Citizens</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>Female FGD</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Fieldwork, 2022

D. Data Collection Methods and Analysis

The data collection involved interviews and focus group discussions, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The first step in analyzing the data involved providing a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases. Strict ethical measures were applied to protect the privacies of all participants. One major limitation of this study was the challenge in speaking to security personnel since all protocols were to be observed. However, we were able to overcome this challenge by observing all of the required protocols such as provision of introductory letters and booking of appointments for interviews.
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of this section presents the results on the causes of the disconnect between the media and national security in Ghana. This laid a foundation for the implications of the disconnect and how policy makers can address the causal factors contributing to the phenomenon.

A. Factors Causing the Disconnect Between Media and National Security

1) Limited trust and skepticism as a factor contributing to the disconnect

The study found that, there was a notable absence of trust between these two entities. According to a key informant interview, the Police have acted in ways that raises issues of trust and this complicates their cordial relationship. To buttress this, an instance of sabotage was cited in which a joint operation between the personnel of the Ghana Immigration and the Ghana Police resulted in betray. The key informant said:

- During a joint operation with the police, illegal Chinese immigrants and miners were arrested in the Wassa-Akropong community, in this region (Western region). However, the police went against the original plan and detained them for seven days, during which they reportedly extorted money from them (Interview with key informant, Takoradi, April 18, 2023).

Another key informant in the central region cites a case of sabotage within the Ghana Police Service, when the Director-General of the Criminal Investigations Department was given wrong information about the whereabouts of missing girls and announced that they had been found, causing public outrage when it was later revealed that the girls were not alive. The key informant remarked:

- (…) they plotted against the woman and spread the hoax in the media and later on turn to say it was the media which reported half-truth without probing beyond the CID boss (Interview with key informant, Cape Coast, April 22, 2023).

In the same vein, key informants from the media dimension provided accounts of how politicians covertly leaked classified information to the media pertaining to national security for their own political benefits. According one key informant, there was a leaked document from the foreign affairs committee in parliament on Ghana-US Military bilateral agreement in 2018. A leading politician in the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) made copies of the report and handed it to the media which exposed the national security arrangement to the public, leading to fear among the people. This means the politician was only interested in making the ruling government unpopular without considering its implication on national security. The key informant said:

- When he got the information, he was not concerned about the implication, he had by then made arrangements with news editors and political analyst to make rattle on the negative side of the agreement. Unfortunately, what the politicians do not know was that this agreement was not new; it was an agreement in 1996 under Rawlings, renewed in 2015 under Mahama administration, and now 2018 under Nana Akuffo Addo (Interview with key informant in a radio station, Accra, April 18, 2023).

This confirms the effect of polarization in the detriment of the relationship between the media and national security.

2) Differing objectives as a factor contributing to the disconnect

Another factor causing the disconnect between the media and national security is what we described as differing objectives they both have. The media's primary objective is to inform the public and uphold transparency and accountability. On the other hand, the national security apparatus aims to protect national interests, maintain confidentiality, and safeguard sensitive operations. These contrasting goals can sometimes create tensions and a perceived disconnect. In addition, the legal framework governing national security and a limited understanding of each other's roles and how they should collectively serve national interests were the underlying issues causing the disconnect. One key informant remarked:

- The Ghanaian constitution mandates security agencies to operate covertly and maintain secrecy. Security personnel are bound by oaths of secrecy and breaching it could lead to legal consequences. Thus, sharing classified information with the media is unrealistic (Interview with key informant, Accra, April 18, 2023).

The statement reflects the influence of securitization theory, which asserts that the primary security actor holds the authority to define security issues. It emphasizes that security is not an objective quality but rather a subjective construct determined by those in power. In this case, national security, as the primary security actor, operates covertly and exercises discretion in identifying events as security matters. The study further established that, the security apparatuses do not hold the media in high regard and view it as a potentially detrimental tool to their operations. A key informant remarked:

- The media people are supposed to be our allies, but their role is not to understand how the police or the security ensure safety. They should wait until we deem it necessary to provide them with any information, and then we will contact them (Interview with key informant, Police intelligence officer, Accra, April 18, 2023).
The study contends that these competing interests contribute to the disconnect between the media and national security agencies. The media's commitment to investigative journalism and holding security agencies accountable posed a challenge to the agencies' autonomy and authority. In response, security agencies adopted a defensive stance, limiting their engagement with the media and withholding certain information. This further widens the gap and hampers effective communication and collaboration between the two entities.

3) Limited access and transparency as a factor contributing to the disconnect

The study discovered that the relationship between the media and national security agencies is strained due to limited access and transparency on the part of the security agencies. National security agencies may restrict media access to certain information, locations, or individuals due to security concerns. This limited access can hinder journalists' ability to provide comprehensive coverage, leading to a perceived disconnect between the media and national security apparatus. The media perceives that decisions made by the security services are shrouded in secrecy, leading to a lack of understanding of the operations of the security agencies by the public. Additionally, the absence of an independent entity to investigate the excesses of security services contributes to the disconnect. A focus group discussion revealed that, there is a recurring pattern where the police promise to conduct investigations following clashes with the public. However, the lack of transparency in the investigation process and the absence of disciplinary actions against police officers involved raises doubt about the credibility of these investigations.

Moreover, the study argues that the lack of independent investigations into security officers' brutality on the public further eroded the trust. While there is a police professional body, the Police Intelligence and Professional Standards (PIPBS), established to receive and investigate public complaints about misconduct by members of the police, there have been no positive outcomes from many complaints from the public over the years. The absence of accountability and transparency in the management of police misconduct has eroded public trust in the security agencies. A personal experience was shared of an officer's misconduct being reported but with no follow-up or outcome communicated. During a focus group session, a participant residing in the central area shared her experience, stating that they were physically assaulted by a law enforcement officer while at a restaurant. However, upon reporting the incident, they were informed that an investigation would be conducted. After a considerable period of time, some individuals were approached regarding the occurrence, but no action was taken. Seeking further information, the participant approached the police inspector once again, only to be informed that the officer in question had been relocated to a different location. As participant expressed, “I was beaten by the officer, but nothing came out of it, so for me, I will never report any case to the police in my life.”

The study further revealed that, the recent allegations of abuse on journalists and citizens, such as the case of Caleb Kuda of Citi FM, who suffered physical abuse by national security personnel in Accra, the Ayawaso West Wuogon police brutality incident, and the Ejura case, which resulted in the death of resident known as Kaaka, have brought the issue of security agencies misconduct to the forefront, further deteriorating the trust. The study further argues that the absence of an ombudsman to investigate these abuses feeds into the mistrust between the media and national security agencies. As a result, the public prefer to volunteer information to the media instead of the security agencies on security incidents and excesses, and the media in turn do not report these incidents to the security agencies. Rather the media bring such issues into the realm of public discussion to court public sympathy on their part, contributing to the long-held perception by the public that the security services are not to be trusted.

4) Communication gap as a factor contributing to the disconnect

The study revealed that there is a notable issue of inadequate communication between the media and national security agencies in Ghana. This lack of effective communication serves as a significant contributing factor to the disconnect between the two entities. Media practitioners and security analysts shared similar arguments. According to a key informant in Tamale, “it is essential to have collaboration between the media and security apparatuses. However, the current situation does not reflect that. There is a complete absence of communication between the two entities.” Another key informant in one of the Radio stations in Tamale in the northern region voiced concerns about the national security agencies' lack of communication with the media and the public: “This lack of communication places the media in a position where they can only provide limited information on security-related matters.”

Within the security agencies, the study found that while some senior staff members acknowledge the importance of providing information to the media for public consumption, they often fail to do so. This failure stems from their perception that the media is not of significant importance or relevance to their operations. A participant in Accra expressed:

While we recognize the media's importance in national security management, security agencies emphasize that their role is limited. The media is only needed for specific message conveyance, but relying on them for broader national security information dissemination is deemed unnecessary as it disrupts operations (Interview with a participant, Accra, 18 April 2023).
On the other hand, the media itself reported that national security agencies tend to neglect the need for collaboration and engagement with them. According to a reporter from Joy FM in Accra:

"The security agencies frequently overlook the media as a means of conveying information, primarily because they believe the media is an adversary to their operations. The lack of communication is not helping either of us because we are working for a national interest (interview with a key informant, Accra, 18 April 2023)."

The statements suggest the lack of communication between the media and national security agencies. This hinders accurate information dissemination, public awareness, and compromises national security and well-being.

B. Implications of the Disconnect

1) Creation of potential for misinformation

The disconnect between the media and national security agencies creates a potential for misinformation. The media may publish inaccurate or incomplete information because they lack access to reliable sources, while national security agencies may withhold or distort information to maintain their image or protect national security interests. This disconnect poses a significant risk as it opens the door for inaccurate or incomplete information to be disseminated to the public.

One contributing factor according to the study is the emergence of potential misinformation as a consequence of the limited access the media has to reliable sources within the national security agencies. Without direct communication and collaboration, the media may have to rely on unofficial or secondhand information, which increases the likelihood of inaccuracies or gaps in their reporting. The focus groups and participants shared a common viewpoint, stating that limited information from both the security agencies and the media is a significant contributing factor to the prevalence of misinformation on social media. A key informant in a prominent TV station said, "The lack of information by national security agencies is equally worrying because, when the media need information on security incident and lacks it, they will be compelled to provide half-truth". The study argues that the lack of a direct line of communication hinders their ability to verify and cross-reference information, leading to potential errors in their coverage.

Moreover, the study revealed that the national security agencies themselves may contribute to the potential for misinformation. In an effort to maintain their image or protect national security interests, they may choose to withhold or manipulate information. This can be done intentionally to control the narrative surrounding certain incidents or to prevent the disclosure of sensitive operational details. According to a security analyst based in Tamale, there are instances where the security agencies intentionally withhold information to manipulate public perception. The analyst stated that "due to the media's reliance on information, misinformation in the media regarding national security-related matters becomes unavoidable". The study argues that such actions, whether deliberate or unintentional, can further exacerbate the disconnect and lead to a distortion of the truth.

The arguments presented align with agenda setting theory and security. Agenda setting theory posits that the media shape public opinion by selecting and emphasizing certain topics. In the context of security, accurate information flow is vital to align the media agenda with national security goals. Lack of accurate information can lead to a contradictory media agenda and the spread of misinformation, negatively impacting national security.

2) Compromise of intelligence gathering for national security

In exploring the level, the disconnect effects on intelligence gathering in Ghana, the study discovered that the disconnect further has detrimental effects on intelligence gathering. By not fostering collaboration and open communication, valuable intelligence opportunities are compromised. Consistent views were expressed by all participants, including focus groups, throughout the study area regarding the detrimental impact of limited information sharing on intelligence gathering. One example of compromised intelligence gathering is the media's role as a source of information. The study argued that with its extensive reach and ability to interact with citizens, the media serve as a valuable channel for gathering crucial information that can aid national security efforts. However, the paper contends that in the absence of trust and effective communication, security agencies may not have access to this valuable information. An Accra based key informant expressed, "Instances where citizens witness or become aware of potential security threats may go unreported, as they may be reluctant to share such information with agencies they perceive as disconnected or untrustworthy".

Furthermore, it was also discovered that the disconnect and resulting public mistrust of security agencies have significant negative repercussions. When the public lacks confidence in the effectiveness and reliability of security agencies, it becomes challenging for these agencies to gather intelligence from the communities they are meant to protect. According to a retired national security officer in the Ashanti region, "citizens may hesitate to provide information or cooperate with security agencies, fearing potential consequences or believing that their information may not be handled appropriately".
It was also revealed that the consequence of compromised intelligence gathering is the potential for security threats to go undetected or unaddressed, since the intelligence community will not take anything seen in the media as incredible. An example comes from a participant in Hamele, located in the upper west region, who shared their experience of exposing terror groups and their hiding places on social media, yet receiving no response from national security operatives.

The participant expressed concern about the alarming condition of the border boundaries and the disheartening lack of action by security personnel in response to the leads posted on social media. As he expressed:

Despite having extensive information about numerous criminals and terror groups in our community, I am hesitant to personally approach the security authorities for fear of potential collaboration between them and those involved. As a result, I have resorted to sharing such information on my Facebook timeline. Unfortunately, there has been a complete absence of response from the security agencies thus far (Phone call interview with a resident in Hamele, 11 April, 2023).

The study argues that the failure to establish trust and bridge the disconnect between security agencies and the public can have detrimental consequences. Security agencies risk losing out on valuable information that could help prevent or address security incidents. Additionally, the media plays a crucial role in providing open-source intelligence to the intelligence community through their interactions with the public. However, the disconnect between the media and security agencies, which can result in misinformation, undermines the ability of security operatives to rely on and trust the information shared by the media, thereby compromising intelligence gathering efforts.

The statements highlight the intersection of securitization theory and agenda setting theory, as well as the concept of public interest, while pointing out a contradiction with national interests. According to securitization theory, security issues are constructed by influential actors, while agenda setting theory explores the media's role in shaping public perception. The statements suggest that the media may prioritize their own interests and public interests when reporting on security events, aligning with agenda setting theory. On the other hand, security agencies may selectively respond to media coverage based on their assessment of national security concerns. This selective response deviates from consistently prioritizing national interests, leading to a contradiction. When the media and security agencies prioritize their interests over national interests or fail to address security concerns consistently, it undermines the national interest.

3) Overall national security management

The investigation into the perspectives of participants on implications of the disconnect for national security revealed that there is a significant implication on national security in Ghana. Participants emphasized that the disconnect between the media and national security agencies leads to limited information sharing. Security officials expressed concerns about sharing sensitive information with the media due to fears of compromising ongoing operations or jeopardizing national security. A key informant stated:

(…) by withholding information, security agencies hinder the media's ability to share important updates, leading to security failures and delayed interventions (Interview with Intelligence officer, Takoradi, 20 April 2023).

On the other hand, media professionals expressed frustration over limited access to timely and accurate information from security agencies, hindering their reporting. Although agencies have limitations, certain information should be shared with the public for their awareness and safety. Failure to communicate security issues deprives the public of vital knowledge, making them vulnerable to adverse consequences (News editor's perspective). Key informant expressed:

If EOCO had shared findings on MenzGold earlier, media could have raised awareness and prevented investments. Lack of timely information led to escalated consequences (Interview with a TV journalist, Accra, 19 April 2023).

Further, participants highlighted that the disconnect hampers media-security collaboration. Challenges in obtaining official statements or interviews with security officials result in incomplete or biased reporting. News editors noted a decline in willingness from police and military to engage with the media. Previously accessible, now they impose stricter requirements, such as seeking permission from Accra headquarters (Interview with news editors, Northern and Ashanti regions). The stated:

Previously, the police regularly shared security updates with the media in the northern region. However, this practice has abruptly ceased, leaving the media to report independently on security incidents. With the absence of official updates, public concern is increasing (Interview with a broadcast journalist, Tamale, 10 April 2023).

Similarly, security officials expressed their reluctance to engage with the media, perceiving them as adversarial rather than collaborative partners in ensuring national security. Another security officer in the greater Accra stated:

At times, there is a concern that our operations may be jeopardized when we share information with the media. There have been instances where the few contacts we have in the media have sensationalized our intelligence,
Moreover, the study discovered the public perception and trust about the security as another factor. During the interviews with the public, stakeholders acknowledged that the disconnect between the media and national security agencies contributes to a decline in public trust.

Members of the public expressed concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability from security agencies, leading them to rely on social media and other unofficial sources for information. One participant shared his perspective:

While I cannot speak for everyone, many citizens share concerns about the trust placed in the media versus national security agencies. Transparency is lacking in the agencies, especially regarding national security matters. It is crucial for citizens to be informed about how their tax contributions are utilized for their safety. Instead of relying solely on the media after incidents occur, the public needs knowledge about the government's approach to security issues (Interview with a Kumasi resident, 14 April 2023).

Another participant highlighted the importance of accountability, expressing his opinion on the matter. He emphasized that there is a lack of accountability to the public, citing instances where security personnel have been accused of mistreating citizens and then claiming to be investigating the incidents. However, in many cases, no updates or outcomes are communicated to the public. The participant further pointed:

Look at the murder of Kaaka in Ejura, the beating of the Citi TV reporter Caleb Kudah, and a recent incident in Asharma. Even with the commissions the government spent money on nothing good comes out.

These incidents contribute to the erosion of public trust in security agencies, as the perceived lack of accountability becomes a significant concern, therefore prefer to report incidents to the media instead of the security agencies. A female participant shared her experience, mentioning that her husband had provided information to the police service regarding criminals in their community in Koforidua, located in the Eastern region. However, she expressed her disappointment as the criminals were released shortly after their arrest. As a result, they started receiving threats from the criminals, which ultimately led them to make the difficult decision to relocate from their community for their own safety. She stated:

They were doing a lot of criminal things in our area, so my husband informed the police, and they exposed my husband to the criminals. It was dangerous for our family, so relocated to Accra.

The paper argues that this erosion of trust can hinder public cooperation, as individuals may be reluctant to report security-related incidents to the authorities, fearing repercussions or a breach of confidentiality.

The statements emphasize the significance of transparency in relation to security agencies. Concerns are raised about the lack of transparency exhibited by these agencies, as they are accused of concealing wrongdoings and restricting information flow to the media. This behavior undermines the principles of transparency, hindering public access to vital information about the agencies' actions. Transparency is crucial in democratic societies as it fosters trust, accountability, and informed decision-making. When security agencies withhold information, it erodes public trust and impairs the media and public's ability to hold them accountable. Moreover, limited information restricts the public's understanding and assessment of their activities, potentially leading to speculation, mistrust, and misinformation, negatively impacting the functioning of the agencies and public perception.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research conducted on the analysis of the factors and consequences of the disconnect between media and national security in Ghana provides insight into the intricate dynamics that exist between these crucial entities. The results of the study emphasize various significant factors that contribute to the disconnection observed. These factors encompass the limited trust and skepticism, differing objectives, limited access and transparency, and communication gap. It is of utmost importance to acknowledge and comprehend these underlying factors in order to cultivate a more productive association between the media and the national security apparatus. With regards to the implication, the study demonstrated the devastating effect of the disconnect between the two entities on the general well-being of citizens. It therefore calls for urgent attention to direct efforts to bridge the existing gap. These efforts should prioritize open communication, trust-building, and finding a balance between transparency and security concerns.
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the research findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the relationship between the media and national security agencies in Ghana. Firstly, it is crucial for the government and security actors, including the national security apparatus and the media, to establish effective and regular channels of communication. This can be achieved by appointing designated spokespersons or liaisons who can provide accurate and timely information to the media. Moreover, engaging stakeholders in dialogue and collaboration is essential to promote understanding between media professionals and security personnel. Joint workshops, seminars, and forums can facilitate the exchange of insights and perspectives, strengthening mutual comprehension of their roles and responsibilities.

Furthermore, the government should encourage national security agencies to adopt transparency and accountability in their operations. Regular updates to the public and media on security-related issues, along with addressing misconceptions and concerns raised by the media, can foster trust. Additionally, it is beneficial for the media and national security apparatus to provide training and workshops to security personnel on effective media engagement. This training should emphasize the importance of providing accurate information, understanding media ethics, and building constructive relationships with media professionals.

To ensure clear guidelines and protocols for information sharing, parliamentary intervention is recommended. Developing comprehensive guidelines that specify the types of information that can be shared, the process for sharing sensitive information, and the appropriate channels for dissemination is essential.

In order to build trust and confidence, proactive measures should be taken by both the media and national security agencies. Joint initiatives such as collaborative reporting or public awareness campaigns can demonstrate their shared commitment to promoting public safety and national security. Additionally, a review of the legal framework concerning national security and media operations is necessary to create an environment conducive to a cooperative relationship. This may involve revisiting laws related to information dissemination, freedom of the press, and national security, striking a balance that safeguards both public safety and media freedom.

By implementing these recommendations, it is anticipated that the relationship between the media and national security agencies in Ghana will significantly improve. This improvement will lead to better information dissemination, enhanced public trust, and ultimately contribute to the overall security and well-being of the nation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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Political Map of Ghana. (n.d) Map Based on UN map. Source: UN Cartographic Sectionhttps://www.nationonlione.org/oneworld/map/ghana_map.htm


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