



7. Newspapers

7.1 Key changes and developments in the newspaper marketplace in the past five years

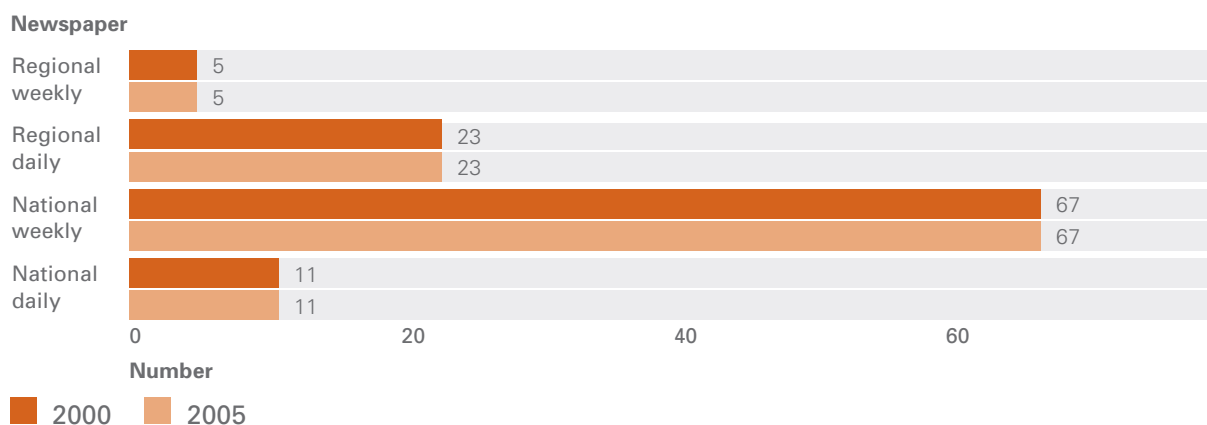
According to the National Media Commission (NMC), Ghana has 106 newspapers (11 dailies, 67 weeklies, 23 bi-weeklies and five tri-weeklies) (P. Owusu Donkor, personal communication, April 2006). Many of the titles now in existence have sprung up in the past five years, providing readers with a wide range of new publications.

More than 50% of the newspapers currently in circulation have come into existence in recent years.

At national level, among the 11 national dailies, the state-owned *Daily Graphic* is the oldest and most widely-read newspaper in Ghana, and it is distributed in all 120 districts nationwide. Established in 1950 and 100% government-owned, the *Daily Graphic* currently has the highest circulation figure. The next strongest national daily, the *Daily Guide*, comes a distant second to the *Graphic* in circulation, and was launched in 1999. It is privately owned and is the only national daily paper giving the *Graphic* some form of competition. The state-owned Ghana News Agency is the only national news agency in the country. The most widely-circulated national weekly, *The Mirror*, is also government-owned. This was founded in 1953. The fourth-highest circulation belongs to a privately-owned national daily, *The Chronicle*, established in 1990. The *Accra Daily Mail*, Ghana's fifth most widely-read paper, was established in 1998 and is privately-owned. But only the government-owned *Daily Graphic* can be said to be a truly national newspaper, because it has structures in all ten regions.

There are only two regional newspapers in Ghana: *The Pioneer*, based in Kumasi (Ashanti Region), and the *Northern Advocate*, based in Tamale (Northern Region). A few other papers devote specific pages on certain days to news from particular regions, particularly the economically vibrant regions of Ashanti and Takoradi.

Figure 7: Total Number of Newspapers



Source: P. Owusu Donkor, personal communication, April 2006

7.2 Investment and growth in newspapers in the past five years

As in the broadcast sectors, the gradual liberalisation of the press sector from the early 1990s onwards has made the setting up of newspapers easier, leading to a mushrooming of new titles. However, the large circulation papers are dominating advertising revenue, making it difficult for the smaller operations. For instance, over the past five years, the state-owned nationally dominant *Daily Graphic* has seen its advertising revenue base drastically improve. Almost all advertisers want to patronise the *Graphic* because of its reach, and this cuts across both public and private sector advertisers⁷.

7.3 Plurality, ownership and control

A diverse range of investors have been behind the start-up of the new private papers in the past few years. However, while there is a certain degree of diversity in the voices of the privately-owned papers, there is also a degree of coalescence in the private newspapers into two broad camps: either in support of, or in opposition to, the government. Thus, on any national issue, it is easy to predict the stand a particular paper will take. The state-owned *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Independent*, meanwhile, are unambiguously pro-government on all issues.

7.4 Diversity

Over the past few years, not many of the papers have diversified in terms of their content, mostly still concentrating on politics. Many papers seem to have been set up primarily to act as mouthpieces for their owners' political views. And, as mentioned above, within the private newspapers, there seems to be a coalescing into two broad camps: pro-government and pro-opposition. More positive has been the growth in recent years in specialised pages on a wide range of topics, such as education, economics, banking, finance and aviation, with these pages generating lucrative sponsorships and expanding the revenue base of the papers.

There are no non-English, vernacular-language newspapers to the knowledge of this researcher.

7.5 Quality of newspaper reporting

The National Media Commission recently brought out a list of 52 papers that were not registered (*Daily Graphic*, 2006), revealing that many papers had simply taken advantage of

⁷ This finding comes from the Centre for Media Analysis, Accra.

the liberalised environment and started operating without any regard for the legal requirement to register. Registration of newspapers with the NMC is required by the 1992 Constitution and 1993 NMC Act, with the *proviso* that the NMC cannot exert control over newspapers. Coming into existence rapidly without a great deal of planning has meant that many papers are of sub-standard quality in terms of their journalistic output and observance of ethics. According to the NMC,

“ Before the 1992 Constitution, the print media was regulated by a licensing regime and that tended to strangle the industry. Quite apart from this factor, editors and journalists were always on their guard lest they either had their licence withdrawn or were even arrested, detained or prosecuted. With the repeal of the Criminal Libel and Seditious Laws by Parliament in 2001, and the apparent boost that the repeal brought to the practice of journalism, there arose the need for basic standards to ensure that journalism practice impacted qualitatively on the reading public. ”

(NMC, 2001)

In spite of the NMC’s efforts at promoting standards, the print media field is still weak, with journalists often sensationalising issues and making unsubstantiated allegations. Many print journalists have been taken to court to face civil libel suits, with large fines imposed on their papers. This has led some to worry that the former danger of journalist imprisonment under the Criminal Libel Law has been replaced by the danger of a newspaper’s financial collapse due to a large civil libel award (NMC, 2004).

A more positive recent development in the print sector has been the placement of some of the papers on the Internet, such that one can now access the papers simultaneously in hard copy and in electronic form. However, no paper is yet providing specialised content for its Internet readers.

7.6 Specific challenges

One challenge for newspapers in Ghana over the next few years will be to see if they can “de-polarise” out of the two existing newspaper camps that currently divide publications between those who support government and those who support the opposition. There may also be a need for more papers to collaborate and share resources, instead of the present proliferation of autonomous titles each trying to capture meagre available resources. Such collaborations could reduce costs and also improve quality.

Key findings

- Only one paper, the state-owned *Daily Graphic*, is truly national with full distribution throughout the country, giving it a clear advantage over other titles in attracting readers and advertisers.
- Newspaper growth has been strong in recent years, but it may be that there are more papers than the Ghanaian market can support, suggesting that collaborations may be necessary.
- The freedom gains made possible by the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law in 2001 are in some respects being undermined by irresponsible journalism and huge civil libel awards being imposed on papers.
- In terms of editorial stance, the newspaper sphere is polarised between two opposing camps: those in support of the government and those supporting the opposition.