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Ghana's 2020 presidential elections: Analysis of news media framing of the two main presidential candidates

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Abstract
The media play a watchdog role and focus on educating the audience on key national issues such as public policies, the personal life of politicians, and the character of presidential candidates during elections. With framing responsibility for political issues as a guide, the researchers adopted episodic and thematic frames to identify how the two most popular media outlets; thus, JOY News and United Television (UTV) framed the two main presidential candidates (John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo) during the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana. The author sampled fifty (50) news stories and use framing theory's episodic and thematic frames of political issues to carry out a quantitative content analysis. The findings revealed that the JOY News framed John Dramani Mahama more episodically and more thematically than Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo in its stories. The UTV News stories, on the other hand, presented Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo more in the episodic frames and John Mahama in more the thematic frames. In conclusion, both news channels framed Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo and John Dramani Mahama episodically by focusing more on their corruption scandals, controversies, and their integrity rather than on their manifesto policies.

Keywords: Presidential elections, media, presidential candidates, politicians, episodic, thematic

Introduction
The Ghanaian citizens went to the polls on December 7th, 2020 to elect their president and members of parliament. This marked the eighth general election after 28 years of multiparty democracy, the first one was held in 1992(The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992) [1]. The creation and development of political parties marked the turning point in 1992 after the restoration of multiparty democracy by the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) junta (Thompson, 2020) [2]. This was after a lot of pressure from the international community as well as other domestic pro-democratic forces (Thompson, 2020; Osei, 2013; Morrison, 2004) [1, 3, 4]. All the general elections had been carried out peacefully and were free and fair. There had been minimal security concerns throughout the period (Gyampo, 2017) [5]. As a presidential and unitary republic with a unicameral legislature and a strong independent judiciary, Ghana appreciates the significance of its various regions. The regions have their assemblies under strong local units of government (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992) [1].

In the 2016 presidential polls, NPP's Nana Akufo-Addo defeated incumbent John Mahama from the NDC following a contentious campaign (Gyampo, 2017) [5]. Eleven parties competed in the parliamentary elections, but only the NPP and the NDC won seats, with the NPP winning a majority(Gyampo, 2017) [5]. The 2020 presidential election was a rematch as the NPP has nominated Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo for re-election and NDC has nominated John Dramani Mahama. This will be their third consecutive match-up. Although party primaries were slightly delayed due to COVID-19, NPP held its primaries on June 20, 2020, to select parliamentary candidates.

The 1992 constitution of Ghana considered the media as the 4th estate. An appellation that points to the fact that media acts as a watchdog over the other three branches of government (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992) [1]. The allocation of frequencies to several private television stations that happened after the privatization of airwaves in the country by the government has resulted in the establishment of many TV stations (National Media Commission, 2020) [6]. Close to three decades now two big media groups receive a high concentration of the audience. These dominant media outlets are; Multimedia group (Joy News) and the Despite group of companies (UTV) (National Media Commission, 2020)

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[6]. These two private media outlets represent 67.39% of all TV consumers, and with it is an assumed potential to influence public opinion in Ghana (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2020; Atawura, 2017) [7, 8]. The high influence of public opinion in Ghana by these two dominant TV media stations is the reason why the author decided to select them for this study. Also, the two media houses for this study are privately owned and do not owe any political or economic allegiance or linkages to any of the presidential candidates or political parties in Ghana. The objective of this current study is to analyze two of Ghana's media giants framed the two main presidential candidates (John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo) during the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana

Review related literature
The state of the media in Ghana and presidential elections
The constitution of Ghana has contributed towards developing the media and press as an institution in Ghana. Several people in Ghana believe that the media is the fourth arm of government. Some debates have been raised regarding media freedom and the need for media to act as a watchdog of the government. According to reports from the National Media Commission (2020) [6], Joy News and UTV increased their interest in Ghana's presidential elections from 2012 onward. The channels got a more significant share of viewership through a change in their content slant as the conservative. During this period, about two-thirds of the increase could be explained by political polarization in Ghana. Nevertheless, the slant of partisan spread across news channels increased from 2012 forward (Gyampo, 2017; Boydstun, 2013) [5, 9].

The state-run media ensured that there is balanced coverage during the election campaigns. Nevertheless, New Patriotic Party (NPP), which is the incumbent party together with National Democratic Congress (NDC) which is the main opposition party, had a solid media presence because they have adequate resources that enabled them to purchase advertising and more airtime (Thompson, 2020; Gyampo, 2015) [2, 5]. To add to that, their broadcasts were not always labeled as campaign advertising because most of the campaign broadcasts were brought up in form of documentaries. NPP broadcasts mainly highlighted the government's achievements, while the opposition parties were mainly critical of their state of affairs (Thompson, 2020; Gyampo 2015; Boydstun, 2013; Ayee, 2008) [2, 5, 9, 10].

It was notable that a large segment of the private media mainly dwelt on some partisan reporting. Nonetheless, the media's basic orientation ensured that they set limits for any form of manipulation of public opinion (Scott, 1993) [11]. It was observable that the widely heard private radio stations which were known to take neutral positions regarding political matters did their best to maintain their standards during and after the election campaigns as well as the electoral process itself (Postigo, 2016) [12]. They played a significant role in ensuring that the electoral process is highly transparent throughout the country (Gyampo, 2017; Arthur, 2010) [5, 13].

During election season, the choice of the vote and the selective exposure through media coverage is believed to play a significant role. This is because selective exposure explains how news outlets are chosen by public preferences and political connotations (Gyampo, 2017) [5]. Based on past experiences during the general elections in Ghana, individuals who prefer specific nominees more than others are likely to give priority to those particular media contents that give preferences to their preferred candidates (Ayee, 2008) [10]. In such a scenario, the news organizations are likely to indicate less strong and factual biases for given presidential candidates (Ksiazek, *et al.*, 2019; Entman, 2007; Tsai, 2015) [14, 15].

Framing and presidential elections
Researchers such as Cornelissen, & Werner (2014) [16] have criticized it for the short-sighted inclination for frame reductionism. Cornelissen, & Werner (2014) [16] highlighted a highly logical way of recognizing stable and efficient sets of schemas or frames. Consequently, a regular approach gives a convenient availability of media texts. However, it risks reifying them by locking them in a given place. They serve specific interests and they change over time (Thompson, 2020; Asghar *et al.*, 2019; Van Aelst, & Walgrave, 2017) [2, 17, 18]. Some researchers agree that the variety of options provided in selecting how to narrate and develop news reports can be subjected to analyses as certain unique features. Depending on the prevailing events and subjects, many frames can be pertinent. Those kinds of frames can be termed issue-specific frames (Hallahan, 1999) [22]. Based on the various frames, the limitation of specific thematic frames was exceeded and could be recognized through some subjects, some based on different cultural aspects and contexts (Hart, 2011; Howard *et al.*, 2003) [19, 20].

Although the initial inquiries were related to the phenomenon of a particular set of frames or interpretation schemes in different cultures, the previous studies have classified framing terms along with unique dimensions and analyzed the effects of the same frame on audience responses (Matthes, & Potter, 2017) [21]. Generally, it entails sets of frames such as episodic vs. thematic frames, gains vs. loss frames among others. There are also the frames of dispute, economic repercussions as well as human interests (Matthes, & Potter, 2017; Asghar *et al.*, 2019) [21, 17]. According to Asghar *et al.* (2019); Howard *et al.* (2003) [17, 20], past studies have found out about the distinctive elements of frames through a clear understanding of inductive research. However, the painless attention to the identification of what several researchers referred to as master frames or cultural themes as well as framesets that can be applied in solving several problems. These kinds of frames are referred to as generic frames (Hart, 2011; Zhang, & Jin, 2017; Aarøe, 2011) [19, 23, 24].

Further, Ksiazek, *et al.*, (2019) [15] discussed that the critical analysis of many mainstream US newspapers revealed four significant frames, that is, fight, talk, stalemate as well as crisis. The four frames point to the sequence of events in the development of news. Similarly, Lewandowsky *et al.* (2020); Sahly *et al.* (2019) [25, 26] recognized three frames during the 2016 election period which led to the election of Donald Trump as the US president. These are the behavioral scandal of Donald Trump, the controversy of the Conservative attack, and propaganda of Liberal response.

Furthermore, Godefroidt *et al.* (2016); Valenzuela *et al.* (2017); Semetko, & Valkenburg (2000); An, & Gower (2009) [27, 28, 29] observed five new news frames, that is, attribution of liability, conflict, economic repercussions, morality, and human fascinations. The frame of conflict

compels disputes between many agencies, individuals as well as groups. To be specific, the face of a human or a given angle of emotions is well presented in the frames of human fascination (Godefroidt *et al*., 2016) [27]. Any form of occurrence is depicted in the frame of liability or responsibility in a manner that attributes the eventual responsibility for solving out a government, a group, or an individual issue. An even or a problem is portrayed based on a religious point of view and the associated moral values within the frame of morality (Sahly *et al*. 2019) [26]. Consequently, in the frames of economics, an event or problem dwells on the economic implications it will create in a group, organization, or on an individual basis (Feezell, *et al*. 2019) [30]. According to the findings of the study, the frame of attribution of both liability and responsibility is believed to be one of the highly used frames. On the other hand, the frames of conflict and economic consequences come second in terms of usage (Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2014) [31].

According to Godefroidt *et al*. (2016); Chong, & Druckman (2007) [27, 32], based on the three observed notions, scholars have revealed the biases that exist after analyzing connections such as scholar level and the level of scrutiny. Based on the illustration of framing, all the necessary linkages provide the required enhancement to the specific interpretation. The above depends on the procedure of selection as well as the perceived reality elements and narration. Four functions are performed by the fully established frames, including the definition of an issue, an analysis that is dependent on casual interpretation, judgment based on morality, and the propagation of the remedy (Chong, & Druckman, 2007; Borah, 2011) [32, 33]. Framing plays a big role in shaping and modifying the priorities of the public as well as the interpretations through priming. Based on the above working formula, the frames raise the apparent implication of the various ideas, activations of schemas which help in raising awareness among the public to help them consider and make decisions and a particular manner (Godefroidt *et al*., 2016; Chong, & Druckman, 2007) [27,32].

On the other hand, Milshteyn, & Molchanov (1976) [34], pointed out that agenda-setting is yet another form of strategic framing which can act as an alternative name for carrying out the first function in a successful way. This can be achieved by explaining the problem that is of great concern to both the viewers and the government. The issue of the agenda will explain the prevailing conditions of the society, the issues taking place in the world, and the character traits of the candidates (Chong, & Druckman, 2007) [32]. The second level of agenda-setting is always divided into three kinds of claims which help in containing the strategic framing. They include empowerment of moral judgment, highlighting the root cause of the problem, and promoting favorable policies (Milshteyn, & Molchanov, 1976) [34].

Framing responsibility for political issues
The theory of framing a situation is depicted in a particular way in terms of the image, and the storyline (Scheufele, 1999) [35]. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the media to frame every issue accordingly be it social, political, or cultural (Scheufele 1999; Scheufele, and Iyengar, 2014) [31, 35]. The theory tries to give the distinctive appeal of framing news reports. These aspects have different effects on the

viewership or readership of political and social problems. A clear understanding of social matters is effectively communicated through the unique frames of media and by doing so, the impacts created in the society are quite significant (Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2014) [31]. According to Iyengar (1991) [36], political issues are mostly framed, using episodic and thematic frames.

Episodic and thematic frames are very important and influential in television news and how audiences and viewers assign duty bearers with the responsibility for pertinent political issues (Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2014) [35]. In an attempt to give further explanations and insight between episodic and thematic framing, Iyengar (1991) [36] made some distinctions. According to Iyengar (1991); Iyengar (1996) [36, 37], when news stories have their central focus on individuals, then such a news story is described as being framed episodically. Iyengar (1996) [37] cited the representation of an individual for a specific issue such as terrorism. On the other hand, the in-depth, broader, and interpretative insight provided on issues of national concerns is what Iyengar (1991, p. 14) [36] termed thematic framing.

Iyengar (1991, p. 14) [36], suggested that when issues such as terrorism are interpreted and discussed from the perspectives of religion and historical backgrounds then the is issues is been framed from the thematic approach. The thematic frame places more emphasis on the public, the environment as well as other institutions of the public. The thematic frames can be used to cover issues through the use of the method known as a wide-angle lens (Iyengar, 1996) [37]. As time goes by, there is a need to keep the focus on developments and clear explanations regarding the various contexts. In most cases, a portrait is demonstrated in the frame of episodic, while the frame of thematic indicates the landscape picture (Aarøe 2011; Bjarnøe 2016) [24, 33].

It can also be noted that the episodic frame defines the ways through which the issue of an individual can be handled while the thematic frame revolves around the causes of the issues that can be fixed (Bjarnøe 2016) [33]. The episodic frame generally focuses on a single event; while a thematic frame maintains its focus on trends and relies more on time. It can also be noted that the episodic frame defines the ways through which the issue of an individual can be handled while the thematic frame revolves around the causes of the issues that can be fixed. The study points out that the episodic frame mainly revolves around the behavior of people (Iyengar, 1991) [36].

Through comprehensive and continuous research, Iyengar (1991) [36] revealed that episodic TV reportage tends to be socially responsible, then issues that are closely related to thematic stories. Iyengar (1991) [36] contended that thematic stories have fewer chances of examining individuals responsible as against episodic news stories watched.

The media background and reference points enhance and are very key determinants for the explanations of issues for framing (Iyengar, 1996) [37]. Other factors such as individual differences might result in seminal work leading to dispositional attributions, and other individuals might stick to external attributions (Scott 1993 and Iyengar 1991) [11, 36]. An individual that holds the external attributions dearly usually assign concrete, contemporary events in describing the behavior of others, which also directly have impact individual negatively. Concerning individuals with dispositional attributes, Iyengar (1996) [37], cited that any

news story framed episodically mostly center on the person that it epitomizes or represents. Base on the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework of this study, the following research questions guide this study:

Research Questions (RQ)
RQ1: What framing types did the two media outlets adopt for the two main presidential candidates?

RQ2: How did the two main media outlets frame the two main presidential candidates (Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo and John Mahama)?

RQ3: What two dominant issues were framed on the two presidential candidates during the period of this study?

Materials and Methods
Sample design, and procedure
The researcher adopted quantitative content research design for this study. The authors used content analysis because it offered the researchers the opportunity to identify and select data-rich cases that are closely related to the study and targeted TV stations that proved to be of great interest for the research purpose (Wagner, 2017) [38]. In all a total of 50 elections 2020 news stories were analyzed for the study; thus 25 news stories for JOY news and 25 news UTV news were broadcast during prime time (6 am and 6 pm). The researcher also settled on JOY News and UTV news due to their dominance in the Ghanaian media landscape (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2020) [7].

Stimulus material, measures, and data analysis
The study made use of data (political news) mined from the Facebook TV pages of two sample TV news stations using Crowd Tangle software. The authors also decided to sample the Facebook TV pages of the two media houses due to the author's convince and wider audience coverage by the two media outlets. Again, the author chooses social media platforms such as Facebook TV pages because they play a very key role in political campaigns, framing, and a key determinant in public discourse (Postigo, 2016). The study focused on two main theoretical constructs of the framing theory; thus, episodic and thematic frames. The framing of both presidential candidates was coded with 1 = episodic and 0 = thematic. The keywords used include; "Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo", "John Dramani Mahama", and the "presidential election 2020", "corruption scandals", and "integrity". The duration of this study was approximately four months, from 1st September to 1st December 2020, the period before the presidential elections. To get some accurate and authentic results, SPSS was used to analyze the

data that was collected. However, to find out the reliability of instruments, the coder coded 50 stories. The analyzed data showed 0.70 percent agreement among coders. It means the intra-coder reliability for the frame type was 0.70, and the report type was 0.60. The final analysis was done, using percentages.

Results
RQ1: Framing types adopted for the two main presidential candidates
Research question one was to carry out an analysis of the types of news frames adopted by the two sampled TV news channels for the two main presidential candidates. The analysis deduced that the two media channels were more focused on framing the episodic coverage rather than thematic coverage. Approximately 48 percent of JOY News's stories out of 50 were framing thematic coverage, while episodic frames of news stories were just about 52 percent. Whereas, news stories of thematic framings and episodic framings in UTV were almost 42 percent and 58 percent out of 50 respectively. "N" here is a symbolic representation of the sample. See Table 1;

Table 1: Tv News Channels and Frame Types

Category of news Frame	TV Station	
	JOY News (Percent)	UTV (Percent)
Episodic	52	58
Thematic	48	42
Number of News Stories(N)	100	100
	50	50

RQ2: Framing of the presidential candidates
This section analyzes how the two presidential candidates were framed by the two media outlets (JOY News and UTV News);

Framing of candidate Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo
According to analysis from **Table 1,** New Patriotic Party's candidate, i.e., Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo was highly boosted by UTV throughout the entire presidential elections of 2020. That is why Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo was 67 percent thematically framed by UTV in contrast to JOY News, which framed Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo only 31 percent. On the other hand, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo was substantially supported by UTV as the New Patriotic Party's candidate. That is why JOY News framed him more episodically as 27 percent rather than UTV, which framed Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo episodically as about 24 percent. See table 2;

Table 2: Framing of Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo

Category of Frame	Presidential candidate *Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo	TV Station	
		JOY News (%)	UTV (%)
Episodic		27	24
Thematic		31	67
Number of News Stories(N)		100	100
		50	50

Framing of candidate John Dramaini Mahama
Table 3 illustrates how JOY News and UTV have distinctly framed the presidential candidate John Dramaini Mahama as UTV supported Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo during elections, that is why 19 percent of John Dramaini Mahama's new stories were thematically framed by it in contrast to JOY News stories (17 percent). On the other hand, John Dramaini Mahama was being supported by JOY News which is why 57 percent of news stories of John Dramaini Mahama were episodically framed more in contrast to UTV, which framed only 32 percent. See table 3;

Table 3: Framing of John Dramaini Mahama by JOY News and UTV News

Category of Frame	Presidential candidate *John Dramaini Mahama	News Reported by TV Station	
		JOY News (%)	UTV (%)
Episodic		57	32
Thematic		17	19
Number of News Stories(N)		100	100
		50	50

QR 3: Key issues framed about the presidential candidates
Table 3 shows that both news channels JOY News and UTV owned different viewpoints related to presidential candidates of 2020. According to the above proportions, both news channels, JOY News and UTV framed Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo favorably over the integrity category in 12 stories and unfavorably in and 3 stories.

Similarly, JOY News framed John Dramaini Mahama regarding the same category in 10 stories favorably and 1 story as unfavorably. Whereas, JOY News framed John Dramaini Mahama favorably in 9 stories in the category of corruption scandals and unfavorably in 2 stories. UTV, framed as favorable in 6 stories and unfavorable in 1stories in the Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo under corruption. See table 3;

Table 3: Frame Category

	Corruption Scandals				Integrity				Total
	Nana Addo		John Dramaini		Nana Addo		John Dramaini		
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	
JOY News	2	10	9	1	2	12	10	1	47
UTV News	6	1	4	5	7	12	3	12	50
	8	11	13	6	9	24	13	13	97

Discussion and Conclusion
According to the analysis of the study, JOY News was more interested in covering the corruption scandals of the candidate Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo rather than reporting on issues other issues in Ghana. Since 2017 when the NPP candidate took over the governance of Ghana, public perception of the level of corruption was a major issue leading to the 2020 presidential elections. According to a report by transparency international, (2017 to 2020), the corruption perception index saw a sharp raised under the leadership of Nana Akuffo Addo. Since the media framing of candidate Nana Akuffo Adoo, was not dwelling on his personality and centered on a comprehensive discussion of corruption, which is a major national issue, then the framing type could be described as thematic. UTV, on the other hand, was very much interested in the integrity of the candidate, John Dramaini Mahama, who is the opposition leader and whose personality was under attack by the media. As indicated by Iyengar (1991) [36] when a news frame is focused on an individual then, attracting a comprehensive coverage and detailed discussion, then it is termed episodic.
Again, analysis of the data obtained from the two TV stations that were sampled regarding the framing of the two main candidates is a clear indication that there exists a trend of an increasing media personalization and concentration of media on the coverage of the two presidential candidates of the main political parties. These findings are in line with previous studies by Gyampo (2017) and Dzisah (2014) [5, 39], which show that in terms of news coverage and framing no presidential candidate has a clear advantage or control of media houses in Ghana. It is notable, however, that there is an indication of a big gap regarding the personalization of the two front-runner presidential candidates and the other candidates participating in the 2020 elections, this finding from this study is also supported by (Gyampo, 2017) [5].
The researcher also observes from this study that there are many levels of media personalization on the integrity of the two presidential candidates of the leading political parties by the privately-owned press in Ghana. This result also goes to confirms previous findings that media houses in Ghana are purely owned and controlled by politicians (Gyampo, 2017; Atawura, 2017; Arthur, 2010) [5, 8, 13].
These findings explain the choice of the two main candidates and their selective exposure through media coverage is believed to play a significant role in the performance of the presidential candidates. This is because selective exposure explains how news outlets are chosen by public preferences and political connotations. Based on past experiences during the general elections in Ghana, individuals who prefer specific nominees more than others are likely to give priority to those particular media contents that give preferences to their preferred candidates. In such a scenario, the news organizations are likely to indicate less strong and factual biases for given presidential candidates,

these findings are also in line with the previous study by (Ksiazek, *et al*., 2019; Entman, 2007; Tsai, 2015) [14, 15, 40]. Consequently, the solution does not entail increasing the visibility of the two candidates, but rather improving the visibility of the level of neglect of the other presidential candidates of other smaller parties (Arthur, 2010; Abdulai, & Crawford, 2010) [13, 41]., by doing, the TV stations will be creating an impression that they working towards promoting all the candidates in presidential elections and the political system in Ghana.

The findings point to the fact that a large segment of the private media mainly dwelt on some partisan reporting. Nonetheless, the media's basic orientation ensured that they set limits for any form of manipulation of public opinion. Ghanaian context this framing show that the widely heard private radio stations which were known to take neutral positions regarding political matters did their best to maintain their standards during and after the election campaigns as well as the electoral process itself. They played a significant role in ensuring that the electoral process is highly transparent throughout the country.

Limitations and future research

There are a few limitations in the study which can be looked into in future research. In the study, the researcher describes the significance of professional journalistic practices and issues characteristics as some of the likely frame-building factors because of the limitations that are integral in the content analysis methodology as well as future production and research that is process-oriented. The research has to be carried out to help in assessing the resultant impact of macro and micro-level frame-building factors on news framing. With the fluctuating political, social, and policy environment upon which the media operates, there is a need to carry out more research on the pressure that may be impacted by political actors on framing. This will give a definite and promising direction to the journalists. Second, this study focused on news coverage in new media (social media) while excluding their traditional print and broadcast media content to avoid redundancy in sampling.

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