



## We are not Campaigning: A Functional Discourse Appraisal of Ghanaian Newspapers' Subtle Political Campaigns

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Recommended Citation: Mintah, K. C., Dawson-Ahmoah, G. N. A., Gyasi, N. Y. O., Ayaawan, A. E., & Opoku, G. (2025). *We are not campaigning: A functional discourse appraisal of Ghanaian newspapers' subtle political campaigns*. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 2(2), 10–21. <https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.2.2.2>

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the discourse strategies and appraisal resources employed by Ghanaian state and private newspapers to subtly endorse their preferred political candidates, thereby circumventing formal prohibitions on political campaigning. Utilizing a Functional Discourse of Campaign framework, complemented by the Attitude system within Appraisal Theory, this research identifies and interprets the discourse strategies evident in the selected data. The data set comprises purposively sampled lead stories published on the eve of elections between 2008 and 2020, drawn from two prominent Ghanaian newspapers: Daily Graphic and Daily Guide. The data was analyzed by coding identified instances of the occurrence of Campaign Discourse markers (Attack, Defense and Acclaim) and Attitude resources (Affect, Judgement and Appreciation). Frequencies and context of their occurrences were generated and interpreted guided by the postulations of the theories and the objectives of the study. The findings reveal significant differences in the usage of Attacks, Acclaims, and Defenses across the newspapers. The state-owned newspaper (Daily Graphic) primarily emphasizes Acclaims, while the privately-owned newspaper (Daily Guide) predominantly employs Attacks within their campaign-related discourses. Furthermore, the attitudinal resources embedded within these three discourse functions differ across the newspapers, reflecting the distinct emotional tones deployed in their campaign narratives. The study concludes that, despite bans or restrictions, newspapers engage in covert political campaigning through linguistically subtle choices that align with the interests of the political entities they support. The study recommends an exploration of how politically-funded newspapers craft their campaign discourses in the face of political bans, offering a broader discussion on media strategies in politically charged environments.*

**Keywords:** Appraisal, Campaign Discourse, Ghanaian Newspapers, Political Endorsement

### I. INTRODUCTION

The media is an indispensable institution in the activities and practices of politics. Its influence is echoed in expressions like *mediatised politics* which conceptualizes the ability of the media to demand, influence, and adjust political decisions and practices (Koivunen & Vuorelma, 2022). In Ghana, like in several democratic countries, the media is regarded as the fourth estate of the realm. This tag not only emphasizes the mandate of the media to play an influential watchdog role in the government and the governance of the country but also foregrounds the importance of the media in the politics and general well-being of the country (Shardow, 2015). Louw (2010) notes that being the fourth estate, the media wields as much authority as the other arms of government (executive, legislature, and judiciary) but differs from them because it is usually independent of the checks and balances the other institutions experience. It is this independence that affirms its essential role as the watchdog of the political system. In the exercise of its watchdog role, the media may challenge political order and may even clash with political institutions if the media upholds its high



journalistic standards (Zuffova, 2023). The adversarial nature of the media to politics has been considered necessary in the media's discharge of its watchdog role (Louw, 2010). This is a common phenomenon in several societies where the media has the freedom to operate.

The Constitution of Ghana guarantees the media its freedom to function as the watchdog of the society by prohibiting all forms of impediments and arbitrary censorship (Karikari, 2007). This assured freedom of the press has encouraged the proliferation of several media organisations in the country. Ghana's National Communications Authority (2022) reports that by the end of the fourth quarter of 2022, Ghana had 156 authorized television stations, with 117 operating during the quarter under review. The country also had a total of 707 radio stations authorized to operate although a total of 513 were operational by the fourth quarter of 2022. The country presently has over 400 registered newspapers (Shardow, 2015).

Despite the significant growth of several forms of media in the country, the newspaper remains a dominant type that shapes the landscape of media practices in Ghana. The newspaper was the first genre of media introduced in Ghana; this was accomplished by the establishment of the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette* newspaper in 1822 by Sir McCarthy at Cape Coast as an official mouthpiece of the colonial government (Anyidoho, 2016). The first phase of the history of the media in Ghana was completely dominated by the newspaper industry. Most newspapers in Ghana are often characterised as political because the majority of them often publish political content (Anyidoho, 2016; Hasty, 2005).

As part of their roles, political newspapers are used to consolidate the democracy of the country (Hasty, 2005, Mintah, 2024a). They serve as a major political tool for many political parties and associations in Ghana as they are used to express political passions which may sometimes be ammunitions used in political wars. The establishment of several newspapers and other media institutions by politically known public figures has complicated the practice of politics in Ghana. These politically affiliated newspapers shape the political discourse in the country by promoting a political party-aligned agenda. Indeed, several newspapers in Ghana are politically aligned, and this affects their news content and their acceptance by readers.

Scholars like Hasty (2005) suggest that both state and private newspapers in Ghana are politically biased. The state newspapers amplify the political party in government's ideas by producing stories that promote the pro-government's political party while the private newspapers often critique the government. Thus, the political colourization of newspapers in Ghana is not peculiar to private newspapers but also state-owned newspapers (Shardow, 2015). This view, however, contradicts the position of other scholars like Temo (2013) who argue that the private newspapers in Ghana are more politically aligned when compared to that of state newspapers. The political affiliation of newspapers affects their performance of the watchdog role as state-owned newspapers in Ghana often do not critique the actions and decisions of top functionaries of whichever political party in power (Agbelengor, 2015). Private newspapers, on the other hand, target rival political officials in their performance of their watchdog functions but are reluctant to pursue functionaries that belong to the political party to which their newspapers are aligned.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

During elections in Ghana, there are conventional and ethical restrictions on active political campaigning, especially on the eve of elections. As a practice, forty-eight hours before election (the silence period) is marked by the absence of campaign-related activities. Ghana's Political Parties Code of Conduct 2012 insists that all campaign-related activities by political entities must cease within 48 hours of the elections. Further, Section 37 of Ghana's PNDCL 284 prohibits campaigning within five hundred meters of any polling station on polling days. Despite these restrictions, there is a pervasive suspicion that newspapers continue to engage in subtle campaigns for their preferred candidates (Hasty, 2005; Shardow, 2015) although an exploration of the linguistic realization of this suspicion has not been pursued. It is for this reason that this research sets out to examine and unveil the discourse strategies employed by the newspapers to subtly campaign for their preferred candidates in defiance of the ban. Moreover, earlier research by Chiang and Knight (2011) has asserted that newspapers' endorsements of political candidates are influential on election outcomes as voters are more likely to vote or support the candidates recommended by the newspapers. As such, it is important to examine how the subtle newspaper endorsements are carried out in newspaper discourses, especially in the face of political bans.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

Specifically, it seeks:

- i. To examines the functional campaign discourse strategies employed by the newspapers in their subtle campaigns
- ii. To examine the patterns of attitudinal resources employed by the newspapers in the performance of functional campaign discourse strategies in their subtle campaigns.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

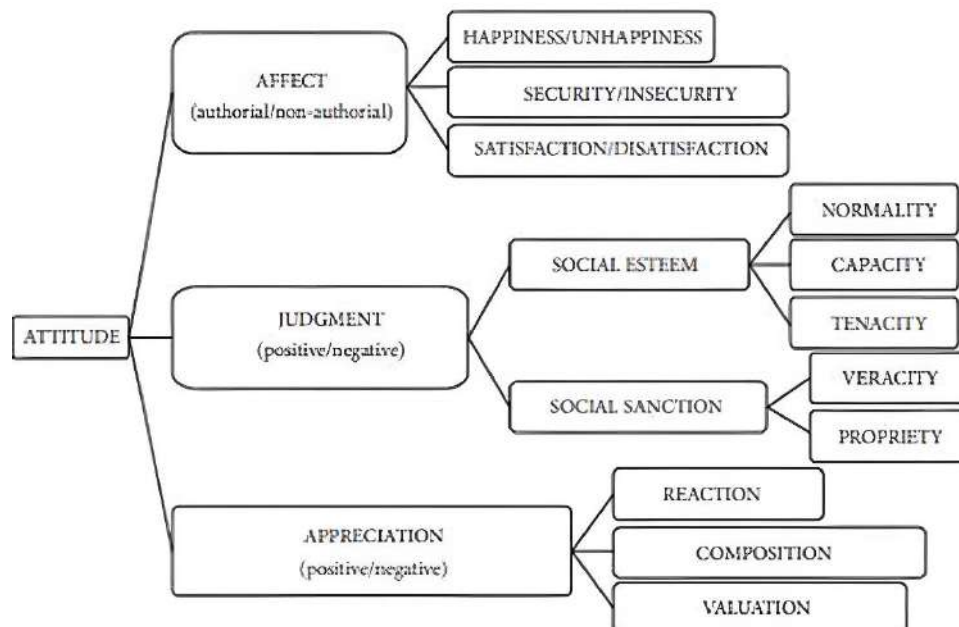
### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse

The study engages the functional theory of political campaign discourse as its analytical framework (Benoit, 2006; Benoit & Sheaffer, 2006; Choi & Benoit, 2016). The theory posits that in an election in democratic contexts, participating candidates themselves or institutions like the media establish their preferences through the several discourse strategies and functions because of the competitive nature of elections. The politicians and agents affiliated to political orientations utilize campaign messages to either cast themselves in a favourable light or to diminish their opponents in the eyes of the public; thus, the politicians and their affiliates attempt to distinguish themselves from their opponents through campaign discourses (Benoit, 2006; Oyekola, 2023). The act of distinguishing themselves are functionally carried out through *Acclaiming*, *Attacking*, and *Defending* (Benoit, 2006; 2007). Acclaiming, as a discourse function, is encoded in the positive attributes or policies about a preferred candidate which are presented in texts or campaign messages. Acclaims are engaged to present a preferred candidate favourably through the association of positive characteristic traits and policies. Furthermore, *Attacking* is carried out by detailing several negative characteristic traits and policies with an unpreferred candidate. The Attacks make the opposing candidate unappealing to readers of texts or voters. Defending is engaged to refute a claim or an attack. It becomes necessary to prevent further damage from an attack and to restore a candidate's damaged face.

#### 2.1.2 Attitude System

The study also used the Attitude system of the Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) to uncover the subjective attitude the newspapers vested and promoted in the political campaigns. According to Martin and Rose (2007), the Appraisal theory presents a system for evaluating the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, and can be used to examine the strength of the feelings involved in the attitude negotiation, and the ways values are sourced and readers aligned (p. 25). The Appraisal system comprises three main systems including Attitude, Graduation and Engagement. This study employs only the system of Attitude to explore the attitudes expressed in the performance of the three campaign discourse functions. *Figure 1* below presents the representation of the Appraisal system and its subtypes.



**Figure 1**

*Attitude system (adapted from Llopis, 2017)*

The Attitude system is concerned with the feelings inscribed and/ or invoked in linguistic items or structures deployed in texts by writers or speakers to demonstrate their subjective opinions and ideological positions (Mintah, 2024a; Opoku, 2022). Thus, language is viewed as a means of construing attitudes which when unveiled allow for understanding of interpersonal meanings. As demonstrated from *Figure 1*, the Attitude system as a framework encompasses three sets of resources as systems of evaluations: Affect, Judgement and Appreciation. Affect represents the linguistic resources that are used to express emotions and feelings, judging character and valuing the worth of things (Martin & Rose, 2007, Llopis, 2017); thus, it interprets thoughts, feelings, and emotional reactions. The affect is



typically realised in the subsystems of happiness/ unhappiness, security/insecurity, and satisfaction/ dissatisfaction. Judgement refers to the linguistic resource that serves to evaluate human behaviour. In the Judgement attitude appraisals, human characters or behaviours are evaluated based on social sanctions and social esteem. Appreciation is realised as an evaluation of things, processes, or events, based on aesthetic principles and other items of social value (Llopis, 2017; Opoku, 2022). Appreciation may be realised as Reaction, Composition or Valuation of things. Each of these classifications and their subtypes were explored to identify the kinds and purposes that are instantiated in the texts studied.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

The discourse of political communication has greatly been, and continues to be shaped by the media. The existence of mediatized politics underscores the deep interest and influence the media has in the politics of a nation or society. Koivunen and Vuorelma (2022, p. 394) indicate that mediatization, as a concept, reflects the permeation of media logic not only in political communication but also in the political process. In other words, the impact the media has on politics manifests in every fiber of politics including political institutions; all political communication; political activities like elections, voting, and vetting of political actors; political actors' decisions; and political campaigns, among others. The media provide and maintain a platform for political debates and opinion sharing (Heiberger et al., 2022). Indeed, there exists a plethora of media-hybrid and media-omnipresent communicative ecosystems that may even be populist in every political system (Kissas, 2024).

As a traditional media, newspapers have long and actively been instrumental in the politics of societies. In the United States of America (USA), for instance, until recently, the newspaper had served as the primary information tool for politicians as they strive to woo their electorate (Petrova et al., 2021). Despite the influx and impact that the new media have had on politics, Archer and Darr (2022) note that national newspapers and local newspapers have a significant impact on political communications, processes, and activities in America. The campaign activities by newspapers have the likelihood of increasing voter turnout and several newspapers that are party-aligned have a significant impact on propagating their party ideologies and slants on American citizens that subscribe to the newspaper's party agenda (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010). In other words, preferences for newspapers are greatly influenced by the newspaper's political positioning in the promulgation of party ideologies and political affinity (Chiang & Knight, 2011; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010). The influence of newspapers on elections is, however, bi-directional; while newspapers can influence the outcome of elections, the outcome of elections too can influence the patronage of newspapers, especially local newspapers (Archer & Darr, 2022; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010).

In several European countries, newspapers are the "power centre" in the life, especially the politics, of its citizens (Koivunen & Vuorelma, 2022). For instance, in Finland newspapers serve as an instrument for nation-building and public discussions, and continue to be a broker of public trust in governance (Koivunen & Vuorelma 2022, p. 399). Similarly, newspapers in Sweden are noted to have identifiable political profiles which influences the way citizens interact with them (Shehata et al., 2022). Citizens, therefore, engage in selective preferences for newspapers based on political ideology affinity and anticipated agreement. In Africa, newspapers have always dictated political interactions and discourses. Besides serving the political agenda of propagating propaganda, they perform the watchdog function. As a watchdog, newspapers serve as a guard for the public interest by providing essential checks on political officers and institutions. It is a necessary and appropriate role, especially in the fight against corruption, abuse of power, and neglect of duties by political actors (Baran & Davis, 2012; Žuffová, 2023). However, political ownership of media organizations has greatly subverted the *watchdog* role of newspapers to what may be described as *lapdog* (Baran & Davis, 2012).

The democratization of the media space has led to the political capture of media organizations by oligarchs who have made several media organizations politically vulnerable and partial, leading to a lack of transparency, compromises, ethical lapses, and unprofessionalism (Shardow & Asare, 2016; Smith et al., 2021). Political ownership of various media organisations has greatly influenced and changed the media discourse in response to political developments on the continent (Agbelengor, 2015). In Ghana, the media, particularly newspapers, have served as a rights protection agent, an independence campaign tool, a political propaganda vessel, and an advocate of democracy (Karikari, 2007; Mintah, 2024a). The discharge of these important roles of the media has often been hindered by political ownership and commercialization. Scholars (Hasty, 2005; Shardow, 2015; Temo, 2013) assert that the newspapers in Ghana are not free from partisan political ideologies, whether state-owned or private-owned because these politically aligned owners are an essential part of the agenda-setters of the newspapers' political decisions. This phenomenon has not changed and continues to characterize several newspapers in Ghana although some independent newspapers continue to thrive. Therefore, the prohibition of political campaigns of newspapers presents an interesting phenomenon worthy of exploration.



### III. METHODOLOGY

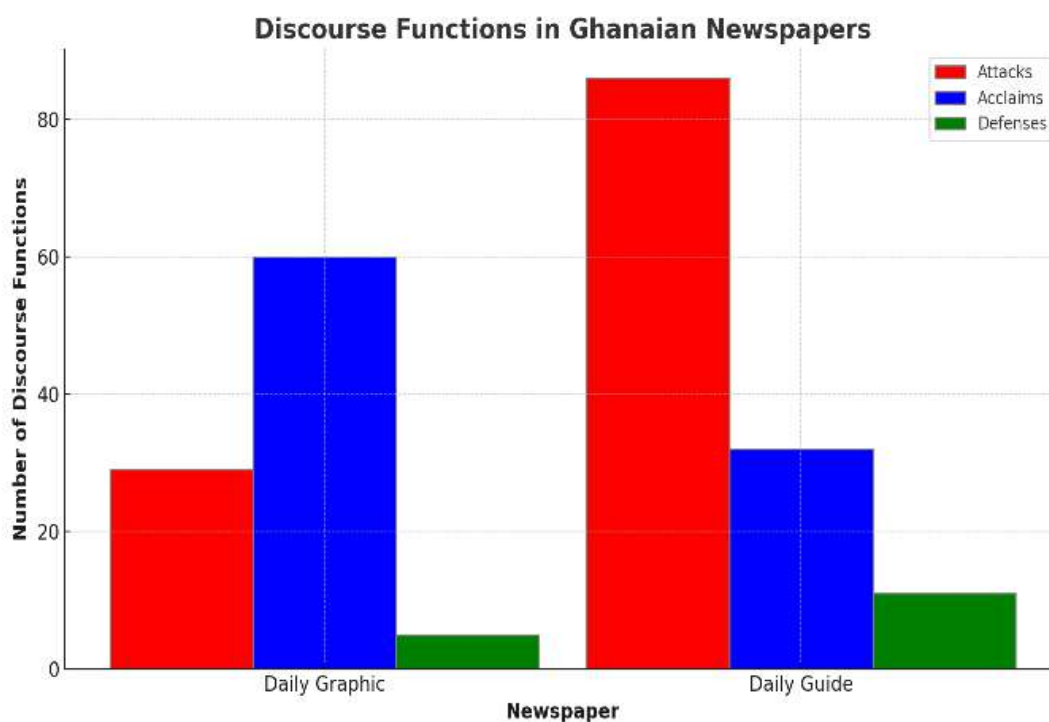
This study examines lead stories from two prominent newspapers in Ghana: *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide*. These newspapers were selected based on their prominence, circulation, and academic interest. *Daily Graphic* is the leading state-owned newspaper while *Daily Guide* is considered the leading private newspaper in the country (Fosu, 2014; Mintah, 2024a). Both newspapers have been the focus of numerous academic studies due to their adherence to high journalistic standards (Frimpong, 2017; Fosu, 2014; Hasty, 2005; Mintah, 2024a, 2024b). The study purposively selected eight lead stories from each newspaper, focusing on the penultimate publications before the December 7 elections in Ghana during the election years of 2008 to 2020. This selection was guided by the research's objective to explore the campaign discourse strategies employed by newspapers, despite the restrictions on political campaigns. The identification of the lead stories was based on criteria established by Mensing and Greer (2006) and Nunoo (2016). The lead story is typically the story with the largest font size on the front page which may be positioned in the far right corner of the page, as this is where dominant elements are usually placed in newspaper design, and reflect the prevailing political climate (Mensing & Greer, 2006; Nunoo, 2016).

For data analysis, the study employed the Functional Theory of campaign discourse and coded the data into functional themes of Acclaim, Attack, and Defense. These themes, as discussed by Oyekola (2023), can manifest at various grammatical levels (sentences, clauses, phrases) as long as they convey a cohesive sense of the discourse's functions. The study further identified and coded Attitude types—Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation—within each discourse function. The coding process entailed identifying the instance of occurrence of the themes at various grammatical levels in the data, and labeling the instances to index them. Thus, the coding terms (Attack, Defense and Acclaim for Campaign Discourse markers; and Affect, Judgement and Appreciation from Attitude system) were culled from the theories. To ensure reliability and validity, two additional experts from the University of Ghana, Legon, who specialize in the relevant theories, independently coded the data. Cohen's kappa inter-coder reliability was employed at a value of 0.81 to confirm the agreement on the identified functions, strategies, and attitudes, consistent with previous research (Cho & Benoit, 2005).

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 General Discourse Functions

The research sets out to identify the functional strategies engaged by the state and the private newspapers in carrying out their subtle campaigns. *Figure 2* below presents the frequencies of these functions observed in the data.



**Figure 2**  
*Frequencies of the Three Functions in the Data*



The findings in *Figure 2* suggest that there are notable differences in the preference for the subtle campaign functions that are engaged by the newspapers. While the state newspaper chooses Acclaims (63.8% of the data) as the preferred strategy, the private newspaper opts for Attacks (66.7% of the data) as its most preferred strategy. This suggests that the state newspaper engages in its subtle campaigns by presenting positive characteristics and appraisals of candidates more than criticizing candidates. This strategy may present preferred candidates in a more appealing manner to the readers without offending other parties. The private newspaper, on the other hand, seems to heavily concentrate on attacking candidates they do not prefer. In this way, they appear to be more aggressive in their campaign than the state newspapers. The observation is not surprising as Hasty (2005) and Mintah (2024b) suggest that state newspapers in Ghana strive to be less confrontational and appear appealing to readers in the reportage of details about personalities in their attributions while private newspapers are more aggressive in their attributions. According to Benoit (2017), it is risky for campaign messages to contain more Attacks than Acclaims as the overwhelming use of Attacks often courts voters' displeasure with the messages. Hence, the campaign strategy of the private newspaper to engage in more Attacks may hinder the effectiveness of the campaign.

Further, earlier research works like Benoit (2017), Cho and Benoit (2005), and Glantz et al. (2016) argue that political campaigns that are carried out by the candidates, their political parties or affiliates are likely to have more Acclaims than Attacks. However, the findings of this research indicate otherwise. As seen in *Figure 1* above, while the state newspaper follows the expected tradition of using more Acclaims, the private newspaper counters the narrative by using more Attacks. The Defense remains the least preferred strategy as characteristic of political campaigns (Benoit, 2017; Oyekola, 2023). Glantz et al. (2016) suggest that Defenses are often rare in campaign discourses because they remind voters of candidates' weaknesses. The newspapers under study did not seem to be interested in defending much of the weaknesses of the candidates but rather concentrated on acclaiming their preferred candidate and attacking opposing candidates.

#### 4.1.1 Acclaims

Acclaim occurs when messages are used to positively appraise candidates' policy or character to construct a positive image of candidates or their parties. Examples of Acclaims found in the data are presented in (1) and (2) below.

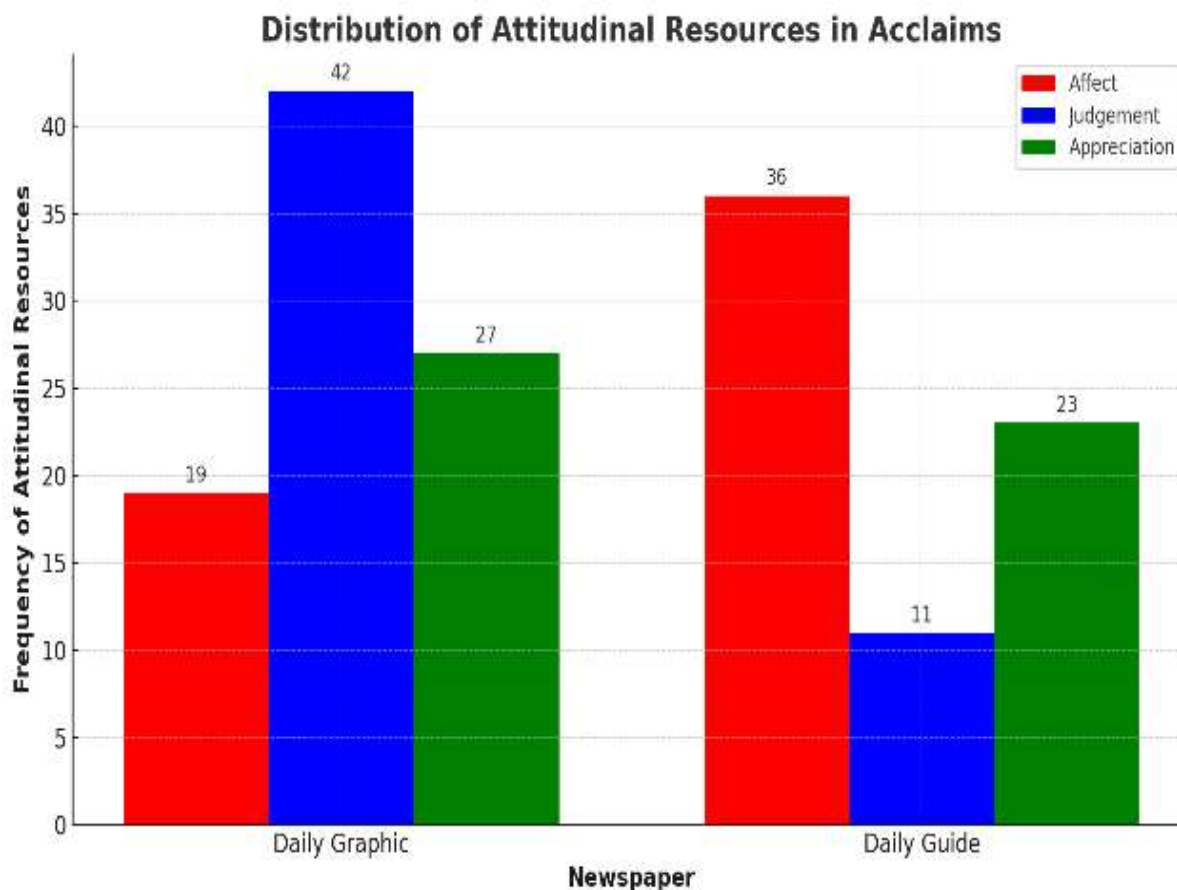
(1) Considered the most popular personality today whose ratings is said to have dwarfed those of both the former and sitting presidents, the name 'Nana' is mentioned at least twice in almost every conversation, be it on the street, market square, or drinking bar. (Daily Guide, 2008)

(2) his government had undertaken many structural reforms with positive results which could only be further consolidated if we press on and stay the course. (Daily Graphic, 2016)

In example (1) above, the private newspaper acclaims the character of Nana Akufo-Addo, the presidential candidate of the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), as the most liked of the presidential candidate whose image and reputation overrides that of his opponents. He is presented as the most famous and desired by voters. In example (2), the state newspaper acclaims the policy of the sitting president, John Dramani Mahama, who was also the presidential candidate of the governing National Democratic Congress (NDC). The structural reforms that were pursued by the candidate were highlighted as significant enough to vote for the candidate.

To identify the patterns of the Acclaims engaged by the newspapers, the percentage of Acclaims assigned to the political candidates and their parties were analyzed to reveal their preferred candidate or party. The study found that state newspaper assigned 46.7% of its Acclaims to the NPP and its presidential candidate, 40% to the NDC and its presidential candidate, 6.7% to the Progressive Peoples Party (PPP) and its candidates, and the rest were assigned to others. The findings were not surprising as Ghana, since the fourth republic, has been governed only by two major political parties: the NPP and the NDC. Indeed, the period under consideration of the data had the two political parties assume the reign of the country, eight years each. The relative parity in the Acclaims assigned to both parties by the state newspaper echoes the dominance of the two parties in the political arena of the country, and also depict the relatively fair representation of campaigns for both parties by the state newspaper. Hasty (2005) and Mintah (2024b) assert that the state newspaper in Ghana strive to be objective and are more likely to be balanced in their news. The private newspaper, however, patterned the Acclaims differently from that of the state newspaper. Over 93% of the Acclaims were assigned to the two major political parties or their candidates with the NPP receiving most of the Acclaims (65.6%) and the NDC receiving 28.1%. The dominance of the NPP Acclaims indicates that the private newspaper is overtly biased in its campaign and demonstrates the paper's preference for NPP to win the election.

The study further explored the attitudinal resources that were engaged in the various Acclaims that were found in the data. *Figure 3* below presents the realizations of this objective.

**Figure 3**

*Attitudinal resources in the Acclams*

Most of the Attitude kinds that were realized in the Acclams were positive. Oyekola (2023) argues that Acclams are more effectively done when positive attitudes are encoded in the campaign; it was, therefore, not surprising that this pattern was realized in the data. However, the findings in *Figure 3* illustrate the distinct attitudinal preferences of each of the newspapers in engaging the Acclaim discourse strategies. While the state newspaper chooses Judgement evaluative resources in acclaiming candidates and/ or political parties, the private newspaper opts for more Affectual resources in the performance of the Acclams. For example, in excerpt (3) below, the state newspaper acclams candidate Mahama's achievement while employing lexemes that provided positive Judgement evaluation of his performance and achievements. The expression *best* is a highly upscaled evaluation that straddles both the social esteems of positive normality, capacity and tenacity; and the social sanction of positive propriety or approval of his performance. Again, the lexeme *improved* represents a Judgement evaluation of positive capacity that foregrounds the candidate's abilities as a president.

(3) he had done his *best* [Judgement-positive] to stabilise the power situation and *improved* [Judgement-positive] the economy in the last four years (Daily Graphic, 2016)

In example (4) below, the Affectual lexeme *happy* show the private newspaper's attempt to highlight the positive disposition of candidate Akuffo-Addo while acclaiming his candidature to woo voters

(4) I am *happy* [Affect-happiness] to give my word (Daily Guide, 2020)

The variation in Attitudinal preferences has implications on the nature of Acclams that are carried out in the two newspapers. The private newspaper's preference for Affect appraisals is more likely to invoke sensationalism in the Acclaim campaigns. Most of the Affects that were realized in the private newspaper were positive Inclinations and Security, 41.7% and 30.6% respectively. This suggests that the private newspaper encodes much of the emotional Acclaim campaigns by focusing on what candidates or their parties were inclined toward in terms of their desires and fears, and also focused on matters of security in terms of trust, confidence, and surprise. The few Judgement appraisals that occurred in the private newspaper evaluated the social esteem of the candidate by highlighting much of their positive tenacity and the social sanctions of veracity and propriety. This is exemplified in example (5) below.

(5) President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo has *pledged* his commitment to the peace and stability of the country, and has *assured* of his readiness to *accept* the verdict of the election. (Daily Guide, 2020)



Here, the lexemes *pledged*, *assured* and *accept* do not only instantiate Affects of positive security and inclinations of the candidate but also also instantiate positive Judgement of +tenacity, i.e., his determination to conduct himself responsibly if elected into office; and +social sanction of both veracity and propriety — the *pledge* (inviting approval) to *accept* the outcome of the election as truth.

On the contrary, the state newspaper's overwhelming choice of Judgement appraisal may come across as an objective evaluation of the candidates or party of choice. The data inform that the evaluations in the state newspaper focused on the social sanctions of propriety. Oyekola (2023) asserts that Judgement Acclaims are very effective when they focus on propriety of social sanctions. The state newspaper demonstrates that acclaiming the propriety of the character and actions of candidates or their political parties is very effective in wooing candidates while concealing the newspaper's political agenda.

#### 4.1.2 Attacks

According to Benoit (2007), Attacks succeed in negatively characterizing an opposing candidate by detailing unpleasant characteristics of the candidate and affiliates. From *Figure 1* above, it can be attested that Attacks are more frequent with the private newspaper than the state newspaper. Examples of Attacks found in the data are presented in (6) from the private newspaper and (7) from the state newspaper below.

(6) the former President Mahama turned the forum into a whining session with a plethora of what he claimed to be 'concerns' and started attacking the current administration. (Daily Guide, 2020).

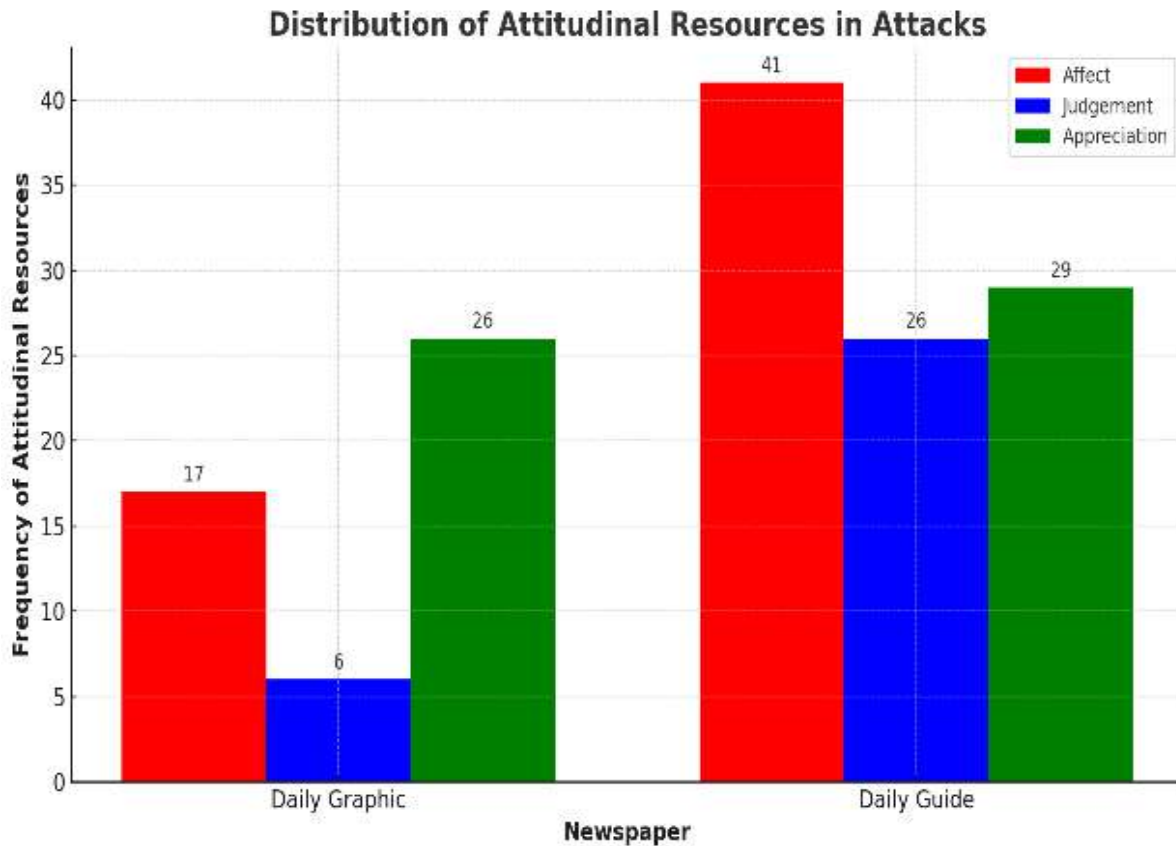
(7) ...the decision to boycott the debate was defeatist and that Nana Akufo-Addo chose to 'run away' from the debate when he rather should be the one calling for it. (Daily Graphic, 2016)

In example (6), the private newspaper attacks candidate Mahama's actions at a forum that was organized to sign a peace pact to ensure a peaceful election before the 2020 December election. The newspaper attacks the candidate and characterizes him as an aggressive, petty individual who does not necessarily want peace. In example (7), the state newspaper attacks the opposition party's candidate, Nana Addo, for refusing to attend the presidential debate organized for all presidential candidates. By reporting this decision of the main opposition candidate, the state newspaper reminds the electorates of the uncooperative nature of the candidate and marks him as undeserving of their votes.

Exploring the Attacks that were assigned to the political candidates, the study found skewed targets of Attacks in the private newspaper, with over 74.4% targeting the presidential candidate of the NDC and no Attacks to the NPP candidate. This positions the NPP presidential candidates as the preferred candidates of the private newspaper, and also the newspaper as very biased. The state newspaper also had the Attacks targeted at the candidates of the two major political parties in the country quite tilted: NPP (48.3%) and NDC (37.9%); the rest of the attacks targeted institutions that could influence the electoral process like the Electoral Commission, the police and other media organizations, among others. This relatively similar attestation of the Attacks to the candidate of the two major parties demonstrates the newspaper's attention to both parties in campaigning against both sides during elections.

Evaluating the attitudes expressed in the Attacks, the study found most of the Attacks to be negatively characterized by distinct patterns of preferences by each of the newspapers. *Figure 4* below presents the realizations in the data.



**Figure 4**

*Attitudinal resources in the Attacks*

Figure 4 above indicates that the state newspaper preferred Appreciation appraisals over Affects, and Judgements in their Attacks. The choice of Appreciation Attacks makes the state newspaper less confrontational as the characters and attributes of candidate and affiliates were not the main focus. Consider the example below from the state newspaper:

(8) He challenged Dr Bawumia to rather ask 'better' questions [APPRECIATION-Valuation] to warrant appropriate responses [APPRECIATION-Valuation]. (Daily Graphic, 2016)

Most of the Appreciation attacks in the state newspaper were focused on valuations of the acts of the presidential candidates and their affiliates while the Affects focused on in/security. The few Judgement attacks that occurred focused on the social sanction acts of propriety.

The private newspaper, however, showed much preference for the Affects in the Attacks; thus, the emotional imports of the actions, characters and policies of candidates were amplified in the Attacks more than the assessment of characters or objects in the private newspaper. Most of the Affects centered on unhappiness and insecurity. Example:

(9) Amofo-Yeboah is battling [AFFECT-Dissatisfaction] marital problems [AFFECT-Unhappiness] ahead of tomorrow's polls. (Daily Guide, 2008).

Encoding this kind of Attitude makes the Attacks in the private newspaper more sensational. While this is not surprising with the private newspapers in Ghana (Hasty, 2005; Mintah, 2024b), the sensationalism can incite voters to be emotional and dislike the candidate in question. Again, the Appreciation evaluation attacks on objects and state affairs of opposing candidates in the private newspaper were centred on social valuations while Judgement evaluations were heavily focused on the opposing candidates' social esteem of capacity to discharge their responsibilities. Examples:

(10) Professor John Evans Atta Mills, the twice-defeated [JUDGEMENT – negative] presidential candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), is also 64 years... (Daily Guide, 2008).

(11) the NDC should be given a red card ATTACK because of poor performance [APPRECIATION-Valuation] and corruption (Daily Guide, 2016)



### 4.1.3 Defenses

The Defenses were the least campaign strategy used in both groups of newspapers as illustrated in *Figure 1* above and as characteristic of earlier studies on campaign discourses (Benoit, 2017). Examples are presented in (12) and (13) below.

(12) Earlier, the Vice- President, Mr. Kwesi Amissah-Arthur, had called on Ghanaians to ignore the change the New Patriotic Party (NPP) was calling for, arguing that what the NPP called change was already happening under President Mahama. (Daily Graphic, 2016).

(13) We are not coming to chastise people and be vindictive, throw people out of work because they are not NPP people (Daily Guide, 2012)

Example (12) presents an instance the state newspaper quotes the sitting vice president defending his government from an attack by the opposition party for a change in the political leadership. In example (13), the private newspaper quotes the main opposition leader in the 2016 election defending himself against the negative tag of being vindictive. Significantly, most of the Defenses that occurred were quotations. This style of presentation seems to mask the newspapers of actively doing the bidding of their preferred political parties. Concerning the Attitudinal resources encoded in the Defenses, the study found both newspapers use more Affects in the Defenses. Most of the Affects targeted the dis/inclination and in/security of the candidates' emotional reactions as they defend themselves and their parties.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

### 5.1 Conclusion

The observations made above highlight the significance of the nature of linguistic features in media texts that endorse political institutions. The findings reveal that established media organizations, particularly newspapers, perceived as alternative voices to political establishments, employ nuanced discourse strategies that differ between state-owned and private newspapers to advance their political objectives. Specifically, the state-owned *Daily Graphic* tends to favour Acclaims, emphasizing positive aspects of candidates, while the privately-owned *Daily Guide* prefers Attacks, often adopting a more critical and sensational tone. The variation in the discourse patterns and the Appraisal resources used to present these strategies underscore the distinct approaches each newspaper takes in influencing public opinion.

The study also suggests that the political campaigns of state newspapers are more likely to be associated with Judgement appraisals, indicating a focus on the character and moral evaluation of candidates. In contrast, private newspapers seem to emphasize Affect, reflecting a more emotionally charged and sensational style. These differences highlight how bans on open political campaigns compel media organizations to develop innovative discourse strategies that align with their political affiliations and objectives while avoiding overt confrontation or societal backlash.

In environments of media censorship, alternative discourse strategies become critical for media organizations to achieve their goals. The strategies identified in this study illustrate how newspapers navigate the complexities of political communication under restrictive conditions, offering insights into how media influence differs from the more direct campaigns conducted by political candidates or institutions. These findings point to the fact that newspapers defy bans or restrictions through political-cloned linguistic choices that foster the campaigns of political institutions they sympathize. With the media as the primary source of political information for many electorates, the publications of the newspapers subtly stimulate and manipulate the electorate's decisions through carefully couched discourse structures that are persuasive. In a way, this consolidates the democracy of the country.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Like all research, this study has its limitations. It focused on state and private newspapers, excluding those directly affiliated with political parties. Future research could explore how politically-funded newspapers craft their campaign discourses in the face of political bans, offering a broader discussion on media strategies in politically charged environments. Especially in nations that also observe prohibitions of political campaigns in the media landscape in the forty-eight hours before the election, research works with a similar agenda to this will add to the insights provided by this research.

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