

Image of the Christian Clergy in the Ghanaian Media: A Study of the *Daily Guide* Newspaper



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ABSTRACT

This article examined how the *Daily Guide* newspaper, through its publication of certain stories, framed the Christian clergy in Ghana. The study, which utilized the mixed-method approach, also employed the gatekeeping and framing theories in its quest to find out the tone of stories, the dominant image of the clergy, as well as the church, which dominated the coverage, whether positively or negatively. The study found that the majority of the stories that the *Daily Guide* newspaper published about the clergy were on negative occurrences involving the clergy. Indeed, out of the 59 stories sampled, 33 of the stories, which is 60 percent, were on scandals and controversies about the clergy, with 20, which is 34 percent, touching on the positive acts of the clergy. Also, hard crimes on the individual note emerged as the dominant frame the clergy was associated with, as 16 out of the 59 stories were on the clergy's involvement in acts like murder, robbery, fraud, and theft, among others. The portrayal, arguably, points to an undesirably negative image of the clergy in Ghana, necessitating that efforts are doubled to arrest the situation so that the clergy do not end up losing their influential role and recognition in society. This study, apart from adding to the literature on the framing of the clergy in Ghana, is also meant to awaken the consciousness of the clergy and society, in general, to review their respective roles in promoting worthy lifestyles and morality in communities.

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INTRODUCTION

The image of the Christian clergy in the media has been a topic of much debate and analysis in recent years.¹ This is primarily due to the growing number of negative publications about the clergy.²

According to Roberts, the continuous negative reportage is unhealthy and, if left unchecked, could cause the clergy to lose their enviably long-held position of honour in society.³ Indeed, the clergy, over the years, have played rich, critical, and diverse roles in society, including serving as role models for society as a whole and not only for congregants.⁴ The Clergy have been regarded as standards of

¹ Tereza Zavadilová, "The Clergy Child Sexual Abuse and Its Cover-up in Media: An Explorative Study of the Official Vatican Media and American Catholic Media in 2013–2020," in *Child Sexual Abuse and the Media* (Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2022), 59–78.

² Magezi E. Baloyi, "The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective," *In Die Skriflig / In Luce Verbi* 58, no. 1 (January 15, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.2993>.

³ Alastair Roberts, "The Loss of Pastoral Credibility in the Age of the Internet," 2014, <https://alastairadversaria.com/2014/07/27/the-loss-of-pastoral-credibility-in-the-age-of-the-internet/>.

⁴ Norman Chivasa, "Instituting Dispute Resolution Procedures in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe Church," *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 52, no. 1 (January 30, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v52i1.2285>.

morality in society,⁵ as trusted agents of peace and reconciliation in society,⁶ and even in a secular context (in local villages and towns), they represent the good in the community.⁷

The Clergy also serve as community leaders, social activists, and spiritual guides,⁸ and their role is not limited only to strict pastoral duties like teaching and preaching the Word of God, church leadership, and pastoral care,⁹ but other social services that would cause society to develop and bring relief to the people.¹⁰ According to Asamoah-Gyadu, pastors are not only religious leaders but also community figures who wield considerable influence over social, political, and economic matters.¹¹

The significant role the clergy and the church in general play requires that the Man of God live above reproach and become a worthy example in society at large.¹² This is especially so in an era where the acts of a member of the clergy could easily find themselves in the media, thereby influencing public perception about such clergy and the church in general.¹³ Wrong acts would arguably mean loss of public confidence in the clergy and the church in general thereby weakening the impact of the church in influencing society positively as the Holy Bible, per Matthew 5:13-16, expects the church to be the Salt and Light of the world by helping in preserving the moral fibre of the society through good, positive and exemplary lifestyles. This is especially so when some members of the clergy have been sighted for negative acts of violence, sexual abuse, financial impropriety, adultery, engagement in fake miracles, occult practices, disrespect for law and order, among other immoral acts.¹⁴ Although some members of the clergy have described such negative acts as isolated cases that are blown out of proportion by the media,¹⁵ the reportage still constitutes a huge dent in the image of the clergy. The conflicting literature on the subject requires that research be carried out to find out the true state of affairs regarding the dominant image of the clergy in the media, especially the Ghanaian media.

The study seeks to establish whether the clergy in Ghana are even fulfilling their clerical and moral mandate in society or otherwise. The majority of the research on the subject is from Western

⁵ Darryl W. Stephens, "The Minister as Moral Theologian: Ethical Dimensions of Pastoral Leadership. By Sondra Wheeler," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39, no. 1 (2019): 189–90, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jsce20193914>; Baloyi, "The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective."

⁶ Konadu Adam and George Kyeremeh, "A Reflection on the Role of the Church in Ensuring Societal Peace," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, December 12, 2022, 665–72, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20223131>.

⁷ Carmen Schuhmann and Annelieke Damen, "Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age," *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 4 (2018): 405–17.

⁸ Lumar Vargas, *More than Spiritual Leaders: A Phenomenological Study of Latina/o Pastors and Their Roles as Transformational Leaders and Agents of Social and Economic Advancement* (Cleveland State University, 2023).

⁹ Rabson Hove, "The Pastor as the Primary Teacher in the Church: The Meaning and Expectations of Pastoral Ministry within the Mainline Denominations," *Pharos Journal of Theology*, no. 104(5) (November 2023), <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.54>.

¹⁰ Charles O Kwarteng and Hannah Emma Acquaye, "The Role of Ghanaian Churches in the Financial Rehabilitation of the Poor: Implications for Re-Visiting the Social Mission of Religious Institutions," *Journal of Financial Services Marketing* 15, no. 4 (March 15, 2011): 309–19, <https://doi.org/10.1057/fsm.2010.26>; Prince Ofori. Appiah, "Provision of Social Services by the Assemblies of God Church in the Suhum District of Eastern Region" (University of Cape Coast, 2011).

¹¹ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'God Bless Our Homeland Ghana': Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State," in *Trajectories of Religion in Africa* (BRILL, 2014), 165–83, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401210577_012.

¹² Baloyi, "The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective."

¹³ Michael O. Ukonu, Olarewaju Eunice Aanu, and Moses Chukwubuike Ani, "An Evaluation of the Views of Editors on Factors Affecting Coverage of Clergy-Related Scandals among Nigerian Newspapers," *RUJMASS* 5, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁴ Mihaela-Alexandra Tudor, "Introducing Religion into the Media: When the Catholic Clergy Becomes Violent," *Comunicazioni Sociali: Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies: Nuova Serie: XLII*, 2, 2020, 295–307; Emmanuel Nii-Boye Quarshie et al., "Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Media Content Analysis of Survivors, Offenders, and Offence Characteristics," *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 4 (August 20, 2022): 3028–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01430-3>; Jill Astbury, "Child Sexual Abuse in the General Community and Clergy-Perpetrated Child Sexual Abuse," *Australian Psychological Society (Unpublished)*, 2013; Gregory W Treadwell, "Preventing Church Embezzlement in US Protestant and Catholic Churches," *Journal of Business and Accounting* 13, no. 1 (2020): 190–201; John Montague, "The Law and Financial Transparency in Churches: Reconsidering the Form 990 Exemption," *Cardozo L. Rev.* 35 (2013): 203; D. L. Bissell, *Restoring Fallen Pastors: A Study on Restoring and Reinstating Clergy Who Have Been Involved in Sexual Misconduct.* (Andrews University, 2005); Solomon O. Ademiluka, "Assessing the Quest for Miracles in Nigeria from the Economic Perspective," *Theologia Viatorum* 47, no. 1 (March 22, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/tv.v47i1.179>; John O Magbadelo, "Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Exploiting or Edifying the Masses?," *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 8, no. 2 (2004): 15–29; Ukonu, Aanu, and Ani, "An Evaluation of the Views of Editors on Factors Affecting Coverage of Clergy-Related Scandals among Nigerian Newspapers"; John O Magbadelo, "Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Exploiting or Edifying the Masses?," *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 8, no. 2 (2004): 15–29; Ukonu, Aanu, and Ani, "An Evaluation of the Views of Editors on Factors Affecting Coverage of Clergy-Related Scandals among Nigerian Newspapers."

¹⁵ Gbcghanaonline, "Rev. Dr. Wengam Calls for a Positive Media Portrayal of Genuine Pastors," 2024, <https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/general-news/assemblies-pastors-media/2024/>.

societies and contexts, leaving the Ghanaian context and perspective less explored. Thus, the work, aside from dealing with the contradiction regarding literature on the topic, will also add to the limited literature on how the clergy are framed in the Ghanaian media, especially their acts that get reported in the print media. The research is underlined by the following questions:

1. What is the tone of the stories covered by the *Daily Guide* on the clergy?
2. What is the dominant image of the clergy in the *Daily Guide*?
3. Which church dominates in terms of the image?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The media's portrayal of the clergy has been a subject of interest, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward religion, morality, and leadership. This is not only a result of the significant role the clergy play in society, especially as standard-bearers of morality,¹⁶ but also because the media have proven to be vital in informing and shaping the opinions of audiences about such happenings in society.¹⁷ Thus, how the clergy are portrayed in the media goes a long way in influencing public perception and general attitude towards such persons or issues. It is on this note that the clergy and society should pay attention to such acts of the clergy and subsequent representations in the media.

According to Schuhmann and Damen, in many instances, the media portrays clergy as moral leaders and pillars of their communities, as this framing emphasizes, among other things, their role in providing spiritual guidance, supporting community initiatives, and offering solace in times of crisis.¹⁸ For example, during natural disasters or social upheavals, pastors are often depicted as comforting figures who mobilize resources and aid for affected individuals.¹⁹ The positive framing underscores the pastoral role in fostering communal solidarity and moral uprightness.²⁰ The clergy has also been instrumental in supporting developmental drives by deploying the resources of the church in building schools,²¹ hospitals, and providing water, among other social services, to support communities.²²

Yirenkyi posits that the clergy, over the years, have been instrumental in politics and governance by calling out non-performing politicians as well as advocating for positive policies for the people, while leading certain crusades aimed at bringing relief to the people.²³ Opoku et al. add to the discussion that the clergy have contributed significantly to the fight against excesses, especially corruption and human rights abuses in the country over the years.²⁴

Groups like the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Christian Council of Ghana, and individual Christian leaders have not been silent on governance, corruption, and other excesses, and even go on to proffer alternative courses of action in the public interest.²⁵ Baloyi adds that the clergy have a fundamental role to play: preaching the gospel to awaken the conscience of the people to worthy lifestyles while serving as role models for society by practicing what they preach, hence living above

¹⁶ Baloyi, "The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective."

¹⁷ Catherine Happer and Greg Philo, "The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 1, no. 1 (2013): 321–36; Dare Owolabi, "The Role of Mass Media in Public Opinion Formation and Governance," *Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities* 17 (2019).

¹⁸ Schuhmann and Damen, "Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age."

¹⁹ Adam and Kyeremeh, "A Reflection on the Role of the Church in Ensuring Societal Peace"; Stephens, "The Minister as Moral Theologian: Ethical Dimensions of Pastoral Leadership. By Sondra Wheeler"; Francis Benyah, "Prayer Camps, Healing, and the Management of Chronic Mental Illness in Ghana: A Qualitative Phenomenological Inquiry," in *Spiritual, Religious, and Faith-Based Practices in Chronicity* (Routledge, 2021), 173–94.

²⁰ Chivasa, "Instituting Dispute Resolution Procedures in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe Church."

²¹ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "An Examination of the Role of Public Theology in the Church's Efforts Toward National Transformation in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, June 21, 2023, 238–52, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2023964>.

²² Benyah, "Prayer Camps, Healing, and the Management of Chronic Mental Illness in Ghana: A Qualitative Phenomenological Inquiry"; Appiah, "Provision of Social Services by the Assemblies of God Church in the Suhum District of Eastern Region."; John Kwaku Opoku, Eric Manu, and Frimpong Wiafe, "Religion, Education and Development in Ghana: A Historical Perspective," *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 12 (2015): 6–18.

²³ Kwasi Yirenkyi, "The Role of Christian Churches in National Politics: Reflections from Laity and Clergy in Ghana," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 3 (2000): 325–38.

²⁴ Opoku, Manu, and Wiafe, "Religion, Education and Development in Ghana: A Historical Perspective."

²⁵ Cruxnow.com, "Ghana Bishops Blast Government for 'Weak, Corrupt' Efforts to Halt Illegal Mining," 2024; Tracy Kuperus and Richard Asante, "Christianity, Citizenship, and Political Engagement among Ghanaian Youth," *African Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (2021): 37–61; Y. D. Gbande, "Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) and Public Policy" (University of Ghana, 2009).

reproach.²⁶ It is arguably the hope of society that if all institutions fail in terms of moral uprightness, it should not be the clergy and, by extension, the church, which has become a worthy standard of morality in society.

However, the hope seems to be waning as recent representations by the media regarding the clergy are not only on acts contrary to the Bible but also other societal standards, with the reportage hinging on scandals and controversies. Media coverage frequently highlights scandals involving pastors and other clergy, focusing on moral failings and hypocrisy.²⁷ Other high-profile cases of theft, financial misconduct, sexual abuse, and other unethical behaviors attract significant media attention, shaping public perception of religious leaders.²⁸ The Scandals indeed seem to have spread across different categories like sex, theft, murder, ritual practices, fraud, and homosexuality, among several others.²⁹

Some clergy also use their position to take advantage of church members, engage in immoral acts,³⁰ mismanage church funds,³¹ and even consult occult powers in their quest for miracles.³² Indeed, these stories often emphasize the contrast between the clergy's public personas and their private actions, thereby questioning their integrity and authenticity.

Indeed, some clergy have fought against the negative tag associated with them, accusing the media of blowing such isolated situations out of proportion. According to the Superintendent of the Assemblies of God Church-Ghana, Rev. Dr. Pastor Wengam, the portrayal does not give a true picture of happenings, especially in Ghana, as a few clergy may be misconducting themselves.³³ According to him, the media should avoid stirring unnecessary controversies for the church and clergy, which happens through unhealthy reporting and generalizations about the clergy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work is undergirded by the Framing and Gatekeeping theories.

Framing Theory

The root of the framing theory is attributed to the theorist Gregory Bateson in 1972 and was built upon by Erving Goffman in 1974 as the theory sought to describe the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar contexts.³⁴ Thus, it helps in focusing the attention of audiences on certain events and then placing them within a field of meaning. The existing literature on framing points to a concept that is useful for analysing how issues or personalities are constructed,³⁵ meaning-making,³⁶ the discursive portrayals,³⁷ and symbolic representations.³⁸ The concept of framing rests, basically, on

²⁶ Baloyi, "The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective."

²⁷ Baloyi, "The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective."

²⁸ Jacobs, Nkem et al., "Rich Churches, Poor Members," *Vanguard (Nigeria)*, October 25, 2014.

²⁹ Ukonu, Aanu, and Ani, "An Evaluation of the Views of Editors on Factors Affecting Coverage of Clergy-Related Scandals among Nigerian Newspapers."

³⁰ M.N. Edigbo, "The Challenges of Immorality and Its Implications on the Growth of Church: A Case Study Of Selected Churches In Ikwo L.G.A, Ebonyi State" (Ebonyi State College of Education, 2024); A.D. Adedoyin, "Sexual Immorality among Pastors and Its Implications to the Local Church: A Case Study of Ogbomoso Baptist Conference" (Eewa Theological Seminary, 2015).

³¹ Ecuplancia Nyumbase Njobvu, Benjamin Kaira, and Taonaziso Chowa, "Financial Accountability and Internal Controls in Religious Organizations: A Case Study of Holy Spirit Catholic Parish," *The International Journal of Business Management and Technology* 4, no. 3 (2020): 248–61; M. Fikizolo, "Church Finance Abuse by the Clergy: Pastoral Challenge" (University of Pretoria, South Africa, 2019).

³² Ukonu, Aanu, and Ani, "An Evaluation of the Views of Editors on Factors Affecting Coverage of Clergy-Related Scandals among Nigerian Newspapers."

³³ Gboghanaonline, "Rev. Dr. Wengam Calls for a Positive Media Portrayal of Genuine Pastors."

³⁴ S O Arowolo, "Understanding Framing Theory, Researchgate," 2017.

³⁵ Ming M Boyer, Loes Aaldering, and Sophie Lecheler, "Motivated Reasoning in Identity Politics: Group Status as a Moderator of Political Motivations," *Political Studies* 70, no. 2 (2022): 385–401; Monica Heilman, "The Racial Elevator Speech: How Multiracial Individuals Respond to Racial Identity Inquiries," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 8, no. 3 (2022): 370–85; Godwin Etse Sikanku et al., "A Comparative Analysis of Hillary Clinton and John Mahama's Concession Speeches in the 2016 US and Ghanaian Presidential Elections," *Howard Journal of Communications* 34, no. 1 (2023): 76–91.

³⁶ Jennifer Sclafani, "Family as a Framing Resource for Political Identity Construction: Introduction Sequences in Presidential Primary Debates," *Language in Society* 44, no. 3 (2015): 369–99.

³⁷ Catherine Wineinger and Mary K Nugent, "Framing Identity Politics: Right-Wing Women as Strategic Party Actors in the UK and US," in *Sell-Outs or Warriors for Change?* (Routledge, 2022), 110–37.

³⁸ Nana Kwame Osei Fordjour and Etse Sikanku, "Vice-Presidential Candidates, Language Frames, and Functions across Two Continental Divides: An Analysis of Acceptance Speeches," *International Journal of Communication* 16 (2022): 19.

the idea that communication is constructed by asserting certain narratives, identities, themes, beliefs, values, and ideas over others.³⁹ This can be done through the use of framing devices such as keywords, roots, quotes, storylines, catchphrases, narratives, and life stories.⁴⁰ Framing is, therefore, a relevant concept for this study because it is intrinsically related to using words or language to contribute to identity formation. Framing defines how issues are constructed or structured in news stories. Communication scholars such as Wallington et al. and Chu, among others, have used frames as a method of communicating how much and in what manner the mass media report information for audience consumption.⁴¹

Framing is based on the assumption that the nature of coverage of issues in news reports can affect how it is understood by audiences.⁴² A frame, in the context of news media, is a central idea for media content.⁴³ Thus, by selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration, the frame suggests what the issue is and determines its context. Framing can have a significant effect on how the media's audience interprets an issue.⁴⁴ According to Entman, framing is part of our everyday lives, and it is present anytime a message is coded.⁴⁵ It is suitable to explain differences in media coverage across different countries,⁴⁶ and also refers to how mass media arrange and come out with issues and events in terms of 'patterns and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion.'⁴⁷ Framing is important in media content studies, and according to Chong and Druckman, the media can influence people, especially in dealing with representations.⁴⁸ Thus, the theory will be key in analyzing the various themes and frames associated with the clergy per the front-page stories published about them in the *Daily Guide* newspaper.

Gatekeeping Theory

The gatekeeping theory was propounded by Kurt Levin, a Social Psychologist, in 1947 and adopted by Shoemaker and others, and it talks about the selective processes or gates news stories go through before they finally find space in the newspaper or other media.⁴⁹ Thus, it emphasizes the filters of news before it is disseminated. The theory is important for this research as it brings out what news types about the clergy the media allows into the public domain based on their judgment, and how the continuous publication leads to the formation of themes and frames about the clergy. Gatekeeping has been defined as the controlling of a strategic portion of a channel to have the power of decision over whether or not whatever is flowing through that channel will enter the group or not.⁵⁰ In short, gatekeeping theory involves a series of checkpoints that the news has to pass through before it gets to the public. Through this process, many people have to decide whether or not the news is to be seen or heard. Gatekeepers of the media are message filters, and they include reporters, writers, editors, producers, and even government officials. The concept involves every aspect of message selection, handling, and control.⁵¹ In this current work, the gatekeepers were the editors of the newspaper who decided what story got

³⁹ Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and Virginia Mapedzahama, "Towards Afrocentric Counter-Narratives of Race and Racism in Australia," *Australasian Review of African Studies, The*, 2018; Sikanku et al., "A Comparative Analysis of Hillary Clinton and John Mahama's Concession Speeches in the 2016 US and Ghanaian Presidential Elections."

⁴⁰ Fordjour and Sikanku, "Vice-Presidential Candidates, Language Frames, and Functions across Two Continental Divides: An Analysis of Acceptance Speeches."

⁴¹ Sherrie Flynt Wallington et al., "Antecedents to Agenda Setting and Framing in Health News: An Examination of Priority, Angle, Source, and Resource Usage from a National Survey of U.S. Health Reporters and Editors," *Journal of Health Communication* 15, no. 1 (February 2, 2010): 76–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730903460559>; Wentao Chu, "A Comparative Framing Analysis of Edward Snowden's Coverage in 'The New York Times' and 'People's Daily'" (Iowa State University, 2015).

⁴² Dietram A. Scheufele and David Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): 9–20.

⁴³ Chu, "A Comparative Framing Analysis of Edward Snowden's Coverage in 'The New York Times' and 'People's Daily'."

⁴⁴ Mira Sotirovic, "Effects of Media Use on Audience Framing and Support for Welfare," *Mass Communication and Society* 3, no. 2–3 (August 17, 2000): 269–96, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0323_06.

⁴⁵ R. M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Chu, "A Comparative Framing Analysis of Edward Snowden's Coverage in 'The New York Times' and 'People's Daily'."

⁴⁷ J. Tankard, *The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing* (Sage, 2001).

⁴⁸ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (June 1, 2007): 103–26, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>.

⁴⁹ Pamela J. Shoemaker, *Gatekeeping* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991).

⁵⁰ Katz, E. and P. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence - The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1995).

⁵¹ Shoemaker, *Gatekeeping*.

published on a given day and on the premium front page, whose repetitive nature arguably resulted in a theme or frame that the clergy could be associated with.

METHODOLOGY

The work employed a mixed method in collecting and analyzing data. Thus, there was a blend of qualitative and quantitative tools in getting it done, as the content-analyzed data was complemented with an interview with the editor of the *Daily Guide* newspaper to situate the data gathered from the front page of the newspaper. Interviews as purposive conversations will give insight into a phenomenon,⁵² and, in this case, the choice of stories published by the editors and what meaning is put on them, and again, their culmination in themes and frames about the clergy.

Hsieh and Shannon, on the relevance of qualitative content analysis, posit that it allows for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.”⁵³ Content analysis primarily focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text.⁵⁴ Quantitative Content Analysis, according to Wimmer and Dominick, enables the study in its analysis of communication to measure variables, and it does so in a manner that is systematic, objective, and quantitative.⁵⁵ Walizer and Wiener also define content analysis as a systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded data.⁵⁶ In the case of this work, the focus was on content found on the front pages of the *Daily Guide* newspaper.

Content analysis has also been described as a good methodological process for studying themes and representation in content.⁵⁷ It is also good for analyzing phenomena such as media content.⁵⁸ According to Krippendorff, qualitative content analysis is mostly used in media studies to analyse units of news articles, such as headlines, photos, and paragraphs, in the context of framing theory.⁵⁹ The researcher, to analyse the stories which finally culminate into themes and frames about the front-page news stories of the *Daily Guide* newspaper, analysed the content of the entire news stories on the front pages. A coding protocol was designed to guide this work, with inter-coder reliability of 0.90 attained with three coders employed for the coding exercise. Content analysis primarily focuses on the “characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text.”⁶⁰ Walizer and Wiener also define content analysis as a systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded data.⁶¹ In the case of this work, the focus was on content found on the front pages of the *Daily Guide* newspaper and specifically stories on the clergy.

Also, the Week Construction Approach, as espoused by Stemple, was used in collecting and sampling data for analysis.⁶² In all, 70 editions of the newspaper were sampled for analysis based on the approach, which calls for 14 editions of the newspaper to be selected to represent a year of publication. Using Simple Random Sampling, a day, which was Monday, was selected to begin the sampling process of the various editions, and since the newspaper does not appear in the stands on Sundays, another day, which was Wednesday, was randomly selected to complete the 14 editions for the year. The process was repeated to arrive at the 70 editions sampled, with 59 stories finally selected for analysis. The data

⁵² S. Kvale and S. Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (SAGE, 2009).

⁵³ Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E Shannon, “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis,” *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1278.

⁵⁴ Hsieh and Shannon, “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis.” 1278.

⁵⁵ Roger D Wimmer, Joseph R Dominick, and Roger Wimmer, “Mass Media Research: An Introduction-9th Edition Research in Advertising,” n.d.

⁵⁶ Michael H. Walizer and Paul L. Weinir, *Research Methods and Analysis: Searching for Relationships* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

⁵⁷ D. Deacon et al., *Researching Communications. A Practical Guide To Methods In Media And Cultural Analysis* (London: Arnold, 1999).

⁵⁸ Wimmer, Dominick, and Wimmer, “Mass Media Research: An Introduction-9th Edition Research in Advertising.”

⁵⁹ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Sage publications, 2018).

⁶⁰ Hsieh and Shannon, “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis.”

⁶¹ Walizer and Weinir, *Research Methods and Analysis: Searching for Relationships*.

⁶² Guido H. Stempel, “Sample Size for Classifying Subject Matter in Dailies.” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1952): 333.

also represented five (5) years of publication, spanning 2019 to 2023. The *Daily Guide* was also purposively selected because of its high reach, circulation, and acceptance for research.⁶³

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study, which sought to find out the dominant and most current image of the Ghanaian Christian clergy in the media, *Daily Guide*, per the stories that the newspaper published, was based on content analysis with interviews conducted to situate the findings. By looking at the continuous selection and publication of certain stories on the clergy in Ghana, a definite image was created to depict the clergy. The work also focused on the tone of the stories, the nature of the stories, the various churches involved, and even which of the groupings and frames dominated the publications. Both qualitative and quantitative tools were employed in analyzing the data, which covered the period 2019-2023, with 59 stories sampled for analysis.

Tone of the Stories

Figure 1 shows the tone of the various stories published about the clergy in Ghana. The data shows an overwhelmingly negative tone of stories about the clergy, focusing on the excesses they tend to engage in regarding their role as clergy in society. Out of the 59 stories published, 33(56.0%) of the stories cast a slur on the character and actions of the clergy, while 20(34.0%) of the stories depicted a positive outlook about the clergy. 6(10.0%) per cent of the stories were on neutral happenings that were due to no fault of the clergy. The negative stories focused on despicable acts frowned upon by the Bible and society at large, such as sexual immorality and abuses, including defilement and rape. Again, acts like murder, fraud, stealing, deception, fake miracles, lawlessness, and general disorder, among others, were also engaged in by clergy who, according to scholars,⁶⁴ are expected to be role models not only for congregants but society in general. Again, the dominant negative tone of stories and images affirms assertions by Baloyi, who posits that the clergy are increasingly deviating from their core mandate as Servants of God, whose lifestyle should be exemplary and inspire others to positive living rather than becoming lawless and immoral.⁶⁵ In terms of the choice of stories which culminated in various tones, the editor of the newspaper posited that the newspaper “only published fresh happenings about the clergy that had an impact on the people positively or negatively with no intention to skew reportage or whip sentiment against any clergy in Ghana” (Interview data). The chart below sheds more light on the findings.

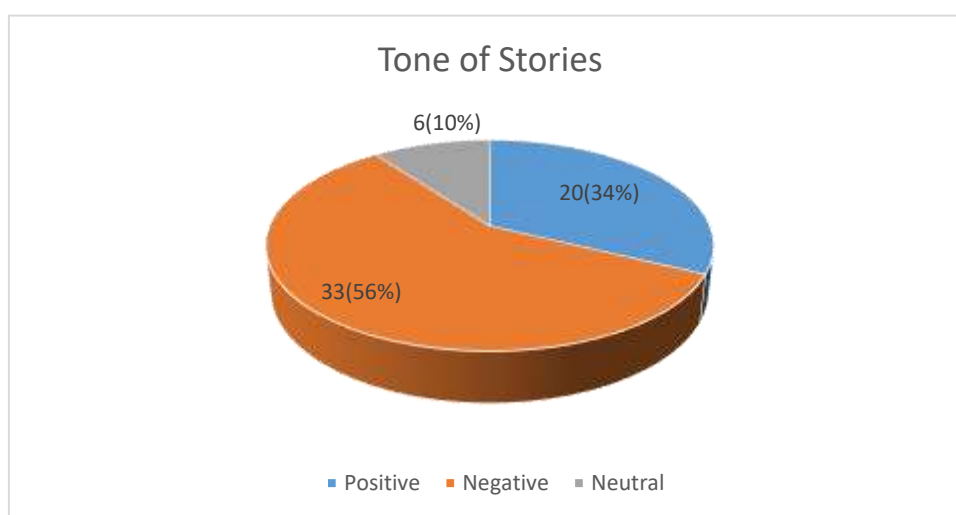


Figure 1: Tone of Stories Published on the Clergy

⁶³ Manu, S., “Perception of Corruption among Ghanaian Politicians: A Study of News Stories in the Daily Guide Newspaper” (University of Cape Coast, 2020).

⁶⁴ Schuhmann and Damen, “Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age”; Chivasa, “Instituting Dispute Resolution Procedures in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe Church.”

⁶⁵ Baloyi, “The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective.”

Image of the Clergy in the Media

Figure 2 paints a harrowing picture of the various images that the Christian clergy in Ghana are associated with. Contrary to assertions that the clergy are worthy community leaders, activists, and guides,⁶⁶ that they are positive role models and a viable standard of morality for congregants and society as a whole⁶⁷ apart from their general teaching, preaching, and general pastoral care,⁶⁸ the data shows a rather negative depiction of the Ghanaian clergy as they are framed with scandals and controversies hinging on criminal acts like murder, theft, fraud, forgery of documents, robbery, defilement, rape, human right abuses, sexual immorality with some clergymen noted to be having sexual intercourse with both married and single women in the church and community at large, with some married pastors snatching the wives of some men, among other negative portrayals. Indeed, out of the 59 stories analysed, 33(56.0%) were on the deviant acts engaged in by the clergy, with 20(34.0%) on the positive acts, while 6 stories were on neutral occurrences that the clergy neither initiated nor had control over.

The negative portrayal is indeed in line with assertions by Chima and Baloyi that a lot of the people in the clergy brackets are deviants who are hiding behind the church and Bible to deceive the gullible in society, hence ‘doing business’ with God’s name.⁶⁹ The unfortunate but rising incidents of sexual abuse and immorality involving the clergy are widely emphasized by scholars.⁷⁰

Again, out of the 59 stories analysed, only 20(34.0%) focused on positive acts by the clergy. These were acts related to the promotion of peace, healthy political rebukes, admonitions and commentaries, humanitarian gestures, and social services, as well as the dutiful discharge of core clerical roles. These acts are in line with assertions by scholars like Vargas, Stephens, and Hove, among others, who emphasize the communal, humanitarian, guiding, and role-modeling role of the clergy in society. Below is a chart showing the various frames the clergy are associated with.⁷¹

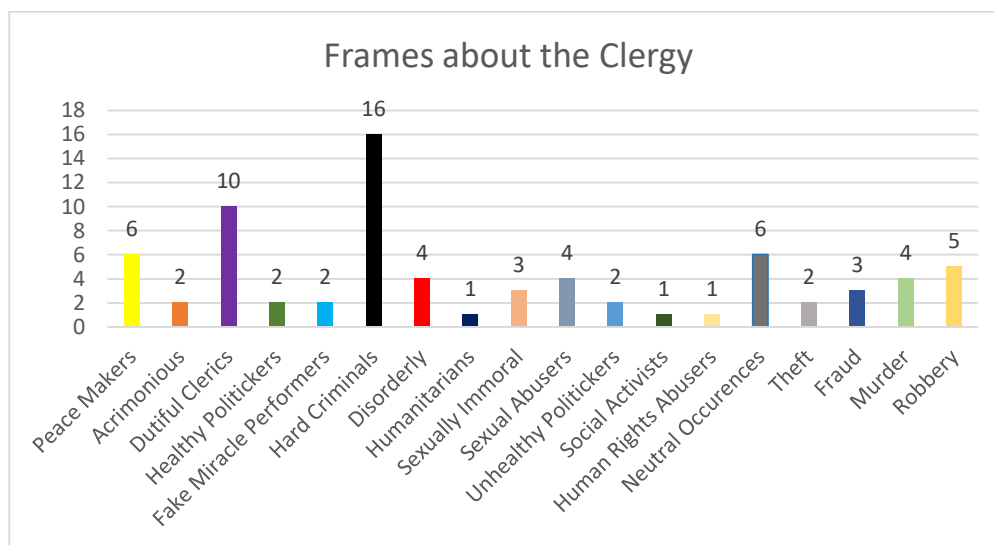


Figure 2: Images associated with clergy

⁶⁶ Vargas, *More than Spiritual Leaders: A Phenomenological Study of Latina/o Pastors and Their Roles as Transformational Leaders and Agents of Social and Economic Advancement*.

⁶⁷ Stephens, “The Minister as Moral Theologian: Ethical Dimensions of Pastoral Leadership. By Sondra Wheeler.”

⁶⁸ Hove, “The Pastor as the Primary Teacher in the Church: The Meaning and Expectations of Pastoral Ministry within the Mainline Denominations.”

⁶⁹ Chima Agazue, “Spiritual Cleansing” through Private Parts: New Patterns of Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by Their Revered ‘Prophets’ in Nigeria”, in *Proceedings of the International Conference on “Exploring Sexuality and Spirituality”, Wednesday, 6th July—Friday, 8th July, 2016*; Baloyi, “The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective.”

⁷⁰ María Elena Oliveri, Robert J Mislevy, and Norbert Elliot, “After Admissions: What Comes next in Higher Education,” *Higher Education Admission Practices: An International Perspective*, 2020, 347–75; Brian J Clites, “In Search of a Historiography of Clergy Sexual Abuse,” *US Catholic Historian* 41, no. 2 (2023): 79–102.;Zavadilová, “The Clergy Child Sexual Abuse and Its Cover-up in Media: An Explorative Study of the Official Vatican Media and American Catholic Media in 2013–2020.”

⁷¹ Vargas, *More than Spiritual Leaders: A Phenomenological Study of Latina/o Pastors and Their Roles as Transformational Leaders and Agents of Social and Economic Advancement*; Stephens, “The Minister as Moral Theologian: Ethical Dimensions of Pastoral Leadership. By Sondra Wheeler”; Hove, “The Pastor as the Primary Teacher in the Church: The Meaning and Expectations of Pastoral Ministry within the Mainline Denominations.”

Categories of Clergy Covered

This aspect of the analysis was based on the Biblical classification of the clergy and the role they should play in advancing the kingdom of God by equipping God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This is what is called the five-fold ministry, which is amply captured in Ephesians 4: 11 as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Inherent in their mandate as leaders and believers are positive conduct, holiness, and exemplary lifestyle modeled after Jesus Christ, as captured in Ephesians 4:1.

Indeed, the majority of the stories, which are 43(72.9%) out of the 59, were on pastors, followed by General descriptions (7 stories), which were general or class references to all or multiple Christian clergy, and it was followed by 6 stories on Prophets who are largely branded controversial in Ghana. The next group that received coverage in terms of coverage was the Evangelists, with a story exclusively focusing on their work, and no story focused on the teacher category. This arguably shows that pastors were deemed more newsworthy, be it on a positive or negative note, by the newspaper compared to other categories of clergy. According to the editor, “It’s all about the impact of the story on society and not necessarily about one’s title, church, or even fame” (Interview data). The chart below shows the various clergy categories who had a story published about them by the *Daily Guide* newspaper.

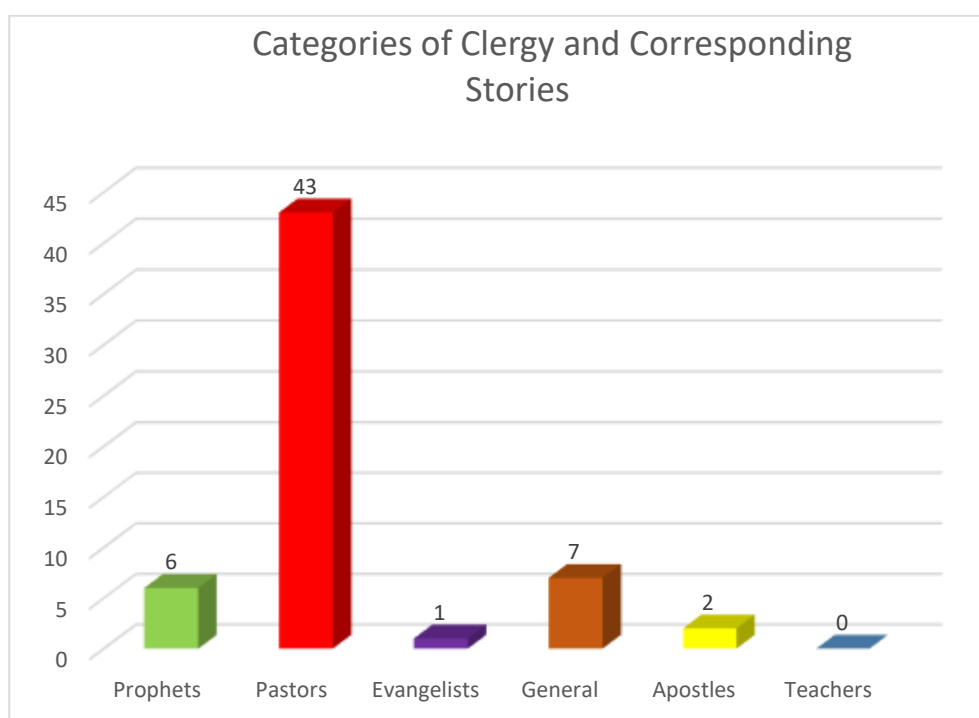


Figure 3: Categories of Clergy and Number of Stories Published about Them

Tone of Stories on Pastors

The pastors per the dictates of the five-fold ministry as espoused by Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:11-13, are the caregivers and shepherds who care daily for the flock and hence must arguably possess the various positive attributes that a good caregiver like a parent or guardian must have in making sure the flock or members and by extension society is well fed, groomed and catered for to grow and develop into useful members of society. This again arguably includes the exhibition of exemplary, positive, and worthy standards by the clergy worthy of emulation by society; hence, immoral acts, deviancy, and lawlessness ought not to be part of their daily activities. However, the data shows a negative trend in terms of the stories published about the shepherds and caregivers, which is the pastor. Out of the 43 stories the newspaper published about pastors in Ghana, an overwhelming 31(69%) of the stories were about negative acts and excesses engaged in by pastors. These acts included fraud, rape, defilement, sodomy, murder, breaking off, and immoral acts like having sex with married women, bathing and washing the private parts of women, and watching their naked bodies, among others. These are acts unbecoming of pastors who, according to Stephens and Schuhmann and Damen, are not only role models

and a worthy standard of morality in society but also represent the good in the community and hence are expected to live above reproach.⁷² Positive acts accounted for 10(22%) of the total stories, with 4 others being neutral occurrences that the pastors were not directly involved in or had control over. The positive acts centred around humanitarian gestures, conflict resolution, peacemaking, helping in the fight against lawlessness, and admonitions, among others. The chart below gives a clearer picture of the tone of the stories.

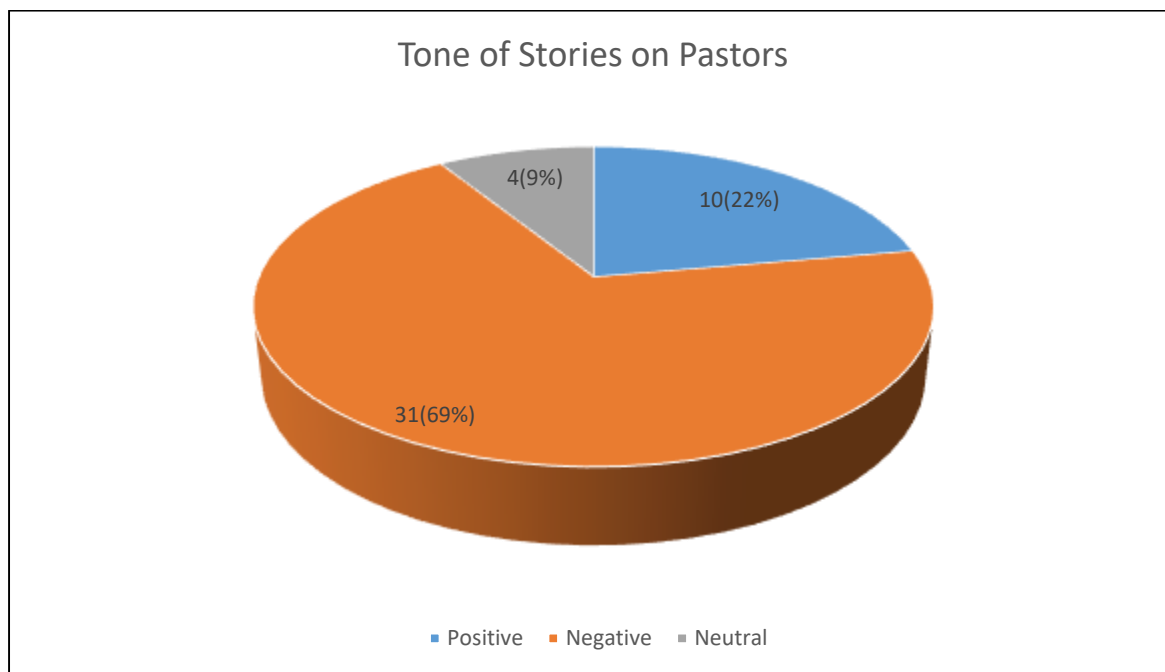


Figure 4: Tone of Stories on Pastors

Tone of Stories about Prophets

The prophetic office has come under so much attack and criticism based on the acts of many Prophets in society, with many describing them as con artists, deceiving and taking undue advantage of the gullible in society.⁷³ In Ghana, not only have Prophets been accused of causing fear and panic with their prophecies,⁷⁴ but engaging in other acts of lawlessness and immorality is unbecoming of clergy.⁷⁵ For instance, their incessant public prophetic utterances caused the Inspector General of Police, Dr. Akuffo Dampare, in 2022, to ban them from making certain ‘prophetic’ utterances, which ended up causing fear and panic in society. The expectation, therefore, was that there would be more negative publications about prophets than positive ones. However, the data suggests a positive outlook for prophets as 3(50%) out of the 6 stories touched on positive acts by the prophets which largely centred on fighting injustice against some members of the clergy and their engagement in acts that sought to preserve the peace in the Ghanaian society, especially in admonishing the political class to refrain from acts that could jeopardize the peace that the country enjoys. 2(33.3%) were rather centred on their negative acts, such as lawless and immoral acts that centre on deceit, taking undue advantage of some unsuspecting members of society, as well as causing unnecessary fear and panic with their prophetic utterances. There

⁷² Stephens, “The Minister as Moral Theologian: Ethical Dimensions of Pastoral Leadership. By Sondra Wheeler.”;Schuhmann and Damen, “Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age.”

⁷³ Agazue, “Spiritual Cleansing” through Private Parts: New Patterns of Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by Their Revered ‘Prophets’ in Nigeria.”

⁷⁴ Ghanaweb, “The ‘doom’ Prophecies Made by Prophets about IGP Dampare,” 2023, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/All-the-doom-prophecies-made-by-prophets-about-IGP-Dampare-1699181>;Graphic Online, “IGP Dampare on Why He Will Not Allow National Fear and Panic under the Guise of Prophecy,” 2023, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/igp-dampare-on-why-he-will-not-allow-prophecies-to-create-national-fear-and-panic.html>;Africannews, “Ghana Police Worried over Death Prophecies Creating Fear, Panic,” 2024.

⁷⁵ D. Quampah, *Good Pastors, Bad Pastors: Pentecostal Ministerial Ethics in Ghana* (Wipf and Stock Publishers., 2014).

was also one (1) story about them that they had no involvement with, hence belonging to the neutral category. The figure below gives a clearer picture of the portrayal.

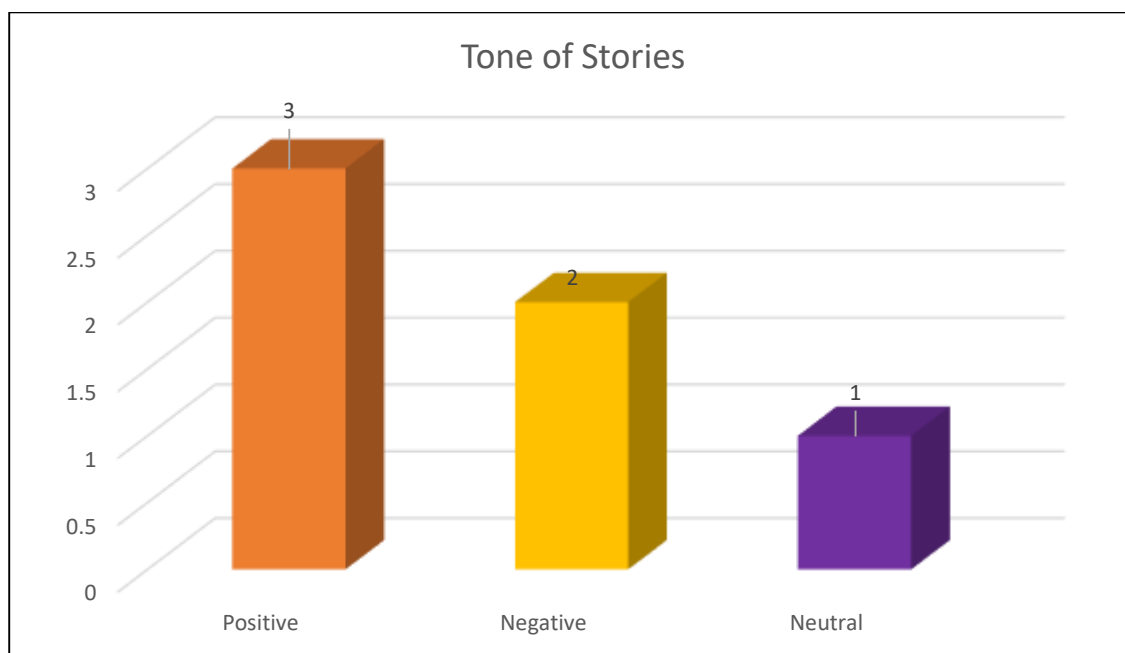


Figure 5: Tone of Stories about Prophets

Churches, Tone and Frequency Of Stories

This aspect of the study looks at the various churches that had stories published about them and the tone of such publications. The data showed an overwhelming publication of stories about charismatic churches(one-man-churches) compared to the orthodox churches. Again, while the majority of the stories on the few orthodox churches were largely positive stories, those of the charismatic churches were largely negative, focusing on the excesses of their leaders. Also, apart from the general references and unnamed churches, which accounted for 12 and 14 stories, respectively, out of the 59 stories, at the individual level, the Ghana New Life Evangelistic Association and the Church of Pentecost accounted for the majority of stories, with 3 stories. While the stories involving the clergy of the Church of Pentecost, which is an orthodox church, were about positive happenings, stories on the charismatic clergy of the Ghana New Life Evangelistic Association were negative and focused on issues like fraud, forgery, and robbery. The table below gives a clearer picture of the various churches and corresponding depictions.

Table 1: Churches, Nature, and Frequency of Stories

Churches	Nature of Stories (Frequency)			Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	
General	7	4	1	12
Divine Healers Church		1		1
Assemblies of God	2			2
Pentecost	1	1	1	3
Ghana New Life Evangelistic Association		3		3
Christ Embassy		1		1
Nyame Ne Hene Prayer Camp		1		1
Unnamed Church	4	9	1	14
End Time Evangelical Ministry			1	1
Evangelical Methodist Church International		1		1
Harmony With Jesus Ministry International			1	1

El-Shaddai Outreach Ministry		1		1
African Faith Tabernacle	1			1
Prophetic Hill Chapel		1		1
Apostle’s Continuation Church		1		1
Alive Chapel International	1			1
Methodist Church	1			1
Lighthouse Chapel International		1		1
Faith Miracle Ministry – Ofankor		1		1
Redeemer Church-Bolga		1		1
Charity Church		1		1
Christ Apostolic Church	1			1
Zoe Outreach Church		1		1
Truth Redemption Church-Assin Fosu		2		2
Calvary Charismatic Chapel-Kumasi	1			2
Paniel Outreach Ministries International		1		1
New Covenant Apostolic Church			1	1
Jesus Spanner Miracle Church		1		1
7 th Day Pentecostal Assembly-Kasoa		1		1
TOTAL	19	34	6	59

Discussion Summary

According to the results, the image of the clergy in the media is negative, which contradicts the expected behavior of clergy who are supposed to live above reproach. The evidence indicates that the clergy are gradually losing their esteemed position as moral leaders or role models in society. Their excesses, shown through scandals, immorality, and serious crimes like murder and rape, create a troubling picture of the current and future state of the clergy and the church overall. If these negative acts are not addressed, they could lead many to lose faith in the clergy and the church as a whole. In fact, out of the 59 stories published by the newspaper about the clergy, 33 (56%) focused on their negative actions, while 20 (34%) highlighted positive acts, with the remaining 6 (10%) covering neutral acts. These findings suggest that the clergy are lowering the standards of ethical conduct expected of Men and Women of God.

Once again, the connection of the clergy with crimes such as robbery, murder, rape, fraud, human rights abuses, and even fake miracles, among others, shows that there are serious issues within the clergy and the church. This calls for a change from these ungodly acts, which go against Biblical principles. In fact, serious crimes are the most common type of incident linked to the clergy, making up 16 of the 59 stories, with pastors from one-man churches leading in terms of wrongdoings.

Indeed, the results showed that the overall image of the clergy per the newspaper publication, is negative, as they are largely depicted with scandals and controversies. Out of the 59 stories analysed, 33(60.0%) of the stories were on their negatives, with 20(34.0%) of the stories focusing on their positive acts. This does not paint a good picture of the clergy, necessitating that they mend their ways. It is arguably not right for custodians of morality to be associated with filth, evil, and immorality.

Also, the dominant image being their association with hard crimes was unhealthy. 16 out of the 43 stories were on hard crimes unbecoming of the clergy and included murder, robbery, fraud, stealing, and forgery of documents. Other related crimes like human rights abuses and sexual offenses centering on rape, defilement, and sodomy among others, cast a slur on the clergy and the church in general hence efforts doubled by the clergy, the Christian community especially the Christian leadership groups like the Christian and Charismatic Councils to help nip the negative lifestyle of the clergy in the bud as the clergy is failing as worthy role models for both congregants and society as a whole per their conduct.

Again, the dominant involvement of the Clergy of the Charismatic Churches(one-man churches) in the excesses reported by the newspaper, compared to the orthodox churches whose portrayal was positive, arguably calls for another layer of checks and regulations regarding the activities of the ‘one-man-churches’ who are largely caught in the web of the nefarious acts. Apart from the general references

and unnamed churches, over 70% of the stories involved the ‘one-man-churches’ with sole founders and leaders. This is a worry and needs to be addressed to prevent the public from completely losing interest in the activities of the church and clergy, as such media reports and resultant frames shape the perceptions of the public about the clergy and the church in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is a trite saying that the general image of the clergy in the media is negative, which does not augur well for the clergy and Christianity in general. A negative portrayal of the leadership, based on their excesses such as immorality, scandals, and other unethical behaviours, will likely have ripple effects. Such negative acts have the potential of causing the clergy and the church in general to lose their enviable reputation and respect as moral standards in society, and Christianity also risks becoming unattractive to many.

There is therefore a need for a moral and ethical reorientation of clergy so they can function effectively in society in line with sound Biblical principles. This should include periodic training sessions for the clergy, which could be organized by the Christian Councils or the immediate leadership of the various churches, if any. Christianity should reach a point where the clergy demonstrate exemplary leadership by prioritizing moral integrity and strictly adhering to Biblical and societal ethical standards. The role of the clergy as spiritual and moral guides requires conduct that is beyond reproach.

There should also be strong oversight by Christian Councils. Christian leadership organizations, like the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, need to intensify their efforts to monitor and guide clergy conduct. These organizations must enforce disciplinary actions when necessary to prevent others from going down that negative path.

Furthermore, government intervention to regulate the activities of churches and the broader religious sector would not be inappropriate to address religious excesses. At the very least, there should be the establishment of regulatory mechanisms for Charismatic and Independent churches, especially the ‘one-man churches’ in the country, as they are often associated with negative portrayals. Collaboration between the government and religious councils could help set minimum standards for operations, accountability, and leadership within these churches, all aimed at ensuring integrity in the religious sector and preventing the abuses and excesses carried out by clergy against unsuspecting members and society at large.

Again, while churches should be encouraged to implement internal governance reforms such as leadership vetting processes, financial transparency, and structures for member complaints and redress to improve accountability, members of the church and society should also be encouraged to speak out when their rights are being violated, including malicious acts by clergy. The church should emphasize teaching sound doctrine as a way of empowering congregants to stay alert and resist negative actions initiated by errant and deviant clergy. The clergy should ultimately regain the trust that many in society may have lost due to their excesses, which are often reported in the media and society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the portrayal of the Christian Clergy in the Ghanaian media. The study was motivated by the premise that, given the instrumental role, recognition, and respect the clergy assume in society, they would receive positive representation in the media to mirror happenings in society. It was the hope that the portrayal would be contrary to assertions by some scholars that the clergy do not deserve the old recognition they were bestowed with due to some excesses they tend to engage in, which are contrary to Biblical, societal norms and expectations. Indeed, the glaring nature of the study findings requires the Christian Clergy and church to turn over a leaf by engaging in positive actions that will help correct the negative image often associated with them.

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