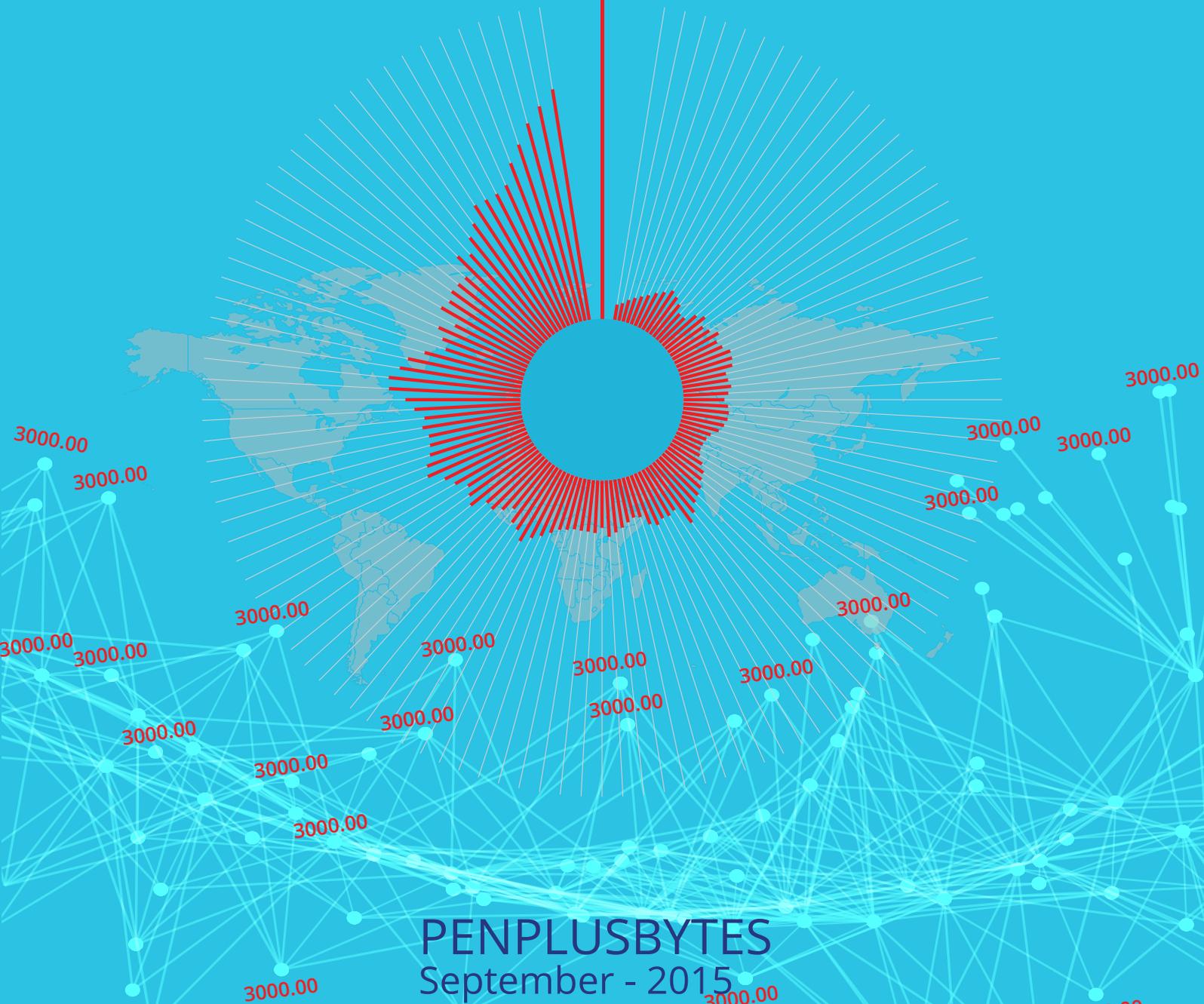
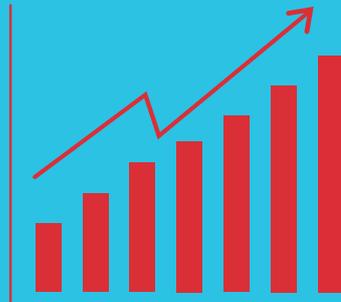


# DATA JOURNALISM



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# DATA JOURNALISM IN GHANA

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# Abstract

We live in the digital age which comes with a limitless scale and range of digital information and this has triggered the vast use of digital technology in the practice of journalism in Ghana. Currently, Ghana's data journalism has received a magnificent boost due to the discovery of oil.

A straightforward definition of Data Journalism would be to simply put it as "Journalism done with Data" as it reflects the increased interaction between content producers (journalist) and several other fields such as design, computer science and statistics. The increased role of numerical data in the production and distribution of information in the digital era which is exactly what Journalism specialty data journalism is.

Not only is data journalism becoming just another way to report a story; in a way, it is becoming the industry standard pulling greater embrace of the news dissemination culture made possible by the democratization of data. Along with this comes a new possibilities of combining the traditional news, information, search and the ability to tell a compelling stories. Unlike Traditional media or journalism, data journalism begins in one of two ways; either you have a question that needs data, or a dataset that needs questioning. Whichever it is, the compilation of data is what defines it as an act of data journalism. The concept of Data Journalism in Ghana is very much in its infant stage though the practice is gaining significant grounds among practitioners over the last few years. The effort to speed up the process for Journalists and media especially to take up and build this skill is however commendable. The call for in depth reporting of developmental issues prompted rapid training workshops for journalists across the country where Ghanaian data experts have drawn training curtains on Data Journalism in the past years to better inform and educate citizenry. This notwithstanding, organizations such as the International Institute of ICT Journalism, Penplusbytes, stands out as one of the foremost bodies to whip life into data journalism practice. This paper study focuses on data journalism as an essential field to be explored by the Ghanaian media in order to enhance accuracy and professionalism in their field of work.

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## Introduction

The dynamic character of Journalism is without a shred of doubt. Every day brings newer and more innovative journalists into the field, and with them new skills and techniques. Ever wonder why Data Journalism is appealing to many newsrooms lately? I guess not. Not only is data journalism becoming just another way to report a story; in a way, it is becoming the industry standard pulling greater embrace of the news dissemination culture made possible by the democratization of data. It has indeed become evident that not only is data journalism changing in itself, its changing journalism too. What does this mean to Ghana and her “free press”? Let’s seek some understanding, shall we?

A straightforward definition of Data Journalism would be to simply put it as “Journalism done with Data.” This effectively accommodates the key elements of the concept which is Data and Journalism. However, that’s overly simplistic considering the dynamics of the discipline. The simplicity of this definition lies in its failure to admit in detail, the increased role of numerical data in the production and distribution of information in the digital era which is exactly what Journalism specialty data journalism is. It reflects the increased interaction between content producers (journalist) and several other fields such as design, computer science and statistics.

Indeed the definition of the concept remains widely varied which is, by itself, a recognition of its multi-faceted nature. Defining data journalism hasn’t always been without controversy as the use of information to create stories; particularly under some journalistic rules and codes. However, this does not erode the essence of data journalism as a steady process of polishing raw data by filtering it into a visual presentation of information by way of a news story.

Data journalism has been around for as long as there’s been data - certainly at least Data. The practice is gaining grounds in modern journalism

practice but no longer is it a novelty as it was a few years ago for the majority of media around the world.

## Data Journalism Comparison with Traditional (Other Forms Of) Journalism

What is that marked, stand-out characteristic of data journalism compared to the rest of journalism? Simple! We live in the digital age and that comes with a limitless scale and range of digital information. Along with this comes a new possibility of combining the traditional news information search and the ability to tell a compelling story.

From a slander charge to a libel sue; journalism has been shifted from official to self-censored politics based news dissemination. Traditional media has been dwindling on public support for media freedoms whiles data journalism has little to fall on but rather solely dependent on their credible content produced using Data.

The decreasing influence of the traditional media in national affairs is that, they display clear sense of little or very limited facts since they can’t go beyond breaking down information from a complicated state to a simple and reader-friendly style or format.

Unlike Traditional media or journalism, data journalism begins in one of two ways either you have a question that needs data, or a dataset that needs questioning. Whichever it is, the compilation of data is what defines it as an act of data journalism.

Citizens’ voices on national development issues can be amplified using Data journalism. This is simply getting the simple facts to the door steps of citizens to power their demand for democratic governance from state leaders through questioning.

Over decades, freedom of media in Ghana has been attributed to good governance and democracy,

stepping from the norm, the data journalism and traditional journalism are two difference top-ics. One key difference is data journalism deals with setting a plan, investigating and bringing findings for the understanding and see of citizens whilst traditional media use of data in telling a story and the difference between traditional journalism and data journalism.

Having undergone periods of severe restriction in the early days of governance, Ghanaian journalists, must never ignore the plant of evidence based elements in news story. However, the digital media take off has triggered the vast use of digital technology in the present Ghana journalism, as a matter of fact, the keen need to employ data must be highly prioritized.

Currently, Ghana's data journalism has received a magnificent boost due to the discovery of oil. Oil discovery from 2010 till now has been the tip for every debate, away from a political channeled radio station, listeners has been in the center of confusion anytime a discussion is raise and this is often attributed to little or no facts of the citizens to err out their views. Oil related issues and the use of figures have bullied and imprisoned citizen's participation in monitoring government asserts as patriots.

Data journalism is therefore the sure process to assess a country's economic facts and study. There have been some reported challenges disclosed by Journalists, some hands have pointed the poor use of data in journalism to the delay of the right to information bill (rti) in parliament. The bill has been in parliament for four years now. Communication institute has argued the fact, this problem has created some impediment for their line of work since they don't get the required information to generate a detailed news story. Further the little or no use of data in journalism is also as a reason of poverty.

## Relevance of Data Journalism in the media landscape

Data journalism has come to stay and has shown just enough to warrant the notion that perhaps, it is the future. However, it must not be seen as a replacement of traditional journalism but a new set complimenting skills; skills for searching and interrogating numerical data and digital sources at a time and era where basic skills from traditional journalism just aren't enough. Journalists thrive on data and would consider every means to come by them. Today, not only would journal-ists fish stories out of conversations at bars but the sheer availability of data also means they would be about poring over data and equipping themselves with the tools to analyze such data, distilling it to catch what's interesting and relevant.

Data Journalism provides new techniques for conveying information and stories. In the words of Aaron Pilhofer of the New York Times, "Data journalism is an umbrella term that, to my mind, encompasses an ever-growing set of tools, techniques and approaches to storytelling. It can include everything from traditional computer-assisted reporting (using data as a 'source') to the most cutting edge data visualization and news applications. The unifying goal is a journalistic one: providing information and analysis to help inform us all about important issues of the day". -[http://datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/introduction\\_2.html#sthash.F2b80rsS.dpuf](http://datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/introduction_2.html#sthash.F2b80rsS.dpuf). This somewhat succinctly, is what all the "noise" is about.

As a solution to Information asymmetry, the inability to take in and process it with the speed and volume that it comes to us—is one of the most significant problems that citizens face in making choices about how to live their lives. Information taken in from print, visual and audio media influence citizens' choices and actions. Good data journalism helps to combat information asymmetry.

## Data Journalism in Africa

Data journalism in the 21st Century of Africa is the

conscious effort of using communication skills in writing to strategically champion a national issue into a polished but simple news story, to reach out to the masses with the help of the digital technology.

A quotation of an expert in Journalism reads “Investigative journalism in Africa, like in many other places, tends to be scoop-driven, which means that someone’s leaked you a set of documents. You’ve gone and you’ve verified them and often done great sleuth work. There are very few systematic, analytical approaches to analyzing broader societal trends. You’re still getting a lot of hit-and-run reporting. That doesn’t help us analyze the societies we’re in, and it doesn’t help us, more importantly, build the tools to make decisions by Justin Arenstein”

In Africa , data journalism is more of getting the scoop or sniffing the dog, creating mind boggling stories with the source and reporting to the target .In this instance, journalists are seen hiding in a corner due to fear of being mobbed or sue.

African journalists are found giving tangible excuses such as lack of digital technology to build up information in the data. Furthermore, the right to information bill in Parliament stands as a major impediment; this is often raised by journalist when they are questioned on poor data work piece. Access to information has been recognized by developed countries as a contributing tool for good governance, this which has been deprived by law makers in African countries.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a Canadian crown corporation established by an act of Parliament with the aim to help developing countries find solutions to their problems, focusing on key areas like governance and accountability moved massively towards looking forward for the enactment of the freedom to information law for citizens most especially journalists in three countries.

This move has resulted in some changes in recent

times. In 2000, South Africa became the first country on the continent to pass an ATI law. Uganda’s on the other hand, had its Access to Information Act enacted in 2005 but has not been fully implemented. After years of debate and a national consultation, a proposed freedom of information bill in Ghana is yet to be passed.

Ghanaian Journalists however had a good case when they attributed their information impediment to the delay of this law. On the whole, access to information law has been active in ten countries with the likes of Angola 2005 , South Africa Promotion of Access to Information Act (2000), Zimbabwe (2002)

Uganda(2005), Ethiopia Freedom of Information and Mass Media Law (2008) ,Liberia Freedom of Information Act (2010), Guinea Organic law on the right of access to Public Information (2010)

Nigeria Freedom of Information Law (2011), Tunisia decree on Access to the Administrative Documents of Public Authorities of Tunisia (2011) and Niger Charter on Access to Public and Administrative Documents (2011).

Nonetheless, Justin believes the use of SMS is central to how African digital journalism will develop but Arenstein said, the lack of digitized information is still a large hurdle to overcome stressing that the fact that many news organizations are actively turning paper records into online databases is a key factor into how the digital news space will develop across the continent.

## Data Journalism in Ghana

The concept of Data Journalism in Ghana is very much in its infant stage though the practice is gaining significant grounds among practitioners over the last few years. Indeed, not much is currently out there by way of crunching the numbers from which a solid conversion of numerical data is made into visual information. The effort to speed up the process for Journalists and media especially to take up and build this skill is however commendable.

In the Ghanaian democratic setting, journalism is largely considered the 5th arm of government and with the passage of the Right to Information bill into law, the over 236 licensed radio stations with the over 180 regularly on air, 16 TV stations some of which have multiple channels, about 70 newspapers and several new media platforms and products have found new liberties under the new law. This has among many other reasons urges journalists on to become more assertive and express themselves better. However the challenge with data availability and the difficulty in accessing them as alluded to in the previous chapters as key characteristics of the data journalism practice does not exempt Ghana.

This notwithstanding, organizations such as the International Institute of ICT Journalism, Penplusbytes, stands out as one of the foremost bodies to whip life into data journalism practice with their\*\*\*

The call for in depth reporting of developmental issues prompted rapid training workshops for journalists across the country. Ghanaian Data experts have drawn training curtains on Data Journalism in the past years to better inform and educate citizenry.

In October 2012, National Information Technology Agency, with funding from Ghana Open Data Initiative (GODI), Africa Media initiative and World Bank Institute executed a three day Data Journalism Boot Camp which aimed at empowering journalists to learn how to use government and other public data to build data visualization has opened in Ghana.

This was to bring together journalists, website developers and creative designers who are put into working groups to build news driven mobile applications and civic engagement websites to augment the traditional news reportage.

The training however targeted the equipping the skills and data knowledge of Journalists in researches and news publications through data mining,

extraction and analytic skills.

In 2012, Ghana open Data Initiative again help a Data training session for Journalists under the theme ‘Elections and Civic Watchdog Media using Open data. The training was to champion the digital skills of Journalists drawn from diverse background to train them. This was also funded by World Bank Institute.

Furthermore, 2014 has its share of the educative training offer as the International Institute of ICT Journalism with support from STARGhana held a forum for CSO and media persons at Hohoe in the Volta Region.

The forum was to emphatically create the needed collaborative platform for direct engagement between members of the media, health officials and other key stakeholder bodies. Having advocated massively for Maternal Mortality over the years, the Institute target the training to help eradicate issues contributing to the menace. The forum was dubbed ‘Open Ghana – Data Journalism for Improved Maternal Healthcare Delivery’ a case study of four populated areas in the Volta region. Ho, Hohoe, Kpando and South Dayi are the affected areas. Again, this was to ensuring accountability for all.

Canadian volunteers with Journalists for Human Right trained about ten journalists from known media outlets in Ghana. This was to help curb the challenges of modern journalism in communicating about data and how to share the stories that live inside the numbers. The training was done in two days to cover up the necessary topic about data journalism.

With the growing trends of Data Journalism workshops, the most prestigious media outlet known for its credible reportage rolled out a data Journalism training course for TEN staff members. Graphic Communications Group Limited (GCGL) had a three day training on Data Journalism by the Country’s best ICT institute Penplusbytes. This was to

help build their capacity in investigative reporting. Categories of participants were from the design and layout as well as journalists.

The Mobile Web Ghana, World Wide Web Foundation and the African Media Initiative again implemented the Code for Ghana initiative early this year. The project seeks to form a community of civic minded technologists and open data experts, and put them at media organizations to drive data journalism in Ghanaian newsrooms to increase and improve citizen and government engagement. The initiative strategically aimed to build a movement of active citizenry by using a data driven journalism approach to create platforms for civic engagement.

The Natural Resource and Governance Institute and the International Institute of ICT Journalism (Pen-plusbytes) in February 2015, introduced Data Dive. Themed “DRILLING DOWN: Ghana extractives data dive, the three day course brought together great ALUMNI of their training courses to build their capacity in story production in the extractive sector.

The project with support of Omidyar Network, forms part of the Institute’s CODEX project (“Catalyzing Open Data for Extractives”) which aims to increase the use of extractive industry data to improve linkages between extractive revenues and human development outcomes.

With the outlined Data Journalism training initiatives, Data is indisputably being Ghana’s sole priority for National Development.

