

1.0 Introduction

A free and independent media is a fundamental pre-requisite for a viable, vibrant and stable democracy. Beyond public education which engenders civic participation, the media contributes to ensuring transparent and accountable governance.

Ghana's 1992 Constitution guarantees a free and independent media, an unrestrained media environment and independent practice of journalism.

“There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a licence as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information,” says Article 162 (3) of the 1992 Constitution.

The roles and freedoms assigned the media require them to adhere to high standards of ethics and professionalism in the delivery of their mandate.

Despite the freedoms guaranteed and the expectations of high standards, there have been concerns of lowering media professionalism and disregard for ethics in the media over the years. The falling standards in professionalism have resulted in waning public trust and confidence in the media and press freedom.

To help deal with the challenge, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has commenced a project titled: **Enhancing media professionalism to inspire public confidence and support for press freedom in Ghana**. The objective of the project is to identify and highlight incidents of ethical infractions and drawing attention to such breaches as a way of fostering adherence to ethical principles by media organisations.

The project involves daily monitoring of the content of selected media organisations and compilation of periodic reports capturing ethical violations and naming the media organisations that commit such infractions.

2.0 Methodology

Using a qualitative content analysis, the project assesses the content of 26 media organisations made up of 10 selected Akan language radio stations, 10 newspapers and six news websites. For newspapers and websites, the focus is on news stories, features, columns and opinion pieces. For radio, news, talk-shows, panel discussions and documentaries are monitored. Analyses of ethical violations are guided by the Ghana Journalists' Association (GJA) Code of Ethics and other best practice guidelines.

The following media organisations are being monitored:

No.	Radio	Newspaper	News Website
1.	Adom FM	Daily Guide	Ghanaweb.com
2.	Accra FM	Daily Graphic	Myjoyonline.com
3.	Oman FM	Daily Searchlight	Citinewsroom.com
4.	Okay FM	The Chronicle	3news.com
5.	Peace FM	The Finder	Modernghana.com
6.	Power FM	Ghanaian Times	Starrfmonline.com
7.	Asempa FM	The Independent	
8.	Hot FM	Today	
9.	Happy FM	New Crusading Guide	
10.	Hot FM	The Herald	

The media organisations were selected considering the following factors:

- Akan language radio stations and publications with considerable audience
- Publications with considerable audience
- Media organisations that recorded high ethical infractions in similar ethics monitoring project

Monitoring instrument has been developed and monitors have been recruited and trained to apply the instrument for the monitoring. Monitors send in daily reports to a team of programme staff and researchers at the MFWA for analysis and compilation of findings. This is the first of such reports to be published.

3.0 Findings

The report covers findings for the period, June 1-14, 2020. It highlights the types and frequency ethical violation recorded. A total of 917 media content programmes were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period.

The main subjects that dominated the content monitored included news and developments on the COVID-19 pandemic, the then-upcoming New Patriotic Party (NPP) parliamentary primaries, Electoral Commission's decision to compile a new voters' register, National Democratic Congress' (NDC's) press statements on the compilation of the new voters' register, general news on public health, infrastructure, education and constitutional matters.

Out of the 917 media content monitored, 141 ethical violations were recorded. The violations were recorded from 14 out of the 26 media organisations monitored.

Radio

- The monitoring noted that media organisations, especially radio stations, repeated broadcasts of viral social media videos and sound bites that were full of invectives and unsubstantiated allegations without recourse to their ethical breaches.
- The monitoring revealed that hosts of many political talk shows and presenters of news bulletins made no attempts to call to order, panelists and interviewees who made unethical statements on air.
- In many instances, some radio show hosts were noted to be inciting and encouraging panelists and guests on their shows to make unethical statements. Some also openly directed their audience to contents that were offensive to good taste and public sensibilities.
- The monitoring also revealed high levels of exaggerations and embellishments of new stories by presenters. Presenters of news were in many cases found to be mixing their personal opinions with the facts. Also, many presenters rendered news stories in a fit of humour and jests, sometimes leaving the facts and severity of the news items lost on the audience.
- On partisan radio stations, hosts and presenters of news bulletins were actively engaged in raining tirades of insults and making unethical and offensive statements against personalities who do not share in the ideologies of the political party of their radio owners.
- Comments sent to radio programme hosts through their various social media platforms were in many cases, not screened before being read on air. In the process, hosts read many unethical comments on air.

News Websites

- The issue of unscreened or unregulated comments emerged as a major ethical problem among news websites. On some of the news websites monitored, comments of readers containing offensive and unethical language were published immediately below news stories without screening by editors for ethical breaches.

3.2 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total 141 ethical violations recorded, 124 (88%) were recorded on radio. Twelve violations (8.5%) were recorded on news websites with the remaining five violations (3.5%) found in the newspapers.

3.3 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that decency is the highest violated principle, followed by violations on accuracy. Table 1 below presents the types of principles that were violated during the monitoring period.

Table 1: Principles Violated

Violated Principles	Frequency	Percentage
Decency	96	68%
Accuracy	20	14%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	12	9%
Balance	6	4%
Separation of Facts from Opinion	3	2%
Prejudice and Stereotyping	2	1.5%
Fairness	2	1.5%
Total	141	100%

3.4 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Table 2: Ethical Principles Violated by Media Organisations

Media	Ethical Principles							Total
	Decency	Balance	Accuracy	Prejudice & Stereotype	Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Fairness	Separation of Facts & Opinions	
Power FM	33		9	1	5			48
Oman FM	29	1	10	1	2		3	46
Ghanaweb.com	5				5			10
Asempa FM	8							8
Adom FM	7							7
Hot FM	3	2				1		6
Happy FM	4							4
Myjoyonline.com	2	1						3
Peace FM	3							3
Daily Guide	1					1		2
New Crusading Guide			1					1
Daily Searchlight		1						1
Accra FM	1							1
The Chronicle		1						1
Total	96	6	20	2	12	2	3	141

From Table 2 above, the pro-NDC radio station, Power FM, led with the highest number of violations (48). This was closely followed by Oman FM, a pro-NPP radio station, with 46 ethical violations. The two radio stations by far led the other media organisations on breaches of ethical principles.

News website Ghanaweb.com followed the two pro-political radio stations with 10 violations—all of them being unethical comments by readers published on the website. This was followed by Multimedia’s Asempa FM and Adom FM with eight and seven ethical violations, respectively.

3.5 Programmes and Ethical Violations

The report indicates that radio stations recorded the highest number of ethical violations. Below, from Table 3, the specific programmes and hosts that recorded the highest of ethical violations are presented.

Table 3: Host and Programmes with the Highest Ethical Violations

No.	Radio Station	Programme	Frequency of Violations	Host
1.	Power FM	Inside Politics	31	Mugaabe Maase
2.	Oman FM	National Agenda	29	Yaw Amofa
3.	Oman FM	Boiling Point	10	Kwabena Kwakye
4.	Power FM	Battle Ground	8	Oheneba B. Bannie
5.	Power FM	Dwaboase	8	Kwame Menka

From Table 3 above, Inside Politics, an afternoon political talk show, on pro-NDC Power FM hosted by Mugaabe Maase emerged as the programme with the highest number of violations (31). This was closely followed by pro-NPP Oman FM's morning show, National Agenda, with 29 violations. National Agenda is hosted by Yaw Amofa.

Oman FM's Boiling Point, an evening political talk show, which is hosted by Kwabena Kwakye followed as the programme with the third-highest recorded violations (10). Battle Ground, afternoon political talk show hosted by Oheneba B. Bannie and Dwaboase, a morning show programme with Kwame Menka as host, both from Power FM, followed as the programmes with the fourth and fifth-highest violations, recording eight violations each.

4.0 Recommendations

The findings of the report indicate a falling standard of professionalism of the media in Ghana, at least among those ones selected for the monitoring. The following are recommended:

Hosts and Editors

- Editors of the various media organisations are encouraged to improve upon their gatekeeping roles as the kind of ethical breaches recorded indicate a seemingly relaxed editorial process in the newsrooms.
- Editors of radio news bulletins and talk shows are also encouraged to ensure as much as possible thorough screening of the comments and voice notes that their audience has shared with them through social media before they are aired.
- Editors of news websites are also encouraged to review readers' comments that are shared on their web pages before they are published.
- It is also advised that presenters of news bulletins and hosts of the political talk shows hold their guests and panelists to the highest standards of professionalism in their commentaries while they also abide by same.

Media Owners

- Media owners are also encouraged to subject their organisations to the general ethical principles that bind the media. Owners must ensure that they produce and regulate their content guided by these principles, regardless of their political affiliations and leanings.
- Also, owners must ensure that they build the capacities of their journalists and presenters on the best practices in media professionalism and ethics.

Associations

- Concerted efforts are needed from media associations such as Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) and Ghana Independent Broadcasters Associations (GIBA) to ensure that their members abide by the ethical principles that are supposed to guide their work. In cases where disciplinary and punitive measures must be instituted, these bodies must ensure that it is exercised to provide an example for other members.

Regulatory Body

- The efforts of the National Media Commission (NMC), the constitutionally mandated body that regulates the content of the media in Ghana, is also much needed to quell the disregard of ethical principles by the media. The NMC must continuously monitor and invite media owners, hosts and journalists to dialogue and build consensus on upholding professional standards.