

1.0 Introduction

An independent, free and credible media is considered a precondition for a stable and vibrant democracy across the world. The media contributes to ensuring transparency and accountability in governance and is recognized as a crucial instrument for public education and citizen's participation in governance processes.

Ghana's 1992 Constitution guarantees a free and independent media, an unrestrained media environment and independent practice of journalism. The Constitution forbears the presence of impediments to the establishment of private press or media. It opposes the passing of any law requiring any person to obtain a licence as a condition to establish or operate a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information.

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

There have, however, been growing concerns of the lowering of 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.	Atinka FM	The Enquirer	
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
- Media organisations that recorded high ethical infractions in similar ethics monitoring project

A 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 second of such reports to be published.

3.0 Findings

The report covers findings for the period, June 15-30, 2020. It highlights the types and frequency of ethical violations recorded as well as some key trends identified in how the media breach ethical principles.

A total of 963 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 National Democratic Congress' (NDC) press conference on the performance of the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) failed promises, outcome of the NPP primaries, Supreme Court (SC) ruling on a case brought to it by the NDC against the Electoral Commission (EC) on the compilation of new voters register, the commencement of the registration of voters and alleged deployment of security to border towns.

Out of the 963 media content monitored, 116 ethical violations were recorded. The violations were recorded from 19 out of the 26 media organisations monitored.

Radio

- The monitoring noted that many hosts of many political talk shows and news anchors are complicit in the use of unethical language on radio as they made no attempts to call to order panelists and interviewees who used unprintable words on their programmes.
- Some news anchors and radio show hosts were noted to be inciting and encouraging panelists and guests to make unethical and offensive statements. While some asked leading and inviting questions that provoked their interviewees to make vituperative statements, others were noted to be amplifying or rehashing abusive statements their guests had already made.
- Also, the monitoring observed a trend where hosts of current affairs and political talk shows commenced their programmes with a monologue where they make strong, offensive and abusive statements talking about national issues. This sets the tone for the discussions and bolster the guests to also make similar offensive statements.
- The monitoring further observed many incidents where show hosts who are supposed to uphold the gatekeeping role by calling guests who made abusive statements to order, rather triggered, led and joined in insulting and making unprintable statements on air. The worst of this unfortunate incidents were noted on the pro-partisan radio stations where the hosts continuously and intentionally presented topics about leaders of their opposing parties for discussions, inviting their panelists and audience to malign and make offensive statements about them (leaders of opposing parties).
- Some hosts of the pro-partisan radio stations were noted to be inciting violence and threatening people who belonged to their opposing party. For instance, following the judgement by the Supreme Court on the voters register where the EC was given the nod to compile a new register against the wish of the NDC, a host of a political talk show on a pro-NDC radio station called on the audience to destroy the machines being used for the registration if they suspect any foul play by the EC.
- The monitoring also noted that news anchors and hosts of political talk shows often projected their personal opinions when presenting the news as against the material facts of the stories.

- The monitoring revealed incidents of overstatements and exaggerations of the details of stories and a conscious effort by the news anchors to be humorous, watering down the news stories with jokes.
- Comments that audience sent to hosts of programmes via social media were mostly not screened before they are read on air. In the process, the hosts read many unethical comments on air—while others immediately apologized, others did not bother.

News Websites

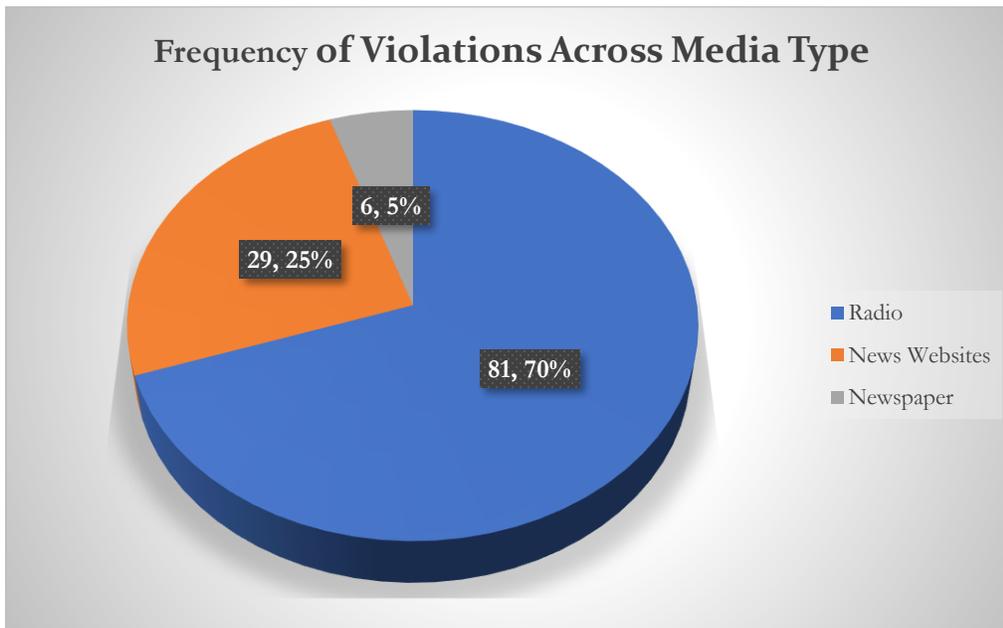
- Unscreened or unregulated comments that are published below stories remain a major ethical problem among news websites. The space has become a platform where readers of the news websites engage in invectives and peddling unsubstantiated allegations.
- The monitoring cited the use of misleading headlines. Eg. Some of the news websites played on the similarity of names between an unknown subject of a news story and that of a prominent personality in the political landscape of the country.

Newspaper

- The use of headlines which does not correspond with news content was also cited among newspapers.
- Also, some newspapers were noted to be republishing unsubstantiated allegations which their sources peddled without recourse to establish their veracity.

3.2 Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

A total of 116 ethical violations recorded across the various media types that were monitored. Figure 1 below presents the details.



3.3 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that the highest violated principle is Decency. It is followed by violations on accuracy and violations on good taste and public sensibilities. Table 1 below presents the types of principles that were violated during the monitoring period.

Table 1: Principles Violated

Violated Principles	Frequency	Percentage
Decency	81	68.9%
Accuracy	21	18.1%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	7	6.0%
Headline	2	1.7%
Prejudice & Stereotyping	2	1.7%
Sensitivity to Persons in Grief	1	0.9%
Separating Facts from Opinions	1	0.9%
Balance	1	0.9%
Total	116	100%

3.4 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Table 2: Ethical Principles Violated Media Organisations

	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste & Public Sensibilities	Sensitivity to Persons in Grief	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts & Opinion	Balance	Headline	Total
Power FM	22	10	1		1				34
Oman FM	16	6		1	1				24
Ghanaweb.com	12		5						17
Happy FM	11	1							12
Moderghana.com	7								7
Adom FM	3	1							4
Myjoyonline.com	3								3
Peace FM	1					1			2
Atinka FM	1		1						2
Daily Searchlight	1	1							2
New Crusading Guide							1		1
Ghanaian Times		1							1
Accra FM	1								1
Starrfmonline.com		1							1
Asempa FM	1								1
3news.com								1	1
Okay FM	1								1
Daily Guide	1								1
The Herald								1	1
Total	81	21	7	1	2	1	1	2	116

From Table 2 above, the pro-NDC radio station, Power FM, led with the highest number of violations (34). This was followed by Oman FM, a pro-NPP radio station, with 24 ethical violations.

News website Ghanaweb.com followed the two pro-political radio stations with 17 violations—all of which were unethical comments by readers published on the website. This was followed by Happy FM (12) and the news website Moderghana.com with seven violations, all being comments from readers.

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

Radio Station	Programme	Frequency of Violations	Host
Power FM	Inside Politics	13	Mugaabe Maase
Epa Ho a Daben	Happy FM	12	Nana Okatakyie Mensah Afrifa
Oman FM	National Agenda	12	Yaw Amofa
Power FM	Battle Ground	12	Oheneba B. Bannie
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 (13).

This was closely followed by pro-NPP Oman FM's morning show, National Agenda, Happy FM's current affairs programme, Epa Ho a Daben, and Power FM's Battle ground, an afternoon political talk show. All the three programmes recorded 12 violations each. Power FM's morning show, Dwaboase, which is hosted by Kwame Menka followed with eight violations.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the report suggest that ethical violations are still prevalent in the media, with issues of decency, accuracy and infractions that offend good taste and public sensibilities being the most common. Also, radio stations record the highest violations by far when compared with the other media types. Also, the political talk shows and current affairs programmes remain the main platforms in the Ghanaian media space that violates ethics the most.

The report suggests the following recommendations to radio show hosts, news anchors and editors; media owners; media associations and media regulatory bodies:

Hosts and Editors

- Editors, especially newspapers and news websites, are encouraged to crosscheck or verify the claims and assertions by their sources and interviewees before publishing as some of their statements were found to be inaccurate and mere allegations without proof.
- Editors of radio news bulletins and talk shows are encouraged to ensure thorough screening of the comments by their audience on social media pages before they are aired.

- Editors of news websites are also urged 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 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.