

1.0 Introduction

Across the world, the place of a free and independent media in a vibrant and stable democracy cannot be overstated. The media contributes to ensuring transparency and accountability in governance and is recognised as a crucial instrument for public education and citizen's active participation in governance processes.

In recognition of the vital role of the media, 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 license 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 declining 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 address these challenges, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is implementing 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 draw 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 a 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 selected media organisations. These are 10 Akan language broadcast radio stations, 10 newspapers (state-owned and private) and six news websites. Items monitored on the radio stations are news, talk-shows, panel discussions and documentaries. For newspapers and websites, news stories, features, columns and opinion pieces are monitored. Guided by the Ghana Journalists' Association (GJA) Code of Ethics and other best practice guidelines, a

monitoring instrument has been developed with monitors 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. Analyses of ethical violations are again 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	Today	
9.	Happy FM	New Crusading Guide	
10.	Hot FM	The Herald	

The media organisations were selected in considering the following factors:

- Akan language broadcast radio stations with considerable audience;
- Newspapers and online platforms with considerable audience
- Media organisations that recorded high ethical infractions in similar ethics monitoring project

3.0 Findings

The report covers findings for the period, **July 1-15, 2020**. It highlights the following:

- Types and frequency of ethical violation recorded
- General observations on how the media breach ethical principles.

A total of 935 media content were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which 118 ethical violations were recorded. The violations were recorded on 10 out of the 26 media organisations monitored. There were no recorded incident in the newspapers for the period.

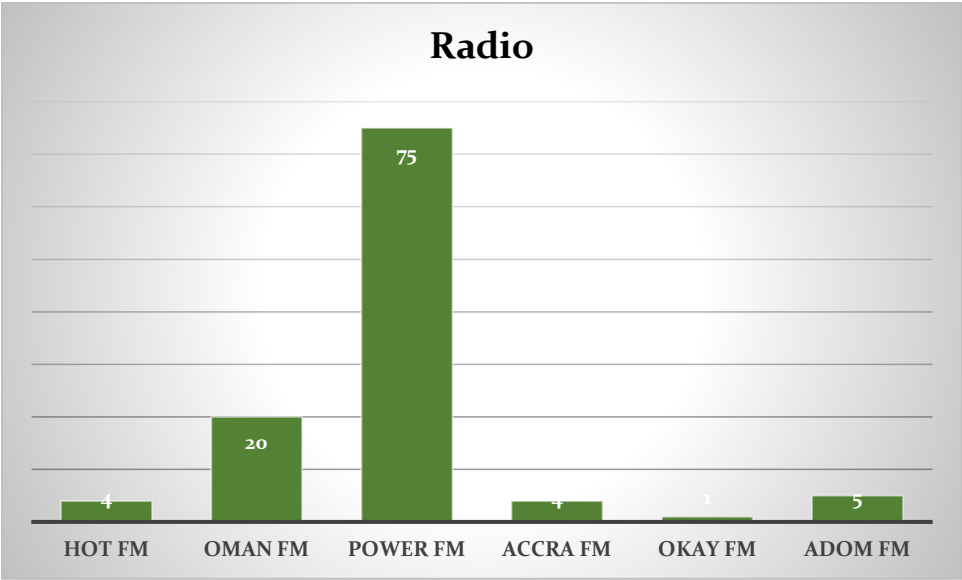
The main issues that dominated the content monitored included news and developments on the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the death of Mr. Kwadwo Owusu Afriyie (Sir John), CEO of the Forestry Commission, and the infection of the Deputy Minister of Trade, Carlos Ahenkorah; selection of Former Minister of Education, Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as the presidential running mate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), compilation of the new voters register by the Electoral Commission (EC) and its attendant issues of some citizens allegedly being prevented from registering.

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total 118 ethical violations recorded, 109 (92%) were recorded on radio. The remaining nine violations (8%) were recorded on news websites. Newspapers recorded no violations for the period of monitoring.

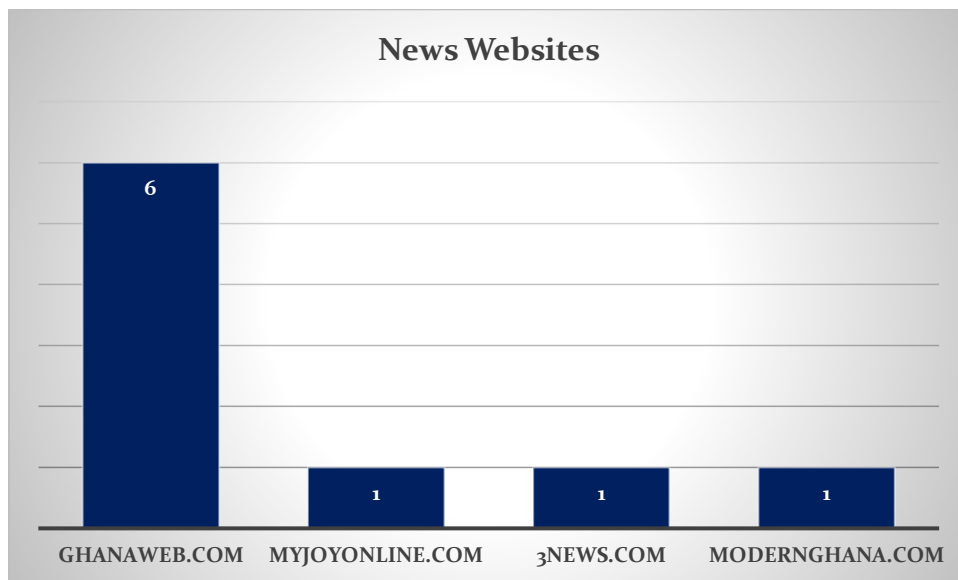
Radio Stations

Out of the 109 violations recorded on radio, pro-NDC radio, Power FM, produced more than two-thirds (75) of the violations. Oman FM, a pro-NPP radio station, followed with 20 violations. Figure 1 below presents the details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.



News Websites

Out of the 9 violations recorded on news websites, Ghanaweb.com recorded more than half (6). Figure 2 below present the details of all the news websites on which the ethical violations were recorded.



3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that Decency is the highest violated ethical principle. This is followed by Accuracy. Table 1 below presents the types of principles that were violated during the monitoring period.

Violated Principles	Frequency	Percentage
Decency	73	61.9%
Accuracy	27	22.9%
Prejudice and Stereotyping	8	6.8%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	5	4.2%
Headline	2	1.7%
Separating Facts from Opinions	2	1.7%
Respect of Privacy	1	0.8%
Total	118	100.00%

	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste & Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Headline	Facts & Opinion	Respect of Privacy	Total
Power FM	53	13	4	2		2	1	75
Oman FM	8	9		3				20
Ghanaweb.com	3			3				6
Adom FM	1	3	1					5
Accra FM	3	1						4
Hot FM	3	1						4
Okay FM	1							1
Myjoyonline.com	1							1
3news.com					1			1
Modernghana.com					1			1
Total	73	27	5	8	2	2	1	118

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

From Table 2 above, Power FM violated the principle of Decency (53), Accuracy (13) and Good taste and Public Sensibilities (4) more than every other media organisation.

On the principle of Prejudice and Stereotyping, Oman FM and Ghanaweb.com led with the highest violation, both recording 3 infractions.

The news websites, 3news.com (1) and Modernghana.com (1), produced stories with Headlines that were either misleading or were not consistent with the content of the story.

3.4 Radio Programmes and Ethical Violations Recorded

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

Table 3: Host and Programmes with the Highest Ethical Violations

Radio Station	Programme	Frequency of Violations	Host
Power FM	Inside Politics	37	Mugaabe Maase
Power FM	Battle Ground	20	Oheneba B. Bannie
Oman FM	National Agenda	11	Yaw Amofa
Power FM	Dwaboase	8	Kwame Menka
Oman FM	Nokware Kaseebo	5	Owuahene Antwi Bosiako/Katakyie Mensah

Pro-NDC radio station, Power FM's afternoon political talk show, **Inside Politics**, which is hosted by Mugabe Maase, emerged as the programme with the highest number of violations (37). **Battle Ground**, another political talk show of Power FM, hosted by Oheneba B. Bannie recorded the second highest violations (20).

Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM's morning show, **National Agenda**, recorded the third highest violations (11). National Agenda is hosted by Yaw Amofa.

Differing from the political talk shows, Oman FM's evening news, **Nokware Kaseebo**, recorded as high as five ethical violations. The evening news is either hosted by Owuahene Antwi Bosiako or Katakylie Mensah.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

i. Indifference by Programme Hosts to use of unethical language

Some hosts of political talk shows and newscasters appeared indifferent when some of their panelists and interviewees used unethical language on their platforms or looked on while their guests made unprintable statements on live radio.

ii. Provocations and Use of Unsubstantiated Allegations/Offensive Comments

The monitoring observed that some show hosts themselves either made or provoked their panelists/guests to make offensive, prejudicial and stereotypical comments. For example, owing to the alleged reports of citizens in some known NDC stronghold constituencies being prevented from registering for the voters' ID card, some hosts on the pro-NDC radio station encouraged their guests to make many unsubstantiated allegations of a conspiracy among the EC, the governing NPP and the state securities aimed at disenfranchising citizens in some electoral areas. Others were also observed inciting violence and calling on their listeners to have a face-off with security personnel who had been deployed to the various registration centers if they were aggrieved.

iii. Mixing Facts and Opinions

It was also observed that some news anchors and hosts of political talk shows often projected their personal opinions when presenting/hosting their programmes as against the material facts of the stories. The monitoring revealed incidence of overstatements and exaggerations of the details of stories and a conscious effort by some news anchors to be humorous, watering down the serious news stories with jokes.

iv. Unscreened/Unregulated Audience Comments

Comments that audience sent to hosts of programmes via social media were in mostly not screened before they were read on air. In the process, many unethical comments were inadvertently read on air. While some show hosts immediately apologized, others did not bother.

B. News Websites

i. Misleading Headlines

The monitoring cited incidents where headlines were grossly misleading compared with the content of the stories. The headlines either drew on the similarity of the name of a subject of a story to a prominent personality or linked the story to a developing event in the media, even though there's no connection, to gain attention of audience.

ii. Unscreened/Unregulated Audience Comments

The issue of unscreened or unregulated comments emerged as a major ethical problem among the news websites monitored. 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.

4.0 Recommendations

Following the findings of the report, below are recommendations to radio show hosts, news anchors and editors; media owners; media associations and media regulatory bodies:

Hosts and Editors

- Editors of the various media organisations are encouraged to develop practical editorial policies and standards where it is absent or ensure strict adherence to them where such policies exist.
- Editors must institute zero-tolerance to certain unethical statements, particularly prejudicial and stereotypical comments that border on ethnicity as such comments can inflame tensions and incite people to violence.
- Editors of news websites are also encouraged to review readers' comments that are shared on their web pages before they are published.
- Editors of radio news bulletins and talk shows are also encouraged to ensure as much as possible thorough screening of the comments that their audience share with them through social media before they are aired.

- 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 may have their own political affiliations and leanings. They are however encouraged to subject their organisations to the general ethical principles and guidelines that bind the media.
- Owners must also 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 to serve as a deterrent to 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.