

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, August 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 973 media content were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which 141 ethical violations were recorded. The violations were recorded on 11 out of the 26 media organisations monitored.

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

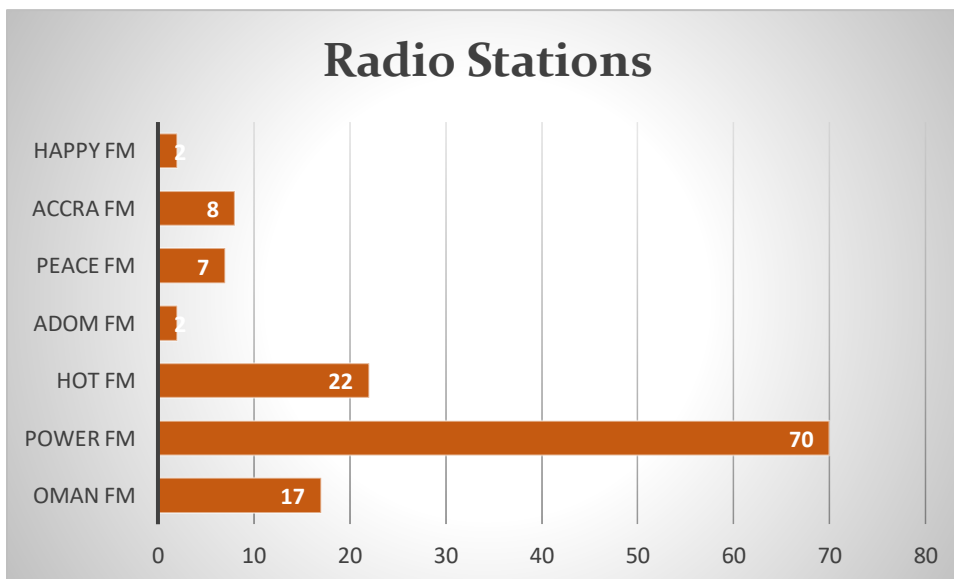
- Writing of the West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) by final year students and recorded incidence of protests and violence in the schools
- Ongoing voter registration exercise across the country
- Conduct of the registration exercise on Senior High School campuses
- The firing of a gun at a registration center by Hawa Koomson, Minister for Special Development Initiatives
- News stories (reactions) on a series of sermons by Bishop Agyin Asare, founder of the Perez Chapel International, on corruption, violence and lack of diligence of the politicians to ensuring development
- Developing news on the announcement of the Prof. Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang as running mate of the major opposition New Democratic Congress (NDC)

Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Of the total **141** ethical violations, Radio stations recorded the highest with **128** incidents. This was followed by news websites with 12 incidents. Newspapers recorded the remaining one (**1**) ethical violation.

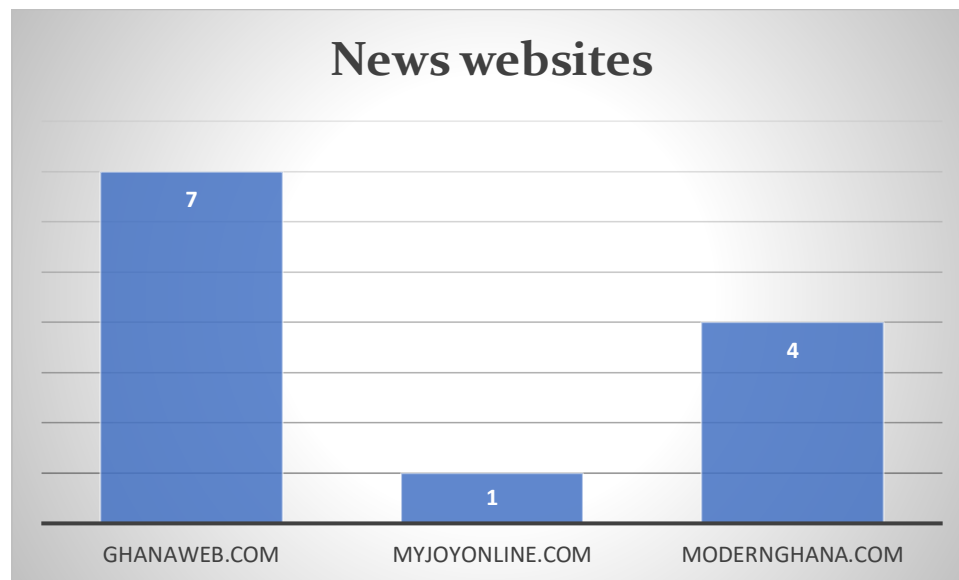
Radio Stations

Out of the 128 violations recorded on radio, pro-NDC radio, Power FM, produced more than more than half (70) of the violations. Hot FM followed with 22 violations and this was immediately followed by Pro-NPP radio, Oman FM with 17 violations. This Figure 1 below presents the details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.



News Websites

Out of the 12 violations recorded on news websites, Ghanaweb.com led pack recording more than half (7) of the infractions. 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 during the period of monitoring. This is followed by Accuracy. Table 1 below presents the types of principles that were violated during the monitoring period.

Table 1: Frequency of the Principles Violated

Violated Principles	Frequency	Percentage
Decency	73	51.8%
Accuracy	40	28.4%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	15	10.6%
Prejudice and Stereotyping	7	5.0%
Facts and Opinion	3	2.1%
Photograph, Pictures and Images	1	0.7%
Respect of Privacy	1	0.7%
Balance	1	0.7%
Total	141	100.00%

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Table 2: Media Organisations and Type of Principle Violated

Media	Ethical Principles								Total
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Photograph, Pictures & Images	Facts & Opinion	Respect of Privacy	Balance	
Power FM	31	25	8	2		3	1		70
Hot FM	18	4							22
Oman FM	4	11	1	1					17
Accra FM	7			1					8
Ghanaweb.com	2		3	2					7
Peace FM	5			1				1	7
Modernghana.com	2		1		1				4
Adom FM	1		1						2
Happy FM	2								2
Myjoyonline.com	1								1
The Daily Searchlight			1						1
Total	73	40	15	7	1	3	1	1	141

From Table 2 above, the pro-NDC radio station, Power FM, recorded the highest ethical infractions. The radio station recorded nearly half of the total number of violations recorded for the period of monitoring. Power FM also led the pack in violating the principles of Decency (31), Accuracy (25), Good Taste and Public Sensibilities (8) and facts and opinion (3). Hot FM followed with 22 violations and also recorded the second highest violation of Decency (18). With 17 violations Oman FM followed. The pro-NPP radio station also recorded the second highest violation of the principle of Accuracy (11).

Ghanaweb.com led the pack of news websites with seven violations, mostly being comments from readers on their websites. This was followed by Modernghana.com with four violations.

The Daily Searchlight (1) is the only newspaper that recorded a violation during the period of monitoring.

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	40	Mugaabe Maase
Power FM	Dwaboase	13	Kwame Menka
Hot FM	Maakye Dwumadie	13	Isaac Boamah Darko
Hot FM	Dwene Ho Bio	8	Kaakyire Kwadwo Asamoah
Oman FM	National Agenda	7	Yaw Amofa

Pro-NDC radio station, Power FM's afternoon political talk show, **Inside Politics**, which is hosted by Mugaabe Maase, recorded the highest number of violations (40) during the period of monitoring. The radio station's morning show, **Dwaboase**, hosted by Kwame Menka and Hot FM's morning show, **Maakye Dwumadie**, host by Isaac Boamah Darko, followed with both recording 13 violations each. Hot FM's afternoon major current affairs show, **Dwene Ho Bio**, also followed with eight violations. The show is hosted by Kaakyire Kwadwo Asamoah.

Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM's morning show, **National Agenda**, recorded the fifth highest violations (7). National Agenda is hosted by Yaw Amofa.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

i. Show Hosts Promoting and Endorsing Violence

Some show hosts of Pro-NDC radio stations were noted to be provoking and endorsing violence among audience in certain regions and communities perceived to be the strong holds of the opposition NDC. This followed alleged reports of security personnel preventing citizens being from registering in the ongoing voter registration exercise in the said communities and regions.

ii. High incidence of Unsubstantiated Allegations on Pro-partisan Radio Stations

The period of monitoring showed a high infraction of the principle of Accuracy. This is owing to the making of wild accusations and unsubstantiated allegations mostly made by

hosts and guests against their political opponents on the pro-partisan radio stations. These allegations were largely unproven, exaggerations and in some cases outright falsehood.

iii. 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.

iv. Mixing Facts and Opinions in News Bulletins

It was also observed that some news anchors often projected their personal opinions when presenting/hosting their programmes as against the material facts of the stories. This is particularly worrying because the news presentation must strictly be focused on the facts and be free opinions of presenters.

v. Unscreened Audience Voice Notes and Comments

Comments that audience sent to hosts of programmes via social media were mostly not screened before they were read on air. There has also been a new trend of audience sending voice notes on WhatsApp to share their opinions on ongoing discussions which, were barely screened before airing. 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, just 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 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the report suggest that ethical violations are still prevalent in the media particularly the pro-partisan radio stations. Again, the ethical principles of decency, accuracy, prejudice and stereotyping are the most abused. 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:

Editors, Producers, News Anchors and Show Hosts

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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.