

MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD JULY 16 - 31, 2020



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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 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 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 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 16-31, 2020**. It highlights the following:

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

A total of **917 media content** were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **92 ethical violations were recorded. The violations were recorded on 14 out of the 26 media organisations monitored.**

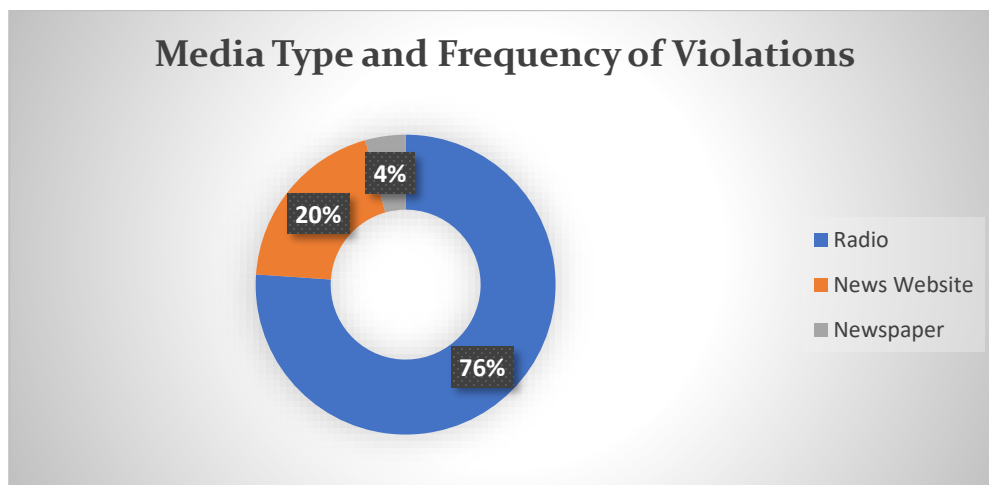
The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- Resumption of school by final year Senior High School students under COVID-19 Conditions
- Ongoing voter registration exercise across the country

- Release of a written ruling by Supreme Court that explains that Birth Certificate is not an eligible document for Voter Registration
- 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
- Government's directive to State Broadcaster the (GBC) to relinquish some of its channels on the Digital Terrestrial Television
- Developing news on the announcement of the Prof. Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang as running mate of the major opposition New Democratic Congress (NDC)

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Of the total 92 ethical violations, Radio stations recorded the highest with 70 incidents. This was followed by news websites with 18 incidents. The remaining 4 ethical violations were in newspapers. Figure 1 below presents more details.



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.

Table 1: Principles Violated

Violated Principles	Frequency	Percentage
Decency	47	51.1%
Accuracy	21	22.8%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	11	12%
Photograph, Picture and Image	5	5.4%
Prejudice and Stereotyping	4	4.3%
Separating Facts from Opinions	4	4.3%
Total	92	100.00%

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Media	Ethical Principles						
	Decency	Accuracy	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts & Opinion	Photograph, Picture & Image	Good Taste & Public Sensibilities	Total
Oman FM	9	16	1	2			28
Power FM	16	5		2		1	24
Ghanaweb.com	2		3		1	10	16
Peace FM	6						6
Adom FM	5						5
Hot FM	4						4
Daily Guide	1				1		2
3news.com					1		1
Myjoyonline.com					1		1
The Chronicle					1		1
Asempa FM	1						1
Okay FM	1						1
Happy FM	1						1
The Ghanaian Times	1						1
Total	47	21	4	4	5	11	92

From Table 2 above, Oman FM recorded the highest number of ethical infractions (28). It led the pack of media organisation that breached the principle of Accuracy with 16 incidents. Oman FM also recorded the second highest incidents of breaching the principle of Decency (9). The partisan radio station together with Power FM twice mixed opinions with the facts.

Power FM recorded the second highest violations (24) for the period of monitoring. The pro-NDC radio station recorded the highest violation of the principle of Decency (16). Peace FM (6), Adom FM (5), Hot FM (4), Asempa FM (1), Okay FM (1), Happy FM (1) are the other radio stations that recorded some violations.

Ghanaweb.com recorded the third-highest violation (16) and also recorded the highest violation of the principle of Good Taste and Public Sensibilities (10). Two newspapers, The Chronicle and The Ghanaian Times, recorded a violation each.

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, 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	Host
Oman FM	National Agenda	14	Yaw Amofa
Power FM	Inside Politics	13	Mugabe Maase
Oman FM	Boiling Point	10	Kwabena Kwakye
Power FM	Dwaboase	5	Kwame Menka
Peace FM	The Platform	5	Nana Yaw Kesse

Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM's morning show, ***National Agenda***, which is hosted by Yaw Amofa, emerged the programme with the highest number of ethical violations (14). Coming immediately after *National Agenda* is Pro-NDC radio station Power FM's afternoon political talk show ***Inside Politics***. The programme hosted by Mugabe Maase recorded the second-highest violations (13). Oman FM's afternoon political show, ***Boiling Point***, hosted by Kwabena Kwakye followed with 10 violations.

Power FM's morning show, ***Dwaboase***, and Peace FM's evening current affairs show, ***The Platform***, recorded five violations each. ***Dwaboase*** is hosted by Kwame Menka while ***The Platform*** is hosted by Nana Yaw Kesse.

3.5 General Observations Made

The following observations were made during the period of monitoring:

A. Radio Stations

i. Programme Hosts spearhead the use of unethical language

Some hosts of political talk shows and newscasters did not only appear to be indifferent when some of their panelists and interviewees used unethical language on their platforms, but in many cases, initiated and or led in the use of foul and unprintable language on air.

ii. High Incidence of Unsubstantiated Allegations and Needless Accusations on Pro-partisan Radio Stations

The period of monitoring showed a high incidence of wild accusations and unsubstantiated allegations which was 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. Little Restraint/Caution for Callers and Social Media Commentaries on Shows

Calls and comments from the audience in many of the political talk shows and news bulletins were observed to be unethical and not fit for radio. Nonetheless, show hosts were not noted to be cautioning their callers, texters and social media commentators or even screening their commentaries before reading.

iv. 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.

B. News Websites

i. 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.

C. Newspapers/News Websites

i. Graphic Images Accompanying Stories

Many websites and newspapers were observed to be publishing pictures that were too graphic and evoked strong emotions. Some of these images which included photos of mutilated bodies and remains of murder victims were not only obscene but showed no empathy to the families of the deceased.

ii. Unethical Statements in Opinion Articles

It was also noted that some published opinion articles in the newspapers and news websites contained statement that violated some ethical principles. While editors may sometimes pay much attention to new stories than opinions, as it was observed, the former can become an avenue for contributors and writers to make statements that violate ethical principles.

4.0 Recommendations

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

Hosts/Presenters 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

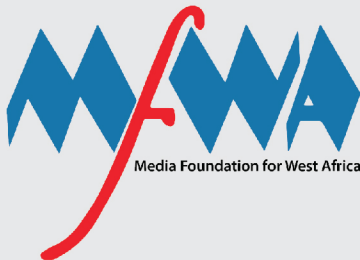
- Media owners may have their own political affiliations and leanings. They are however encouraged to subject their organisations to the general ethical principles and guidelines that bind the media.
- Owners must also ensure that they build the capacities of their journalists and presenters on the best 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 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 for 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.



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