

MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD AUGUST 16-31, 2020



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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

This report covers findings for the period, **August 16-31, 2020**. It highlights the following:

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

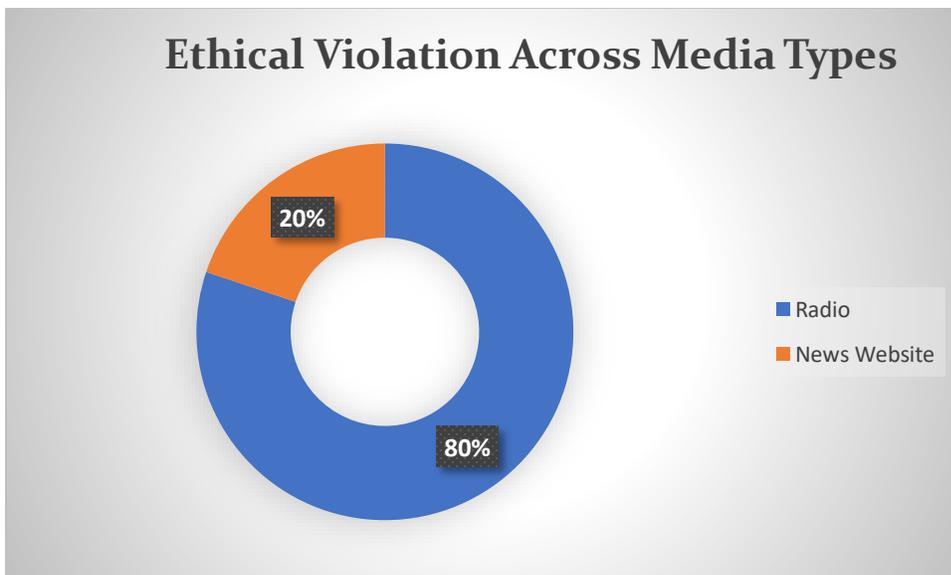
A total of 971 media content were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which 136 ethical violations were recorded. The violations were recorded on 10 out of the 26 media organisations monitored. There were no recorded incidents in the newspapers for the period.

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- Social media trends on “Papa No”, an alleged old rich politician spending monies on young girls he’s in a sexual relationship with.
- The “Papa No” phrase mentioned in Parliament by the Minister of Information, Kojo Opong Nkrumah
- Commissioning of the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat office in Accra
- The Convention People’s Party (CPP) Primaries
- President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo’s tours in the Central and Western Region
- John Mahama’s tour in the Volta Region
- Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia’s addresses at a Town Hall meeting to showcase infrastructural records of the ruling NPP
- Martin Amidu’s write-up on the inaccuracies in Kwamena Ahwoi’s book titled “Working with Rawlings”
- News on Agyapa deal
- Launch of NPP Manifesto
- Discussions on legalization of Okada following John Mahama’s announcement
- Free food/lunch for JHS Students as part COVID-19 support by government

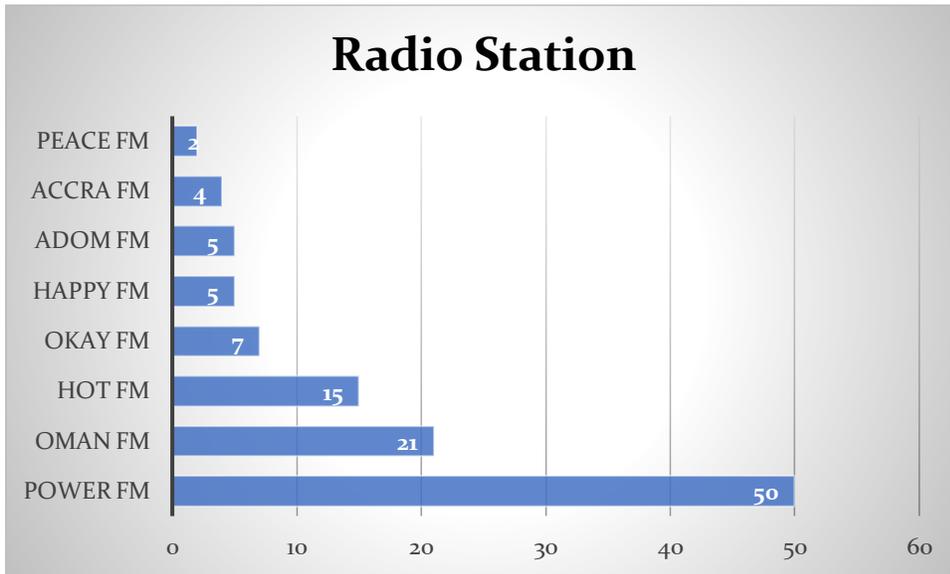
3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total 136 ethical violations recorded, 109 (80%) were recorded on radio. The remaining 27 violations (20%) 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 nearly half (50) 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 27 violations recorded on news websites, Ghanaweb.com recorded nearly three-quarters (20). Figure 2 below presents the details of all the news websites on which the ethical violations were recorded.



3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

Decency was the highest violated ethical principle for the period. This is followed by the principle of Good Taste and Public Sensibilities. Table 1 below presents the types of principles that were violated during the monitoring period.

Table 1: Frequency of Violated Ethical Principle

Ethical Principle	Frequency	Percentage
Decency	73	53.7%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	24	17.6%
Accuracy	22	16.2%
Facts and Opinion	8	5.9%
Prejudice and Stereotyping	3	2.2%
Fairness	3	2.2%
Photo, Picture and Image	1	0.7%
Respect of Privacy	1	0.7%
Balance	1	0.7%
Total	136	100.0%

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Media	Ethical Principles									
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste & Public Sensibilities	Photo, Picture & Image	Facts & Opinion	Respect of Privacy	Balance	Prejudice and Stereotyping	Fairness	Total
Power FM	28	6	7		5	1	1	2		50
Oman FM	6	9	1		2				3	21
Ghanaweb.com	4		15					1		20
Hot FM	10	5								15
Okay FM	4	2			1					7
Myjoyonline.com	5		1							6
Happy FM	5									5
Adom FM	5									5
Accra FM	4									4
Peace FM	2									2
Modernghana.com				1						1
Total	73	22	24	1	8	1	1	3	3	136

From Table 2 above, the pro-NDC radio station, Power FM (50), recorded the highest ethical infractions. The radio station also led the pack in violating the principles of Decency (28) as well as mixing facts with opinion (3). Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM followed with 21 violations and also led with the highest infraction of the principle of Accuracy (9).

News website Ghanaweb.com was the third highest perpetrator of the ethical principles. The website violated the principle of Good Taste and Public Sensibilities the most, with all of such violations emanating from unprintable readers' comments published on the website.

3.4 Host, 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	33	Mugaabe Maase
Hot FM	Maakye Dwumadie	12	Isaac Boamah Darko
Oman FM	National Agenda	11	Yaw Amofa
Power FM	Dwaboase	9	Kwame Menka
Oman FM	Boiling Point	8	Kwabena Kwakye

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 (33) during the period of monitoring. This was followed by Hot FM's morning show, **Maakye Dwumadie**, hosted by Isaac Boamah Darko, which recorded 12 violations.

Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM's morning show, **National Agenda**, recorded the third highest violations (7). National Agenda is hosted by Yaw Amofa. Power FM's morning show **Dwaboase**, hosted by Kwame Menka, also followed with nine (9) violations while Oman FM's afternoon political talk show, **Boiling Point**, recorded eight (8) violations being the programme with the fifth highest violation for the period of monitoring. The programme is hosted by Kwabena Kwakye.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

i. Show Hosts Endorsing and Reinforcing Commentaries that Promote Violence

The period of monitoring witnessed alleged reports of security personnel preventing citizens being from registered in the ongoing voter registration exercise in some communities and regions noted to be the stronghold of the opposition NDC. Some show hosts of the pro-NDC radio station were, following the reports, noted to be inciting their audience to engage in violence in an attempt to resist the security personnel who were alleged to be preventing them from registering.

Some of these show hosts also consciously played recordings and allowed commentators who enforced ideas of violence talk freely on live programmes.

ii. High incidence of Inaccuracies and Unsubstantiated Allegations on Radio Stations

The period of monitoring also spotted a worrying rise of show hosts and news anchors engaging in making claims that have little or no truth. Some of these claims were also wild accusations and unsubstantiated allegations mostly made by hosts and guests against their political opponents on the pro-partisan radio stations. The occurrence of inaccuracies is worrying because the news media is noted to be the source of verified information. This unfortunate phenomenon will sadly aggravate the downward spiral of trust in the media.

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. 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. Readers' Comment Sections Becoming Platforms for Obscenities and Trading of Insults

The comments section of some of the news websites are left unscreened or unregulated by editors. This sections which are part of the news websites are becoming platforms where audience actively engage in publishing obscenities and trading invectives either at the subject matter of the news items or at another reader who has shared an opinion on the platform. This is evidenced in the high violation of the principle of Good Taste and Public Sensibilities.

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 must institute zero-tolerance to certain unethical statements and must consciously clamp down or stand against its emergence on any of their platforms.
- 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 of news websites are also encouraged to review readers' comments that are shared on their web pages before they are published. Editors can also disable these sections, as some other news websites have done, if the review of them may be a herculean task.
- Editors of radio news bulletins and talk shows are also encouraged to ensure thorough screening of the comments that their audience share with them through social media before they are aired.

Media Owners

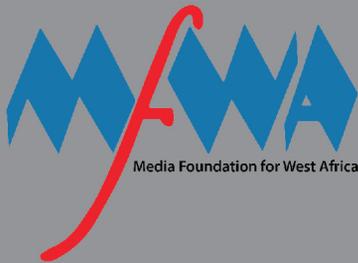
- Media owners may have their own political affiliations and leanings. They are, however, encouraged to subject their organisations to the general ethical principles and guidelines that bind the media.
- Owners must also ensure that they build the capacities of their journalists and presenters on the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

Associations

- Concerted efforts are needed from media associations such as Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) and the 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 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.



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