

MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER 1-15, 2020



With funding support from:



Embassy of the
Kingdom of the Netherlands

1.0 Introduction

A free and independent media is a fundamental pre-requisite for a viable, vibrant and stable democracy. Beyond public education, the media engenders civic participation which 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 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 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 in the media 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

This report covers findings for the period, September 1-15, 2020. It highlights the following:

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

A total of 962 media content were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **149 ethical violations** were recorded. The violations were recorded on 13 out of the 26 media organisations monitored.

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- The Launch of the National Democratic Congress (NDC's) 2020 Manifesto
- Discussions on Agyapa Royalties Deal

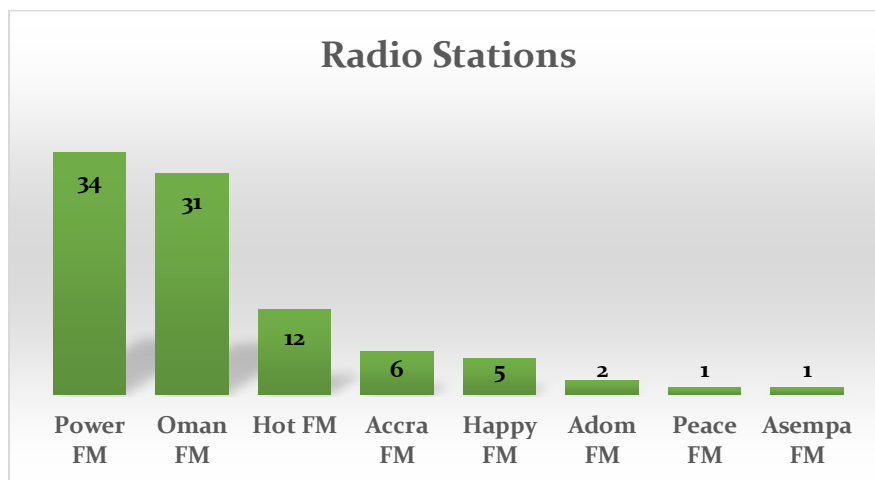
- John Dramani Mahama, Presidential Candidate of the NDC, sharing a Facebook post by Isaac Adongo, MP for Bolgantanga Central, which referred to some government appointees who support the Agyapa deal as ‘Akyem Sakawa Boys’
- Nii Lante Vanderpuye, MP for Odododiado, beaten by alleged National Security Operatives
- Discussions on Legalisation of Okada by the NDC
- Customers of collapsed financial institutions arrested during protests
- Kennedy Agyapong, MP for Assin Central, insulting Judge for placing injunction on his (Kennedy Agyapong) land
- Electoral Commission’s (EC) Increment of presidential nomination fees to Ghs 100,000

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total 149 ethical violations recorded, 92 (62%) were recorded on radio. News websites recorded 55 violations (37%), with the remaining two (2) violations (1%) recorded in Newspapers.

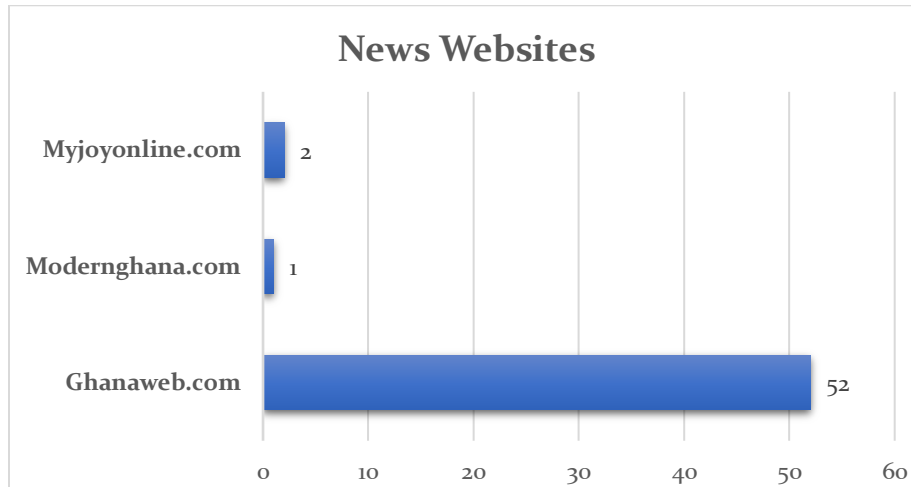
Radio Stations

Out of the 92 violations recorded on radio, pro-partisan radio stations, Power FM (34) and Oman FM (31), produced more than nearly three-quarters of the violations. Hot FM followed the pro-partisan stations with 12 violations. Figure 1 below presents the details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.



New Websites

Out of the 55 violations recorded on news websites, Ghanaweb.com recorded 52 violations. Figure 2 below present the details of all the news websites on which the ethical violations were recorded.



Newspapers

On newspapers, The Herald and The Daily Searchlight recorded a violation each.

3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that **Decency** is the highest violated ethical principle. This is followed by the principle **Good Taste and Public Sensibilities**, and **Accuracy**. Table 1 below presents the types of principles that were violated during the monitoring period.

Table 1: Frequency of Violated Ethical Principle

Ethical Principles	Total	Percentage
Decency	69	46%
Good Taste & Public Sensibilities	39	26%
Accuracy	25	17%
Prejudice & Stereotyping	12	8%
Facts & Opinion	3	2%
Balance	1	1%
Total	149	100%

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Media	Ethical Principles						
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste & Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts & Opinion	Balance	Total
Ghanaweb.com	9	1	32	10			52
Power FM	18	11	5				34
Oman FM	18	9	2	1	1		31
Hot FM	9	2			1		12
Accra FM	5				1		6
Happy FM	5						5
Adom FM	2						2
Myjoyonline.com	2						2
Peace FM		1					1
Asempa FM				1			1
Modernghana.com	1						1
The Daily Searchlight						1	1
The Herald Newspaper		1					1
Total	69	25	39	12	3	1	149

From Table 2 above, Ghanaweb.com led the pack with the highest violation of 52 infraction—all of them being readers' comments published on the website. The news websites also violated the principles of Good Taste and Public Sensibilities (32) and Prejudice and Stereotyping (10) the most.

Pro-partisan radio stations, Power FM (34) and Oman FM (31) followed the new website. The two pro-partisan radio stations violated the principle of Decency the most with each recording 18 violations. Pro-NDC Power FM, however, led the with the most violation of the principle of the Accuracy.

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	18	Mugaabe Maase

Oman FM	National Agenda	12	Yaw Amofa
Oman FM	Boiling Point	9	Kwabena Kwakye
Power FM	Battle Ground	7	Oheneba Boamah Bennie
Power FM	Dwaboase	6	Kwame Minkah
Hot FM	Dwene Ho Biom	6	Boamah Darko

Pro-NDC radio station, Power FM's afternoon political talk show, **Inside Politics**, which is hosted by Mugabe Maase, recorded the highest number of violations (18) during the period of monitoring. This was followed by Pro-NPP, Oman FM's morning show, **National Agenda**, hosted by Yaw Amofa, with 12 violations.

Oman FM's afternoon political talk show, **Boiling Point**, which is hosted by Kwabena Kwakye, recorded the third highest violations (9). Power FM's afternoon political talk show, **Battle Ground**, followed with seven (7) violations. The show is hosted by Oheneba Boamah Bennie.

Power FM's morning show, **Dwaboase**, hosted by Kwame Minkah and Hot FM's political talk show, **Dwene Ho Biom**, hosted by Boamah Darko recorded six violations each.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

i. Unscreened/Unedited Audience Commentaries

While the phenomenon of allowing audience to share their views and thoughts on programmes is progressive and engenders participation in the discussions, it was observed that many show producers and hosts give a carte blanche to audience to pass abusive and unethical comments on the shows. Even in situations like reading comments of audience on social media platforms where the producers and show hosts could skip or choose not to read such offensive comments, they were noted to be indifferent.

ii. High Incidence in Offensive Attacks, Less Interest in Analysis on Pro-partisan Radio Stations

The period of monitoring witnessed the launch of the manifesto of the main opposition party, NDC. The governing NPP had launched their manifesto a few weeks before that. This called for a good opportunity for the show hosts and producers to compare both manifestos and make some informed analyses on their shows. However, many of the

show hosts were rather interested in maligning, attacking and making unsubstantiated allegations against their political opponents.

iii. High Occurrence of Inaccuracies in Presentation

The principle of Accuracy was among the top three most violated principle for the monitoring period. Many of the incidence of inaccuracies were cited on news bulletins and political talk shows. This is particularly worrying because news presentation must be factual and accurate. Information presented in news bulletins are expected to be verified.

iv. Indifference by Programme Hosts to use of unethical language

Some newscasters and hosts of political talk shows 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.

B. News Websites

I. Comments Section replete with Abusive and Obscene Language

While it has been the practice of some news websites to not edit or review the comments section of their news pages, the period of monitoring underscored how the practice undermines professionalism and the gatekeeper's role of the media. For instance, Ghanaweb.com recorded the highest ethical violations for the period and all of the violations were readers' comments published on their website. Most of these comments were extremely obscene and deplorable language which must not be published by any news media which is bounded by the ethics of the profession.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the report suggest that ethical violations are very prevalent in the media, particularly the pro-partisan radio stations. The findings further suggest that ethical principles of Decency, Accuracy, Good Taste and Public Sensibilities, Prejudice and Stereotyping are the most abused.

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 news websites are 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 must institute zero-tolerance for unethical statements and must consciously clamp down or stand against its usage on 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 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

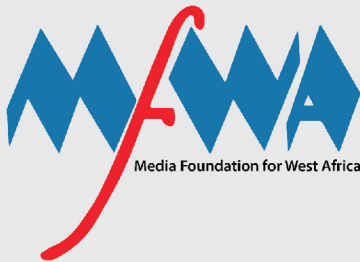
- Media owners may have their own political affiliations and leanings. They are, however, encouraged to subject their organisations to the general ethical principles and guidelines that bind the media.
- Owners must also ensure that they build the capacities of their journalists and presenters on the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



Media Foundation for West Africa

32 Otele Avenue, East Legon,

Telephone: +233 (0) 302 555 327

Twitter: @TheMFWA

Facebook: Media Foundation for West Africa

info@mfw.org

www.mfw.org



[@themfwa](https://twitter.com/themfwa)



www.mfw.org



[themfwa](https://www.facebook.com/themfwa)