

# MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER 16-30, 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, 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 16-30, 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 **136 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:

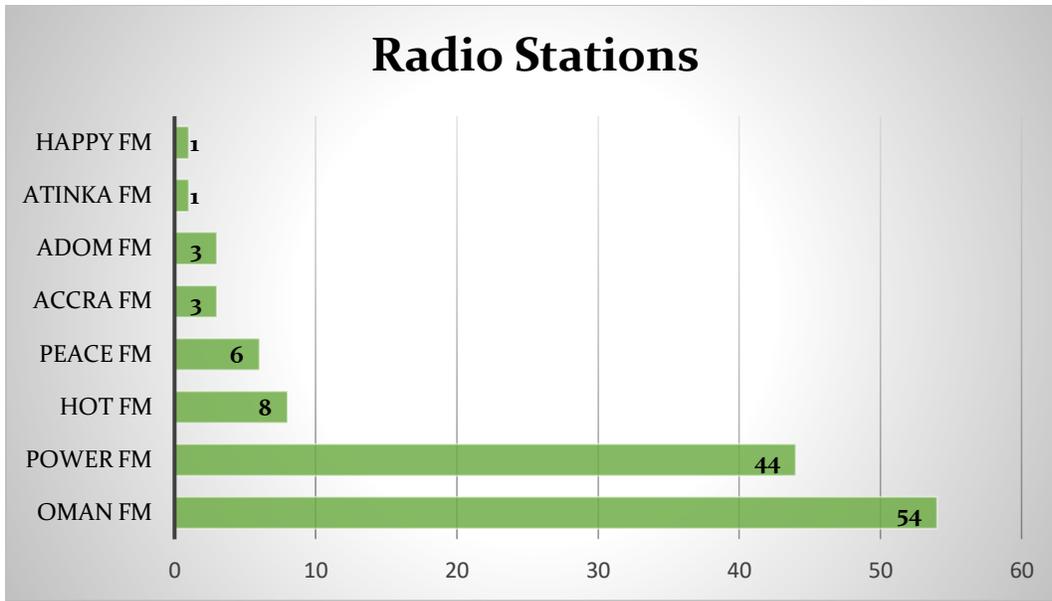
- Heads of States and Governments in ECOWAS' meeting in Ghana to discuss the Mali military takeover
- Government releases of money to pay customers of collapsed financial institutions
- Press Briefings of the Electoral Commission on Exhibition of Voters Registration List
- General discussions on comparisons of the manifestos of the NPP and the NDC
- Commentary on Media Language and Ethics Report released by the Media Foundation for West Africa
- Government's decision to ban the importation of salvage vehicles
- Government suspension of ban the importation of salvage vehicles
- Media comparisons of the manifestos of both the NPP and the NDC
- Press Release by Special Prosecutor Martin Amidu on Agyapa Deal
- Strike Action by Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association
- Commentary on John Mahama's promise of building mortuary for the Muslim community
- John Mahama's commentary on VW cars being assembled in Ghana
- Secessionist group blocking roads in some portions of the Volta Region

### **3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media**

Out of the total 136 ethical violations recorded, 120 (88%) were recorded on radio. News websites recorded 12 violations (9%), with the remaining four (4) violations (3%) recorded in Newspapers.

#### **Radio Stations**

Out of the 120 violations recorded on radio, pro-partisan radio stations, Oman FM (54) and Power FM (44), produced most of the violations. Hot FM followed the pro-partisan stations with 8 violations. 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 recorded 7 violations. Figure 2 below presents the details of the news websites on which the ethical violations were recorded.



### Newspapers

On newspapers, Daily Guide recorded three (3) violations while the Herald newspaper recorded one (1).

### 3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

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

**Table 1: Frequency of Violated Ethical Principle**

<b>Ethical Principles</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Decency	68	50.0%
Accuracy	39	28.7%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	10	7.4%
Fairness	7	5.1%
Prejudice & Stereotyping	4	2.9%
Facts and Opinion	3	2.2%
Respect for Privacy	2	1.5%
Balance	1	0.7%
Sensitive to Persons in Grief/Distress	1	0.7%
Headline	1	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Media	Ethical Principles										
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts & Opinion	Fairness	Balance	Sensitive to Persons in Grief/Distress	Headline	Respect for Privacy	Total
Oman FM	15	28	2	3	2	2		1		1	54
Power FM	26	8	5	1		4					44
Hot FM	7	1									8
Ghanaweb.com	4		3								7
Peace FM	3	1			1	1					6
Accra FM	2									1	3
Daily Guide	3										3
Adom FM	3										3
Modernghana.com	1								1		2
Myjoyonline.com	2										2
Atinka FM	1										1
The Herald Newspaper		1									1
Happy FM	1										1
Citinewsroom.com							1				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>136</b>

From Table 2 above, the pro-partisan radio station, Power FM (54) and Oman FM (44) led the pack with the highest violations. While pro-NPP Oman FM led with the highest violation of the principle of **Accuracy** (28), **Prejudice and Stereotyping** (3), **Mixing Facts with Opinion** (2); pro-NDC Power FM led the highest violation of the principle of **Decency** (26), **Good Taste and Public Sensibilities** (5) and **Fairness** (4).

Hot FM followed the pro-partisan radio stations with eight (8) violations. The news website Ghanaweb followed with seven (7) violations.

### 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**

<b>Radio Station</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Frequency of Violations</b>	<b>Host</b>
Power FM	Inside Politics	37	Mugaabe Maase
Oman FM	National Agenda	21	Yaw Amofa
Oman FM	Boiling Point	21	Kwabena Kwakye
Hot FM	Dwene Ho Biom	7	Boamah Darko
Oman FM	The Dialogue	7	Owoahene Antwi Boasiako

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 (37) during the period of monitoring. This was followed by Pro-NPP Oman FM’s morning show, **National Agenda**, hosted by Yaw Amofa and the station’s afternoon political talk show, **Boiling Point**, which is hosted by Kwabena Kwakye. Both programmes recorded 21 violations each.

Hot FM’s political talk show, **Dwene Ho Biom**, hosted by Boamah Darko recorded seven violations each. Net 2 TV’s morning show, **The Dialogue**, which was carried live on Oman FM on some occasions during the period of monitoring also recorded seven violations.

### **3.5 General Observations Made**

#### **A. Radio Stations**

##### **i. Deliberate Misreporting and Incitement of Audience against Voter Registration Verification Process on Pro-NDC Radio Station**

The monitoring observed intentional misreporting and collective efforts by show hosts and news anchors at misinforming audience on the voter verification process. These show hosts and news anchors also spurred on guests on their shows to entrench such misinformation which appeared to malign the voter register verification process ongoing at the time and as well reduce public trust in the process.

##### **ii. High Incidence of Verbal Attacks Against Opponent Politicians on Pro-Partisan Radio Stations at Prime Time**

The monitoring also observed the high occurrence of insults and attacks on personalities of opposition politicians on the pro-partisan radio stations. These attacks ranged from unsubstantiated allegations, disrespect of the privacy and outright insults against their opponents. Sadly, most of these attacks happened during the primetime radio when more audience were expected to be listening.

##### **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 and Newspapers**

##### **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 gatekeeping role of the media. Indeed, most of the infractions recorded on news websites were comments of readers which were not reviewed.

## **ii. False Connection/Misleading Headlines**

It was also observed on some news websites and newspapers the tendency of engaging in false connection, a form of misinformation, where the headlines of stories do not connect exactly with the content. In the specific instances, the headline carried on the front page that attracted audience to buy had content that did not speak exactly to the subject matter as shown on the front page.

## **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**

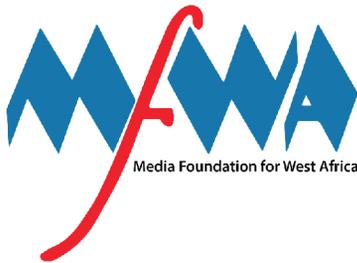
- Media owners may have their own political affiliations and leanings. They are, however, encouraged to subject their organisations to the general ethical principles and guidelines that bind the media.
- Owners must also ensure that they build the capacities of their journalists and presenters on the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



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