

MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD OCTOBER 1-15, 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	The Enquirer	
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 **966 media content** was monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **151 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:

- President Akufo-Addo's campaign speech at the Manhyia Palace.
- John Mahama's campaign tour of the Western North.
- Allegations against COCOBOD by the NDC for cancelling and stopping cocoa roads contracts.
- President Akufo-Addo takes a special seat along on his campaign tour.

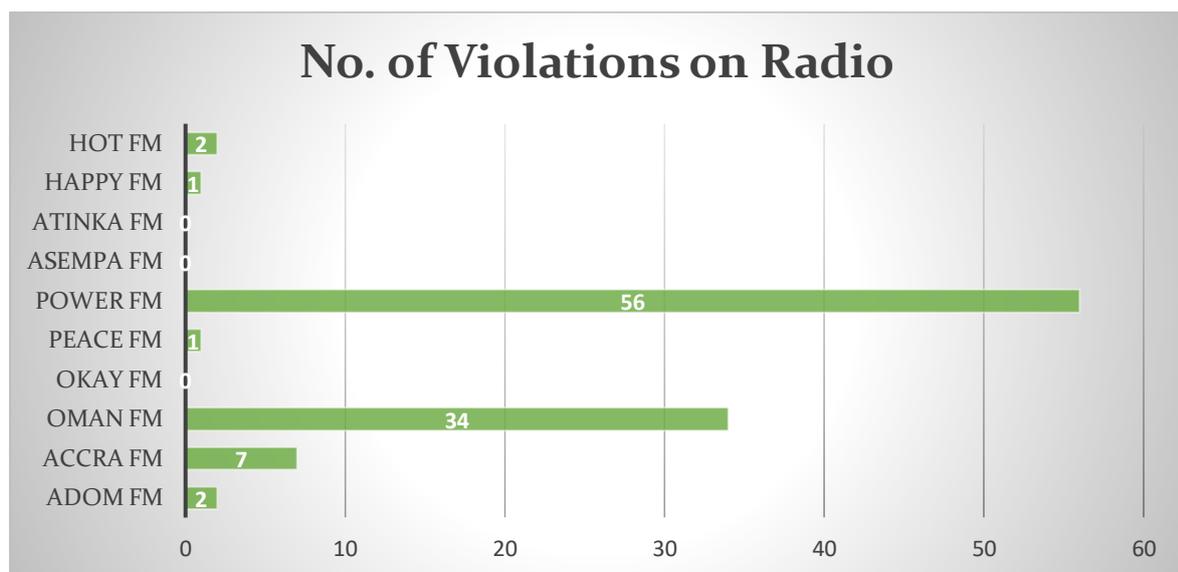
- Government’s claims in the agricultural sector are purported to be false.
- General Secretary for the NDC files nomination on behalf of John Mahama.
- Tarkwa Nsuaem MP Mireku Duker’s Family Attacked with Cutlass
- Ghana Revenue Authority seize a container with guns and ammunition hidden inside.
- 2020 Polls: Possibility of a civil war in Ghana high – Vladimir Antwi Danso warns
- A government official has allegedly been arrested abroad for trying to bring into the country, 26 million pounds via a chartered flight.
- Parliamentarians ask for police protection following MP’s death.
- Samuel Atta Akyea, Minister Works and Housing, submits report on the Saglemi housing project and inconsistencies found to the police for investigations.

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total **151** ethical violations recorded, **103(68%)** were recorded on radio. News websites recorded **47 violations (31%)**, with the remaining **one (1) violation (1%)** recorded in Newspapers.

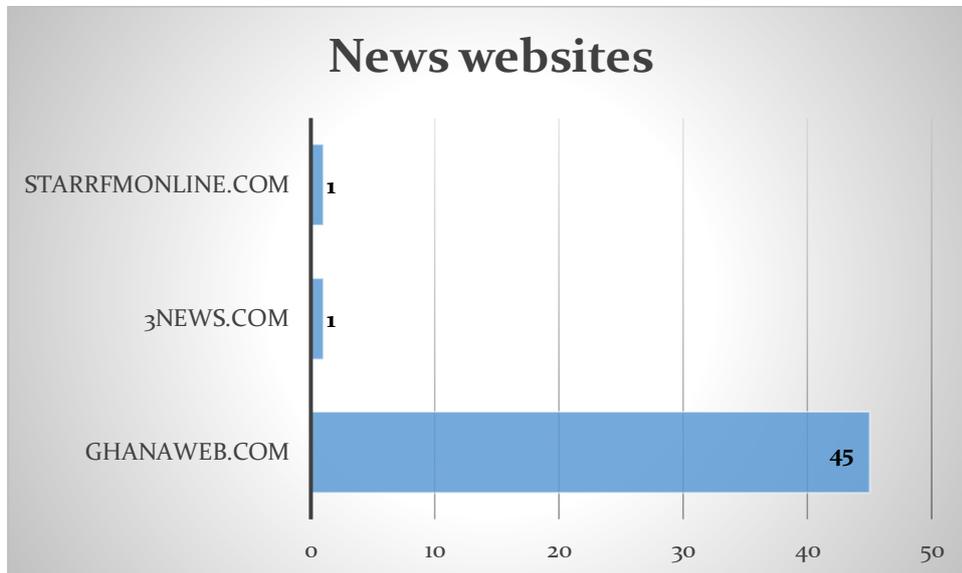
Radio Stations

Out of the 103 violations recorded on radio, pro-partisan radio stations, **Power FM (56)** and **Oman FM (34)**, produced most of the violations. **Accra FM** followed the pro-partisan stations with **7 violations**. Figure 1 below presents the details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.



News Websites

Out of the 47 violations recorded on news websites, **Ghanaweb.com** recorded **45 violations**. Figure 2 below presents the details of the news websites on which the ethical violations were recorded.



Newspapers

On newspapers, New Crusading Guide recorded one violation.

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

Ethical Principles	Total	Percentage
Decency	50	33.1%
Accuracy	43	28.5%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	37	24.5%
Prejudice & Stereotyping	8	5.3%
Facts and Opinion	5	3.3%
Fairness	3	2.0%
Respect for Privacy	1	0.7%
photography, Pictures and Images	1	0.7%
Balance	2	1.3%
Headline	1	0.7%
TOTAL	151	100%

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Media	Ethical Principles										
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts & Opinion	Fairness	Balance	Photography, Pictures and Images	Headline	Respect for Privacy	Total
Power FM	25	22	1	1	5	1				1	56
Ghanaweb.com	1	1	36	7							45
Oman FM	14	16				2	2				34
Accra FM	6	1									7
Adom FM	1	1									2
Hot FM	2										2
Peace FM	1										1
3news.com		1									1
Starrfmonline.com								1			1
New Crusading Guide									1		1
Happy FM		1									1
Total	50	43	37	8	5	3	2	1	1	1	151

From Table 2 above, the pro-partisan radio station, Power FM (54) led the pack with the highest violation whilst GhanaWeb, a news website followed with 45 violations. Pro-NPP Oman FM was third on the list with (34) violations.

With regards to specific principles, Ghanaweb led with the highest violation of the principle of **Offensive to Good Taste and Public Sensibilities** (36), and **Prejudice and Stereotyping** (7), whilst pro-NDC Power FM led the highest violation of the principle of **Decency** (25), **Accuracy** (23) and **Facts and Opinion** (5).

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	30	Mugaabe Maase
Oman FM	Boiling Point	21	Kwabena Kwakye
Oman FM	National Agenda	9	Yaw Amofa
Power FM	Battleground	9	Oheneba B. Bernie
Power FM	Dwaboase	8	Kwame Minka
Power FM	Evening News	8	Oheneba B. Bernie and Beposohemaa Nana Yaa Oforiwaa
Accra FM	Citizen Show	5	Bobie Ansah

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 (30) during the period of monitoring. This was followed by Pro-NPP Oman FM's evening show, **Boiling Point** (21) hosted by Kwabena Kwakye and the station's morning political talk show, **National Agenda** (9) which is hosted by Yaw Amofa. Again, Pro NDC Power FM's Battleground political show recorded (9) violations whilst its breakfast show-Dwaboase and Evening news recorded (8) violations each. Accra FM's political talk show, **hosted** by

Bobie Ansah recorded five violations and Power FM's Evening News by Oheneba B. Bernie and Beposohemaa Nana Yaa Oforiwaa.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

i. High Occurrence of Verbal Attacks Against Opponent Politicians on Pro-Partisan Radio Stations at Prime Time

The monitoring observed a high occurrence of needless insults and attacks on personalities of political opponents on the pro-partisan radio stations. These attacks ranged from total disrespect of the privacy, unsubstantiated allegations, and outright insults which were offensive to good taste and public sensibilities. Unfortunately, a majority of these attacks transpired during the primetime radio when more audience were expected to be listening.

ii. High Incidence of Inaccuracies in Presentation

The principle of Accuracy was the second most violated principle for the monitoring period. Many of the incidence of inaccuracies identified during the period were cited on political talk shows and occasionally, news bulletins. Opposing politicians and news anchors comfortably threw numbers around without being subjected to any rigorous standard of verification. This is particularly worrying because news presentation must be factual and accurate. Information presented in news bulletins are expected to be verified.

iii. Indifference by Programme Hosts and Editors to the use of unethical language

Some newscasters, hosts of political talk shows appeared indifferent and unperturbed when some of their panelists and interviewees boldly used unethical language on their platforms or looked on while their guests made unprintable statements on live radio. The hosts seemed not to have a total control over their shows as their panelists got away with the unprintable words without being called to order.

B. News Websites

i. Comments Section filled with Abusive and Obscene Language

The Editors of some news websites failed to edit or review the comments section of their news pages, thus, there was a deep underscore of violations perpetuated by visitors of the website. The seemingly intentional refusal by the editors to control the comments in the comment sections of their websites shows proof of how such practice undermines professionalism and the gatekeeping role of the media.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the report highlight the fact that ethical violations are prevailing in the media space, particularly the pro-partisan radio stations. Also, the findings show a manifestation of Decency, Accuracy, Good Taste and Public Sensibilities, Prejudice and Stereotyping as ethical principles that were mostly abused.

In view of this, 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 a zero-tolerance policy for unethical statements and must consciously and willingly clamp down or stand against its usage on their platforms. In view of this, they are encouraged to review readers' comments that are shared on their web pages before they are published. This will root out all unethical comments.
- Whilst we share in the observation that reviewing individual comments before posting in the comment section may be a tedious and herculean task, Editors are encouraged to take a cue from other websites and disable these comment sections.
- Editors of radio news bulletins and talk shows are also encouraged to employ a rigorous and high level of screening process to filter comments shared by audiences before they are aired.

Media Owners

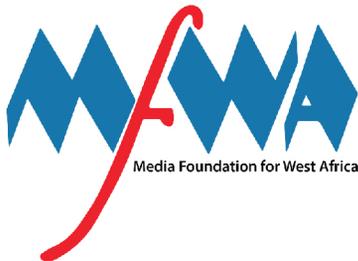
- Despite the political leanings and affiliations of media owners, they are encouraged to institute a high standard respect for the general ethical principles and guidelines that binds the work of the media.
- Media owners are also encouraged to periodically organize workshops and conferences to build 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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