

MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD DECEMBER 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	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, December 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 **950 media content** were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **110 ethical violations** were recorded. **The violations were recorded on 10 out of the 26 media organizations monitored.**

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- President Akufo Addo caught on video tape allegedly receiving bribe
- Mustapha Hamid threatens to sue media houses that play the video of President Akufo Addo allegedly taking bribe.
- Supporters of the NDC invoke curses on government bodies believed to be planning to rig elections.
- Man shot for snatching ballot box at Awutu Senya West.
- Ato Forson accused of sharing money on election day to influence constituents to vote for him.
- Government accused of conniving with the EC to rig the Dec 7th Elections.
- Election 2020 and matters arising.
- Kennedy Agyapong accuses Gbevlo Lartey of plotting with ex-military and police personnel to attack some individuals and organizations.
- Former President Mahama in a press conference refuses to accept results of flawed election

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total **110** ethical violations recorded, **82 (74%)** were recorded on radio. News websites recorded **27** violations (**25%**), with the remaining one (**1**) violations (**1%**) recorded from Newspapers.

Radio Stations

Out of the **82 violations** recorded on radio, pro NPP radio station, **Oman FM (58)** produced the highest number of violations followed by **Power FM**, a pro NDC radio station with (**11**) violations. Accra FM followed the pro-partisan radio stations with **4** violations. **Figure 1** below presents the details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.

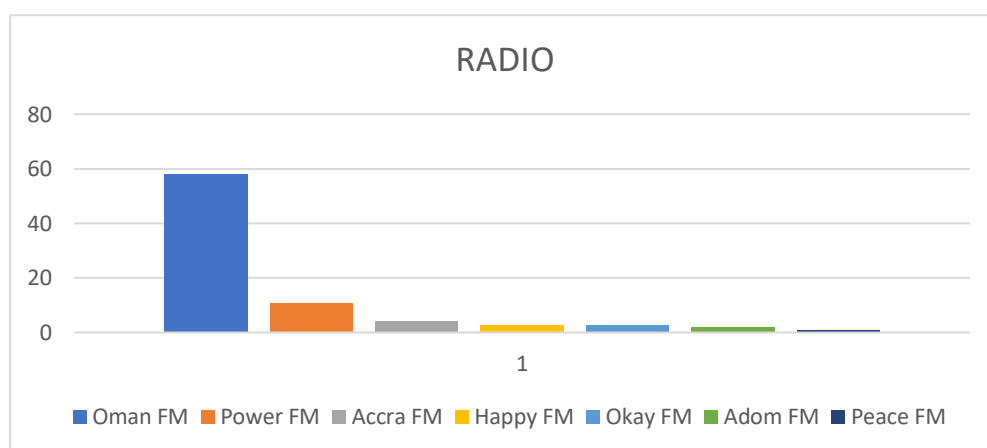


Fig. 1 Number of Violations by Radio Stations.

News Websites

Out of the **27** violations recorded on news websites, Ghanaweb.com recorded **24** violations making it the highest in the category. Myjoyonline.com followed with **3** violations. Figure 2 below presents the details of the news websites on which the ethical violations were recorded.

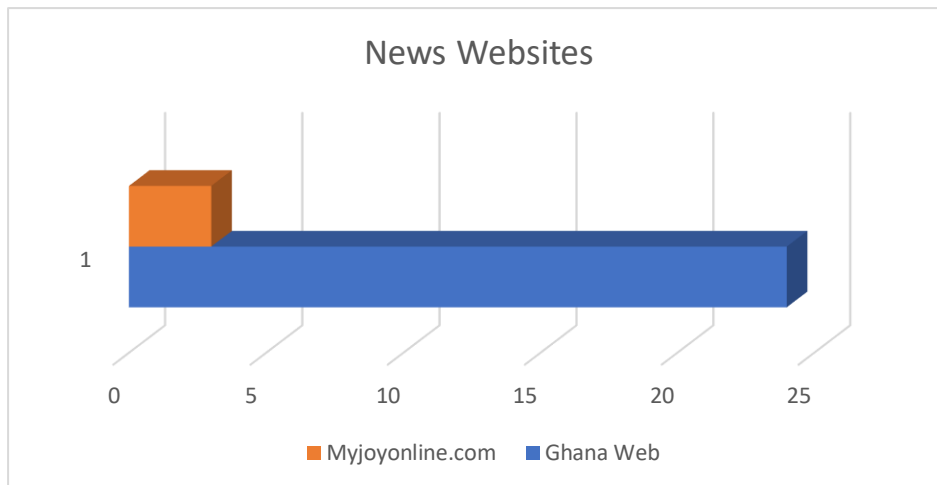


Fig. 2 Number of violations by news websites.

Newspapers

On newspapers, **Daily Guide** was the only offender with one (1) violation recorded during the period of monitoring.

3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that **Decency** is the highest violated ethical principle with 47 counts. The principles of **Accuracy** (36) and **Facts and Opinion** (9) 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	47	43%

Accuracy	36	33 ⁰ %
Facts and Opinion	9	8%
Good Taste	7	6%
Fairness	7	6%
Prejudice	3	3 ⁰ %
Balance	1	1 ⁰ %
Total	110	100%

Media	Ethical Principles							
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts and Opinion	Fairness	Balance	Total
Oman FM	22	22	1	2	6	4	1	58
Ghanaweb.com	11	4	6	1	2			24
Power FM	5	5				1		11
Accra FM	4							4
Happy FM	2	1						3
Okay FM					1	2		3
Myjoyonline.com		3						3
Adom FM	2							2
Peace FM	1							1
Daily Guide		1						1
								0
								0
Total	47	36	7	3	9	7	1	110

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

From **Table 2** above, Pro-Partisan radio station, Oman FM (**58**) came on top as the media house with the highest count of violation. In extension, Oman FM came on top with the highest violation of the principles of **Decency** and **Accuracy** (**22**) and **Facts and Opinion** (**6**). News website, **Ghanaweb.com** recorded the highest violation of the principle of **Good Taste and Public Sensibilities** (**6**) whilst being the second highest offender to the principles of **Decency** (**11**), **Accuracy** (**4**) and **Facts and Opinion** (**2**).

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	Programme	Host	Frequency
Oman FM	National Agenda	Yaw Amofa Boakye	29
Oman FM	Election Reference Centre	Gordon Asare Bediako	16
Oman FM	Boiling Point	Kwabena kwakye	13
Power FM	Inside Politics	Mugabe Maase	4
Power FM	Dwaboase	Kwame Minka	4

During the period of monitoring, three different shows on Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM took the top spot with regards to the highest number of violations. **National Agenda**, hosted by Yaw Amofa Boakye recorded the highest count of violation at (**29**). **Election Reference Center**, hosted by Gordon Asare Bediako was second with (**16**) counts of violations whilst the station's afternoon political show, **Boiling Point**, hosted by Kwabena Kwakye came third with (**13**) counts of violation.

Two shows (**Inside politics** hosted by Mugabe Maase and **Dwaboase** hosted by Kwame minka) on pro NDC's radio station Power FM followed recording four (**4**) violations each.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

i. Allowing the Use of Unethical Language by Programme Hosts and Producers.

The period of monitoring captured the use of unsavory words on primetime radio. More worrying is the fact that some newscasters and hosts of political talk shows allowed their guests (panelists) to use unethical language without calling them to order. Most of the show hosts appeared lacking control over their shows as guests freely used foul languages on live radio.

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

Due to the tensed atmosphere created by the presidential and parliamentary, the use of verbal attacks intensified with political opponents facing the brunt of insults from their colleagues on either political divide. These attacks, which mostly occurred on the pro-partisan radio stations, ranged from unsubstantiated allegations to outright disrespect of privacy to direct insult and use of unprintable words on political opponents. Sadly, majority of these attacks transpired during primetime radio, when most audience were listening.

iii. High Rise of Inaccuracies in Presentation

In their bid to win the sympathy and votes of the electorate, the politicians and the communicators of various political parties made continuously threw around numbers and facts without any form of verification. Thus, the principle of Accuracy was the second most violated principle for the monitoring period. Many of the incidence of inaccuracy identified during the period were mostly cited on political talk shows and, occasionally, on news bulletins.

B. News Websites

i. Comments Section filled with Abusive and Obscene Language

The Editors of some news websites fell short of editing or reviewing the comments section of their news pages, thus, there was a high count of the use of obscene and offensive words used by visitors of the website. The seemingly intentional refusal by the editors to review the type of comments in the comment sections of their websites is proof of the dipping professionalism in the media.

C. 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 major ethical principles that were violated.

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

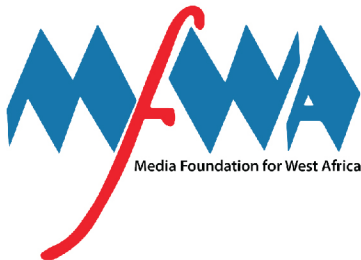
- Despite the political leanings and affiliations of media owners, they are encouraged to institute a high standard respect for the general ethical principles and guidelines that binds the work of the media.
- Media owners are also encouraged to periodically organize workshops and conferences to build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