

# MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD OCTOBER 16-31, 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	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, October 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 **960** media content were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **164 ethical violations** were recorded. The violations were recorded on **9** out of the **26** media organisations monitored.

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- President Akufo-Addo building Astro-turfs to build up the football talent in the zongo communities.
- Former president Mahama asks for the evidence of 1m jobs the president promised.
- Kwabena Kwakye accuses John Mahama of taking funds out of COCOBOD and building a house in his hometown with it.
- Nobody accepts the results of a flawed election; President Mahama.

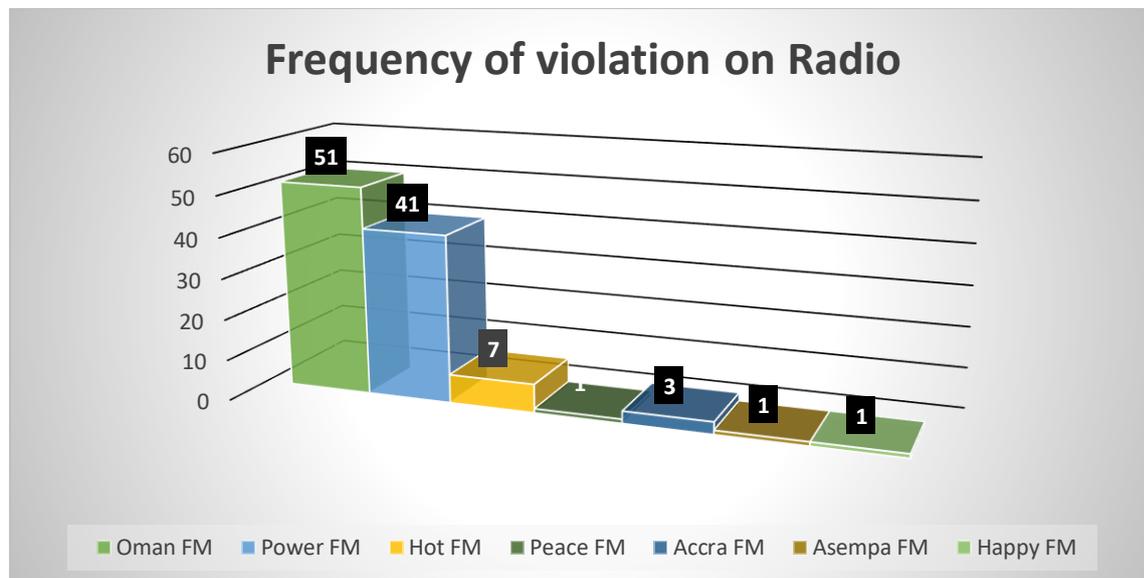
- Ghana police disrupts #EndSARS protest at Nigerian High Commission in Ghana.
- John Mahama promises to fulfil his words to the people of the Central Region.
- President Akufo-Addo's daughters receive funds from Ghana Commercial Bank to help to sponsor their NGO.
- The sod cutting of a district hospital project in Kpone by President Akuffo Addo.
- Videos circulating about the Paramount chief of Kpone-Katamanso walking out on the President at an event to cut sod for a project.
- The Deputy Communication Director of the NPP asks that former president stops his war anticipations.
- EC says some people are bent on bringing down the institution.
- Helen Ama Berko accuses the CEPS personnel at the border for taking bribes and allowing people cross the border.

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

Out of the total **164** ethical violations recorded, **105 (64%)** were recorded on radio. News websites recorded **58** violations (**35%**), with the remaining **one (1)** violation (**1%**) recorded in Newspapers.

#### Radio Stations

Out of the 105 violations recorded on radio, pro-partisan radio stations, **Oman FM (51)** and **Power FM (41)**, produced more than nearly three-quarters of the violations. **Hot 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.



## New Websites

All the 58 violations were recorded on news websites **Ghanaweb.com**

## Newspapers

On newspapers, The Daily Searchlight recorded the only violation.

### 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	58	35%
Accuracy	39	24%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	36	22%
Prejudice & Stereotyping	26	16%
Facts and Opinion	2	1%
Fairness	1	1%
Impartiality	1	1%
Respect for Privacy	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100%</b>

Media	Ethical Principles								Total
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste & Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts & Opinion	Fairness	Impartiality	Respect of Privacy	
Ghanaweb.com	2	2	32	22					58
Oman FM	25	20	1	3		1	1		51
Power FM	24	11	3	1	1			1	41
Hot FM	4	2			1				7
Accra FM	2	1							3
Peace FM		1							1
Happy FM		1							1
The Daily Searchlight	1								1
Asempa FM		1							1
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>164</b>

### 3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

From Table 2 above, **Ghanaweb.com** led with the highest violation of 58 infractions—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 (22)** the most.

Pro-partisan radio stations, **Oman FM (51)** and **Power FM (41)** followed the news website with the most violations. Oman FM violated the **principles of Decency (25) and Accuracy (20)** whilst **Power FM** followed suit with **(24) violations for the principle of Decency and (11) for the principle of 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**

<b>Radio Station</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Frequency of Violations</b>	<b>Host</b>
Oman FM	National Agenda	31	Yaw Amofa
Power FM	Inside Politics	23	Mugaabe Maase
Oman FM	Boiling Point	7	Kwabena Kwakye
Power FM	Dwaboase	7	Kwame Minkah and Beposohemaa N.Y Oforiwaa
Power FM	Midday News	7	Beposohemaa N.Y Oforiwaa

From the table above, Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM’s morning talk show, **National Agenda** which is hosted by Yaw Amofa recorded the highest number of violations (31) during the period of monitoring. This was followed by Pro-NDC, Power FM’s major current affairs programme, **Inside Politics**, hosted by Mugabe Maase, with 23 violations.

Oman FM’s afternoon political talk show, **Boiling Point**, which is hosted by Kwabena Kwakye, recorded the third highest violations (7) whilst Power FM’s morning talk show, **Dwaboase and Midday news**, followed with seven (7) violations each. These shows are hosted by Kwame Minkah and Beposohemaa N.Y Oforiwaa.

### 3.5 General Observations Made

## **A. Radio Stations**

### **i. High Incidence of Unprintable Commentaries by Audience**

During the period of monitoring, it was observed that many show producers and hosts failed to exercise restraint in allowing the 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 have the power to skip or choose not to read such offensive comments, they were noted to be indifferent and unperturbed.

### **ii. Inordinate Incidence in Offensive Attacks with Less Interest in Analysis on Pro-Partisan Radio Stations**

The period of monitoring witnessed the two major political parties stretching wide the reach of their campaigns with every opportunity used in explaining their policies to win the heart of the electorates. This called for a good opportunity for the show hosts and producers to offer their airtime to communicators from both parties to explain their party's manifesto to the audience however, many of the show hosts were rather interested in maligning, attacking and making unsubstantiated allegations against their political opponents.

### **iii. High Occurrence of Indecent Comments in Presentation**

The principle of Decency was the most violated principle for the monitoring period. Many of the indecent comments were cited on political talk shows and news bulletins. This is particularly worrying because the political talk shows are supposed to be replete with the exchange of ideas and opinions based on facts and empirical evidences. Information presented in news bulletins are expected to be verified.

### **iv. Apathetic Posture by Programme Hosts to the use of Unethical language on Air**

Broadly, some newscasters and hosts of political talk shows appeared indifferent and apathetic when some of their panelists and interviewees used unethical and foul 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**

The continuous practice of not editing or reviewing the comment sections by some media houses highlights how the practice undermines professionalism and the gatekeeper's role of the media. For instance, Ghanaweb.com recorded the highest ethical violations for the monitoring period and all of the violations were readers' comments published on their website. Most of these comments saw the use of extremely obscene and unprintable language which was highly offensive to the good taste and

sensibilities of the public. As such, it 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.

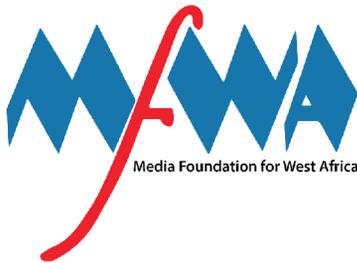
### Associations

- 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.



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