

MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY 16-31, 2021



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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
	Adom FM	Daily Guide	Ghanaweb.com
	Accra FM	Daily Graphic	Myjoyonline.com
	Oman FM	Daily Searchlight	Citinewsroom.com
	Okay FM	The Chronicle	3news.com
	Peace FM	The Finder	Modernnghana.com
	Power FM	Ghanaian Times	Starrfmonline.com
	Asempa FM	The Independent	
	Atinka FM	Today	
	Happy FM	New Crusading Guide	
	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, January 16-31, 2021. It highlights the following:

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

A total of **930 media content** were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **54 ethical violations** were recorded. **The violations were recorded only six out of the 26 media organisations monitored.**

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- President Akuffo Addo presents list of ministerial nominees to Parliament.
- IGP instructed to ensure rigorous enforcement of mask wearing at all public places.
- NDC petitions Supreme Court over the 2020 presidential elections result.
- School reopening amid COVID-19 and government's preparedness to deal with the cases.
- Ernest Owusu Bempah's house to be sold to pay remainder of Ibrahim Mahama's judgement.
- Court orders NIB to transfer GHC310,000 from Ernest Owusu Bempah's account to Ibrahim mahama.
- Drivers Associations give government ultimatum to reduce fuel prices or face their wrath
- Ghana Armed Forces hold vigil in honour of Flt.Lt. Jerry John Rawlings
- Akuffo Addo urges Supreme Court to dismiss Mahama's stay of proceedings application – says it is useless.
- Rawlings shall forever be credited with the Fourth Republic – says koku Anyidoho

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total **54** ethical violations recorded, **29 (54%)** were recorded on news websites. Radio stations recorded **25** violations (**46%**), with Newspapers recording none.

Radio Stations

Out of the **25 violations** recorded on radio, Pro NDC radio station, **Power FM (13)** produced the highest number of violations followed by **Accra FM, with (6) violations**. Pro NPP radio station Oman FM came third with **3** violations (the lowest ever recorded for the station). **Figure 1** below presents the details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.

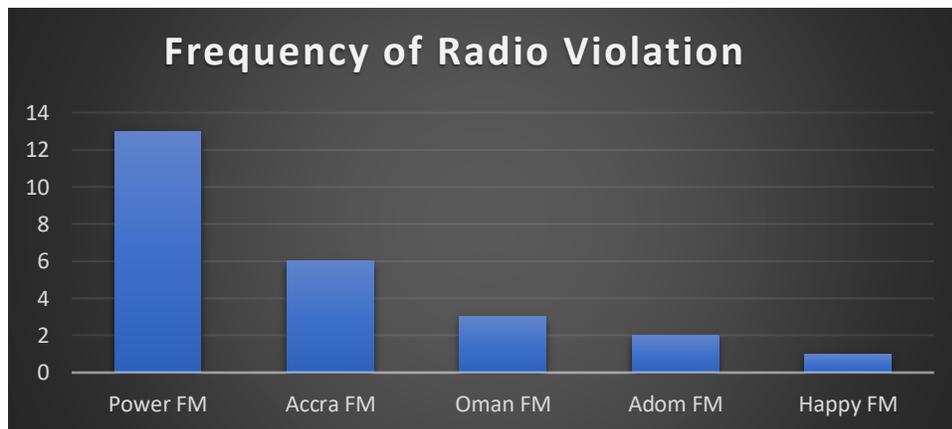


Fig. 1 Number of Violations by Radio Stations.

News Websites and Newspapers.

Ghanaweb.com recorded 29 counts of violations making it the only website to be cited for violations in this category. Newspapers recorded no violations during the period of monitoring.

3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that **Decency** is the highest violated ethical principle with **29** counts. The principles of **Accuracy (12)** was identified as the second highest violated principle whilst Good Taste and Public Sensibilities (**9**) followed as the third highest violated principle. 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	29	53.7%
Accuracy	12	22.2%
Good Taste	9	16.6%
Prejudice	3	5.5%
Fairness	1	1.8%
TOTAL	54	100%

3.3 Table 2: Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Media	Ethical Principles					Total
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Fairness	
Ghanaweb.com	18		8	3		29
Power FM	3	9	1			13
Accra FM	6					6
Oman FM	1	2				3
Adom FM	1				1	2
Happy FM		1				1
TOTAL	29	12	9	3	1	54

From **Table 2** above, popular news website **Ghanaweb.com (29)** emerged as the media house with the highest count of violation. Regarding the ethical principles violated, Ghanaweb.com is cited as guilty of being the highest violator of the principles of **Decency (18), Good Taste and Public Sensibilities (8) and Prejudice and Stereotyping (3)**.

Pro NDC radio station, **Power FM** recorded the highest violation of the principle of **Accuracy** with **(9)** counts of 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

Radio	Programme	Host	Frequency
Power FM	Inside Politics	Mugabe Maase	7
Accra FM	Citizen Show	Bobie Ansah	6
Power FM	Dwaboase	Kwame Minka	2
Power FM	Morning News	Bepsohemaa N. Y Oforiwaa	2
Power FM	Evening News	Oheneba B. Benie	2
Oman FM	Nukr3 Kase3bo	Gordon Asare Bediako	2
Adom FM	Panel Discussion	Chief Jerry Forson	2

During the period of monitoring, Pro NDC's Power FM's political show **Inside Politics** hosted by Mugabe Maase recorded the highest number of violations at (7) followed by Accra FM's **Citizen Show** hosted by Bobie Ansah with (6) counts of violations.

Again, three other shows on Pro NDC radio station, Power FM recorded two violations each. The shows include **Dwaboase** hosted by Kwame Minka, Morning News hosted by Bepsohemaa N.Y Oforiwaa and Evening News hosted by Oheneba B. Benie. Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM's news bulletin **Nukr3 kase3bo** hosted by Owoahene Antwi Boasiako recorded 2 violations as well as Adom FM's **Panel Discussion** show.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

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

The use of unethical language continues to persist on primetime radio. Some newscasters and hosts of political talk shows allowed their guests (panelists) to use inhospitable language on air without calling them out. Most of the show hosts seem to have ceded control of their shows to their guests as the guests freely used foul languages on live radio. Due to this, the principle of Decency is the most violated principle in the period of monitoring.

Continuous Verbal Attacks On Opponent Politicians and Government Officials on Pro-Partisan Radio Stations at Prime Time

Despite the end of the elections, the use of verbal attacks continues to be intensified with political opponents trading abusive words and sometimes, insults at each other. Also, government officials received the brunt of insults from opposition members and some sections of the public who think these officials aren't up to task. These attacks, which mostly occurred on the pro partisan radio stations sadly transpired during primetime radio when most audience were listening.

High Rise of Inaccuracies in Presentation

During the period of monitoring, the principle of Accuracy was the second most violated principle. This is due to the fact that politicians and government officials made claims without any form of verification. 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 and Newspapers

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 language by visitors of the website. The seemingly intentional refusal by the editors to control the type of comments in the comment sections of their websites underline the lowering professionalism of the media. In light of this, the Principle of

Good Taste and Public sensibilities was amongst the most violated principles during the period of monitoring.

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.

