

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	Modernghana.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, February 1-15, 2021. It highlights the following:

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

A total of **980 media content** were monitored on the 26 selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **108 ethical violations** were recorded. **The violations were recorded on 8 out of the 26 media organizations monitored.**

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- Claims of Government's Covid-19 law and protocols selectively dealing with citizens
- JB Danquah-Adu's wife narrates how the head of the CID unit sexually harassed her.
- Petitioner in Election 2020 files third witness statement in court
- Hannah Tetteh congratulates AU chief on his reelection.
- Kwesi Pratt says it is senseless for Akuffo Addo to limit funeral attendance to 25 people
- Gabby Otchere Darko questions if Tsatsu Tsikata is paid for the long hours he spends in court.
- Executive Secretary of the National Coalition for Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values accuses the Australian Ambassador and other white people of contracting the individuals who opened the LGBTIQ office in Ghana.
- Ghana hit with \$134m judgement debt for cancelling GCGP's power agreement.

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total **108** ethical violations recorded, **49 (45%)** were recorded on radio whilst News websites recorded **59** violations (**55%**). Newspapers did not record any infractions under the period of monitoring.

Radio Stations

Out of the **49** violations recorded on radio, pro NPP radio station, **Oman FM (19)** produced the highest number of violations followed closely by **Power FM**, a pro NDC radio station, with **(18) violations**. Accra FM followed the pro-partisan radio stations with **9** violations. **Figure 1** below presents the details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.

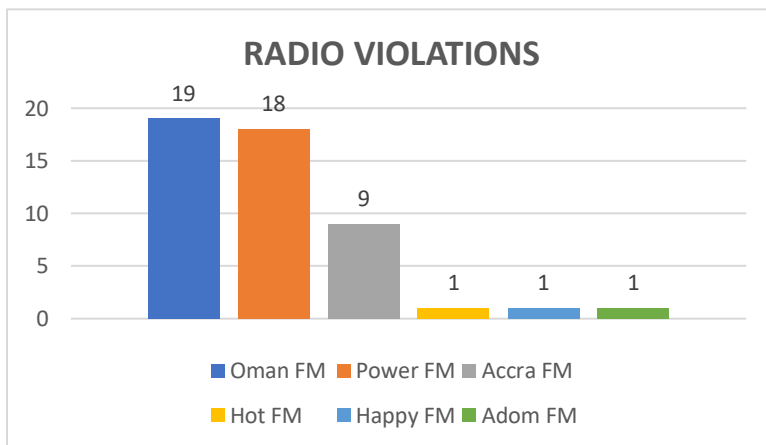


Fig. 1 Number of Violations by Radio Stations.

News Websites

Out of the **59** violations recorded on news websites, Ghanaweb.com recorded **58** violations making it the highest in the category. Modernghana.com followed with **1** violation.

Figure 2 below presents the details of the news websites on which the ethical violations were recorded.

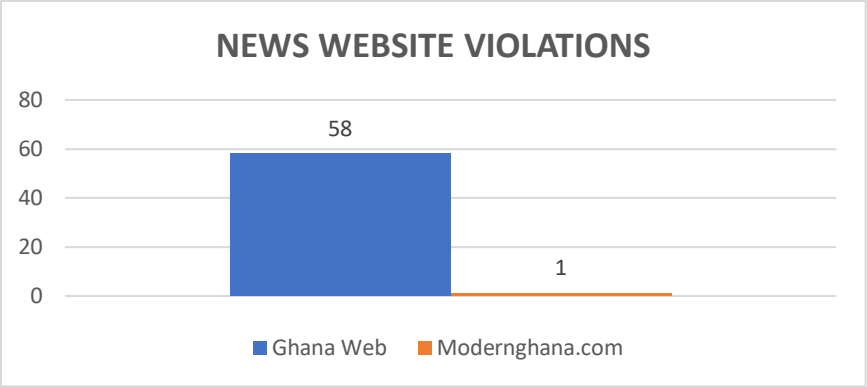


Fig. 2 Number of violations by news websites.

3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that **Decency** is the highest violated ethical principle with **48** counts of violations. The principles of **Good Taste and Public sensibilities (30)** and **Accuracy (21)** 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	48	44%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	30	28%
Accuracy	21	19%
Prejudice & Stereotyping	5	5%
Facts and Opinion	4	4%
Total	108	100%

3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

Media	Ethical Principles		Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts and Opinion	Total
	Decency	Accuracy				
Ghanaweb.com	23		30	5		58
Oman FM	8	10			1	19
Power FM	7	8			3	18
Accra FM	7	2				9
Hot FM	1					1
Happy FM		1				1
Adom FM	1					1
Modernghana.com	1					1
Total	48	21	30	5	4	108

From **Table 2** above, popular news website, **Ghanaweb.com** took the lead with **58** counts of violations. This was followed by Pro-Partisan radio stations, **Oman FM (19)** and **Power FM (18)**. Accra FM recorded **9** counts of violations with **Hot FM, Happy FM, Adom FM** and online news portal **Modernghana.com** recording **1** infraction each. With regards to the specifics of the principles violated, **Ghanaweb.com** got flagged as the highest violator of the principles of **Decency (23)** and **Good Taste and Public Sensibilities (30)**. Again, the news portal was the only media organization to get flagged for the violating the principle of **Prejudice and Stereotyping with 5 counts**. Oman FM was the highest violator of the principle of **Accuracy (10)** whilst being the second highest violator of the principle of **Decency with 8 counts**.

3.4 Radio Programmes and Ethical Violations Recorded

The report indicates that radio stations recorded the second and third highest number of ethical violations after online news portal Ghanaweb.com. Below, from Table 3, are the specific programmes and hosts that recorded the highest number of ethical violations on radio.

Table 3: Host and Programmes with the Highest Ethical Violations

Radio	Programme	Host	Frequency
Power FM	Inside Politics	Mugabe Maase	15
Oman FM	National Agenda	Yaw Amofa	13
Accra FM	Citizen Show	Nana Kwabena Bobie Ansah	9
Oman FM	Boiling Point	Kwabena Kwakye	4
Oman FM	Nukre Kase3bo	Owoahene Antwi Boasiako	3

During the period of monitoring, Pro-NDC radio station, Power FM's **Inside Politics**, hosted by **Mugabe Maase** recorded the highest number of violations with 15 counts. This is closely followed by Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM's **National Agenda** Show hosted by **Yaw Amofa** recording **13** counts of violations. Accra FM's **Citizen Show** hosted by Bobie Ansah came third with **9** counts of violations whilst, again, Oman FM's Boiling

Point show hosted by Kwabena Kwakye and **Nukr3 kase3bo** their evening news bulletin hosted by **Owoahene Antwi Boasiako** recorded **4 and 3** counts of violations respectively.

3.5 General Observations Made

A. Radio Stations

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

Under the period of monitoring, it was observed that show hosts allowed a free-range use of offensive and distasteful 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 on them to retract and apologize where necessary. Most of the show hosts appeared lacking control over their shows as guests freely used foul languages on live radio.

High Counts of Verbal Attacks Against Government officials on Pro-Partisan Radio Stations at Prime Time.

Right after the 2020 elections, the direction of insults and distasteful comments changed from individual politicians in the studios to government officials heading the various institutions. The use of verbal attacks intensifies after every action or inaction of these officials. Occasionally, political opponents deliberating issues on media platforms face 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 opponent. Sadly, majority of these attacks transpired during primetime radio when most audience were listening.

Misrepresentation of Facts

In their bid to score political points, politicians and political party communicators, especially the opposition political parties made the effort to throw around numbers and misrepresent facts without any form of verification or fact checking. 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 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 words used 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 shows proof of how such practice undermines professionalism and the gatekeeping role of 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

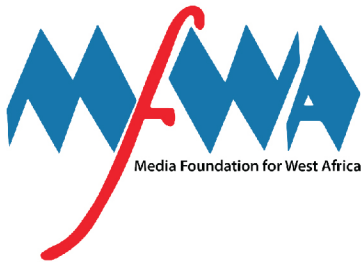
- Despite the political leanings and affiliations of media owners, they are encouraged to institute a high standard respect for the general ethical principles and guidelines that binds the work of the media.
- Media owners are also encouraged to periodically organize workshops and conferences to build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