

# MEDIA ETHICS MONITORING

FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD FEBRUARY 16-28, 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          | 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 16-28, 2021. 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 **90 ethical violations** were recorded. **The violations were recorded on 7 out of the 26 media organizations monitored.**

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

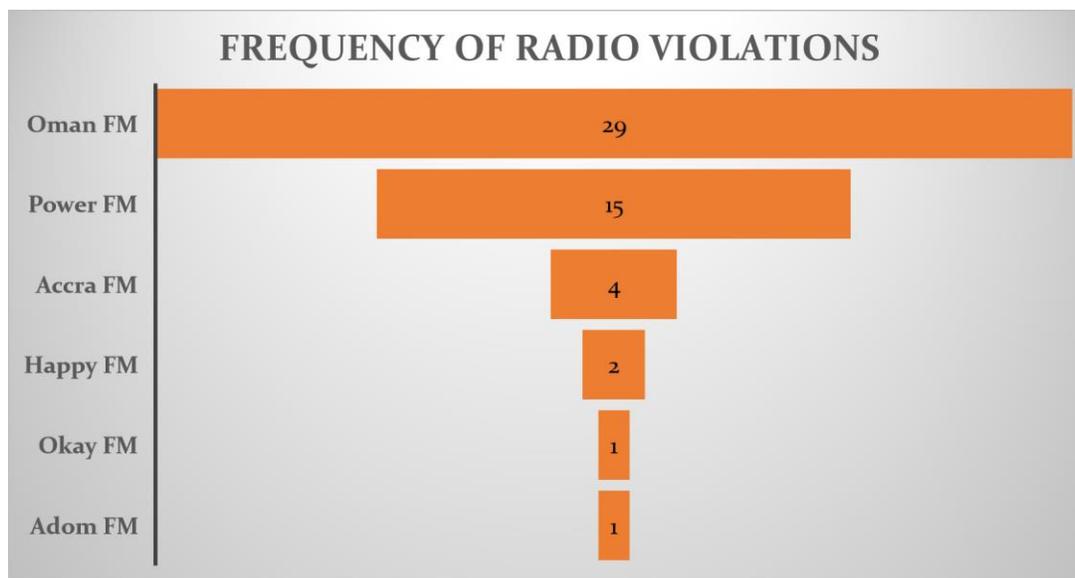
- Covid-19 death toll goes up rapidly in 2021
- Government receives COVID-19 vaccines with a ceremony at the airport.
- Homosexuals open office in Ghana.
- LGBTQI office opened in Ghana closed down – Foh Amoaning claims LGBTI community using some state agencies to infiltrate the system.
- Executive Director of IMANI Ghana says IMANI will accept unconditional funds from LGBTQI groups.
- Vetting of ministerial nominees: NDC caucus investigates COVID-19 antigen testing contract at airport.
- The Tuna Association writes a letter to parliament asking that Hawa Koomson be rejected as Fisheries Minister.
- Former GES Director -General calls on government to allow LGBTQ+ to be taught in schools.
- EC encourages Supreme Court to dismiss Mahama's strange election petition.
- Your efforts at promoting work of journalists abysmal – Manasseh calls out Oppong Nkrumah.
- Parliament votes to confirm ministerial appointees.

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

Out of the total **90** ethical violations recorded, **52 (58%)** were recorded on radio whilst News websites recorded **38** violations (**42%**). Newspapers did not record any infractions under the period of monitoring.

#### Radio Stations

Out of the **52 violations** recorded on radio, pro-NPP radio station, **Oman FM (29)** produced the highest number of violations followed closely by **Power FM**, a pro-NDC radio station with **(15) 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

Popular news website Ghanaweb.com recorded **38** violations making it the only news website in the category.

### 3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

The findings indicate that **Decency** is the highest violated ethical principle with **31** counts of violations. The principles of **Good Taste and Public sensibilities (21)** and **Accuracy (21)** tied 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**

| <b>Ethical Principles</b>                  | <b>Total</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--|--------------|-------------------|
| <b>Decency</b>                             | <b>31</b>    | <b>34.4%</b>      |
| <b>Good Taste and Public Sensibilities</b> | <b>21</b>    | <b>23.3%</b>      |
| <b>Accuracy</b>                            | <b>21</b>    | <b>23.3%</b>      |
| <b>Prejudice &amp; Stereotyping</b>        | <b>7</b>     | <b>7.7%</b>       |
| <b>Fairness</b>                            | <b>4</b>     | <b>4.4%</b>       |
| <b>Facts and Opinion</b>                   | <b>3</b>     | <b>3.3%</b>       |
| <b>Balance</b>                             | <b>2</b>     | <b>2.2%</b>       |
| <b>Impartiality</b>                        | <b>1</b>     | <b>1.1%</b>       |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>90</b>    | <b>100%</b>       |

### 3.3 Media Organisations and Ethical Principles Violated

| Media        | Ethical Principles |           | Good Taste and Public Sensibilities | Prejudice & Stereotyping | Facts and Opinion | Fairness | Balance  | Impartiality | Total     |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|--------------|-----------|
|              | Decency            | Accuracy  |                                     |                          |                   |          |          |              |           |
| Ghanaweb.com | 12                 | 1         | 20                                  | 5                        |                   |          |          |              | 38        |
| Oman FM      | 10                 | 11        | 1                                   | 1                        | 1                 | 3        | 2        |              | 29        |
| Power FM     | 4                  | 8         |                                     |                          | 2                 |          |          | 1            | 15        |
| Accra FM     | 4                  |           |                                     |                          |                   |          |          |              | 4         |
| Happy FM     |                    | 1         |                                     |                          |                   | 1        |          |              | 2         |
| Okay FM      | 1                  |           |                                     |                          |                   |          |          |              | 1         |
| Peace FM     |                    |           |                                     | 1                        |                   |          |          |              | 1         |
|              |                    |           |                                     |                          |                   |          |          |              |           |
|              |                    |           |                                     |                          |                   |          |          |              |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>31</b>          | <b>21</b> | <b>21</b>                           | <b>7</b>                 | <b>3</b>          | <b>4</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>1</b>     | <b>90</b> |

From **Table 2** above, popular news website, **Ghanaweb.com** took the lead with **38** counts of violations. This was followed by Pro-Partisan radio stations, **Oman FM (29)** and **Power FM (15)**. Accra FM recorded **4** counts of violations with **Happy FM** recording **(2)** violations whilst **Okay FM and Peace FM** recorded **1** infraction each. With regards to the specifics of the principles violated, **Ghanaweb.com** got flagged as the highest violator of the principles of **Good Taste and Public Sensibilities (20)** and **Decency (12)**. **Oman FM** was the second highest violator of the principle of **Decency** with **(10)** counts whilst being the highest violator of the principle of **Accuracy** with **(11)** counts of violations. **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 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 |
|----------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Oman FM  | National Agenda | Yaw Amofa                | <b>18</b> |
| Power FM | Inside Politics | Mugabe Maase             | <b>12</b> |
| Oman FM  | Boiling Point   | Kwabena Kwakye           | <b>6</b>  |
| Oman FM  | Nukr3 kase3bo   | Owoahene Antwi Boasiako  | <b>5</b>  |
| Accra FM | Citizen Show    | Nana Kwabena Bobie Ansah | <b>4</b>  |
| Oman FM  | Morning News    | Bepsohemaa N.Y Oforiwaa  | <b>2</b>  |
| Power FM | Dwaboase        | Kwame Minka              | <b>1</b>  |

During the period of monitoring, Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM's **National Agenda** Show hosted by **Yaw Amofa** recorded **(18)** counts of violations making it the highest in the category. Pro-NDC radio station Power FM's **Inside Politics**, hosted by **Mugabe Maase** recorded the second highest number of violations with **(12)** counts. This is followed by Oman FM's **Boiling Point** show hosted by **Kwabena Kwakye** and **Nukr3 kase3bo** their evening news bulletin hosted by **Owoahene Antwi Boasiako** recording

(6) and (3) counts of violations respectively. Accra FM's **Citizen Show** hosted by Bobie Ansah recorded (4) counts of violations during the period of monitoring.

### 3.5 General Observations Made

#### A. Radio Stations

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

During the period of monitoring, it was observed that there was a continuous allowance of the use of unprintable and offensive 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 to lack control over their shows as guests freely used inappropriate words on live radio.

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

With each period of monitoring, there is an increase of 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.

##### **Misrepresentation of Facts**

In their bid to score political points, politicians and party communicators at each political divide confidently threw around numbers and made bold claims without any recourse to verification or rigorous fact checking. Thus, the principle of Accuracy and 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.

## **4.0 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

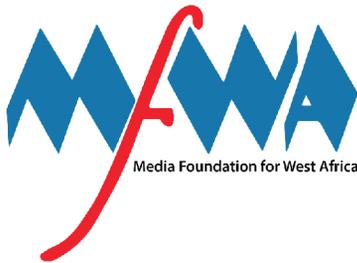
- Despite the political leanings and affiliations of media owners, they are encouraged to institute a high standard respect for the general ethical principles and guidelines that binds the work of the media.
- Media owners are also encouraged to periodically organize workshops and conferences to build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