

1.0 Introduction

Across the world, the place of a free and independent media in a vibrant and stable democracy cannot be overstated. The media contributes to ensuring transparency and accountability in governance and is recognised as a crucial instrument for public education and citizen's active participation in governance processes.

In recognition of the vital role of the media, 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 declining 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 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	Today	
9.	Happy FM	New Crusading Guide	
10.	Hot FM	The Herald	

The media organisations were selected in 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, **April 1 - 15, 2021**. It highlights the following:

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

A total of **890** media content were monitored on the **26** selected media organisations over the two-week period out of which **91** ethical violations were recorded. The violations were recorded on **9** out of the 26 media organisations monitored. There were no recorded incidents in the newspapers for the period.

The main issues that dominated the content monitored included:

- North Tongu MP, Ablakwa resigns from the Appointments Committee of Parliament.
- 11-year-old boy murdered by two teenagers in Kasoa.
- Police begin investigation into murder of 11-year-old boy for ritual.

- Claims that education under President Akuffo Addo is losing standards
- Intermittent power cuts across the country not different from ‘dumsor’ during John Mahama’s tenure.
- NPP National Secretary John Boadu claims NPP grassroots angry with Alan, Bawumia over premature flagbearership noise.
- False claims that IMF has downgraded Ghana to a lower-income economy.
- Electoral Commission breaks silence on Supreme Court ruling.

3.1 Frequency of Ethical Violation Across Types of Media

Out of the total 91 ethical violations recorded, **51 (56%)** were recorded on news websites, **33 (36%)** recorded on Radio and **7 (8%)** recorded on Newspapers.

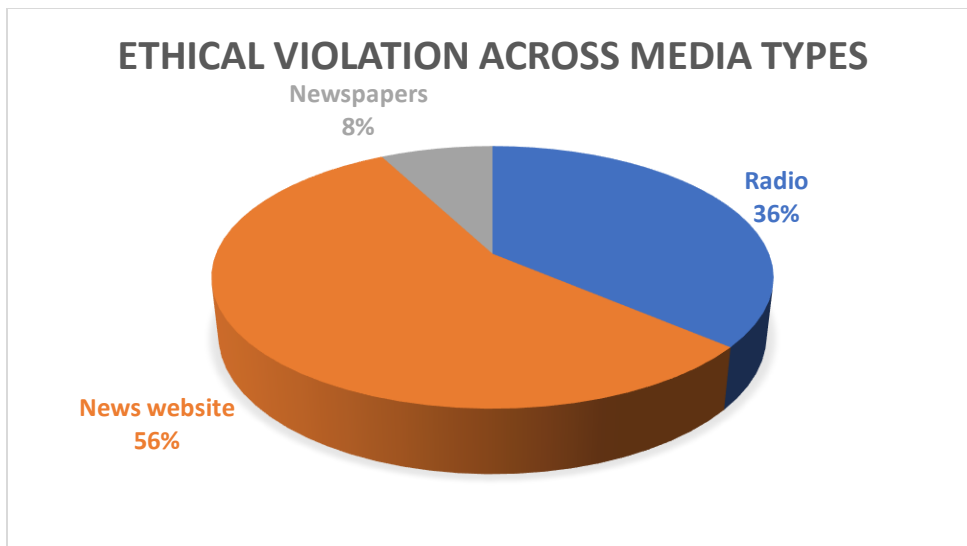


Figure 1. Ethical Violations Across Media Types

Radio Stations

Out of the **33** violations recorded on radio, Pro-NDC radio station, Power FM produced the highest violation (**17**), followed by Oman FM, a Pro-NPP radio station with (**9**) counts of violations. Figure 2 below presents the full details of all the radio stations on which the ethical violations were recorded.

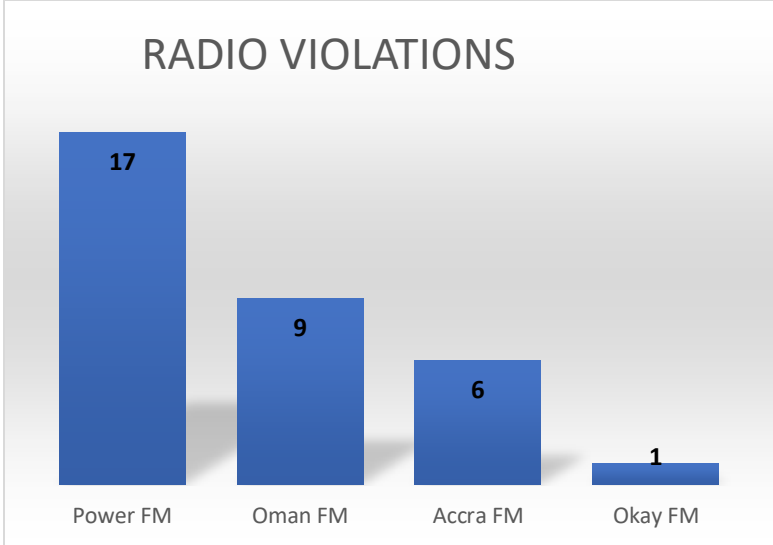


Figure 2. Radio Violations

News Websites

Popular news website, Ghanaweb.com recorded (**46**) violations followed by Myjoyonline.com (3) and Modernghana.com (2) counts of violations respectively. Fig. 3 gives a graphical representation.



Fig.3 News Website violation.

Newspapers

During the period of monitoring, two newspapers, **Daily Guide (5)** and **Ghanaian Times (2)** were cited for breaching ethical principles of the media.



Fig. 4 Newspaper Violations

3.2 Ethical Principles Violated

Decency was the highest violated ethical principle for the period. This is followed by the principle of **Good Taste and Public Sensibilities**. 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	46	51.0%
Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	14	15.3%
Accuracy	11	12.0%
Protection of minors	9	10.0%

Facts and Opinion	5	5.4%
Prejudice and Stereotyping	3	3.3%
Fairness	1	1.0%
Balance	1	1.0%
Photography, Pictures and Images	1	1.0%
TOTAL	91	100.0%

Table 2: Violated media principle

Media	Ethical Principles									TOTAL
	Decency	Accuracy	Good Taste and Public Sensibilities	Prejudice & Stereotyping	Facts and Opinion	Fairness	Photography, Pictures and Images	Protection of Minors	Balance	
Ghanaweb.com	29		14	3						46
Power FM	6	7			4					17
Oman FM	3	4				1			1	9
Accra FM	6									6
Okay FM	1									1
Myjoyonline.com							1	2		3
Modernghana.com	1							1		2
Daily Guide					1			4		5
Ghanaian Times								2		2
TOTAL	46	11	14	3	5	1	1	9	1	91

From **Table 2** above, news website, Ghanaweb.com recorded the highest number of violations (46) during the period of monitoring. This is followed by Pro NDC radio station Power FM with (17) counts of violations. Pro NPP radio station Oman FM recorded (9) violations with Accra FM recording (6) violations during the period of monitoring. Regarding the specific ethical principles violated, the principle of **Decency** was the most violated (46), followed by **Good Taste and Public Sensibilities**(14) and **Accuracy** (11).

3.4 Host, Radio Programmes and Ethical Violations Recorded

The report indicates that radio stations recorded the second 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	10
Oman FM	National Agenda	Yaw Amofa	6
Power FM	Dwaboase	Kwame Minka	5
Accra FM	Citizen Show	Nana Kwabena Bobie Ansah	5
Oman FM	Boiling Point	Kwabena Kwakye	3

From the table above, Pro-NDC radio station, Power FM’s afternoon political talk show, **Inside Politics**, which is hosted by Mugabe Maase recorded the highest number of violations (10). This is followed by Pro-NPP radio station, Oman FM’s Political Talk Show, **National Agenda** hosted by Yaw Amofa recording (6) counts of violations. Power FM’s **Dwaboase**, hosted by Kwame Minka and Accra FM’s **Citizen Show** also hosted by Nana Kwabena Bobie Ansah both recorded (5) violations each whilst Oman FM’s Boiling Point Political show recorded the least violations (3).

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 third 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.

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.