



Media Ethics Monitoring

Final Report - 2014

ETHICAL VIOLATIONS IN THE GHANAIAN MEDIA: MFWA'S FINAL REPORT

1.0 Introduction

The media remain critical stakeholders in fostering good governance and ensuring that duty-bearers are accountable to their respective constituencies. This makes media freedom, credibility and survival crucial for democracy and development. However, evidence available suggests that even when the media are free, not every media is able to contribute positively due to professional misconduct. In some countries, unprofessional media practices have led to the media being used as agents for initiating and fuelling conflicts and undue partisanship which often lead to under development.

In Ghana, media freedom is largely guaranteed in the 1992 Constitution. However, the freedom, credibility and survival of the media face a potential threat as a result of unprofessionalism in a number Ghanaian media. The public is increasingly raising concerns about rampant professional lapses among the Ghanaian media with some calling for the reintroduction of criminal libel which was repealed in July 2001.

As an organisation committed to the promotion of media freedom and development, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) often undertakes initiatives that contribute to enhancing media professionalism, credibility, freedom and survival. In line with this, the MFWA with support from STAR-Ghana has been implementing the project *“Promoting Professional Standards and Enhancing the Watchdog Role of the Ghanaian Media.”*

The project is aimed at improving the professional standards of the media in Ghana and supporting them to play a more effective role in fostering transparent and accountable governance through critical and investigative stories. The component of the project that focuses on enhancing professional standards of the media involves the monitoring and reporting of ethical violations from 40 selected media outlets (25 radio stations, 10 newspapers and 5 news websites); convening experts to discuss reported incidents of violations and recommending remedial measures.

This report briefly highlights some of the findings of the last month of the monitoring (October 2014); compares and analyses the findings of the six-month monitoring exercise; and concludes with recommendations for stakeholders in the Ghanaian media landscape on how to help sustain the

gains made through this exercise and further improve professional standards in the media.

2.0 General Findings

Over the six-month monitoring period (May – October 2014), a total of 25,129 newspaper and news website reports and radio programmes were monitored on the 40 media outlets sampled for the project. The reports and programmes monitored included news reports, editorials, features, opinion pieces, rejoinders, letters, comments, current affairs shows and political discussion talk shows.

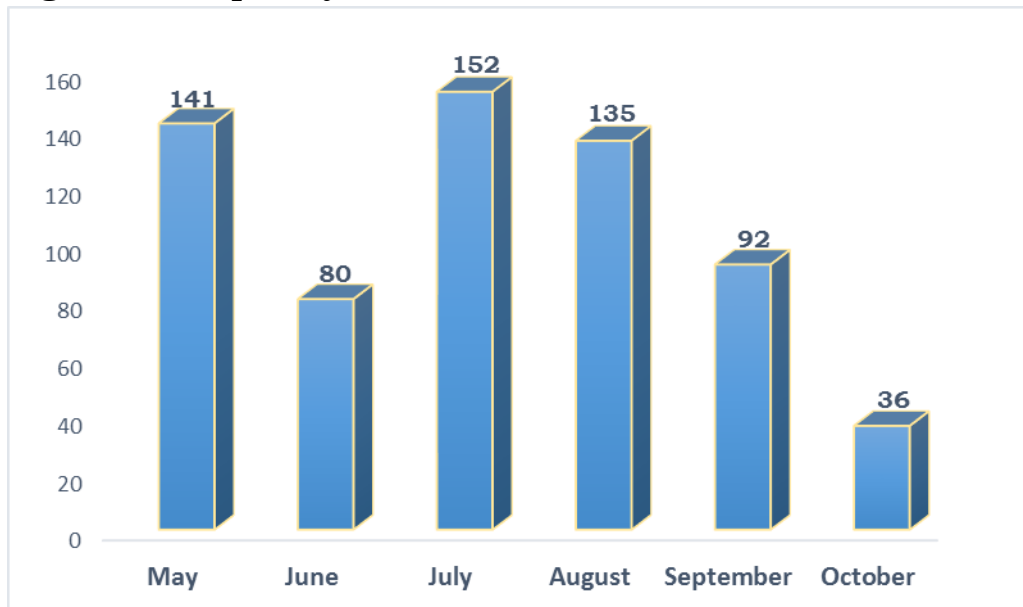
The month-on-month breakdown of the programmes and reports monitored is as follows:

- ✚ May: 3,254
- ✚ June: 3,822
- ✚ July: 4,422
- ✚ August: 4,420
- ✚ September: 4,901
- ✚ October: 4,310

The 25,129 programmes and reports mainly focused on political party activities, presidential and governance affairs, health and sanitation-related issues and crime and security-related issues. Other major issues included the economic situation of the country, corruption, labour and educational issues. These were the main subjects of discussion around which majority of the ethical violations were recorded in the course of the six months.

Incidents of ethical violations were quite high when the monitoring started in May (141). The month of July however recorded the highest number of ethical violations (152) within the six-month monitoring period. Conversely, the last month of the monitoring (October) recorded the lowest incidents of ethical violations (36). That is, from May to October 2014, incidents of ethical violations significantly reduced by 75 percent. Even though the decline was gradual, it was sturdy from the month of July to October as depicted in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Frequency of Ethical Violations Recorded in Each Month



Majority of the ethical violations were recorded from the news reports of newspapers, comments' sections of news websites, and newscasts and morning discussion show programmes of radio stations.

3.0 Specific Findings

Altogether 16 benchmark principles were set and used for the monitoring exercise. The principles were mainly derived from the Ghana Journalist Association's (GJA) Code of Ethics. Each of the 16 principles recorded at least one violation during the monitoring period even though some were violated more often than others. Specifically, indecency in language was by far the most prevalent ethical violation and the last month of monitoring (October) was no exception. The six-month monitoring recorded a total of 636 ethical violations. Cumulatively, indecency in language recorded more than a third (43%) of all the 636 infractions recorded as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Ethical Principles Violated

Ethical Violations Recorded	Frequency
Decency in language	270
Balance	91
Fairness	90
Accuracy	79
Avoiding Prejudice and Stereotyping	35
Appropriate use of Photography	21
Separating Facts from Opinion	17
Respecting Public Sensibilities	12
Appropriate use of Headlines	7
Sensitivity to Persons in grief or distress	5
Protecting Minors	3
Avoiding Partiality	2
Respect for public interest value	1
Respect for Privacy	1
Protection of Minors	1
Protection of Victims of Sexual Crimes	1
Total	636

3.1 Incidents of ethical violations on the three platforms monitored

The 40 media outlets sampled for the monitoring exercise were selected from three media platforms: radio (25), newspapers (10) and news websites (5). Ethical violations were recorded on all three platforms in each of the six months. News websites proportionately and consistently registered the highest number of ethical infractions each month. Table 2 below details the month-on-month collation of ethical breaches recorded on each of the three media platforms over the six-month monitoring period:

Table 2: Ethical Violations recorded from Radio, Newspapers and Online

Month	Ethical Violation Recorded			
	Radio	News Websites	Newspapers	Total
May	71	37	33	141
June	42	29	9	80
July	89	59	4	152
August	66	53	16	135
September	43	47	2	92
October	19	14	3	36
Total	330	239	67	636

31.1 Ethical Violations Recorded Online

Indecency in language was the major ethical breach found on the five online news portals monitored. Most of the infractions were recorded from the comments' sections of the news portals – an indication that the comments' sections of the various news websites were not being managed or moderated very well.

Of the five (5) news portals monitored, *GhanaWeb.com* recorded the highest number of ethical violations. More than two-thirds (77%) of the ethical infractions recorded from online news portals were coded from *GhanaWeb.com*. Beyond that the *GhanaWeb.com* news portal topped all the 40 media outlets monitored under the project by singlehandedly recording close to 30 percent of all the 636 ethical infractions recorded on all the platforms over the six months. The incidents of ethical violations recorded on each of the five news websites are presented below in Table 3.

Table 3: Ethical Violations recorded from News Websites

News Website	Ethical Violation Recorded						
	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Total
<i>GhanaWeb</i>	26	21	51	37	39	11	185
<i>Peacefmonline</i>	11	0	5	14	6	3	39
<i>Citifmonline</i>	0	6	3	0	0	0	9
<i>Myjoyonline</i>	0	0	0	2	2	0	4
<i>Radioxyzonline</i>	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total	37	29	59	53	47	14	239

3.1.2 Ethical Violations Recorded in Newspapers

Newspapers recorded the lowest number of ethical violations. The ethical breaches recorded from the 10 newspapers selected for the exercise constituted approximately 10 percent of all the ethical violations recorded. Inappropriate use of photographs was the major ethical violation found in the newspapers that registered ethical infractions. It is worth noting that after six months of monitoring, no ethical violation was registered by two (*New Crusading Guide* and *Public Agenda*) of the 10 newspapers sampled for the exercise. Table 4 below displays the frequency of ethical violations recorded on the newspapers monitored:

Table 4: Ethical Violations recorded from Newspapers

Newspaper	Ethical Violation Recorded						
	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Total
Daily Guide	7	0	1	6	0	1	15
The Chronicle	3	0	0	8	1	1	13
Ghana Palaver	5	2	1	1	0	1	10
Today	5	4	0	0	1	0	10
Enquirer	6	0	2	1	0	0	9
The Statesman	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
Daily Graphic	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
The Finder	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
New Crusading Guide	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public Agenda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	33	9	4	16	2	3	67

3.1.3 Ethical Violations recorded on Radio

Radio stations constituted the largest proportion of all the media outlets monitored. Approximately two-thirds of the sampled media houses were radio stations (because they are the most patronised among the three media platforms monitored – radio, newspapers and online). However, the large size of radio stations in the sample did not necessarily result in high numbers of ethical violations among radio stations as against newspapers and online news portals.

Radio stations accounted for 52 percent (330) of all the ethical violations recorded. The 330 ethical breaches were recorded on 18 out of the 25 radio stations monitored. That is, on the average, approximately 18 ethical infractions were recorded on each of the 18 radio stations over the six-month monitoring period. Three radio stations (*Oman FM*, *Obuoba FM* and *Adom FM*) together accounted for 60 percent of the 330 ethical violations as shown in Table 5 below.

Remarkably, not every radio station monitored registered an ethical violation. Seven (7) of the 25 radio stations did not register any ethical infractions during the six months of monitoring. Even for some of those cited for ethical misconduct, as shown in Table 5, there was a gradual reduction in the incidence of ethical violations at some point.

Table 5: Ethical Violations recorded on Radio

Radio Station	Ethical Violation Recorded						
	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Total
Oman FM (Accra)	10	12	26	20	10	4	82
Obuoba FM (Nkawkaw)	2	0	9	25	17	7	60
Adom FM (Accra)	23	5	17	6	5	2	58
Radio Gold (Accra)	9	6	4	2	2	0	23
Classic FM (Techiman)	8	4	4	1	2	1	20
North Star FM (Tamale)	6	4	5	3	1	1	20
Fox FM (Kumasi)	2	2	1	5	0	2	12
Kessben FM (Kumasi)	0	0	10	0	0	1	11
Radio Jubilee (Keta)	3	3	4	0	0	0	10
Okay (Accra)	1	0	5	2	1	0	9
Citi FM (Accra)	2	2	1	0	1	0	6
Joy FM (Accra)	0	2	2	1	1	0	6
Angel FM (Kumasi)	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
Radio Justice	0	1	1	1	0	1	4

(Tamale)							
Twin City Radio (Takoradi)	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Lorlonyo FM (Hohoe)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Peace FM (Accra)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
ROK FM (Takoradi)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
ATL FM (Cape Coast)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Radio Gurune (Upper East)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Radio Peace (Winneba)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Radio Progress (Upper West)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Radio Savanna (Tamale)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rite FM (Somanya)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suncity FM (Sunyani)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	71	42	89	66	43	19	330

4.0 Conclusion

The monitoring of ethical violations in the Ghanaian media which span May to October 2014 has ended with impressive findings. The findings show that even though ethical infractions were quite prevalent in the media when the monitoring began in May, there has been a significant improvement resulting in a 75 percent reduction by the end of October (the last month of monitoring).

This is a positive development for media professionalism and the Ghanaian media in particular. The MFWA commends all stakeholders, especially the management, editors and journalists of the various media outlets monitored

for the remedial steps taken which has resulted in this notable reduction. We also commend the various media groups and associations for their support.

There is, however, a need to sustain the gains made and further improve the Ghanaian media landscape especially as the country prepares towards election 2016. The MFWA has, therefore, proposed a number of recommendations to stakeholders in the media industry to help in this direction.

Recommendations

- Editors and journalists should continue to insist and adhere to the ethical principles of the profession as espoused in the GJA Code of Ethics at all times
- Local language broadcast outlets in particular should try their best to work according to the Guidelines for Local Language Broadcasting by the NMC which has been distributed by the MFWA
- Online editors should actively moderate the comments sections of their portals to ensure that unethical comments are not put in the public domain
- Media groups/associations such as the Ghana Journalists Association, Ghana Independent Broadcasters' Association, Ghana Community Radio Network, Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana, and Editors Forum, Ghana, are encouraged to undertake continuous professional capacity building for their members
- Media groups and associations should introduce effective self-regulatory mechanisms that promote adherence to ethical standards among journalists
- Journalism training schools should balance theory with practice and endeavour to nurture a culture of adherence to professional ethics among students
- The National Media Commission (NMC) should expand its efforts at promoting media professionalism to ensuring that the media adhere to standards of the profession. In line with that the MFWA calls on the Legislature to empower the Commission so it can effectively deliver on its mandate of promoting professional media practice in Ghana.