



Media Ethics Monitoring

Report for June & July, 2014

**ETHICAL VIOLATIONS IN THE GHANAIAN MEDIA:
MFWA'S REPORT FOR JUNE, JULY**

Findings from the Media Foundation for West Africa's (MFWA) media ethics monitoring show a persistence of ethical violations among the 40 media organisations that are being monitored. This report features analyses of ethical violations that were recorded in June and July 2014. Whereas ethical violations reduced from 141 in May to 80 in June, July recorded 152 ethical violations, the highest so far.

The online news portal, *Ghanaweb.com*, recorded the highest number of ethical violations during the two months, followed by the Accra-based *Oman FM* and *Adom FM* in that order. The ethical principle of **Decency** was the most violated principle especially among radio stations and the news websites monitored.

The monitoring and reporting of ethical violations on the 40 selected media outlets form part of the MFWA's project titled: "*Promoting Professional Standards and Enhancing the Watchdog Role of the Ghanaian Media*" which is being funded by STAR-Ghana.

The project is aimed at contributing to improving professional standards of the media in Ghana and supporting them to play a more effective role in fostering transparent and accountable governance in the country. It involves daily monitoring and analysis of ethical violations on 25 selected radio stations, 10 newspapers and five news websites across the country.

General Findings

A total of 8,244 programmes and other items (news, features, opinion pieces, letters, readers' comments) were monitored on all the 40 target media outlets in June and July. The monthly breakdown of the figure is as follows:

- ❖ June 2014 – 3,822
- ❖ July 2014 – 4,422

Programmes monitored on radio included news bulletins, political and current affairs discussion programmes. For the newspapers and websites, the monitoring focused on news items, features, opinion pieces, letters and readers' comments.

Various issues were discussed and highlighted in the radio programmes, newspapers and news websites monitored. Prominent among the subjects reported and discussed were:

- ✚ Politics and Political Party Activities
- ✚ Economic-related issues
- ✚ Crime-related issues
- ✚ Governance and Presidential affairs
- ✚ Labour Issues
- ✚ Health-related issues
- ✚ Social Issues

News items and discussion programmes around these dominant issues registered most of the ethical infractions recorded. Specifically, discussions around political issues registered more ethical violations than the other subjects.

Sources of news were quite diverse, but were dominated by members and affiliates of the main opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), followed by government officials, ministers of state, the President, and members of organised labour. For the online portals monitored, a significant number of the stories were sourced from newspapers and other online sites.

Specific findings

Over the two months, a total of 232 ethical violations were recorded. Incidents of ethical violations occurred more in July than in June. July recorded a total of 152 ethical violations whereas 80 violations were recorded in June.

Overall, 13 out of the 16 ethical principles being applied in the monitoring were violated. The 16 principles are:

- Accuracy
- Fairness
- Balance
- Impartiality
- Facts and Opinions
- Headlines
- Decency
- Offensive to Good Taste and Public Sensibilities
- Respect of Privacy
- Protection of Minors
- Protection of Victims of Sexual Crimes
- Sensitivity to Persons in Grief or Distress

- Prejudice and Stereotyping
- Photography, Pictures and Images
- Public Interest value
- Effective Gate-keeping Role of Online Editors

In Table 1 below, the 13 ethical principles that were violated and the frequency of violations is detailed out:

Table 1: Ethical Principles Violated

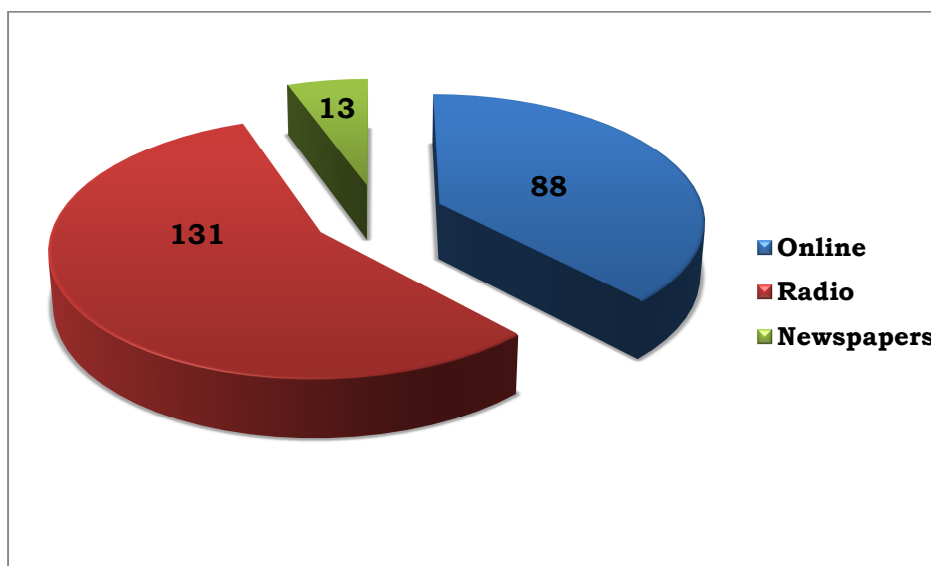
Ethical Principle Violated	Frequency of violations
Decency	99
Accuracy	39
Balance	33
Fairness	33
Avoiding Prejudice and Stereotyping	14
Appropriate use of Headlines	5
Appropriate use of Photography, Pictures and Images	3
Separating Facts from Opinion	1
Avoiding Partiality	1
Protecting Minors	1
Protecting Victims of Sexual Crimes	1
Respect for public interest value	1
Being sensitivity to Persons in grief or distress	1
Total	232

It is worth noting that findings from the months of May, June and July show that consecutively, the ethical principles of Decency, Accuracy, Fairness, and Balance are the most violated with Decency always being the single most violated principle.

Among the three types of media being monitored, the news websites proportionately recorded more ethical breaches than the others. Whereas the websites constitute 12.5 percent of the number of media being monitored, they accounted for 38 percent of violations.

Most of the ethical violations on online portals were recorded from their comments sections pointing to a dereliction of the required gatekeeping role among those websites. Figure 1 below presents the number of ethical violations recorded on each of the three types of media being monitored

Figure 1: Ethical Violations Recorded on Radio, Newspapers and Online



Ethical Violations Recorded on Radio

A total of 131 ethical violations were recorded on 14 out of the 25 radio stations being monitored. Most of the violations were recorded on the Accra-based *Oman FM* and *Adom FM*. The ethical infractions that were often violated on the two radio stations were violations of the principles of decency, accuracy, fairness and balance, with violations of these principles accounting for 120 out of the 131 total violations.

It is worth noticing that ethical violations on *Oman FM* and *Adom FM* occurred during news bulletins, which are otherwise expected to be the most objective and factual programmes in nature compared to opinion programmes.

Table 2 below shows the ethical violations recorded on each of the 14 radio stations:

Table 2: Radio Stations and Ethical Violations Recorded

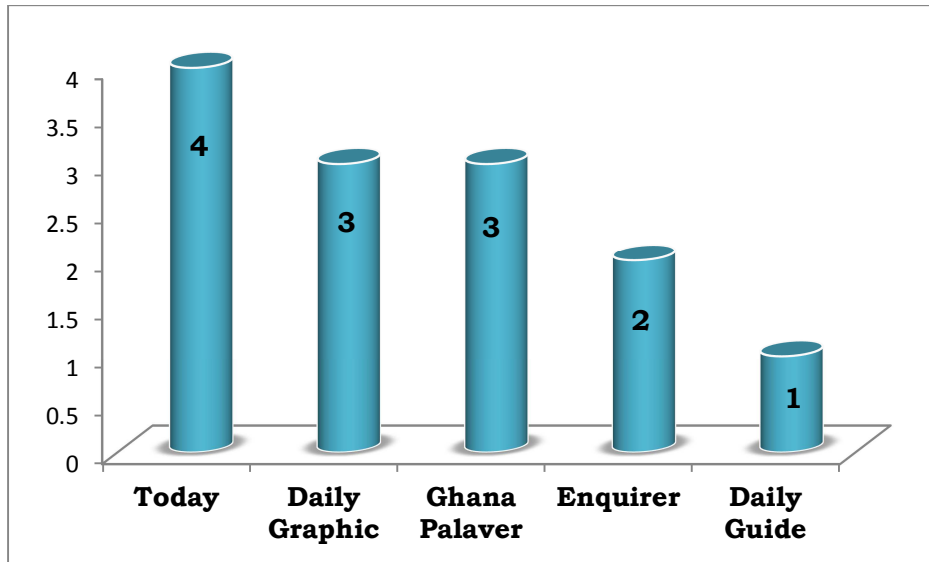
Radio Station	Frequency	Type of Violation
Oman FM	38	Unverified claims and allegations; one-sided presentation of issues especially during news bulletins and political discussion programmes
Adom FM	22	Use of indecent expressions especially during news bulletins
Radio Gold	10	Presentation of one-sided stories/issues often lacking fairness and balance
Kessben FM	10	Use of indecent expressions
Obuoba FM	9	Presentation of one-sided stories/issues often lacking fairness and balance
North Star	9	Unverified claims and allegations; and the use of indecent expressions
Classic FM	8	Unverified claims and allegations; and the use of indecent expressions
Radio Jubilee	7	Presentation of one-sided stories
Okay	5	Unverified claims and allegations
Joy FM	4	Presentation of one-sided stories
Citi FM	3	Use of indecent expressions
Fox FM	3	Prejudiced & Stereotypical comment
Radio Justice	2	Prejudiced & Stereotypical comments
Angel FM	1	Not protecting a victim of sexual crime
Total	131	

Ethical Violations Recorded in Newspapers

A total of 13 ethical violations were recorded in five out of the 10 newspapers being monitored. Four of the five newspapers that recorded ethical violations were privately owned and politically-oriented newspapers. The ethical

principles of fairness and balance were the main principles violated. Figure 2 below provides details of this finding:

Figure 2: Ethical Violations Recorded in Newspapers

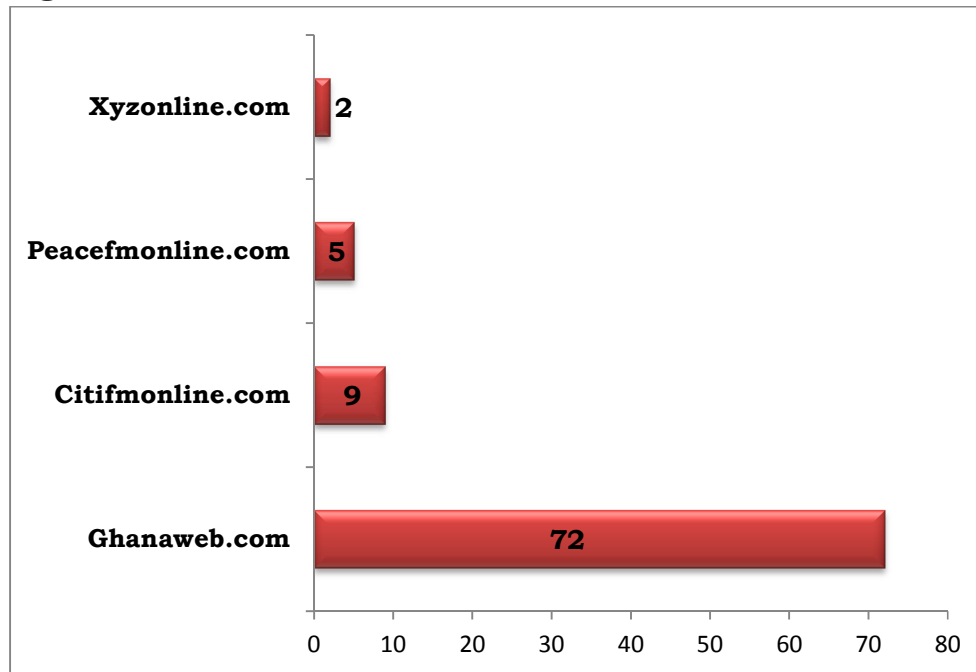


The figures show that the Daily Guide newspaper recorded the least number (one) of infractions. This is a commendable reduction over the findings of May where the paper recorded the highest (seven) number of ethical violations among seven newspapers.

Ethical Violations Recorded on Online News Portals

A total of 88 ethical violations were recorded from four out of the five news websites being monitored under the project. The website, *Ghanaweb.com*, recorded the highest number of violations among the 40 media outlets being monitored. Most of the infractions recorded were indecent and stereotypical comments posted by readers and allowed to be displayed. Figure 2 below gives a breakdown of the ethical violations recorded on the four news websites.

Figure 3: Ethical Violations Recorded on the Four News Websites



Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings for June and July, as detailed above, show that ethical violations are still prevalent among a number of Ghanaian media outlets. The ethical principles of Decency, Accuracy, Fairness and Balance have been the most violated since May 2014 when the monitoring started. Whereas some of the ethical infractions were committed by some moderators/presenters, reporters, newspapers, and news websites, quite a number of the violations were committed by individuals who featured on radio programmes or commented on issues in the media.

Persistent ethical violations on the part of the media often have a very negative impact on their credibility, and undermine their capacity to play their watchdog role effectively. Also, unethical media pose a serious threat to media freedom and survival as many leaders have often used such violations as grounds to unduly crack down on media freedom. Adherence to professional standards is,

thus, critical for enhancing media freedom and bolstering the media's capacity to contribute meaningfully to good governance.

The MFWA, therefore, calls on editors and journalists to always strive to adhere to the code ethics of the profession. Professional associations and groups such as the Ghana Journalists Association, Ghana Independent Broadcasters' Association, Ghana Community Radio Network, Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana, and Editors Forum, Ghana should prioritise the promotion of professional standards in their capacity building and media development programmes. Also, the National Media Commission needs to intensify efforts at promoting media professionalism in the country.