



Media Ethics Monitoring

Report for September, 2014

ETHICAL VIOLATIONS IN THE GHANAIAN MEDIA: MFWA'S REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER 2014

1.0 Introduction

An independent, credible and vibrant media is a precondition for an open society with transparent and accountable governance processes. For the media to remain free and credible to play their watchdog role effectively, they need to be professional in their work. The Ghanaian media have often been touted as *free*, but unprofessional media practices remain a source of worry to many. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), therefore, continues its project on “*Promoting Professional Standards and Enhancing the Watchdog Role of the Ghanaian Media*” to help improve the situation.

The project, which is funded by STAR-Ghana, 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.

This report covers findings of monitoring for the month of September 2014. The findings show a significant reduction (32%) in the incidents of ethical violations (from 135 in August down to 92 in September). By extension, this constitutes a significant reduction in ethical violations over the last three months. That is, from 152 in July to 135 in August and now, in September, 92 ethical violations – a 40 percent reduction in three months. Details of the findings are presented below.

2.0 General Findings

In the month of September, a total of 4,901 items (news, features, editorials, opinion pieces, letters, comments and rejoinders) and discussion programmes were monitored on all the 40 media outlets selected for the project. Dominant among them were news items and discussion programmes. Findings presented in this report are, thus, based on the 4,901 items and programmes monitored.

Several issues were discussed in the media in the course of the month. The subjects that dominated many of the items and programmes monitored included political parties' issues, presidential and governance issues, labour

issues, corruption, crime, health, sports and education issues. The sources used in the media items monitored were mostly political party executives and communicators, the President of Ghana, government officials and other sources. However, most of the stories monitored from online news portals, especially *GhanaWeb.com*, were sourced from newspapers and other websites. A significant number of the online stories were without by-lines though.

3.0 Specific Findings

Incidents of ethical violations reduced significantly during the one-month monitoring. Whereas August recorded a total of 135 ethical violations, 92 infractions were recorded in September. This constitutes a 32 percent (43 cases) reduction in the incidents of ethical violations from August to September 2014.

Altogether, seven (7) ethical principles were violated in the monitoring period. Indecency in language was the most dominant ethical violation followed by infractions against the principles of Balance and Fairness as shown in Table 1 below:

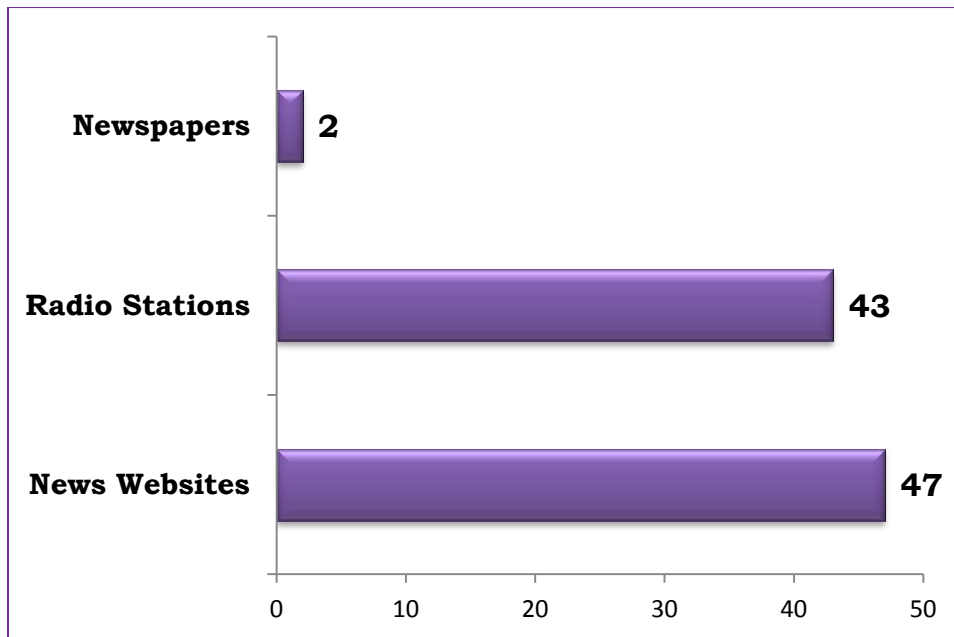
Table 1: Ethical Violations Recorded in September

Ethical Violations	Frequency
Decency in Language	50
Balance	15
Fairness	14
Avoiding Prejudice and Stereotyping	6
Accuracy	4
Separating Facts from Opinion	2
Appropriate use of Photography, Pictures and Images	1
Total	92

The 92 violations were recorded on 17 of the 40 media outlets being monitored across the country. Online news portals registered the highest number of

ethical violation. The incidents of ethical violations that occurred on the three media platforms being monitored are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Ethical Violations Recorded from Radio Stations, Newspapers and News Websites



3.1 Ethical Violations recorded on Radio

Out of the 25 radio stations being monitored, 12 registered ethical violations. Fairness and Balance were the principles that were most often violated on the 12 radio stations. Indecency in language was also prevalent. *Obuoba FM* recorded the highest number of ethical breaches. The majority of these violations were against the ethical principles of Fairness and Balance. In Table 2 below, the frequency of violations recorded on each of the 12 radio stations are presented:

Table 1: Ethical Violations Recorded on Radio Stations

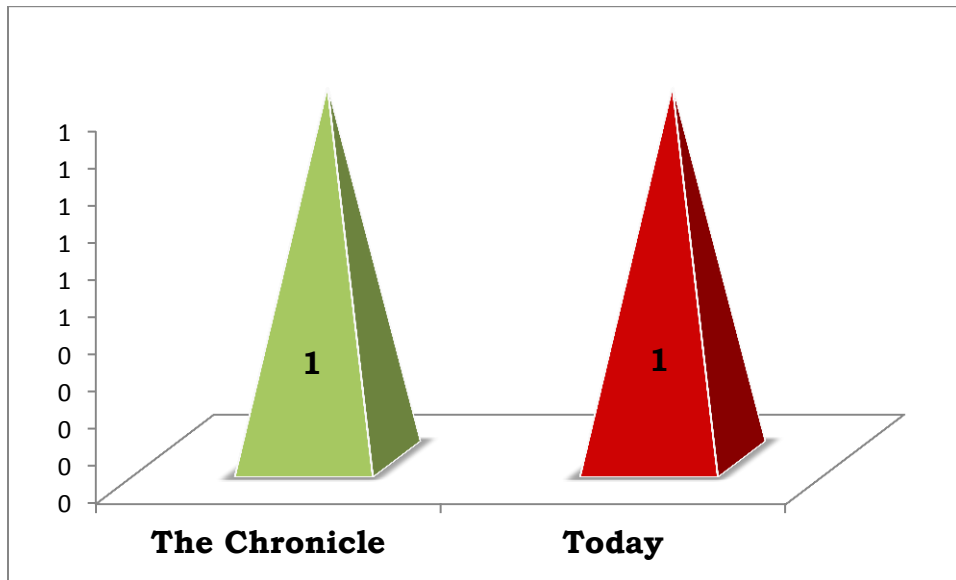
Name of Radio Station	Ethical Principle Violated					
	Accuracy	Fairness	Balance	Separating Facts and Opinion	Decency in Language	Total
Obuoba FM	1	8	8	0	0	17
Oman FM	1	4	4	0	1	10
Adom FM	0	0	0	1	4	5
Radio Gold	0	1	1	0	0	2
Classic FM	1	0	0	1	0	2
Citi FM	0	0	0	0	1	1
Peace FM	0	0	0	0	1	1
Joy FM	0	0	0	0	1	1
Okay	0	0	0	0	1	1
ROK FM	0	0	0	0	1	1
Twin City Radio	0	0	0	0	1	1
North Star	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	3	13	13	2	12	43

Most of the violations were recorded during Evening and Midday News. Out of the 43 ethical violations attributed to radio stations, 31 (72%) of them were recorded during Evening (19) and Midday (12) newscasts. Considering the fact that news are meant to be objective and factual it is quite disturbing that the principles of Fairness and Balance are the most violated during broadcasts.

3.2 Ethical Violations Recorded in Newspapers

Findings from the newspaper category show a very positive record. From 16 cases of ethical violations in August, the month of September recorded only two incidents of ethical infractions. The two infractions were recorded from *The Chronicle* and *Today* newspapers – *The Chronicle* was coded for the use of an inappropriate photograph while the *Today* newspaper registered an indecent expression. The findings are presented in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Ethical Violations Recorded on News Websites

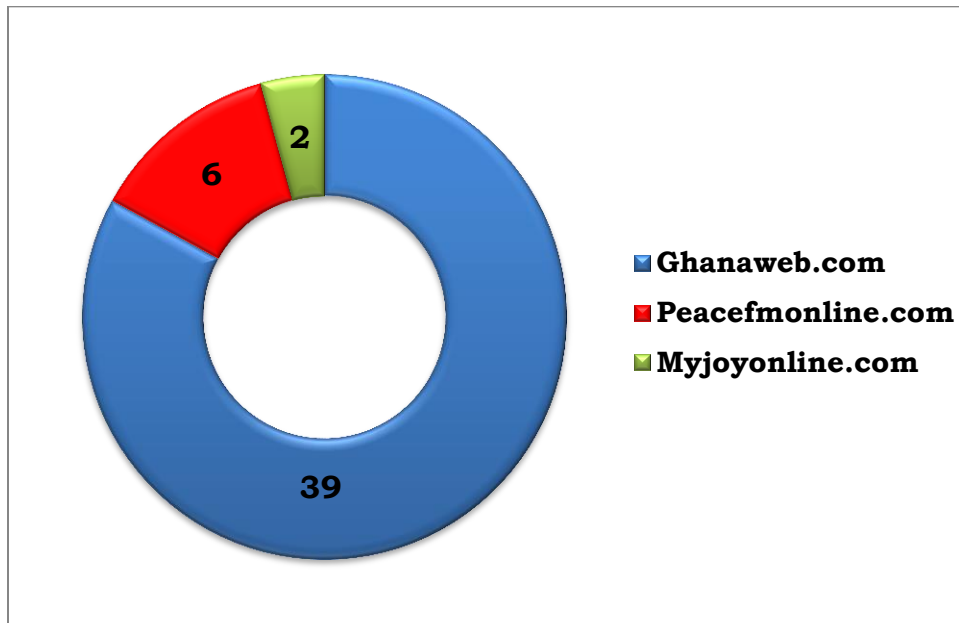


It is worth noting that *The Chronicle* newspaper which recorded the highest (8) cases of ethical violations among the newspaper category in August recorded only one violation in the month under review.

3.3 Ethical Violations Recorded on News websites

Online media accounted for more than half (51%) of all the ethical violations recorded in the month. Out of the 92 violations recorded in September, 47 of them were recorded on three out of the five online news portals being monitored under the project. The same three news portals – Ghanaweb.com, peacefonline.com and myjoyonline.com – were reported for ethical violations in August.

Figure 3: Violations Recorded on News Websites



As shown in Figure 3 above, *GhanaWeb.com* singlehandedly recorded 39 (83%) of the 47 incidents of ethical violations recorded on all the three online news portals. Thus, for the fifth month running, *GhanaWeb.com* has been the only news portal that has consistently recorded the highest number of ethical violations.

As in previous months, most of the infractions recorded on *GhanaWeb.com* were from the comments sections of the site. A breakdown of the categories of ethical violations recorded on *GhanaWeb.com* in the month of September is as follows:

- ✚ Indecency in language: 30
- ✚ Prejudicial and Stereotypical comments: 6
- ✚ Fairness: 1
- ✚ Balance: 2

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

It is quite encouraging that incidents of ethical violations are gradually going down on the various media outlets, especially in the selected newspapers. We commend all managers/editors and individual journalists who are making a conscious effort to help improve ethical standards on their platforms. We,

however, call for a concerted effort to help improve the situation further since 92 ethical violations in one month is still worrying.

The MFWA, therefore, appeals to all managers and editors again, especially those of *GhanaWeb.com*, Nkawkaw-based *Obuoba FM*, and Accra-based *Oman FM* to step up their gate-keeping role to help improve professionalism on their respective platforms.

We also call on all professional associations and groups such as the Ghana Journalists Association, Ghana Independent Broadcasters' Association; Ghana Community Radio Network; Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana; Editors Forum, Ghana; as well the National Media Commission to prioritise the promotion of professional standards, capacity building and media development programmes for the Ghanaian media.