

BROADCASTING STANDARDS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	v	
GENERAL GUIDELINES:		
National Identity of and	1	
Good Taste and Decency	1	
Language In Broadcasts	1	
Authenticity	2	
Morality and Social Values	2	
Portrayal of Sex	2	
Crime, Law and Order	2	
Broadcasts and the Law	3	
Portrayal of Violence, Cruelty and Horror	3	
Children’s Programme	3	
Quiz Programmes	4	
Music	5	
Schools Programmes	5	
Drama And Film	5	
News and Current Affairs Programmes	6	
Political Broadcasts	7	
Religious Programmes	8	
Advertisements	8	
Legality	8	
Programming Sponsorship	8	
Unacceptable Advertising	9	
Advertising and Children	9	
Alcoholic Drinks	9	
Financial Advertising	10	
Comparisons	11	
Health Crimes, Medicines and Treatment etc.	11	
Station Identification and Monitoring of Programmes		11
Programme Relays	11	

PREFACE

The National Media Commission in the exercise of its responsibility to facilitate media pluralism and freedom, especially in the wake of the liberalization of the airwaves, has come out with Guidelines on Broadcasting Standards to enable our people maximize returns from the proliferation of the electronic media.

Until the 1992 Constitution, although there was legislation for private participation in the electronic media under the National Redemption Council, pluralism of radio and were non-existent. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation remained the lone voice. Things have now changed with Frequency Modulation Stations in Accra, Kumasi and most of the regional capitals. With pluralism, there has been the need for basic standards as a way of ensuring that the liberalization of the airwaves impact qualitatively and positively on the society. Equally, because the frequencies are national resources, they must be applied for the good of our people.

It is in this regard that the National Media Commission commissioned a group of experts, mostly field operators in the sector to develop standards for broadcasting practice in the country.

It is our hope that readers and practitioners will find the Broadcasting Standards useful.

The Commission is greatly indebted to Messrs. John Hammond, Kwaw Ansah, David Newton, Berifi Appenteng, Kwasi Twum, Samuel Atta Mensah, Charles Bucknor, Cyril Acolatse, Baffoe Bonnie, James Appiah, Yaw Poku Dankwa and Prince Kofi Kludjeson as well as Mrs. Frances Ademola, Ms. Gertrude Opere Addo and Mrs. Sarah Akrofi Quarcoo for devoting their energies in developing the guidelines.

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Any lapses in the standards remain the responsibility of the Commission.

PREAMBLE

Taking into consideration the importance and sensitivity of the electronic media for the promotion of freedom of expression, democracy, national culture, as well as social and economic development, the following standards shall apply in the on preparation, presentation and transmission not only of programmes but also of advertising material on any broadcasting station transmitting in Ghana.

1. National Identity of Programming

- (a) In pursuance of the stated cultural and social development objectives of broadcasting in Ghana Emphasis shall be placed on the broadcast of local programmes and the development of a national identify as a major priority by all broadcasting stations authorized to operate in Ghana.
- (b) Broadcasting stations shall endeavour at all times to reflect and promote national development in their programmes and other output including advertising, protection of the environment, family planning and gender issues.
- (c) Broadcasting stations shall, in particular, facilitate the participation of marginalized individuals and communities in national priority-setting and decision-making by providing them access to express their views and share their knowledge in programmes.

2. Accuracy, Objectivity and Fairness

- (a) Information given in any programme, should be presented accurately, honestly and impartially.
- (b) All issues of public interest should be adequately presented to ensure fairness. The right of reply should be guaranteed to any person or body with a genuine claim to misrepresentation.

3. Good Taste And Decency

- (a) Broadcast programmes should avoid all indecency and incitement to ethnic, religious sectional hatred and disaffection.
- (b) Obscene or vulgar language, expressions and presentations should not be used.
- (c) The sanctity of marriage and family values should be promoted and strictly upheld.
- (d) Care should be taken not to offend the sensibilities of disabled and handicapped persons.

- (e) The use of lewd or profane expressions, except in a specifically relevant context, should be avoided.
- (f) Ghanaian cultural rites and practices of value should be promoted with accuracy.

4. Language in Broadcasts

Presenters and speakers on radio and television serve as role models, as far as the use of language is concerned. Broadcasting stations should ensure at all times that their presenters and participants in their programmes speak language appropriate to the programme and of the highest possible standard.

5. Authenticity

- (a) Great care must be taken that broadcasting does not blur the distinction between truth and fiction.
- (b) Fictional events, including reconstructions
- (c) Statements or information that could be ambiguous or misleading should be avoided.

6. Morality and Social Values

- (a) Undesirable aspects of human nature, such as cruelty, greed, lust, selfishness, and vindictiveness should not be glamorized.
- (b) Drunkenness and robbery should not be allowed in programmes except as destructive habits to be avoided or denounced.
- (c) The use of narcotic substances should only be presented to educate the public on their harmful effect.
- (d) Sex-related crimes, such as prostitution, rape, bestiality, incest etc., should be portrayed as destructive practices to be avoided or denounced.
- (e) Liquor consumption and smoking should be shown only when consistent with plot and character developed.
- (f) Suicide should not be treated as an acceptable solution to human problems.
- (g) Programmes meant for adults of 18 years and above should be broadcast only after 10.00pm.

7. Portrayal of Sex

- (a) Treatment of sex in all programmes or as part of entertainment should be handled in a manner not to offend the moral dignity, decency and sensibilities of the audience.
- (b) Documentaries or programmes dealing with a variety of sexual themes shall not make public and explicit what should be private and exclusive.
- (c) Where a story involves actual sexual relations, it should be presented without undue exploitation of its sexual aspects.
- (d) In representing sexual activity in televised or filmed drama, producers should consider whether the degree of explicitness is justified by the context in which it occurs.
- (e) Actual sexual intercourse between humans should at no time be transmitted.

8. Crime, Law and Order

- (a) Language or likely to encourage or incite crime, glorify war or lead to disorder should be avoided.
- (b) Criminal tendencies should be presented as undesirable.
- (c) The treatment of the commission of crime in a frivolous and permissive manner should be avoided.
- (d) The presentation of techniques of crime, in such detail as to invite imitation, should be avoided.
- (e) Law enforcement should be upheld at all times in a manner that affirms that law and order are the universally-accepted norms of society.

9. Broadcasts and the Law

Broadcasters should satisfy themselves that the contents of all programmes are not at variance with the Constitution of Ghana nor infringe laws and regulations such as:

- (a) Laws of libel and sedition
- (b) The Copyright Law of 1985 (P.N.D.C. L110)
- (c) Copyright Society of Ghana Regulations 1992 (L.I. 1527)

- (d) Any other relevant laws, regulations, international treaties or obligations relating to broadcasting and the standards set out in these guidelines.

10. Portrayal of Violence, Cruelty and Horror

- (a) Broadcasting shall at all times uphold respect for the dignity of human beings and their environment.
- (b) All forms of domestic violence should be presented as undesirable.
- (c) Excessive or detailed portrayal of physical suffering and pain or images of human and animal parts should be avoided.
- (d) Sexual violence and violence directed at older people or children should be reported with particular sensitivity.
- (e) In representing violent crimes, programmes should not glamorise the criminal or soften their image in a manner which may diminish the ugliness and severity of crime.
- (f) In reconstructing a crime involving violence, care should be taken not to over-emphasize the dramatic aspects of the incident nor discuss the weapons used in unnecessary detail.
- (g) Violence should not be portrayed in drama as an end in itself or for the purposes of entertainment.
- (h) Care should be taken about the intrusion of violence into locations regarded as places of safety such as hospitals, places of worship and homes which may threaten some people's sense of security and seriously reduce the quality of their lives.
- (i) Violent crimes should not be presented to the extent that they will have a "copycat" effect.
- (j) TV stations should avoid repeated exposure of their audiences to violence, which will desensitize them and make them indifferent to the plight of victims.
- (k) The degradation of women as objects of male violence should not be encouraged.

11. Children's Programmes

It is the duty of the media to protect the identity, privacy and reputation of children.

Where they are involved in court (criminal) proceedings their identity should not be revealed.

In any other instances the media should satisfy themselves that their publication will not have adverse effect on the child.

- (a) Materials likely to affect adversely the sensitivities and sensibilities of children should be avoided.
- (b) Any programme which contravenes social values, shows disrespect for law and order, or departs from an honourable life-style should be forbidden.
- (c) Programmes with “adult” content eg. Sexually-explicit scenes or language should not be broadcast when children are likely to be watching or listening.
- (d) Swearing or blasphemous language of any kind should be avoided.
- (e) Children should be protected from ethnic or other complexes resulting from careless or deliberate comparisons or information.
- (f) Violence and crime should not be glamorized but should be portrayed as punishable.
- (g) Foreign folklore and values should be identified as such and treated with caution to prevent undue influence.
- (h) Ghanaian culture, folklore and values should be promoted. Popular superstitions should be handled with discretion.

12. Quiz Programmes

Programmes such as contests of knowledge, information, skill or luck should be absolutely genuine and not contrived through collusion with, or amongst, contestants, or any other action which will favour one contestant over another. Results shall not be the product of any malpractice.

13. Music

- (a) In the choice of music for all applications in broadcasting, emphasis shall be placed on Africans music particularly Ghanaian music.
- (b) Ghanaian and African music shall constitute a minimum of fifty (50) per cent of all music broadcast by any radio or television station in any particular week. Care should also be taken to have a fair representation of local ethnic talent.

- (c) The provision covering good taste and decency, morality and social values, shall also apply to music, particularly lyrics and visual presentation.

14. Schools Programmes

- (a) All Stations must endeavour to broadcast instructional educational programmes to support the work of the Ministry of Education. Such programmes are referred to in this code as Schools Programmes i.e. educational programmes based on a specific curriculum designed for systematic teaching of a subject with an object of preparing people for an examination at any level of the educational system.
- (b) Schools programmes must be of high quality and broadcast in consultation with appropriate educational authority.
- (c) The integrity of schools programmes must not be compromised or influence by sponsorship or advertising considerations.
- (d) Advertising in school programmes should be in conformity with the theme of the programme and should give useful and relevant information with credits for the Sponsors. Sponsor's advertisements shall only be allowed at the beginning and at the end of schools programmes.
- (e) People who present schools programmes must have the appropriate qualification in the subject(s) they present.

15. Drama and Film

- (a) Film and Drama programmes must serve as important means of education, promotion of national consciousness, entertainment, as well as vehicles for promoting the social, economic and cultural objectives of the Nation.
- (b) As far as possible, broadcasters shall devote at least 50% of their airtime to local productions.
- (c) Television broadcasters are encouraged to show Ghanaians and African films.
- (d) An internal mechanism of censoring local and foreign films and radio programmes should be established to safeguard Ghanaians values and interests.
- (e) Films and radio and television programmes with adult content should not be broadcast when children are likely to be watching or listening.

- (f) Violence and crime should not be glamorized in films but should be portrayed as punishable.
- (g) Pornography and copy of foreign values and expressions, which are likely to impact negatively on Ghanaians, should be discouraged.
- (h) Upgrading of the quality of local productions should be encouraged and promoted.
- (i) The scheduling of all films and television programmes should be guided by existing classification policy.
- (j) Discretion should be used in the portrayal of women in film and drama to avoid presenting a consistently negative and stereotyped image.

16. News and Current Affairs Programmes

- (a) In order to promote diversity, broadcasters should endeavour to have regular news programmes in their broadcast schedules.
- (b) All news reports should be truthful, accurate and impartial.
- (c) News commentaries and analyses should be clearly identified as such.
- (d) Programmes devoted to the discussion of controversial public affairs should ensure fairness and balance of views.
- (e) Commercials and paid-for items in news and current affairs programmes should be placed and presented in a manner that will make them clearly distinguishable from the programmes.
- (f) All transmissions intended to supply information and help form public opinion should be thoroughly researched and assertions of fact should be verifiable.

17. Political Broadcasts

- (a) All broadcasts in support of political parties or candidates whether paid for or on free air-time basis shall be clearly identified as such.
- (b) Coverage of political activities must include the aim of collecting and disseminating truthful, unbiased information on political parties and their activities to the public.

- (c) Broadcasters must provide the public with information that would enable the electorate to make intelligent choices during elections.
- (d) Stations are to ensure that coverage of political activities is comprehensive and fair to all that the information gathered is presented also objectively and impartially as possible.
- (e) Broadcasting operators shall maintain a logbook with detailed records on all political broadcasts. Such records shall be made available on request to the National Media Commission and members of the public.
- (f) Details to be recorded in the log-book shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following:
 - i. Date, time and duration of broadcast;
 - ii. Personalities involved, and
 - iii. Subject matter.
- (g) Media practitioners must remain neutral in partisan politics and avoid all associations and activities that may compromise their integrity as journalists or damage their credibility.
- (h) The host of any political programme who is identified with a particular political party should be required to be fair to all parties.
- (i) Presentation of government activities during election should be weighed carefully to ensure that the incumbent party does not gain unfair access to the media. Bona fide news should be covered without giving the impression of bias.
- (j) All political broadcasts should be in decent language.
- (k) Controversial or offensive references to opponents must be avoided, if at all possible, unless there is clear justification.
- (l) Conditions for broadcasting political and party candidates programmes should be the same for all political parties.

18. Religious Programmes

- (a) The opportunity for religious broadcast presentations should be made available to the various religions in the community, but caution should be applied that the expectations of listeners and viewers are not abused.

- (b) Religious broadcasts that relate to religious doctrine exclusively, should be presented by responsible representatives of the religion.
- (c) Religious broadcasts should not contain any attack on, or ridicule of, any other religion.
- (d) The content of religious programmes shall be prepared with due regard and respect for the beliefs and sensibilities of all religions.
- (e) Conditions for broadcasting religious programmes should be the same for all religious groups.

19. Advertisements

- (i) Advertisement shall be clearly identified as such and distinguished from normal programmes. There shall be not more than ten (10) minutes of advertisements in any one (1) hour.

(ii) Legality

- (a) No advertisement shall be broadcast in connection with a product or service, which is illegal.
- (b) It is the responsibility of broadcasters to ensure that all claims made on behalf of a product or service can be substantiated.

(iii) Programme Sponsorship

- (a) Sponsorship shall be allowed for entire programmes or parts of a programme, except the news and programmes dealing with current political or industrial controversy. However, sponsorship may be allowed for specialist reports, eg. Financial news, weather, traffic and sports.
- (b) No political party will be allowed to sponsor any programme other than a political broadcast.
- (c) Sponsorship conditions shall not interfere with the integrity of the programmes. However, commercial breaks may be allowed in such programmes.
- (d) Editorial responsibility for sponsored programmes remains with the broadcaster.

- (e) Sponsorship of a programme or part of a programme by a promoter of a product or service shall also be considered as advertising.

(iv) Unacceptable Advertising

- (a) No advertisement shall cause those who see or hear it unwarranted anxiety. Neither shall there be an appeal to fear.
- (b) No advertisement shall promote stereotypes or in any way denigrate any individual or group in society, religions, faiths and philosophies of life.
- (c) It is unethical for professions to advertise. They are Physicians, Lawyers, Dentists, Osteopaths, Chiropractors, Occultists, Optometrists and others of a similar nature.
- (d) Advertising of tobacco products should not be allowed.

(v) Advertising and Children

- (a) When children are likely to be viewing or listening, no product or service may be advertised and no method of advertising should be employed which takes advantage of their natural credulity and susceptibility.
- (c) Advertisements should not exhort children to purchase or to ask parents/guardians to purchase items/services.
- (d) Advertisements for the following should not be transmitted during children's programmes or adjacent to them:
 - i) Alcoholic drinks
 - ii) Medicines
 - iii) Contraceptives
 - iv) Trailers of films with adult content, that is sex, violence, nudity and bad Language.
 - v) Any other items that could pose a danger to children.
- (e) Advertisements, which may frighten or cause distress to children should be subject to appropriate restrictions on time of transmission.
- (f) Children in advertisements should be well mannered and well behaved.
- (g) Raffles and lotteries should not be advertised in or juxtaposed to children's programmes neither should advertisements for such events be targeted at them.

(vi) Alcoholic Drinks

- (a) Advertising of alcoholic drinks should not be directed at persons under 18 years in contravention of the Liquor Licensing Act 1970 (Act 331). Presentation of advertisements on alcoholic drinks likely to be of particular appeal to children should be avoided.
- (b) Children should not be seen or heard in an advertisement for alcoholic drinks.
- (c) In advertisements for drinks containing alcohol anyone associated with drinking should be or appear to be at least 18 years old.
- (d) Advertisements for alcoholic drinks should not feature any personality whose example persons under 18 years are likely to emulate or who has a particular appeal to persons under that age.
- (e) Advertisements should not imply that drinking is essential to social success or acceptance or that refusal is a sign of weakness. It should also not be implied that the successful outcome of a social occasion is dependent on the consumption of alcohol.
- (f) Advertisement should not claim that alcohol has therapeutic qualities nor should it be presented as a stimulant, sedative or tranquiliser.
- (g) While advertisements may refer to refreshment after physical performance they should not give any impression that performance can be improved by alcoholic drinks.
- (h) Advertisements should not suggest that a drink is to be preferred because of higher alcohol content or intoxicating effect.
- (i) Nothing in an advertisement should link drinking of alcohol with driving or the operation of potentially dangerous machinery.
- (j) Advertisements should neither claim nor suggest that any alcoholic drink can contribute towards sexual success or can enhance sexual attractiveness.
- (k) Advertisements should not suggest that regular solitary drinking is acceptable or that drinking is a means of resolving personal problems.
- (l) No advertisement should suggest that drinking is an essential attribute of masculinity. Advertisements featuring toughness or bravado in association with drinking should not be used. Alcoholic drinks should not be advertised in the context of aggressive or anti-social behavior.

(m) Alcoholic drinks should not be seen to be consumed in a working environment unless it is clearly established that the working day has ended.

(vii) Financial Advertising

- (a) Advertisements should not present a financial product or service in misleading terms.
- (b) References to taxation or interest on savings etc. should be clearly explained, and be factually correct at the time of transmission.
- (c) Advertisements should comply with legal requirements.
- (d) Any advertisement which falls in a grey area should be referred to the appropriate authority for clearance.

(viii) Comparison

Advertisements should not unfairly attack or discredit other products or services, advertisers or advertisements expressly or by implication.

(ix) Health Claims, Medicines and Medical Treatment etc.

- (a) Medicines require great care in their advertising, and health claims require very close scrutiny. Therefore all advertising of medicines and pharmaceutical products should be screened by the Pharmacy Council.
- (b) No script or advertisement should be accepted which may mislead persons to believe that the product or service has the endorsement of any health authority.
- (c) Advertising for alternative medicines and medical treatment should meet the same requirements as do orthodox non-prescription medicines and treatment. However these may need to be channeled through an establishment familiar with that area or alternative medicine.

20. Station Identification and Monitoring of Programmes

- (a) Each station shall, during its normal broadcasting hours, transmit at intervals not exceeding 30 minutes, a station identification which shall include the station name and operating frequencies.
- (b) Broadcasting stations shall operate logging systems. Station logs shall be available at all times for inspection by the appropriate authorities.

- (c) Each station shall keep a daily log of all transmitted programmes for a period of (six) 6 months.

21. Programme Relays

Caution should be exercised in the relay of foreign broadcasts since they may directly or indirectly subvert national identity, culture and self-respect. Such broadcasts if any, should only be relayed through a local station.