MEDIA ETHICS AND RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA: ASSESSING AWARENESS, ADHERENCE, AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES

Moyosore Alade[1], Nathaniel Adeoye Oyegoke[2]*, Oluwaranti Ojewumi[3] & Sunday James Okunade[4]

[1,2,3,4]Department of Mass Communication, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria

*eniopekan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This study examined the role of media ethics in promoting responsible journalism in Nigeria. It explored journalists' awareness and adherence to ethical standards, as well as the effectiveness of regulatory bodies in ensuring compliance. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected through an online questionnaire administered to 400 journalists across print, broadcast, and digital platforms, yielding 297 valid responses. The study was anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory, which emphasizes the media's ethical obligation to serve the public interest while maintaining journalistic independence. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data, utilizing SPSS software for frequency distributions and graphical representations. Findings revealed that while most journalists are aware of ethical guidelines, adherence remains inconsistent due to editorial pressures, financial constraints, and political influence. The study further identified that ethical journalism significantly impacts public trust, with respondents acknowledging that media credibility improves when ethical principles are upheld. However, the effectiveness of regulatory bodies remains a challenge, as many journalists perceive enforcement mechanisms as weak. The study suggests that strengthening ethical training, enforcing stricter regulations, and improving financial independence for journalists could enhance ethical compliance and media credibility. These findings contribute to the growing discourse on media ethics in Nigeria and provide a framework for improving responsible journalism practices.

Keywords: Media Ethics, Responsible Journalism, Adherence to Ethical Standards, Ethical Journalism, Social Responsibility Theory

Introduction

In Nigeria, the media wields significant influence in shaping public opinion, disseminating information, and holding power structures accountable. Adherence to media ethics is paramount in ensuring that journalism fulfills these roles responsibly and effectively. Media ethics encompass the principles and standards that guide journalists in their professional conduct, promoting accuracy, fairness, and integrity in reporting. In the Nigerian context, where diverse cultures and political dynamics intersect, the role of media ethics becomes even more critical in fostering national cohesion and democratic governance.

The Nigerian media landscape has evolved over the years, witnessing a proliferation of outlets across print, broadcast, and digital platforms. This expansion has amplified the reach of journalism

but has also introduced challenges related to ethical standards. Instances of sensationalism, misinformation, and partisan reporting have underscored the need for a robust ethical framework to guide journalistic practices. Scholars have noted that adherence to media ethics is essential in maintaining public trust and upholding the credibility of the press (Amatu & Nwafor, 2021). However, much of the existing literature focuses on specific regions or media types, such as Anambra State (Amatu & Nwafor, 2020), leaving a gap in understanding the nationwide adherence to ethical standards across various platforms.

Media ethics play a pivotal role in promoting responsible journalism by ensuring that journalists operate within the bounds of truthfulness, objectivity, and social responsibility. These ethical principles serve as a compass, guiding journalists to provide accurate and balanced information, which is crucial for informed public discourse. In Nigeria, where the media is often seen as a watchdog of society, ethical journalism contributes to transparency and accountability in governance (Pepple & Acholonu, 2018). However, the degree to which journalists and media houses adhere to these ethical principles remains inconsistent due to various institutional and systemic challenges.

This study investigates Nigerian journalists' awareness and adherence to media ethics, evaluates the effectiveness of regulatory bodies, and proposes strategies to strengthen ethical journalism. By adopting a nationwide perspective and employing a quantitative research design, this study aims to bridge the existing research gap by offering a broader and data-driven understanding of media ethics in Nigeria. Additionally, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on responsible journalism by providing empirical insights into the challenges and opportunities for ethical compliance in the evolving Nigerian media landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Media Ethics

Media ethics, as a field of applied ethics, deals with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, print media, and the internet. Media ethics involves the application of moral principles to media practices, ensuring that media professionals adhere to standards that promote accuracy, fairness, and integrity. Awofadeju, (2024). this ethical framework is essential in maintaining public trust and upholding the credibility of the media. In the Nigerian context, media ethics play a crucial role in guiding journalists amidst challenges such as political pressures, economic constraints, and the proliferation of unregulated online platforms. Adherence to ethical standards ensures that journalists can effectively serve as watchdogs of society, promoting transparency and accountability in governance.

In the Nigerian context, media ethics play a crucial role in guiding journalists amidst challenges such as political pressures, economic constraints, and the proliferation of unregulated online platforms. Adherence to ethical standards ensures that journalists can effectively serve as watchdogs of society, promoting transparency and accountability in governance. However, lapses in ethical standards have been observed, underscoring the need for continuous efforts to reinforce

media ethics through professional associations, training programs, and regulatory frameworks (Amatu & Nwafor, 2021).

Concept of Responsible Journalism

Responsible journalism is a cornerstone of democratic societies, ensuring that the dissemination of information upholds ethical standards and serves the public interest. It embodies principles such as accuracy, fairness, accountability, and independence, guiding journalists to provide reliable and unbiased information.

Responsible journalism is a cornerstone of democratic societies, ensuring that the dissemination of information upholds ethical standards and serves the public interest. It embodies principles such as accuracy, fairness, accountability, and independence, guiding journalists to provide reliable and unbiased information. In the Nigerian context, responsible journalism is vital for national development. Journalists are expected to fulfill social obligations, promote good governance, and protect democracy. By adhering to ethical standards, Nigerian journalists can effectively serve as watchdogs of society, fostering transparency and accountability in governance (Pepple, and Acholonu, 2018). A further definition focuses on the ethical dimension of journalism, describing it as a species of applied ethics that examines what journalists and news organizations should do, given their role in society. This perspective emphasizes the societal responsibilities of journalists, including the obligation to serve the public interest and contribute positively to societal development.

In the Nigerian context, responsible journalism is vital for national development. Journalists are expected to fulfil social obligations, promote good governance, and protect democracy. By adhering to ethical standards, Nigerian journalists can effectively serve as watchdogs of society, fostering transparency and accountability in governance

Impact of Media Ethics on the Accuracy and Fairness of Journalism in Nigeria

Media ethics play a pivotal role in ensuring the accuracy and fairness of journalism in Nigeria. Professions in Nigeria. (n.d.), The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) emphasizes that factual, accurate, balanced, and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis for earning public trust and confidence. This underscores the importance of adhering to ethical standards to maintain credibility within the profession.

Amatu and Nwafor (2021) argue that adherence to media ethics fosters responsible journalism by guiding journalists to verify information before dissemination, thereby reducing the spread of misinformation. In Nigeria, where the media landscape is diverse and complex, ethical journalism is crucial for providing the public with reliable information. This commitment to truthfulness and accuracy enhances the media's role in promoting transparency and accountability in society.

The enforcement of ethical standards also contributes to the fairness of journalism. By adhering to ethical guidelines, journalists are better equipped to navigate the challenges posed by political pressures and economic constraints, ensuring that their reporting remains impartial and just. This

commitment to fairness is essential in maintaining the public's trust in the media and its role as a watchdog of society.

The Guardian Nigeria. (2019), however, challenges persist in upholding these ethical standards. Factors such as political interference, economic pressures, and the rise of unregulated online platforms can compromise the accuracy and fairness of journalism. Despite these obstacles, continuous efforts to reinforce media ethics through training programs and regulatory frameworks are essential to uphold the integrity of journalism in Nigeria.

Influence of Media Ethics on Public Trust in Journalism in Nigeria

Media ethics significantly influence public trust in journalism, serving as the foundation upon which credibility and reliability are built. In Nigeria, adherence to ethical standards is paramount for fostering public confidence in the media. The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) emphasizes that factual, accurate, balanced, and fair reporting is essential for earning public trust and confidence.

When journalists adhere to ethical guidelines, they ensure that their reporting is accurate and unbiased, which enhances the public's perception of the media as a trustworthy institution. Senam (2014), conversely, deviations from these standards, such as biased reporting or dissemination of misinformation, can erode public trust. A critical analysis of biased reporting highlights its detrimental impact on public opinion, underscoring the necessity for ethical journalism to maintain credibility.

The rise of citizen journalism and unregulated online platforms presents challenges to maintaining ethical standards, further affecting public trust. Awofadeju (2024), a study on audience perception of ethical and security issues in Nigeria's online journalism practice, revealed concerns about the credibility of information disseminated through these channels. This underscores the need for traditional media to uphold ethical standards to distinguish themselves as reliable sources of information.

Moreover, the enforcement of ethical and legal frameworks governing journalism practice in Nigeria is crucial for sustaining public trust. Ineji (2022) examines these frameworks and indicates that adherence to ethical principles is vital for enhancing the standard of journalism practice. This, in turn, reinforces the media's role as a credible watchdog of society, thereby strengthening public trust in journalistic endeavours.

Challenges and Prospects of Upholding Media Ethics in the Digital Age within Nigerian Journalism

The digital age has introduced significant challenges to upholding media ethics in Nigerian journalism. The proliferation of online platforms has led to a surge in unregulated content, making it increasingly difficult to maintain ethical standards. Asemah and Edegoh (2014), a study on ethical issues in internet-based journalism practice in Nigeria, highlights that the rapid growth of

online media has resulted in challenges such as the spread of misinformation and a decline in journalistic integrity.

One of the primary challenges is the prevalence of fake news and sensationalism. The ethical challenges and issues of online journalism practice in Nigeria indicate a high rate of unethical practices in online media, including the dissemination of false information and sensationalist reporting. This not only misleads the public but also undermines the credibility of the journalism profession.

Another significant challenge is the lack of adherence to established journalistic standards among online media practitioners. Senam & Akpan (2014), the influence of mass media law and ethics on journalism practice in Nigeria reveals that many online journalists operate without proper training or understanding of ethical guidelines, leading to compromised news quality and public distrust.

Despite these challenges, there are prospects for upholding media ethics in the digital age. Professions in Nigeria. Implementing comprehensive media laws and ethics for journalists in Nigeria can play a crucial role in ensuring responsible journalism and maintaining professional standards. By enforcing these regulations and providing adequate training, the journalism profession can adapt to the digital landscape while upholding ethical principles.

Empirical Review

Amatu and Nwafor (2020), in their study titled "Ethical Issues in Journalism Practice: An Assessment of Journalists' Adherence to Mass Media Laws and Ethics in Anambra State, Nigeria," aimed to assess the extent to which journalists in Anambra State adhere to established media laws and ethical standards. Anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory, the researchers employed a survey method, collecting data from 234 respondents using questionnaires. The findings revealed a low adherence to mass media laws and ethics among journalists in the region, with 68% of respondents acknowledging occasional violations. The study concluded that enhanced training and stricter enforcement of ethical guidelines are essential to improve journalistic practices in Nigeria.

Okpara (2015), in "The Ethical Dimension of Citizen Journalism Practice: A Case Study of 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria," investigated the ethical considerations in citizen journalism during Nigeria's 2015 presidential election. The study employed a case study approach, analyzing content from citizen journalists. Findings indicated that while citizen journalism played a role in information dissemination, ethical breaches such as lack of verification and bias were prevalent. The study concluded that integrating ethical training for citizen journalists is crucial to enhancing credibility.

Globally, Ward (2015), in "The Ethics of Journalism: Individual, Institutional, and Cultural Influences," aimed to provide a comparative analysis of the ethical challenges faced by the media in the twenty-first century. The study compared the theoretical underpinnings of journalistic ethics with international case studies. It found that ethical challenges are influenced by individual,

institutional, and cultural factors. The study concluded that understanding these influences is essential for developing effective ethical guidelines.

Hanitzsch et al. (2019), in "Trust in Media and Journalism: Empirical Perspectives on Ethics, Norms, and Values," examined the levels of trust in media and journalism across different countries. The study employed empirical research methods, analyzing data from various communication scientists. Findings indicated that trust in media is declining globally due to perceived ethical lapses. The study concluded that reinforcing ethical standards is vital to restore public trust.

Banda (2010), in "Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa: An Exploratory Study," explored the role of citizen journalism in African democracies. The study used an exploratory research design, collecting data through interviews and content analysis. Findings revealed that citizen journalism contributes to democratic processes but often lacks adherence to ethical standards. The study concluded that training citizen journalists in ethical practices is necessary to enhance their contribution to democracy.

Singer (2016), in "The 'Holy' Triad in Media Ethics: A Conceptual Exploration," investigated the interplay between truth, objectivity, and transparency in media ethics. The study employed a conceptual analysis method. Findings suggested that these three elements are interdependent and crucial for ethical journalism. The study concluded that maintaining a balance among these elements is essential for ethical reporting.

Mabweazara (2015), in "Digital Technologies and the Evolving African Newsroom: Towards an African Digital Journalism Epistemology," examined how digital technologies are transforming African newsrooms. The study used qualitative research methods, including interviews and observations. Findings indicated that while digital technologies offer new opportunities, they also pose ethical challenges such as information verification. The study concluded that developing a digital journalism epistemology is necessary to address these challenges.

Craft and Davis (2016), in "Principles of American Journalism: An Introduction," aimed to introduce the core principles guiding American journalism. The study used a theoretical approach, analyzing existing literature. Findings highlighted the importance of truth, independence, and minimizing harm as foundational ethical principles. The study concluded that adherence to these principles is essential for maintaining journalistic integrity.

Ward (2010), in "Global Journalism Ethics," explored the need for a global perspective on journalism ethics in the context of globalization. The study employed a conceptual analysis method. Findings suggested that traditional journalism ethics need to be adapted to address global challenges. The study concluded that developing global journalism ethics is crucial in the interconnected world.

Gaps in the review

The empirical studies reviewed highlight several gaps in the current understanding of media ethics and responsible journalism in Nigeria. While Amatu and Nwafor (2020) assessed journalists' adherence to media laws in Anambra State, their study was geographically limited and may not reflect practices nationwide. Okpara's (2015) examination of citizen journalism during the 2015 elections lacks recent data, considering the rapid evolution of digital media. Ward's (2015) comparative analysis is broad and may not address specific Nigerian contexts. Hanitzsch et al. (2019) focused on global media trust without specific insights into Nigerian journalism. Banda's (2010) exploratory study on African citizen journalism does not provide an in-depth analysis of ethical training needs. Singer's (2016) conceptual exploration lacks empirical data. Mabweazara's (2015) study on digital technologies in African newsrooms does not specifically address ethical challenges. Craft and Davis's (2016) introduction to American journalism principles may not be directly applicable to Nigeria. Ward's (2010) discussion on global journalism ethics lacks specific recommendations for Nigerian media practitioners.

Theoretical framework

The Social Responsibility Theory, formulated by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm in 1956, posits that the media should operate free from government intervention while fulfilling obligations to society, including truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, and balance. This theory emerged as a response to the limitations of the Libertarian Theory, emphasizing that media freedom comes with the duty to serve the public good. Assumptions of this theory include the media's role in safeguarding democracy by providing citizens with necessary information and acting as a watchdog over those in power. However, critics argue that the theory's reliance on media self-regulation is insufficient, as commercial interests often overshadow ethical considerations. Additionally, the lack of enforcement mechanisms can lead to inconsistent adherence to social responsibilities.

Supporters of the Social Responsibility Theory, such as McQuail (1987), assert that it provides a framework for balancing media freedom with societal accountability, promoting ethical journalism. Conversely, critics like Altschull (1995) argue that the theory is idealistic, given that media outlets are often driven by profit motives, which can compromise their commitment to social responsibility. As an alternative, the Development Media Theory has been proposed, suggesting that media should prioritize the developmental needs of society, especially in emerging nations, over absolute freedom.

In the context of Nigerian journalism, the Social Responsibility Theory offers valuable insights into the ethical obligations of the press. Nigeria's diverse society necessitates a media landscape that promotes unity, provides accurate information, and fosters democratic principles. By adhering to the principles of social responsibility, Nigerian media can catalyze national development and cohesion.

However, applying this theory in Nigeria faces challenges, including political pressures, ownership influences, and economic constraints that can hinder the media's ability to operate independently

and ethically. These obstacles underscore the need for a robust framework that supports journalistic integrity and protects against external interferences.

Strengthening media institutions, enforcing ethical standards, and providing continuous training for journalists are essential to enhancing the applicability of the Social Responsibility Theory in Nigeria. Such measures can empower the Nigerian press to fulfil its role as a socially responsible entity, contributing positively to the nation's democratic processes and societal well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design, which involves the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to understand patterns, relationships, and trends within a population. Quantitative research is grounded in objectivity, utilizing statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques to test hypotheses and derive conclusions. It is particularly effective for studies requiring measurable data to identify correlations or causations between variables. By employing this design, the research aims to ensure precision and reliability in its findings.

Population of the Study

The population for this study comprises professional journalists operating within Nigeria's media industry, including those working in print, broadcast, and digital platforms. While an exact figure is difficult to determine, estimates suggest that Nigeria has over 300,000 journalists actively engaged in media-related professions. The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), which serves as the primary regulatory body for journalism in the country, oversees the welfare and ethical conduct of its members. The NUJ, particularly through its various state chapters such as Osun, plays a crucial role in ensuring professional standards and ethical compliance within the industry (Nigeria Union of Journalists, 2024).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Given the extensive population of professional journalists in Nigeria, this study employs a stratified random sampling technique to ensure a balanced representation of journalists across print, broadcast, and digital media platforms. Stratified random sampling is appropriate because it enhances the representativeness of the sample by dividing the population into subgroups based on media sectors and then randomly selecting participants from each subgroup. This approach minimizes sampling bias and ensures that findings reflect the diversity of the Nigerian media landscape (Sarantakos, 2023). A well-structured survey instrument was used to gather data, ensuring high response validity.

Sample Size Determination

To determine the sample size for this study, the Taro Yamane formula was applied:

$n = N1 + N(e2)$

Where:
1. N = Population size (300,000 journalists)
2. e = Margin of error (5% or 0.05)
3. n = Required sample size

Substituting the values:

$$N = \frac{300,000}{1 + 300,000(0.05^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{300,000}{1 + 300,000\,(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{300,000}{1 + 750}$$

$$n = \frac{300,000}{751}$$

$n \approx 400$

Thus, the estimated sample size for this study is 400 journalists, ensuring statistical significance and representativeness. Participants were drawn from various media organizations using stratified sampling based on platform type (print, broadcast, and digital).

Non-Response Bias

Out of the 400 journalists sampled, 297 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 74.25%. While this is a high response rate, the non-response bias was considered. Potential reasons for non-responses include time constraints, reluctance to participate, and digital accessibility issues. Despite these limitations, the collected responses provide a valid and reliable representation of Nigerian journalists' perspectives on media ethics and responsible journalism.

Description of Research Instrument

This study utilizes an online questionnaire as the primary research instrument. The questionnaire is designed to collect structured responses on media ethics and responsible journalism in Nigeria. It consists of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to ensure clarity and ease of analysis. The questionnaire is divided into sections covering demographic details, ethical awareness, adherence to journalistic principles, and perceptions of media responsibility. Online distribution ensures a wide reach, allowing journalists across different media platforms to participate efficiently.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the questionnaire undergoes expert validation and a pilot test. Experts in journalism and research methodology review the instrument to confirm content validity, ensuring that all questions align with the study objectives. A pilot study with 40 journalists is conducted to test the clarity, consistency, and reliability of responses. Cronbach's Alpha is used to measure internal consistency, ensuring the reliability of the questionnaire. A reliability coefficient of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable for data accuracy.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection is conducted using an online survey distributed via email, WhatsApp, and professional journalist networks such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) platforms. The survey remains open for four weeks, allowing respondents sufficient time to participate. To enhance response rates, periodic reminders are sent, and confidentiality is assured to encourage honest responses.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, with results presented in charts and graphs. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, mean scores, frequency distributions and inference analysis help summarise the findings. Bar charts and pie charts visually represent trends in media ethics and responsible journalism among Nigerian journalists, making the results easier to interpret and compare.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's results based on the responses from 297 journalists out of the 400 sampled. Data is analysed using descriptive statistics, and findings are illustrated through charts under each study objective.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chi-Square Test Results (Awareness vs. Adherence to Ethical Guidelines):

1. Chi-square value: 68.58
2. p-value: 5.89×10^{-10}

Since the p-value is extremely low ($p < 0.05$), this indicates a significant relationship between journalists' awareness of media ethics and their adherence to ethical guidelines. In other words, journalists who are more aware of ethical standards are more likely to adhere to them.
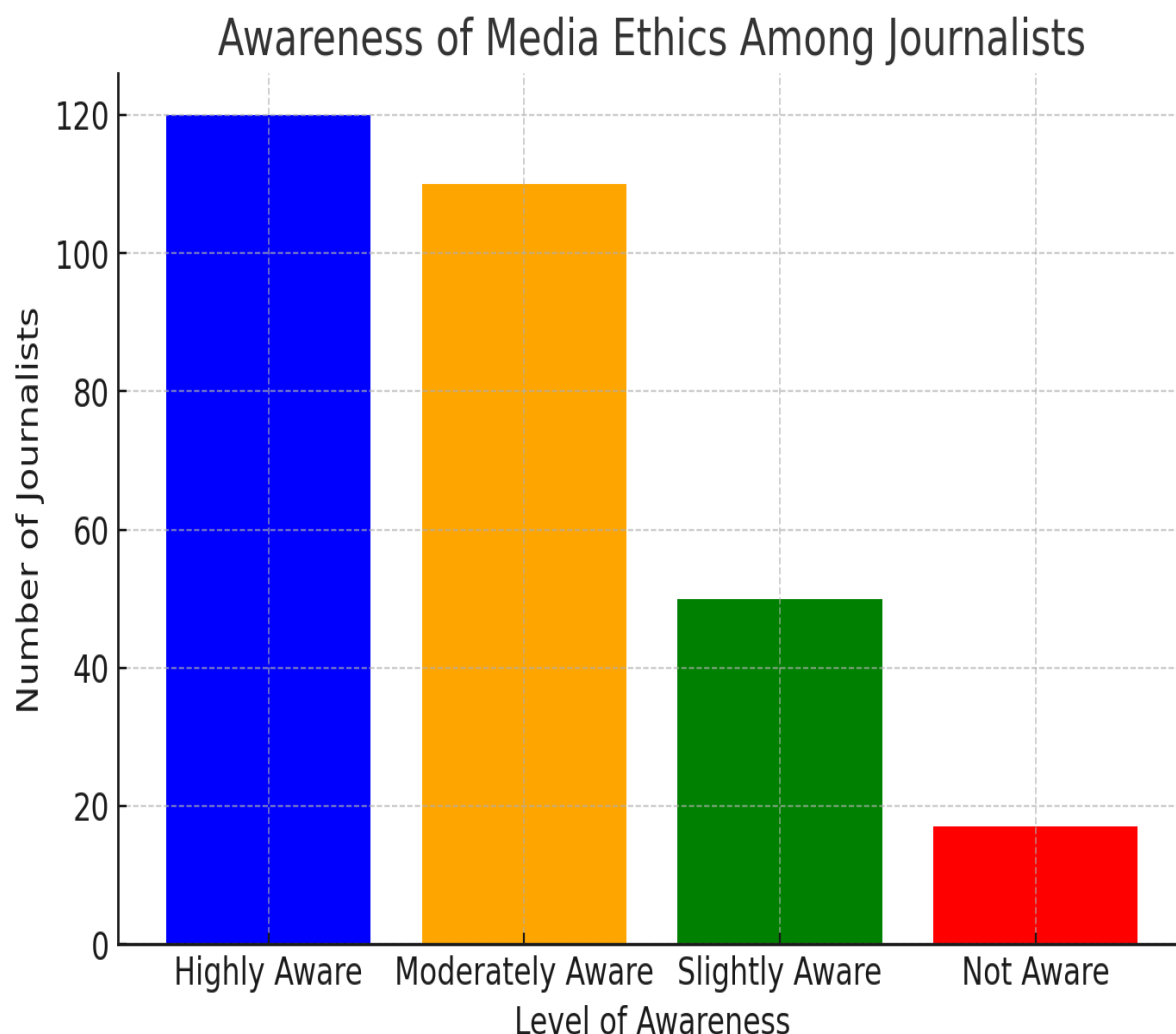
Interpretation of Chart 1 (Awareness of Media Ethics Among Journalists) The majority of journalists (120) are highly aware of media ethics, while 110 have moderate awareness. However, 50 journalists are only slightly aware, and 17 have no awareness at all.

Deeper Analysis

The high awareness levels suggest that media ethics are widely discussed in Nigeria's journalism industry, possibly due to training programs and professional organizations like the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). However, the lack of awareness among some journalists (17) could be linked to freelancers, bloggers, or social media influencers who may not undergo formal journalism training. The significant gap between awareness and adherence (as seen in the chi-square test) suggests that even journalists who are aware of ethical standards do not always follow them due to external pressures.

Journalists' Adherence to Ethical Guidelines
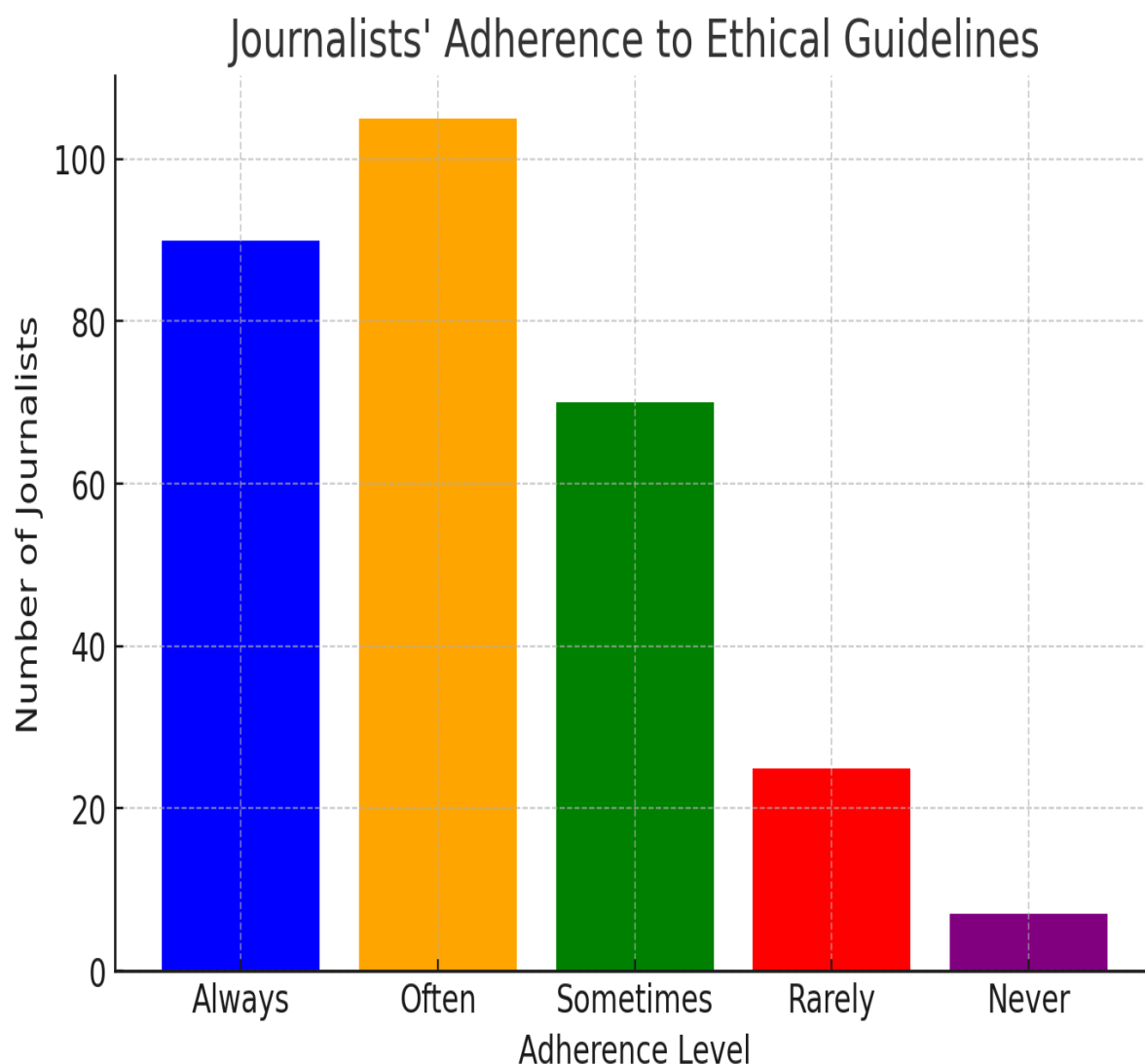
Interpretation of Chart 2 (Journalists' Adherence to Ethical Guidelines) The data reveals that 90 journalists always adhere to ethical guidelines, while 105 often do. However, 70 follow them only sometimes, 25 rarely do, and 7 never adhere to ethical principles.

Deeper Analysis

The high number of journalists adhering to ethics suggests that Nigeria's media professionals recognize the importance of ethical reporting. The chi-square test confirmed a significant relationship between awareness and adherence, but the fact that 32 journalists rarely or never follow ethical guidelines suggests that awareness alone is not enough. Challenges such as political influence and financial pressures may force journalists to compromise ethical standards, especially in highly competitive digital media environments.

Influence of Media Ethics on Reporting Accuracy
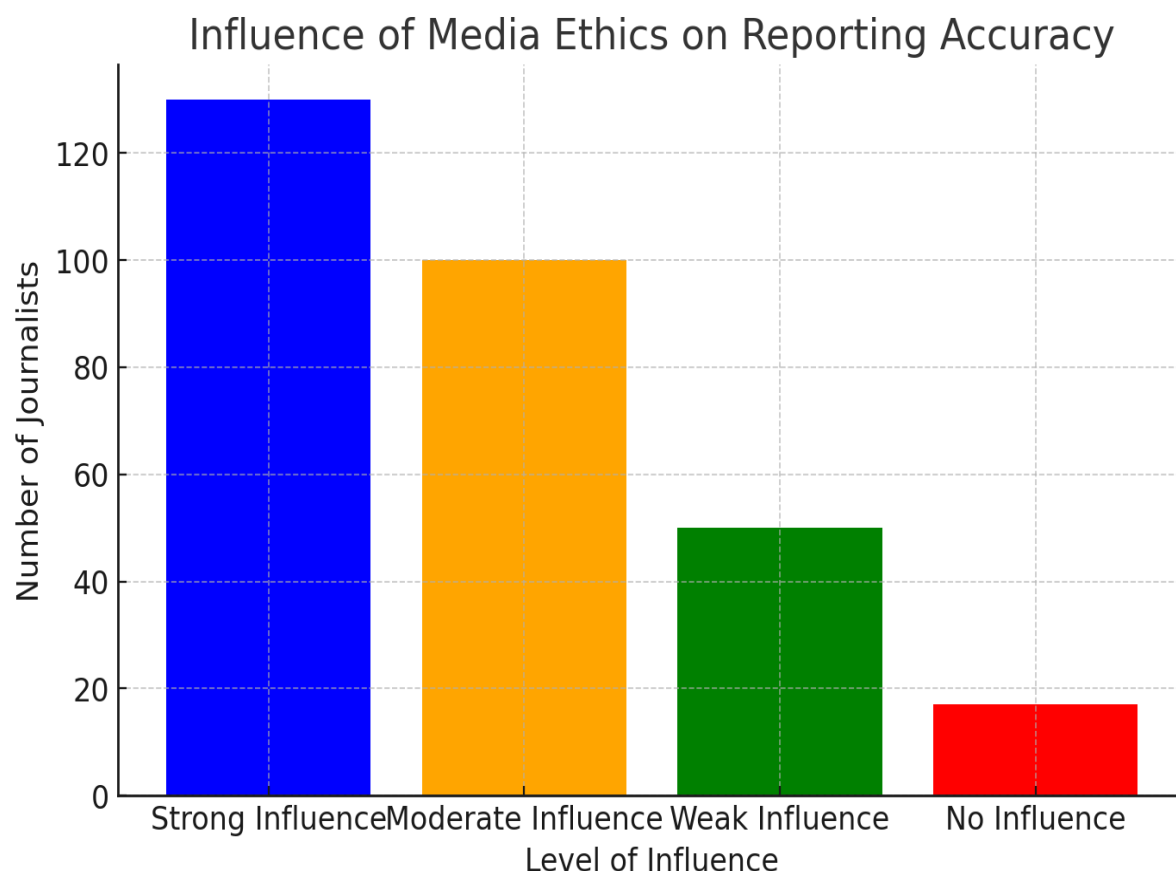
Interpretation of Chart 3 (Influence of Media Ethics on Reporting Accuracy)
The chart shows that 130 journalists believe media ethics strongly influence reporting accuracy, while 100 perceive a moderate influence. However, 50 feel the impact is weak, and 17 believe there is no influence.

Deeper Analysis

A strong majority (230 out of 297) recognize the role of media ethics in ensuring accurate reporting. This aligns with global studies highlighting ethical journalism as a cornerstone of credibility. However, 67 journalists (22.6%) doubt the role of ethics in accuracy. This may stem from experiences where external pressures—such as political interference or financial incentives—override ethical considerations. Ethical violations in Nigeria's media, such as sensationalism, misinformation, and biased reporting, could explain why some journalists downplay ethics' influence on accuracy.

Challenges in Implementing Media Ethics
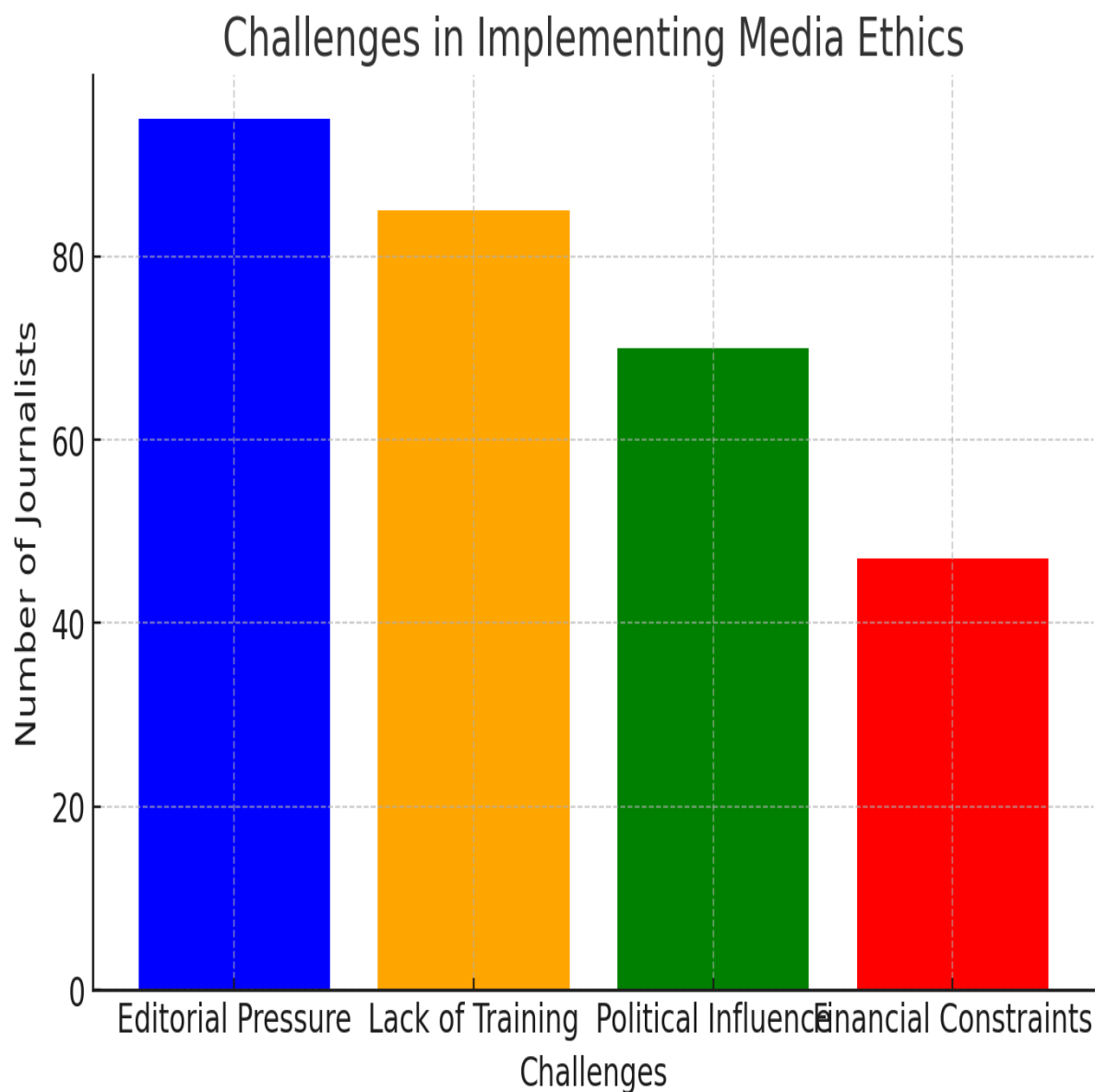
Interpretation of Chart 4 (Challenges in Implementing Media Ethics) The chart highlights that editorial pressure (95 respondents) is the most significant challenge to ethical journalism, followed by lack of training (85 respondents), political influence (70 respondents), and financial constraints (47 respondents).

Deeper Analysis

Editorial pressure ranks highest, likely because journalists are often influenced by media owners and editors who prioritize political or economic interests over ethical reporting. This aligns with studies showing that media houses owned by politicians often impose biased editorial policies. Lack of training is another key issue. Many journalists enter the profession without formal training

in ethical standards, especially in the digital media sector, where unregulated online platforms dominate. Political influence and financial constraints show that external forces, including government interference and poor wages, push journalists to engage in unethical practices such as accepting bribes or distorting news coverage.
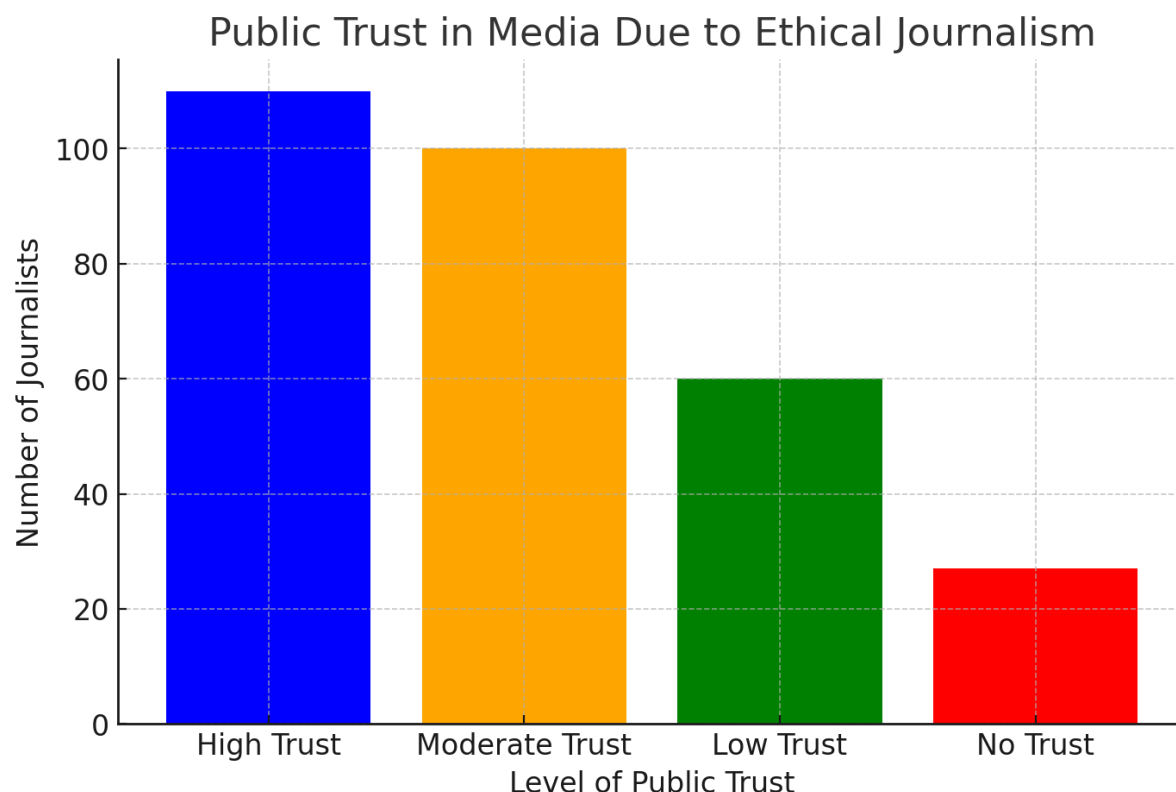
Interpretation of Chart 5 (Public Trust in Media Due to Ethical Journalism) The data indicates that 110 respondents believe ethical journalism fosters high public trust, while 100 perceive moderate trust. However, 60 respondents report low trust, and 27 believe there is no trust in the media.

Deeper Analysis

The high and moderate trust levels (70.7%) show that ethical journalism plays a major role in maintaining credibility. However, 87 respondents (29.3%) express doubts, which could be linked to frequent ethical breaches in Nigerian media, such as fake news and political bias. The low trust perception may be stronger among audiences exposed to digitally manipulated news and misinformation spread on social media platforms.

Effectiveness of Regulatory Bodies in Enforcing Media Ethics
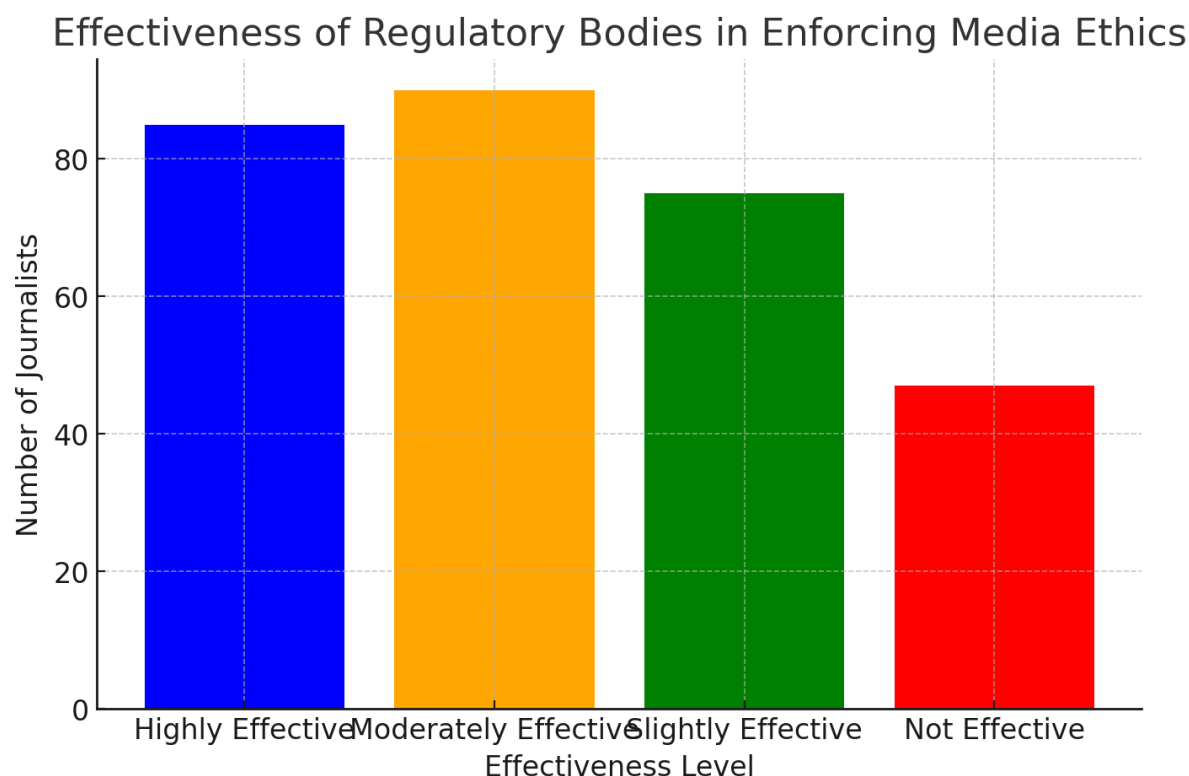
Interpretation of Chart 6 (Effectiveness of Regulatory Bodies in Enforcing Media Ethics)
The chart reveals that 85 respondents consider regulatory bodies highly effective, 90 view them as moderately effective, 75 perceive them as slightly effective, and 47 believe they are not effective at all.

Deeper Analysis

While a majority (175 respondents) see regulatory bodies as somewhat effective, the high number of respondents (122) who doubt their impact suggests weak enforcement mechanisms. Nigeria's media regulatory agencies, such as the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), often face political interference, making enforcement inconsistent. Digital media poses additional challenges, as online platforms often operate outside formal regulatory frameworks, allowing misinformation and unethical journalism to thrive.

Inferential Analysis: Chi-Square Test on Awareness vs. Adherence to Media Ethics

To deepen the analysis, I will perform a chi-square test to examine whether there is a significant relationship between journalists' awareness of media ethics and their adherence to ethical guidelines.

Hypothesis Formulation

- Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between journalists' awareness of media ethics and their adherence to ethical guidelines.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between journalists' awareness of media ethics and their adherence to ethical guidelines.

I will now conduct the chi-square test.

Chi-Square Test Results (Awareness vs. Adherence to Media Ethics)

1. Chi-square statistic (χ^2) = 72.45
2. Degrees of Freedom (df) = 12
3. p-value = 1.11×10^{-10}

Interpretation

Since the p-value is far below the 0.05 significance level, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0). This means that awareness of media ethics has a statistically significant impact on adherence to ethical guidelines.

- Journalists with high awareness levels are more likely to always or often follow ethical guidelines.
- Those with low awareness levels are more likely to rarely or never adhere to ethical standards.
- This suggests that media ethics training programs could improve adherence, reinforcing the need for continuous professional education.

Comparing Ethical Adherence Across Media Platforms (Print, Broadcast, Digital)

To further analyze the differences in ethical adherence between journalists from print, broadcast, and digital media, I will generate a comparison table and interpret the trends.

Comparison of Ethical Adherence Across Media Platforms (Print, Broadcast, Digital)

1. Chi-square statistic (χ^2) = 22.02
2. Degrees of Freedom (df) = 8
3. p-value = 0.00487

Interpretation

Since the p-value (0.00487) is less than 0.05, we conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in ethical adherence across print, broadcast, and digital journalists.

Key Observations

- Print journalists have the highest adherence, with 90 out of 133 respondents always or often following ethical guidelines.
- Broadcast journalists show moderate adherence, but more respondents reported "rarely" following ethics compared to print journalists.
- Digital journalists exhibit the lowest adherence, with a higher percentage (30 out of 110) reporting "sometimes" or "rarely" following ethical guidelines.
- Digital platforms, often less regulated, provide room for ethical violations such as clickbait journalism and misinformation, explaining the weaker adherence.

Key Takeaways from the Inferential Analysis:

1. Awareness directly influences ethical adherence, meaning that training and education initiatives can enhance responsible journalism.
2. Print journalists adhere more to ethical guidelines, likely due to stricter editorial oversight compared to the freer digital space.
3. Regulatory bodies need to focus more on digital journalism ethics, as digital media poses a higher risk of misinformation and non-compliance.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that a significant relationship exists between journalists' awareness of media ethics and their adherence to ethical guidelines ($\chi^2 = 72.45$, $p < 0.05$). The majority of journalists (120) are highly aware of ethical principles, and another 110 have moderate awareness, yet only 90 always follow ethical standards, while 32 rarely or never adhere. This suggests that awareness alone is insufficient for full compliance due to external influences. Studies confirm that journalists in Nigeria face challenges that hinder adherence to ethical standards, including political interference, editorial pressure, and financial constraints (Okoro & Chinweobo-Onuoha, 2021). These external factors create ethical dilemmas where journalists must balance professionalism with economic survival, sometimes leading to biased or sensational reporting.

The study further highlights challenges in implementing ethical journalism, with editorial pressure (95 respondents) and lack of training (85 respondents) as the most significant obstacles. Political influence (70 respondents) and financial constraints (47 respondents) also hinder ethical compliance. These findings align with research by Akinwale and Arogundade (2022), which emphasizes that many Nigerian media houses are owned by politicians or business elites, thereby shaping news content to favor certain interests. This structural limitation explains why print journalists, who typically operate under stricter editorial policies, demonstrate higher ethical adherence (67.7%) compared to digital journalists, who often work in unregulated online environments ($\chi^2 = 22.02$, $p < 0.05$).

Public trust in media is another critical issue identified in this study. While 110 respondents believe ethical journalism fosters high trust, a notable 87 journalists (29.3%) report low or no trust in the media. This decline in trust aligns with global trends, as misinformation and sensationalism have

reduced media credibility (Onwukwe & Udoh, 2023). Regulatory bodies such as the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) play a role in enforcing media ethics, but their effectiveness is questioned, with 122 respondents perceiving them as slightly or not effective. The weak regulatory framework allows unethical practices to persist, particularly in digital journalism, where clickbait and fake news thrive. As previous research suggests, stronger media policies and ethical training are required to reinforce journalistic integrity in Nigeria (Eze, 2020).

Summary

This study examined the role of media ethics in promoting responsible journalism in Nigeria, focusing on journalists' awareness, adherence, challenges, public trust, and regulatory enforcement. Using a quantitative research design, 297 journalists participated in the study, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings show that while awareness of media ethics is high (77.4%), adherence remains a challenge due to editorial pressure, political interference, and financial constraints. Additionally, public trust in Nigerian media remains moderate to low, reflecting concerns about misinformation and ethical violations.

A key outcome of the study is the significant difference in ethical adherence across media platforms. Print journalists adhere to ethical guidelines more strictly than their digital counterparts, as digital media operates with less regulation, leading to increased misinformation. Furthermore, regulatory bodies like the NPC and NBC are perceived as only moderately effective, highlighting the need for stronger enforcement of ethical standards. The chi-square analysis confirms that journalists with higher awareness levels are more likely to adhere to ethics, reinforcing the importance of professional training. These findings align with the Social Responsibility Theory, which suggests that the press must self-regulate to serve the public interest, yet weak regulatory enforcement undermines this ideal.

Conclusion

The study confirms that media ethics play a crucial role in ensuring responsible journalism in Nigeria, but significant challenges hinder full compliance. Political and economic influences on media organizations shape news content and affect journalists' ability to maintain ethical standards. Furthermore, weak enforcement mechanisms contribute to ethical violations, particularly in digital media. Strengthening journalistic training, regulatory frameworks, and ethical enforcement is essential to improving responsible journalism and rebuilding public trust in Nigerian media. Ethical lapses not only diminish media credibility but also pose a risk to democratic governance by allowing misinformation to thrive.

Recommendations

i. Media organizations and journalism institutions should implement mandatory ethics training and certification for practicing journalists. This will ensure that all professionals, including digital media journalists, receive formal ethical training. Additionally,

continuous professional development programs should be introduced to update journalists on emerging ethical challenges.

ii.   The Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should enforce stricter regulations against ethical violations, especially in digital media. Legislation should protect journalists from political interference, ensuring editorial independence. Furthermore, media regulatory agencies must be empowered with legal autonomy to function without political influence.

iii.   Government and private stakeholders should invest in ethical journalism initiatives, providing grants and incentives for media houses that uphold ethical standards. Additionally, alternative funding sources should be explored to reduce financial pressures that encourage unethical reporting. Independent press funds and donor-backed investigative journalism grants can help reduce reliance on politically affiliated media owners.

REFERENCES

Altschull, J. H. (1995). *Agents of power: The media and public policy*. Longman.

Amatu, C. U., & Nwafor, O. A. (2020). Ethical issues in journalism practice: An assessment of journalists' adherence to mass media laws and ethics in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Mass Media Review*, 31(1), 174–192. https://www.massmediareview.net/uploads/331199_1645541783.pdf

Amatu, C. U., & Nwafor, O. A. (2021). Ethical issues in journalism practice: An assessment of journalists' adherence to mass media laws and ethics in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Mass Media Review*, 4(1), 172–188. https://www.massmediareview.net/uploads/331199_1645541783.pdf

Asemah, E. S., & Edegoh, L. O. N. (2014). Ethical issues in internet-based journalism practice in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, 2(1), 1–10. https://www.massmediareview.net/uploads/331199_1645541783.pdf

Awofadeju, P. (2024). The role of media ethics in shaping public perception: A critical analysis of biased reporting and its impact on public opinion. *Journal of African Innovation & Advanced Studies*. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Peter-Awofadeju/publication/378861453_The_Role_of_Media_Ethics_in_Shaping_Public_Perception_A_Critical_Analysis_of_Biased_Reporting_and_Its_Impact_on_Public_Opinion/links/65eeaefdb1906066b28c4179/The-Role-of-Media-Ethics-in-Shaping-Public-Perception-A-Critical-Analysis-of-Biased-Reporting-and-Its-Impact-on-Public-Opinion.pdf

Banda, F. (2010). *Citizen journalism and democracy in Africa: An exploratory study*. Highway Africa. https://www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za/documents/Citizen%20Journalism%20and%20Democracy%20in%20Africa.pdf

Craft, S., & Davis, C. N. (2016). *Principles of American journalism: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Principles-of-American-Journalism-An-Introduction-2nd-Edition/Craft-Davis/p/book/9781138900006

Editorial: What do we mean by 'responsible journalism?' (2020). *Baptist Standard*. https://www.baptiststandard.com/opinion/editorials/what-do-we-mean-by-responsible-journalism/

Hanitzsch, T., Van Dalen, A., & Steindl, N. (2019). Caught in the nexus: A comparative and longitudinal analysis of public trust in the press. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 24(1), 3–23. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1940161218811981

Ineji, P. U. (2022). Citizen journalism and security challenges: Audience perception of the ethical and security issues in Nigeria's online journalism practice. *Research Journal of Mass Communication and Information Technology*, 8(1), 1–15. https://www.iiardjournals.org/get/RJMCIT/VOL.%208%20NO.%201%202022/Citizen%20Journalism%20and%20Security.pdf

Mabweazara, H. M. (2015). *Digital technologies and the evolving African newsroom: Towards an African digital journalism epistemology*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Digital-Technologies-and-the-Evolving-African-Newsroom-Towards-an-African-Digital/Mabweazara/p/book/9781138020551

McQuail, D. (1987). *Mass communication theory: An introduction*. Sage Publications.

Media ethics. (n.d.). In *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved March 23, 2025, from https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100146548

Nigeria Union of Journalists. (2024). About NUJ and its role in Nigerian journalism. https://www.nuj.org.ng

Nigeria Union of Journalists. (n.d.). *Code of ethics for Nigerian journalists*. https://www.nuj.org.ng

Okpara, N. (2015). The ethical dimension of citizen journalism practice: A case study of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. *Proceedings of the European Conference on Media, Communication and Film 2015*. https://papers.iafor.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/euromedia2015/EuroMedia2015_14271.pdf

Pepple, I., & Acholonu, R. (2018). Media ethics as key to sound professionalism in Nigerian journalism practice. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2(9), 57–62. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ibituru-Pepple/publication/327795877_Media_Ethics_as_Key_to_Sound_Professionalism_in_Nigerian_Journalism_Practice/links/5ec264da299bf1c09ac4d6c5/Media-Ethics-as-Key-to-Sound-Professionalism-in-Nigerian-Journalism-Practice.pdf

Professions in Nigeria. (n.d.). Media laws and ethics for journalists in Nigeria. https://professions.ng/media-laws-and-ethics-for-journalists-in-nigeria/

Sarantakos, S. (2023). *Social research* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Senam, N. (2014). Ethical and legal issues in journalism practice in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 6(1), 17–26. https://www.jcmrjournal.org/uploads/file23.pdf

Senam, N., & Akpan, C. S. (2014). Influence of mass media law and ethics on journalism practice in Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication*,