

An Analysis of Ethical Influences in Selected Kenyan Radio Programs

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the factors influencing media ethics in the selected radio shows in Kenya, specifically focusing on 'Patanisho Show' on Radio Jambo, 'Kesi Mashinani' on Radio Maisha, and 'Hali Iliyoy' on Milele FM. This research employed a qualitative approach to analyse content from these shows. This study employed a qualitative research design that included content analysis of programs on YouTube and in-depth interviews with key informants. The selection of programs for content analysis was purposive, while the participants in interviews were selected using snowball sampling. The interviewees comprised radio presenters, media ethics scholars, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) and regular listeners of the selected shows. The major factors influencing the application of media ethics among radio presenters were training in ethical standards and awareness of editorial policies, the pressure of the audience, their expectations, their level of engagement and the competitive pressure in the market and commercial obligations. This illustrates the pressure on radio shows to keep up with others in the market and to entertain the audience. The study findings highlight that while some progress has been made, significant work remains to be done to ensure consistent adherence to ethical standards across all media platforms. Therefore, the study recommends the control of the external factors and the need for media houses to establish independent editorial oversight committees to uphold ethical journalism.

Key terms: Journalist, mass media, programme, radio show, user-generated content.

INTRODUCTION

There has been growing concern over the conduct of certain journalists, particularly in their on-air practices. Instances of discussing topics without proper verification and sensationalising serious issues have surfaced, posing significant threats to the media's credibility, reliability, and overall integrity. Such behaviours ultimately erode the trust and confidence that the public places in journalism. Nahida (2014) underscored the pivotal role of media in society, emphasising its function as a primary vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge and as a platform for intercultural dialogue. However, the efficacy and impact of this critical role become compromised when public trust wavers due to perceived breaches in journalistic ethics.

Subsequently, recognising the importance of an independent and responsible media sector, the Constitution of Kenya (2010) explicitly safeguards the freedom and independence of all forms of media in Chapter 4, Article 34. This constitutional provision underscores the fundamental rights of journalists to operate without undue influence and censorship, ensuring a vibrant and pluralistic media landscape.

In many nations, the mass media have undergone liberalisation, privatisation, and commercialisation to strengthen their position as the primary institution of the public realm. This changing environment has brought about extreme competition in the industry, which has had negative consequences of overlooking media ethics to attract more subscribers. For instance, in India, Jhumur (2014) outlined the resultant effects of overlooking the accepted media standards by the Indian news media. According to Cohen (2012), every media association has the right to set the ethical values of its coverage. For example, one of the leading newspapers of the world (published from the United States), The New York Times, continues to print on its front page the claim, 'All the News That's Fit to Print', patented in 1896. Without going much into how far the newspaper has been successful in following its principles, it signifies that each media organisation has the authority to set its in-house ethical standards and guidelines to guide journalists in their work.

Independence stands as a cornerstone in the realm of media ethics. In the intricate tapestry of professional

journalism, both the US and UK have left indelible marks, emphasising objectivity as not merely a principle but a foundational ethos (Li & Chitty, 2017). This commitment to objectivity is not a mere aspiration but a rigorous practice that demands unwavering dedication from reporters and journalists. To uphold this ideal of objectivity, journalists are tasked with navigating a complex landscape of responsibilities and challenges. Beyond eyewitness testimonies, the verification of facts emerges as a critical step in the journalistic process (Graves & Amazeen, 2019). Moreover, the pursuit of objectivity extends beyond the gathering of facts; it permeates the very essence of how information is conveyed as journalists strive to present information in a balanced and unbiased manner, transcending personal biases and external pressures (Julia, 2012). In essence, objectivity remains a cornerstone tenet of professional journalism, serving not merely as a guideline but as a compass that directs the ethical and responsible practice of journalism (Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023).

According to the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK), there are 155 radio stations that have been assigned broadcast frequencies in Kenya; 37 of them are community radio stations (Githinji, 2021). Most of these stations are privately owned, and their editorial policy is semiautonomous when compared to the national broadcaster, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), which has recently expanded its brands in Nairobi and Mombasa, due to competition for audiences and the need to grow revenue. Its brands include KBC Radio *Taifa*, *Pwani FM*, *Kitwek FM*, *Mayienga FM*, *Ingo FM*, *Iftin FM*, *Nosim FM*, among others that also broadcast in local languages (MCK, 2014). Most of these radio stations use the Swahili language to broadcast. Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, commonly known as KBC *Ithaa ya Tifa*, was the first radio station to broadcast in Swahili, followed by independent media like Radio Citizen that opened the doors for more private radio stations to broadcast in the Swahili language (MCK, 2023). Due to the volatile nature of Kenyan politics at the time, and less freedom of speech during that era, Citizen Radio's programmes were seen to be a public awakening, and it earned a huge followership from the masses. The influence of Radio Citizen grew notable programmes like *Wembe wa Citizen*, which largely resonated with the people for calling out public servants who were

using their powers to oppress the commoners. Due to such programmes that influenced people to stand up for what they believed in, Radio Citizen was several times closed, presenters arrested and jailed, but once it got its footing, it grew to be a giant media staple in the country and region that resonates with the majority.

Later, several stations opened, including Radio Maisha, under the privately-owned Standard Media Group that has also grown to have several radio stations, including Spice FM and Vibe's Radio. Nation Media Group, known for its Nation newspaper circulation in the region, established a short-lived Q-FM and Nation FM, which later closed because they didn't meet the projected target in terms of revenue (MCK, 2014). After several years, Nation FM was revived and came back on air as Easy FM, but it still struggles to make any meaningful impact in society and to meet its targeted revenue to date. Another notable radio station, as per the following, is Radio Jambo, which broadcasts in Swahili, under the umbrella of Radio Free Africa. According to the Media Council of Kenya (2019), the status of the media reports, Radio Jambo, was among the most listened to Swahili radio stations in Kenya. Radio Citizen led with 19 per cent of the audience share, Radio *Jambo* 14 per cent, Radio *Maisha* 10 per cent, *Inooro* FM 5 per cent, and *Kameme* FM closed the 5 front runners with 5 per cent.

Competition has jeopardised the values of journalism's impartiality and objectivity. Increased rivalry for advertising money has created an environment in which radio stations are tempted to give paid news or advertorials masquerading as neutral reporting (Nyarko, 2023). It has also had the potential to cause compromised integrity of journalism and jeopardise the public's trust in the media, and raise issues about the lack of transparency and potential conflicts of interest. In the realm of journalism, ethical considerations play a pivotal role in shaping credibility, integrity, and public trust associated with media practices (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019).

Ethical challenges in journalism encompass a range of issues, including accuracy in reporting, objectivity, fairness, and respect for privacy (Firmstone, 2023). Most studies have concentrated on issues such as the sexualisation of advertisements, leaving a dearth of

factors influencing ethical practices within morning radio programming (MCK, 2014). Consequently, this study addresses this gap by analysing the factors influencing media ethics in the selected morning radio shows in Kenya. By focusing on this specific time slot, the study sought to shed light on the unique ethical dilemmas faced by journalists and media houses during morning broadcasts, contributing valuable insights to the broader discourse on media ethics in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Regulation and Ethics in Kenya

In the realm of media, ethics serves as a foundational framework that guides professionals in navigating the complex landscape of content creation, dissemination, and interaction with the public. These ethical principles are not arbitrary; rather, they are a meticulously crafted body of guidelines, rules, and regulations collaboratively developed by industry experts, often in conjunction with media houses and professionals, with the overarching aim of enhancing the media's capacity to serve the public interest effectively. According to Adenkunle et al. (2024), the terms "ethics" and "morality" are frequently used interchangeably, yet they possess distinct nuances that merit attention. While both concepts pertain to guiding principles that shape human behaviour and decision-making, morality is often understood as a broader framework encompassing a complex set of rules, values, and norms that influence or are intended to influence people's actions.

In contrast, ethics delves into the theoretical underpinnings of morality, offering a systematic analysis and interpretation of the principles that govern ethical conduct within a specific profession or context, such as journalism (Adenkunle et al., 2024). Understanding this distinction is crucial for media professionals as it provides a deeper insight into the philosophical foundations that underpin ethical practices and decision-making in the media industry. By acknowledging the intricate relationship between ethics and morality, media practitioners can foster a culture of responsible and accountable journalism, thereby strengthening the bond of trust and credibility with their audience. The role of ethics in mass communication and media cannot be overstated, serving as a critical framework that governs the

conduct and content of media organisations. As Tilak (2020) elucidated, ethics within the media sphere encompasses specific principles and standards that guide the responsible dissemination of information and content to the public. Balaji (2023) posited that the impact of mass media on society can be dichotomous, potentially leading to either beneficial or detrimental outcomes based on its utilisation. Despite frequent criticisms levied against the media for various shortcomings, the power to influence positive change lies squarely with the stakeholders who control communication channels.

Furthermore, the Committee of Editors and Press Complaints Commission (2012) underscored the pivotal role of media owners, corporate executives, and board members in effecting meaningful changes within media organisations. These key stakeholders wield significant influence over the policies, content, and ethical standards adopted by radio stations and media outlets at large. Furthermore, through proactive engagement and commitment, upholding ethical practices becomes essential for fostering a culture of responsible journalism and enhancing the media's credibility and trustworthiness (McFadden, 2019). Accordingly, the onus is on these decision-makers to prioritise ethical considerations and enact policies that prioritise the public interest while maintaining journalistic integrity and professionalism.

Ethics serves as a fundamental guiding principle that shapes the behaviour and direction of society at large. Within the context of media, particularly radio, which is widely consumed by most people in Kenya, upholding ethical standards is of paramount importance.

The responsibility for ensuring adherence to these standards falls primarily on the MCK, established through an act of parliament (Media Council Act, 2013). Among its diverse functions, the Council is tasked with monitoring and regulating compliance with media ethics, promoting and safeguarding the freedom and independence of the media, and setting standards for journalists, media practitioners, and media enterprises (Media Council Act, 2013). In alignment with its regulatory mandate, MCK has instituted a comprehensive code of conduct for journalism practice in the country. This code is

anchored on core principles of accuracy and fairness, emphasising the need for journalists to report on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, and unbiased manner (Media Council of Kenya Code of Conduct, 2013). Journalists are expected to uphold the highest standards of integrity and decency in their reporting, avoiding both real and perceived conflicts of interest, and demonstrating respect for the dignity and intelligence of both the audience and the subjects of news stories.

Furthermore, the code stipulates that journalists and media practitioners have a duty to actively promote adherence to these ethical standards, respond promptly to public concerns, investigate complaints, and correct errors in a timely manner (Tilak, 2020). Recognising their accountability to the public, the profession, and themselves, journalists are duty-bound to conduct themselves ethically, thereby fostering trust, credibility, and professionalism within the media industry (Media Council of Kenya Code of Conduct, 2013). A fair opportunity to reply to inaccuracies shall be given to or organisations when reasonably called for. If the request to correct inaccuracies in a story is in the form of a letter, the editor has the discretion to publish/ or broadcast it in full or in its abridged and edited version, particularly when it is too long, but the remainder shall be an effective reply to the allegations (MCK Code of Conduct, 2013). The summarised version of the reply shall not lose the core content. Obscenity, Taste and Tone in general, journalists shall not publish obscene or vulgar material unless such material contains news.

The intersection of media and commerce has long been a subject of debate, with concerns often raised about the potential impact of commercialisation on journalistic integrity and ethical standards. In the contemporary media landscape, the pursuit of profitability can sometimes overshadow the fundamental principles of journalism, leading to the prioritisation of sensationalised or controversial content to attract a larger audience.

Ismail (2021) highlights this tension, arguing that the commercial imperatives of the media industry can contribute to the devaluation of media ethics. Commercial journalism, driven promptly by the quest for profit, often prioritises sensational news items and

graphic imagery, potentially compromising its core function of providing accurate and informative content to the public. Building on this perspective, Adamu and Anzaku (2021) further emphasise the pressures faced by media organisations, particularly from advertisers, in their pursuit of revenue generation. While advertising serves as a crucial revenue stream for media outlets, it also introduces potential conflicts of interest that can undermine ethical practices. Therefore, it is essential for media organisations to strike a balance between commercial interests and ethical considerations. Just like any other professional environment, the media industry must adhere to ethically acceptable standards in its practices to maintain credibility, trust, and public confidence. By prioritising ethical integrity alongside commercial objectives, media organisations can uphold their responsibility to serve the public interest while also ensuring their financial sustainability.

The influence of media in shaping societal norms, values, and perceptions cannot be overstated. As Liao (2023) aptly points out, the power of media extends beyond mere content production and dissemination; it significantly impacts social, economic, and political landscapes, contributing to the globalisation of perspectives and cultures. Contrary to the traditional notion that physical transportation has been the primary driver of global interconnectedness, Liao emphasises that the media's pervasive reach and influence have played an instrumental role in transforming the world into a global village. Building on this understanding, Paul and Rai (2020) assert the pivotal role of mass media in society, highlighting its multifaceted impact on driving social change, shaping cultural tastes, influencing political discourse, and constructing public images.

However, the expansive influence of media also brings forth ethical considerations, particularly concerning the depiction of content deemed as obscene or vulgar. According to Pressman (2020), obscenity and vulgarity encompass words or behaviours that violate societal standards of good taste, often involving slang or references to body functions or parts. While perceptions of obscenity can vary among individuals based on cultural and societal norms, regulatory bodies worldwide bear the responsibility of classifying content as vulgar or obscene in alignment with

industry guidelines. These bodies determine the appropriateness of content for audience consumption and regulate its broadcast timing to safeguard public sensibilities. Kryston (2021) underscored the imperative for media organisations to uphold journalistic ethics and societal values by refraining from disseminating offensive content that contradicts prevailing social norms and values. Content that is considered indecent or shameful within a society should be avoided or appropriately contextualised to ensure responsible and ethical practices. In essence, while the media holds immense power to inform, educate, and entertain, it also carries the responsibility to act as a conscientious guardian of societal values and ethical standards.

The pervasive influence of mass media on society comes with significant responsibilities, particularly regarding the content's impact on societal values and moral fabric. Continuous airing of obscene content can undermine the foundational belief systems of a society, leading to the erosion of moral values and societal norms. Recognising the potential dangers posed by such practices, regulatory bodies like the Media Council of Kenya have taken proactive measures to address ethical concerns within the media landscape. Established under section 27 of the Media Council Act (2013), the Complaints Commission of the Media Council of Kenya plays a crucial role in mediating and adjudicating disputes related to ethical issues between the government, the public, and intra-media entities. This regulatory framework serves as a mechanism to uphold journalistic integrity and maintain a balance between freedom of expression and responsible reporting. However, concerns about the media's role in perpetuating Western socialisation, nudity, and obscenity persist. Olorunda (2022) attributes the proliferation of such content to the mass media, suggesting that it has contributed to the prevalence of immoral behaviour and impoliteness within communities. The continuous invasion of privacy, especially by popular press outlets, further exacerbates these concerns, leading to a loss of media credibility and the associated prestige.

In this context, Vargas-Hernández (2020) emphasises the importance of integrity in the media profession. Integrity, characterised by honesty, moral uprightness, and undivided commitment to ethical principles,

serves as a cornerstone of journalistic practice. Journalists are expected to adhere strictly to the ethics and code of conduct prescribed by regulatory bodies, ensuring that they maintain the highest standards of professionalism and uphold public trust. While mass media holds immense power to inform, educate, and influence societal perspectives, it also bears the responsibility to act ethically and responsibly. Regulatory frameworks, ethical guidelines, and a commitment to integrity are essential to ensure that the media fulfils its role as a credible and trustworthy source of information in society. Every journalist ought to seek the truth and report it the way it is, minimise harm while reporting or in the process of pursuing a story, be accountable, be sincere, truthful and accurate, impartial, and be fair and decent in all reporting. According to Ward (2019), journalists should be guided by the principle of 'doing no harm' and avoid any news reports that can stir conflict or lower the dignity of any individual member of society or a group, avoiding personalised opinions in the content. In that light, these ethics should be applied when journalists are on the daily news beat.

Much attention has been drawn to the journalists on a daily beat or on-air broadcasting; most often, they are criticised because of their visibility and proximity to the story sources. The role of the media managers is never put in the limelight, and yet they are the greatest influencers of the editorial content in media houses (Hitesh, 2023). Most dictate what happens and what will not. They should separate business and journalistic interests if the media house is really meant to serve the masses. They must not censor any news item and /or give others undue significance in pursuit of personal interests, like political or advertising, or in a bid to protect their businesses in general. The managers also must ensure that the contents of advertising are tasteful, accurate and reasonably harmless. All over the world, the media codes of ethics are almost similar because each country's media council drafts its code in conjunction with experts who use the other countries' codes as the blueprint in the media world. According to Ojala (2021), journalists are called to be neutral in all their undertakings; they must remain unscrupulously honest, make sure they avoid any form of conflict of interest by refusing any moral or material favour, presents, discounts and other services like trips for free, that are meant to influence

them for favourable coverage. They are also called to never use their status as journalists to obtain any form of personal advantage in return for clandestine advantage. A journalist should not sell their pen or use their profession for extortion.

The ethical principles that govern the practice of journalism serve as the cornerstone of responsible and credible reporting, ensuring that journalists uphold their commitment to informing the public with accuracy, fairness, and integrity. As highlighted by Belair-Gagnon et al. (2019), the primary responsibility of journalists is to serve their audience by providing timely and accurate information about events and developments within their society and beyond. These ethical guidelines not only serve as anchor points for journalists and media practitioners but also reflect the growing influence and impact of media on public opinion and discourse.

In today's digital age, where information is readily accessible and consumed at an unprecedented rate, the need for journalistic integrity and adherence to ethical standards has never been more crucial. As emphasised by Tilak (2020), journalists must prioritise their accountability to themselves and their audience above all else, ensuring that they do not compromise their professional ethics for any reason. This includes refraining from accepting assignments that contradict their ethical principles and maintaining confidentiality regarding their employers' internal affairs to preserve the organisation's reputation. Moreover, journalists play a vital role in advocating for press freedom, fighting against censorship, and promoting access to information, both private and public (Sulzberger, 2023). Collaboration and professionalism among journalists are equally essential, requiring them to support their colleagues, especially foreign correspondents facing challenges in unfamiliar territories. Accurate reporting, particularly when quoting statements or summarising lengthy declarations, is paramount to maintaining credibility and trust with the audience. Distorting or taking statements out of context can undermine the essence and meaning of the original message, leading to misinformation and public distrust. In summary, adherence to ethical principles and professional conduct is fundamental to the practice of journalism, ensuring that journalists fulfil their duty to inform the

public accurately, responsibly, and impartially. These guidelines not only guide journalists in their daily operations but also safeguard the credibility, integrity, and trustworthiness of the media industry.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Responsibility theory underscores the importance of comprehensive and unbiased reporting, requiring journalists to present all sides of a story and report truthfully to their audience (Siebert & Schramm, 1956). This principle resonates with the study's objective to analyse factors influencing media ethics in the content of selected radio shows in Kenya, focusing on whether these shows present a balanced view of societal issues or exhibit bias in their reporting. Moreover, the Social Responsibility theory advocates for the protection of confidential sources when necessary to obtain critical information, emphasising the journalist's moral duty to safeguard the identities of their sources (Uzuegbunam, 2013).

In conclusion, the Social Responsibility theory provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the ethical standards and societal responsibilities of journalists in the media industry. By employing this theory, the study aims to uncover potential causes of ethical violations in selected radio shows in Kenya. Through this multifaceted approach, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on media ethics and professionalism in Kenya, ultimately promoting responsible and ethical journalism for the benefit of society.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design that included content analysis and in-depth interviews. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing ethical behaviour (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select three popular morning radio shows from leading Kenyan radio stations on YouTube. The selection was guided by three criteria: (i) audience reach and popularity, (ii) language of broadcast (Swahili, English, or vernacular), and (iii) type of content (news, entertainment, political discussions, or social commentary). Due to convenience and resource limitations, the study adopted systematic sampling to select specific episodes. A fixed periodic interval of five was applied from 60 shows aired in one month, resulting in a sample of 12 programs for content analysis. For interviews, purposive sampling was also used to select 12 key informants, including industry experts and participants from the chosen programs. The interviewees comprised two radio presenters and producers, two media ethics scholars, two representatives from the Media Council of Kenya, and six regular listeners of the selected shows (2 from each station). The sampling of these participants adopted a snowball procedure, which is a non-probabilistic method relying on referrals.

Table 1: Sample Size for Content Analysis

| Radio station | Programme | Sample size (YouTube) |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Radio Jambo | <i>Patanisho</i> | 12 |
| Radio Maisha | <i>Kesi Mashinani</i> | 12 |
| Milele FM | <i>Hali ilivyo</i> | 12 |

The research used both primary and secondary data collection methods. These include an analysis of program recordings available online on YouTube channels of the selected radio stations. Primary data was collected through structured interviews among the key informants. The study interviewed radio presenters, representatives from the MCK, regular listeners, and media scholars. The interview content covered aspects influencing the ethical standards.

The qualitative exploration provided valuable insights into the complexities of ethical reporting practices within the Kenyan radio industry, shedding light on the underlying factors contributing to potential ethical violations and offering recommendations for fostering more responsible and ethical journalism. Thematic analysis was employed to extract qualitative data from interviews. Content analysis results were quantified where applicable, identifying recurring ethical

concerns. Comparative analysis was conducted across different stations and formats.

The researcher sought permission from the relevant authorities, starting from Egerton University, to obtain a license from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The researcher, while collecting data, ensured that participation was voluntary for the people who were willing to take part, making sure that there was informed consent where the researcher sought the agreement of the participant to be part of the research; the researcher also maintained the anonymity of the participants where they requested so, the researcher also made sure that the participants were not at risk of harassment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Media ethics guide journalists and presenters in making responsible decisions that promote truth, fairness, and accountability as outlined in the principles of media codes (MCK, 2014). However, key players in the industry highlighted several factors that influence how radio presenters in radio stations adhere to or deviate from ethical standards. It was also established that journalists contravened media laws and ethics because of several factors. Table 2 shows significant factors identified by participants, including cultural norms, competition, audience demands, ethical dilemmas, and ignorance of media laws and ethics.

Table 2: Major Ethical Issues among Radio Presenters

| S/N | Main themes/Factors | Frequency |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 1 | Training in the Code of Ethics/Editorial Policies | 3 |
| 2 | Editorial/Commercial Pressure/Market Competition | 2 |
| 3 | Audience influence/expectations and engagement/social media/trends/Entertainment pressure | 5 |
| 4 | Presenter Bias/presenters' subjectivity | 2 |
| 5 | Cultural Influence/Cultural and Social Norms | 2 |

Influence of Training in Ethical Issues among Radio Presenters

The findings indicate that one of the primary factors influencing media ethics among radio presenters is training in ethical standards and awareness of editorial policies. Some participants emphasised that breaches

in media ethics often stem from insufficient or inadequate training in ethical guidelines. The question below was used to derive responses on how training on ethical practices affects radio programs' media ethics.

Table 3: How Training on Ethical Practices Influences Media Ethics in Radio Programmes

| |
|--|
| Which primary factor influences radio presenters' adherence to media ethics in selected shows? Elaborate on the chosen factor. |
| Respondent 1: (MCK 1) |
| 1. "Ethical issues among the radio presenters are linked to the level of training on ethical practices and oversight among the presenters and the management." 2. "Presenters sometimes do not fully understand the ethical implications of their content." |
| Respondent 2: Media Scholar 1 |
| 3. "Ethical problems sometimes occur due to lack of relevant journalism training ethics and codes of practices" 4. "Presenters sometimes do not apply the set rules fully because of the lack of penalties from the authorities" |

While the training is deemed to influence ethical issues, most of the presenters have received training on media ethics. According to one interviewee

representing the Media Council of Kenya, the MCK trains journalists through in-house experts and outsourced trainers, depending on the subject matter,

such as psychological training or financial management. However, the frequency of ethics training on radio stations varies depending on the availability of funds. Ndonye and Ndisya (2014) posit that this financial constraint suggests that while the intention to maintain ethical standards is present, practical limitations may hinder consistent training efforts. This corroborates findings by Peel and Adagala (2017), who noted that regulatory bodies such as the MCK and the Communication Authority of Kenya were leading efforts to regulate content in the interests of decency.

Moreover, radio presenters revealed that all the morning radio journalists had received training on ethical standards and procedures. According to the presenters, every media house in Kenya has participated in ethics training sessions. However, implementing ethical practices as per the training and guidelines in daily programs under the current study remains a challenge. This highlights a gap in professional development and enforcement of editorial standards and explains the ethical violations within radio broadcasting. The study's findings indicated that the journalists generally demonstrated an awareness of ethical standards. However, the

actual implementation of these standards in day-to-day broadcasting remains inconsistent. This supports the assertion by Obonyo and Nyamboga (2011) that while many Kenyan journalists undergo basic training, not all presenters receive comprehensive education on media ethics. This gap leads to inconsistent application of ethical practices across stations. Presenters who lack formal training may inadvertently breach ethical codes, particularly regarding objectivity, privacy, and fairness. As a result, in interactive programs such as the three shows selected in the current study, untrained presenters may unintentionally allow biased narratives or compromise caller privacy (Peel & Adagala, 2017).

Audience Influence and Expectations

Another major factor influencing the media ethics among radio presenters is the pressure of the audience, their expectations and their level of engagement. Some presenters identified the pressure to dramatise the content to entertain the audience. Therefore, listener engagement via call-ins and social media significantly modifies content decisions, sometimes leading to ethical violations. The following question was asked to assess how audience expectations influence media ethics in radio programs.

Table 4: How does the audience influence the Ethical Practices among Presenters

| |
|--|
| Which primary factor influences radio presenters' adherence to media ethics in selected shows? Elaborate your reasoning |
| Respondent one: Presenter-RM |
| 1. <i>"Sometimes the need to keep the audience entertained makes us exaggerate or dramatise situations."</i> |
| Respondent two - Presenter-M FM |
| <i>"Audience engagement is key"</i> |
| <i>"We often tailor our content based on live feedback, which sometimes leads to spontaneous and less-controlled discussions."</i> |
| Radio Caller 1 RJ |
| <i>"Presenters modify their shows based on what the audience wants to hear"</i> |
| Radio Caller 1 RM |
| <i>"Social media influences some programs, for example, the Kesi Mashinani"</i> |
| <i>"Presenters tend to pick trending topics from online platforms."</i> |

This highlights that despite the importance of media laws and regulations in practising journalism, the audiences can influence adherence to media laws and ethics. Qualitative findings reveal several interconnected factors that significantly influence media ethics among radio presenters. The data

strongly suggests that audience dynamics are crucial in shaping media ethics. Multiple respondents highlight the pressure to keep audiences entertained, respond to live feedback and modify content based on audience preferences. This aligns with scholarly research on media performance, particularly the

"audience-driven journalism" concept explored by media scholars like McQuail (2010), who argue that audience expectations increasingly dictate media content strategies. Some radio presenters reported the tension between ethical storytelling and entertainment.

One participant noted:

"The need to keep the audience entertained makes us dramatise situations" [RM]

This reflects a critical observation in media ethics literature about the commodification of information and the blurring of lines between journalism and entertainment. Researchers like Bourdieu (2005) have extensively documented this phenomenon, describing it as the "infotainment" syndrome, where journalistic integrity is compromised for increased audience engagement. The mention of social media's impact, particularly in programs like "Kesi Mashinani", highlights the growing influence of digital platforms on traditional media content. This observation is supported by contemporary media studies emphasising the interconnectedness of traditional and social media ecosystems. This corroborates findings by

Rosenstiel (2014), who posits that social media has fundamentally transformed how news is sourced, produced, and consumed, creating a more dynamic and responsive media landscape.

The findings reveal a complex relationship between journalistic ethics, audience expectations, and pressures for commercial revenues and audiences. This highlights the growing challenges in an ethical environment where audience numbers and satisfaction compete with traditional journalistic values and social media. Accordingly, entertainment values can compromise ethical standards.

Commercial and Market Competition Pressure

Some participants reported the competitive pressure in the market and commercial obligations. This illustrates the pressure on radio shows to keep up with others in the market. The following question was used to derive the relationship between competition and the implementation of media ethics in selected radio stations.

Table 5: How does Market Pressure Influence Media Ethics among Radio Presenters

| |
|---|
| Which primary factor influences radio presenters' adherence to media ethics in selected shows? Elaborate your reasoning |
| Respondent 1: Presenter RJ |
| <i>"Competition in the industry is intense, and we are constantly trying to improve and remain relevant as other stations, and sometimes that means pushing boundaries.</i> |
| Respondent 2: MCK 2 |
| <i>Commercial pressure plays a huge role in their practices. Presenters often prioritise sensational content over ethical standards to boost ratings and attract advertisers.</i> |

The findings reveal two significant perspectives on how market pressure influences media ethics among radio presenters: industry competition and commercial pressure. This indicates that competitive pressure serves as a primary factor influencing ethical practices among radio presenters. The need to "remain relevant" in a crowded media landscape, the willingness to "push boundaries" to differentiate content and imply tension between ethical standards and competitive differentiation.

The second respondent explicitly identifies commercial pressures as a dominant influence, highlighting the prioritisation of ratings-driven content

over ethical considerations, the influence of advertising revenue on content decisions and the shift toward sensationalism as a commercial strategy. These findings align with McManus's Market-Driven Journalism Theory. McManus (1994) proposed that commercial news media operate simultaneously in multiple markets—the audience, advertising, and capital markets—creating inherent tensions with journalistic values. The qualitative findings directly reflect this theory, with respondents acknowledging how market considerations drive ethical compromises.

Croteau and Hoynes (2006) have extensively documented how market concentration and

commercialisation create systemic pressures on media ethics. The view of one respondent from the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) effectively corroborates with Croteau and Hoynes (2006) by noting how "commercial pressure plays a huge role" in ethical practices. Moreover, Plaisance (2013) has shown how competitive media environments can lead to a "race to the bottom" in ethical standards. The first respondent's acknowledgement of boundary-pushing behaviour as a competitive strategy confirms these scholarly observations.

These findings reveal a complex interplay between external market forces (competition, audience expectations, advertising revenue), internal professional standards (implied ethical boundaries being "pushed") and organisational imperatives

(ratings, relevance, commercial viability). This interplay creates what Hanitzsch Vos (2018) describes as "role conflict" for media practitioners, where professional values clash with institutional and market demands—precisely what both respondents articulate from different perspectives.

Cultural Influence and Social Norms

Cultural and social norms also shape the application of ethical practices among radio presenters. Due to cultural norms, some ethical practices among presenters are upheld. For example, the participants are guided by their cultural norms during the selected interactive programmes on the three radio stations. To ascertain the influence of culture on media ethics, the participants were asked the following questions.

Table 6: How does culture influence the Enforcement of Media Ethics in Radio Stations

| |
|---|
| What is the main factor influencing the adherence to media ethics among radio presenters during selected shows? Elaborate your reasoning |
| Caller 1 (M FM)] |
| <i>"In Hali ilivyo show, presenters sometimes push the boundaries when discussing sensitive topics, but also try to respect cultural values. Some aspects cannot be presented in the discussion due to cultural respect."</i> |
| Media Scholar 2 [MS 2] |
| 3. <i>"Cultural influences often have an impact on ethical practice"</i> |

The qualitative findings revealed that, although presenters sometimes push the boundaries when discussing sensitive topics, they also try to respect cultural values. For example, one respondent asserted: *"Some aspects cannot be presented in the discussion due to cultural respect."* [MS 2]

The central theme emerging from this interview is that cultural values and norms are a significant factor influencing media ethics adherence among radio presenters. This manifests in several ways. One is the cultural values as ethical constraints. The caller's observation that "some aspects cannot be presented in the discussion due to cultural respect" reveals how cultural considerations create boundaries around content selection and presentation. This suggests that presenters engage in self-censorship based on cultural sensitivities. Second is the culture as a means of upholding ethical practices. The statement that

presenters "sometimes push the boundaries when discussing sensitive topics, but they also try to respect cultural values" highlights the ongoing tension between creative expression and cultural adherence. This indicates a conscious balancing act performed by presenters. The media scholar's confirmation that "cultural influences often have an impact on ethical practice" provides academic validation of the phenomenon described by the caller, suggesting this is a recognised factor in media ethics scholarship. The findings support what Wasserman (2013) describes as the "cultural encoding" of media ethics, the process by which cultural values become embedded in ethical decision-making. The qualitative results provide a practical example of how this encoding manifests in daily radio production.

Christians et al. (2017) argued that media ethics cannot be understood through universal principles alone but must account for cultural contexts. These findings,

therefore, support this theoretical position, showing how cultural considerations actively shape ethical boundaries in radio broadcasting. This is also linked to Clifford Christians' Communitarian Ethics. Christians' communitarian ethics framework emphasises how community values should inform media practice. The qualitative data directly exemplifies this theory, with the caller describing how presenters moderate content based on community cultural standards. The concept of cultural proximity suggests that media content is filtered through cultural relevance and acceptability (Christians et al., 2017). The caller's reference to cultural respect aligns with this theoretical perspective.

Shoemaker and Vos's (2009) work on gatekeeping theory includes cultural forces as a key influence on content selection. The comment that "some aspects cannot be presented" exemplifies cultural gatekeeping in practice. While previous analyses have highlighted market pressures and audience expectations as factors influencing media ethics, this finding suggests that cultural considerations operate as an independent, potentially counterbalancing factor. Unlike market pressures that might push presenters toward sensationalism, cultural considerations often function as a restraining force, establishing boundaries that presenters are reluctant to cross, regardless of potential audience or commercial benefits. This cultural dimension of media ethics suggests that universal ethical codes may be insufficient without cultural contextualisation. Radio presenters require cultural competency alongside technical skills, and presenters regularly negotiate tensions between debates and cultural respect.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The primary factor influencing adherence to media ethics among radio presenters is the commercial imperatives driven by market competition. The findings demonstrate that market pressures manifest as competitive anxiety (the need to remain

relevant) and commercial prioritisation (privileging sensationalism for ratings and advertising). These findings suggest that media ethics in Kenyan radio shows are often compromised due to inadequate adherence to professional standards, regulatory challenges, and the influence of social biases. The findings revealed a multifaceted ethical environment where journalists and media organisations constantly navigated between maintaining ethical standards and responding to external pressures, including those from media ownership, audience demands, and financial constraints. The key factors influencing ethical adherence were the effectiveness of ethics training provided to journalists and competitive pressure. While the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) tried to train journalists on ethical standards, the study revealed that these training sessions were often irregular and dependent on available funding. Interviews with key stakeholders highlighted the challenges of maintaining consistent ethics training, especially for non-traditional media personalities such as comedians and untrained individuals who became prominent figures in morning radio shows.

Recommendations: The study's findings suggest that while some progress has been made, significant work remains to ensure consistent adherence to ethical standards across all media platforms. There is a need to control the external factors that influence the application of media ethics in radio stations. This can be achieved by developing more explicit ethical guidelines for presenters by all media houses, providing media ethics training that addresses digital-age challenges and creating mechanisms for balancing audience engagement with journalistic integrity. The current study highlighted that the audience influences the application of media ethics among radio presenters due to their demand and engagement. Future research could investigate how Kenyan audiences perceive ethical breaches in journalism and what they expect from the media regarding ethical standards.

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