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Assessing Media Ethics in Selected Morning Radio Shows in Kenya

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Abstract

This study examines ethical challenges faced by journalists in Kenyan morning radio programs, focusing on '*Patanisho Show*' on Radio Jambo, '*Kesi Mashinani*' on Radio Maisha, and '*Hali Ilivyo*' on Milele FM. Guided by social responsibility theory, this study employed a qualitative research design that included content analysis of programs on YouTube and in-depth interviews with key informants. Purposive sampling was used in program selection for content analysis, while participants in interviews were selected using snowball sampling. The interviewees comprised radio presenters, media ethics scholars, the Media Council of Kenya and regular listeners of selected shows. Findings addressed themes of accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and respect for privacy. Findings showed that Radio Jambo's "*Patanisho*" had the highest rate of accuracy issues among presenters (32%). In the principle of objectivity, Milele FM "*Hali ilivyo*" recorded the highest number of breaches, with 23 instances (47%). Fairness was moderately observed across all programs. Privacy issues were identified with *the Patanisho* program exhibiting the highest number of privacy breaches (30%). Major factors influencing the application of media ethics among radio presenters were training in ethical standards and awareness of editorial policies, pressure of the audience, their expectations and level of engagement, and competitive pressure in the market and commercial obligations. 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. Study recommends control of external factors and the need for media houses to establish independent editorial oversight committees to enhance adherence to internal editorial guidelines and uphold ethical journalism.

Key words: Editorial policy, ethical challenges, ethics violation, gender mainstreaming, radio show.



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INTRODUCTION

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 comprehensive analysis on ethical practices within morning radio programming (MCK, 2014). This study, therefore, addresses this gap by examining the ethical challenges manifested in 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.

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.

Further bolstering this commitment to journalistic integrity, the Constitution also instituted the Media Council of Kenya (MCK). Tasked with the mandate of setting media standards and ensuring compliance, the MCK plays a pivotal role in upholding the ethical standards of journalism in the country (MCK, 2023). Subsequently, the MCK enforces the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya, thereby serving as a regulatory body that strives to uphold the balance between freedom of expression and responsible journalism.

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 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 Julie (2012), every media association has the opportunity 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).

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 absence of transparency and the possibility of 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). While many may intuitively understand the importance of ethical conduct in journalism, it is essential to explicitly discuss and categorise these ethical issues based on the four guiding principles commonly recognised in the field: accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and respect for privacy (Firmstone, 2023).

Firstly, accuracy stands as a fundamental pillar of ethical journalism. Journalists have a responsibility to diligently verify information and facts before disseminating them to the public (Githinji, 2021). Errors in reporting not only compromise the integrity of the journalist but also erode the trustworthiness of the media outlet. Inaccurate reporting can lead to misinformation, thereby influencing public opinion and potentially shaping societal perspectives based on false premises. Secondly, objectivity served as a cornerstone tenet of ethical journalism. Journalists are expected to maintain a neutral stance, refraining from allowing personal biases, prejudices, or external pressures to influence their reporting (Gerken, 2019). Objectivity demands a commitment to presenting information in a balanced and unbiased manner, ensuring that diverse viewpoints are represented, and that the audience gains a thorough understanding of the issues at hand.

Fairness constituted another vital ethical principle in journalism. It required journalists to treat all subjects with impartiality and equity, avoiding any form of discrimination or favouritism (Gerken, 2019). Fair reporting entails providing all parties involved in a story an opportunity to share their perspectives, thereby ensuring a well-rounded and inclusive portrayal of events. Lastly, respect for privacy underscores the ethical obligation of journalists to safeguard the personal information and dignity of individuals featured in their reporting (Firmstone, 2023). Intrusive inquiries into an individual's private life without consent are generally deemed unacceptable unless there is a compelling public interest that warrants such scrutiny (Hitesh, 2023). Journalists must exercise discretion and sensitivity when navigating the delicate balance between public interest and personal privacy, ensuring their reporting respects the rights and dignity of individuals. In conclusion, these

four guiding principles, accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and respect for privacy, serve as the ethical compass that guides journalists in their pursuit of responsible and ethical journalism. By adhering to these principles, journalists can uphold the highest standards of integrity, foster public trust, and contribute to the maintenance of a vibrant and informed democratic society.

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 required to maintain 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 our 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 material containing obscene or vulgar content 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 crucial for media organisations to balance commercial interests with 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 widespread impact 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 structures, ethical principles, and a dedication 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, 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 theirs 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 guide the field 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

Furthermore, 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 (Hutchins Commission, 1947; Siebert et al., 1956). This principle resonates with the study's objective to scrutinise 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. The study analysed the extent to which these radio programs adhere to the tenets of balanced and truthful reporting as stipulated by the Media Council of Kenya. By doing so, it aims to shed light on the broader implications of media bias and its impact on public perception and understanding of critical issues. This will contribute to the discourse on journalistic integrity and accuracy in the Kenyan media landscape, offering insights into potential areas for improvement and reform (Media Council of Kenya, 2023). 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 & Udeze, 2013). This ethical guideline is crucial in maintaining the trust and credibility of journalists and their respective media outlets.

The study assessed whether the radio shows under investigation respect this principle by safeguarding the anonymity of their sources when required. Furthermore, it explored the potential challenges and ethical dilemmas faced by journalists in balancing the need for transparency with the obligation to safeguard sensitive information. This aspect of the theory guided the study in examining the extent to which the selected radio shows prioritise source confidentiality while gathering and presenting news stories, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of journalistic practices and ethical considerations in the Kenyan media industry.

Additionally, the Social Responsibility theory promotes the avoidance of content that is offensive, vulgar, or indecent to the public, emphasising the need for journalists to align with media regulatory guidelines (Uzuegbunam & Udeze, 2013). This principle highlights the responsibility of media organisations to respect cultural sensitivity and uphold community standards in their content production and dissemination. The study scrutinised the content of the selected radio shows to determine whether they adhere to these guidelines by refraining from broadcasting offensive or indecent material. Additionally, it explored the perceptions and preferences of the audience regarding content decency and sensitivity, providing valuable insights into the alignment between media content and societal expectations. By doing so, the study assessed the extent to which these radio programs uphold the principles of decency and respect for their audience, as mandated by the Media Council of Kenya and other relevant regulatory bodies.

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 ethical violations in selected radio

shows in Kenya, assess the influence of commercial pressures on journalistic decisions, and examine adherence to journalistic principles such as balanced reporting, source protection, and content decency. 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 qualitative study utilised a mixed-methods research design, combining content analysis and in-depth interviews to investigate ethical practices in Kenyan radio broadcasting. The approach enabled a thorough examination of professional standards, ethical influences, and internal editorial policies. Purposive sampling selected three prominent morning radio shows from leading Kenyan stations on YouTube: Radio Jambo's *Patanisho*, Radio Maisha's *Kesi Mashinani*, and Milele FM's *Hali Ilivyo*, based on audience reach, broadcast language (Swahili, English, or vernacular), and content type (news, entertainment, or social commentary). Systematic sampling with a fixed interval of five was applied to 60 episodes aired over one month, resulting in 12 programs for content analysis.

For interviews, purposive and snowball sampling identified 12 key informants: two presenters, two producers, two media ethics scholars, two Media Council of Kenya representatives, and six regular listeners (two per station). Primary data were collected via structured interviews with informants, focusing on ethical standards and editorial policies. Secondary data involved content analysis of the 12 episodes over three months, assessing adherence to journalistic ethics (accuracy, objectivity, fairness, privacy) and identifying bias, sensationalism, or hate speech. Thematic analysis was employed to extract recurring themes and ethical dilemmas from both interview and broadcast data. Comparative analysis across stations and formats highlighted variations in ethical practices, offering insights into ethical challenges and recommendations for enhancing journalistic standards.

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

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic Analysis of Ethical Issues in Selected Morning Radio Shows in Kenya

The thematic analysis delves into the ethical challenges encountered by popular morning radio shows in Kenya, namely "*Patanisho*" on Radio Jambo, "*Kesi Mashinani*" on Radio Maisha, and "*Hali ilivyo*" on Milele FM. These shows, known for engaging with real-life issues such as personal disputes, legal cases, and social problems, present a unique opportunity to assess how Kenyan media navigates ethical journalism principles. Using the thematic analysis framework of Braun & Clarke (2006), the recurring themes of accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and respect for privacy were identified and evaluated in terms of their adherence to or deviation from established ethical standards.

Theme One: Accuracy

Accuracy is a cornerstone of ethical journalism, ensuring that all broadcast information is factual, verified, and truthful. In the analysis, accuracy emerged as a key theme, highlighting moments where presenters either upheld or compromised this standard. The findings showed that Radio Jambo's "*Patanisho*" had the highest rate of accuracy issues among presenters, accounting for 32 per cent of the total (Table 1). On Radio Maisha's "*Kesi Mashinani*", presenters recorded only one accuracy issue, whereas callers accounted for three instances (16%). For Milele FM's "*Hali ilivyo*", presenters had 4 cases of inaccuracy (21%). Within the content analysis of 12 episodes of each programme, there were 19 instances where accuracy was compromised, and presenters comprised 10 instances, while callers comprised nine instances. Radio Jambo had the most issues (8), followed by Milele FM (7) and Radio Maisha (4).

Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Instances of Accuracy Compromised

Radio station	Programme	Participants	Frequency	Per cent
Radio Jambo	<i>Patanisho</i>	Presenters	6	32%
		Callers	2	11%
Radio Maisha	<i>Kesi Mashinani</i>	Presenters	1	5%
		Callers	3	16%
Milele FM	<i>Hali ilivyo</i>	Presenters	4	21%
		Callers	3	16%
Total			19	100%

In "*Patanisho*," a show that helps reconcile broken relationships, accuracy was sometimes overlooked due to the desired outcome of emotional engagement (Simiyu & Mberia, 2017). This suggests that accuracy is a concern with presenters on Radio Jambo's "*Patanisho*" program, while Radio Maisha's presenters maintained better accuracy standards. However, Radio Maisha had more caller-related accuracy issues than the other stations. A notable example is an episode where a wife accused her husband of cheating, saying:

Excerpt 1: "*Ulipotea kwa siku tatu bila kusema ulikuwa wapi na uliporudi, ulikuwa na harufu ya pombe.*" The presenter confronted

the husband with exaggerated statements like, "*Sasa ndugu yangu, ni ukweli kuwa ulitoka nje ya ndoa na kumuumiza mke wako*"?

Despite lacking concrete evidence, the host escalated the situation, making conclusions that were based purely on one side of the story. The compromise of accuracy for sensationalism detracts from the journalistic responsibility to provide balanced, verified information. Similarly, in "*Kesi Mashinani*," accuracy is sometimes sacrificed to dramatise rural court cases. In an episode involving a land dispute, the presenter declared:

Excerpt 2: *"Bila shaka huyu mzee ana haki ya shamba hili,"*

Before hearing the opposing party's argument, the case, which required careful consideration of legal documents and testimonies, was hastily judged based on incomplete information. The rush to present a conclusive narrative distorts the truth, misleads the public, and undermines the credibility of the program and such embellishments not only fuel misinformation but also damage trust in the media (Mutsvairo & Harris, 2020).

While there was a notable case of inaccuracy (21%) among the presenters in other programmes, such as Milele FM's "Hali ilivyo", there were also episodes in which the presenters upheld accuracy. For instance, in "Hali ilivyo," a guest discussed challenges in the Kenyan healthcare system, with the presenter asking detailed follow-up questions like:

Excerpt 3: *"Tunaweza kuthibitisha kuwa hali ya hospitali za umma inaendelea kudhoofika kwa sababu ya ukosefu wa vifaa muhimu kama vile vitanda na dawa?"*

The line of questioning showed a clear commitment to accuracy, as the presenter sought to clarify the claims by asking for verifiable evidence. However, these instances were fewer compared to those where accuracy was compromised.

Theme Two: Objectivity

Table 3 presents an analysis of breaches in the principle of objectivity among presenters in three selected radio programs. Objectivity, a core principle in ethical journalism, requires presenters to report facts impartially, free from personal bias or emotional influence (Ward, 2019). However, the data reveals significant deviations from this standard across all three programs.

Table 3: Analysis of Instances of Breach of the Principle of Objectivity among Presenters in Three Selected Programmes

Radio station	Programme	Participant	Frequency	Per cent
Radio Jambo	<i>Patanisho</i>	Presenters	17	35%
Radio Maisha	<i>Kesi Mashinani</i>	Presenters	9	18%
Milele FM	<i>Hali ilivyo</i>	Presenters	23	47%
Total			49	100%

Milele FM "Hali ilivyo" recorded the highest number of breaches, with 23 instances (47%). The high frequency suggests that presenters often allowed personal biases or subjective interpretations to influence their narratives. There was an equally high percentage of upholding the principle of objectivity in "In Hali ilivyo". One notable case in the content analysis was during a discussion about youth unemployment, where the presenter ensured that government representatives and affected youth were given equal airtime to explain their perspectives.

Excerpt 4: *"Tutawapa nafasi wote, serikali ina jukumu la kujibu, lakini vijana nao wana haki ya kuelezea changamoto zao."*

The commitment to equal representation demonstrated an effort to maintain objectivity and offers listeners a more balanced understanding of the issue. The frequent breach of this principle of objectivity could be attributed to the nature of the program, focusing on emotive or controversial topics, which, as Day (2006) notes, can

challenge journalists' ability to maintain objectivity. However, McQuail (2010) posits that the breaches of objectivity may reflect weaker editorial oversight or a format that encourages presenter opinions over fact-based reporting. Radio Jambo's "Patanisho" recorded 17 instances (35%) of objectivity breaches. In this programme, objectivity was often compromised when the presenters expressed personal opinions in a dispute involving two parties. For instance, a woman complained about her husband's neglect in one episode, stating:

Excerpt 5: *"Ananipuuza kabisa, hata hajali mimi na Watoto." The presenter was noted to take the side of the wife in his response, "Wanaume siku hizi wanapoteza majukumu yao, wanajiona tu"*

Without seeking the husband's perspective. Such remarks reflect a lack of balance, as the presenter's personal beliefs overshadow the need for objective reporting. The bias potentially alienates listeners who expect fairness in

the representation of all parties involved in the discussions.

Given that the program mediates personal disputes, the high breach rate could stem from the emotionally charged content that often tempts presenters to offer subjective judgments. This aligns with Day's (2006) argument that maintaining journalistic objectivity becomes particularly challenging in formats involving interpersonal conflicts, as presenters may feel compelled to express empathy or take sides.

Radio Maisha "*Kesi Mashinani*" represented the lowest number of breaches of the objectivity principle, with only nine instances (18%) of breaches. However, a few instances were identified to have compromised the principle of objectivity. For instance, when discussing a politically sensitive case about land grabbing, the presenter remarked:

Excerpt 6: "*Hii ni kesi ya kawaida sana nchini, lakini wanasiasa wanahusika sana.*"

The generalised statement implied blame on politicians without providing specific evidence or hearing their side of the story. Such a commentary reflects a bias that feeds public resentment toward specific groups rather than offering a balanced view of the facts. However, there were also instances where objectivity was upheld. The low number of cases of breach of the principle of objectivity in "*Kesi mashinani*" can be attributed to the station's highest adherence to objectivity. It may also be linked to the program's structured format or investigative content. Often, these inherently demand factual accuracy and impartiality. This corroborates with Rosenstiel (2014), who posits that such formats typically benefit from stricter editorial guidelines. Consequently, investigative journalism often maintains higher objectivity standards due to its reliance on verifiable data and balanced perspectives.

As seen in other scholarships (Rosenstiel, 2014; Peel & Adagala, 2017; Nassanga, 2008; Ward, 2019), the principle of objectivity is central to ethical journalism and is deeply rooted in the notion that the media should serve as an unbiased conduit of information (Ward, 2019). The observed breaches highlight the complex dynamics that challenge objectivity in practice, especially in interactive or emotion-driven programs.

Nassanga (2008), in a study in Uganda, posits that effective media regulation and media education are crucial for ensuring ethical codes are implemented in Uganda's emerging new media culture of radio talk shows and public debates. Rosenstiel (2014) asserts that while objectivity remains a guiding ideal, its application varies depending on the format and nature of the program. In shows like "*Patanisho*" and "*Hali ilivyo*", where presenters navigate personal narratives, complete objectivity becomes difficult, leading to increased breaches.

Peel and Adagala (2017) point out that journalists often prioritise relatability over strict adherence to facts, compromising objectivity in human-interest stories or emotionally charged content. Therefore, McQuail (2010) emphasises that editorial policies play a pivotal role in safeguarding objectivity. Programs with rigorous editorial oversight, like "*Kesi Mashinani*", are better equipped to maintain balance and impartiality, reducing the likelihood of breaches. Peel and Adagala (2017) further explain that audience expectations influence presenter behaviour. In entertainment-oriented or reality-based formats, audiences may favour subjective commentary, prompting presenters to deviate from objective reporting in favour of engagement and entertainment.

Theme Three: Fairness

Fairness entails giving equitable coverage to all sides of a story and ensuring no party is unfairly marginalised. The theme of fairness was particularly relevant in cases where presenters had to navigate contentious or emotional issues, ensuring that every individual or group was treated justly. Table 4 shows the thematic analysis of fairness across three selected radio programs, highlighting how presenters and callers adhered to journalistic standards of impartiality, balance, and equity. There were 46 instances where fairness was upheld, with presenters contributing the majority (31 instances, 67%) and callers accounting for 15 instances (33%). The varying levels of fairness observed in the programs suggest that while presenters play a critical role in upholding ethical principles, callers influence the overall content balance. This dual responsibility aligns with the *Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics* (SPJ, 2014), which calls for journalists and media platforms to ensure fairness, accuracy, and impartiality in all broadcast

Table 4: Shows the Instances Where Fairness Prevailed in the Thematic Analysis of Three Selected Programmes

Radio station	Programme	Participant	Frequency	Percent
Radio Jambo	Patanisho	Presenters	10	22%
		Callers	4	9%
Radio Maisha	Kesi Mashinani	Presenters	15	33%
		Callers	7	15%
Milele FM	Hali ilivyo	Presenters	6	13%
		Callers	4	9%
Total			46	100%

Radio Maisha’s “Kesi Mashinani” emerged as the program with the highest adherence to fairness principles (48%, presenters 33% and 15% callers). This suggests a structured approach to content delivery, likely reflecting rigorous editorial policies that promote impartiality in storytelling, particularly in legal or conflict-related narratives (McQuail, 2010). This finding aligns with Bertrand (2018), who emphasises that structured program formats with clear ethical guidelines are more likely to uphold fairness.

Despite the high adherence to principles of fairness, it was noted that “Kesi Mashinani” also exhibits breaches of fairness, particularly in legal disputes where one party was given significantly more airtime or portrayed in a more favourable light. For example, in a case involving a dispute over inheritance, the presenter said:

Excerpt 7: “Mzee huyu amefanyiwa ukatili na familia yake.”

Before giving the other party a chance to explain their side. The immediate portrayal of the elderly man as a victim skewed the narrative and compromised the fairness of the program. Such instances highlight the challenges faced by these shows in maintaining an even-handed approach to contentious issues.

Radio Jambo’s “Patanisho” also recorded higher instances where fairness was observed from presenters and callers (31%). In “Patanisho,” fairness was upheld in episodes where both parties in a dispute were allowed to present their side of the story. For instance, in a case where a man accused his wife of abandoning their children, the presenter asked the wife:

Excerpts 8: “Wewe unasema huna hatia, lakini kwa nini uliondoka bila kuacha maelezo yoyote?”

The question gave her the opportunity to explain her actions, ensuring that both sides were fairly represented. Overall, there was no notable case of breach of fairness in *Patanisho* in the content analysed. Additionally, the show generally maintains balance in such disputes, even if some episodes leaned toward sensationalism. This was supported by (McQuail, 2010), who reported that the presenters in “Patanisho” were generally fair given the emotive nature of the programme, which often involves mediating sensitive personal disputes, leading to challenges in maintaining neutrality.

Milele FM’s “Hali ilivyo” recorded the lowest instances of fairness among presenters (13%). Particularly, fairness was compromised in “Hali ilivyo,” in episodes where the presenter aligned with one side of a discussion. During a debate about gender roles in marriage, the presenter commented:

Excerpt 9: “Wanaume wanakandamizwa sana siku hizi, hata wanawake wanapewa kila kitu.”

The statement minimised the experiences of women, suggesting that men were the primary victims of societal changes. The lack of fair representation for women in the discussion demonstrated a clear bias, ultimately undermining the fairness of the show. This suggests potential inconsistencies in the presenters' approach to fairness, possibly influenced by the program's format or the nature of the topics discussed. Such disparities highlight how program design can impact ethical compliance, supporting Couldry and Hepp’s (2018) view that media structures influence the performance of ethical journalism.

The principle of fairness in journalism ensures that diverse perspectives are represented and no party is unjustly favoured (Rosenstiel, 2014). As Day (2006) notes, fairness is especially critical in interactive media

formats, where the spontaneity of live discussions can sometimes lead to biased or unbalanced coverage. In support of the findings in the current study, McQuail (2010) highlights that fairness is often contingent upon the editorial framework guiding a program, with structured formats (like “*Kesi Mashinani*”) better positioned to maintain balance. Meanwhile, Coudry and Hepp (2018) argue that fairness also depends on the interaction between media producers and audiences, where active audience participation can either enhance or compromise ethical standards.

The varying levels of fairness observed in the programs suggest that while presenters play a critical role in upholding ethical principles, callers also influence the overall balance of content. This dual responsibility aligns with the *Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics* (SPJ, 2014), which calls for both journalists and

media platforms to actively ensure fairness, accuracy, and impartiality in all broadcasts.

Theme 4: Respect for Privacy

Privacy entails respecting individuals' privacy, especially when handling sensitive personal information. The theme emerged strongly in the analysis, as the selected radio shows often dealt with deeply personal matters. The balance between public interest and respect for individuals' privacy was not always maintained, with significant lapses observed. The results of content analysis on the theme of privacy across three selected radio programs reveal varying degrees of adherence to ethical standards concerning participants' privacy. The findings indicate that presenters were the primary source of privacy violations, accounting for 70 per cent of the cases (7 out of 10).

Table 5: Thematic Analysis of Respect for Privacy in Three Selected Programmes on Radio Stations

Radio station	Programme	Participant	Frequency	Percent
Radio Jambo	<i>Patanisho</i>	Presenters	3	30%
		Callers	1	10%
Radio Maisha	<i>Kesi Mashinani</i>	Presenters	2	20%
		Callers	0	0%
Milele FM	<i>Hali ilivyo</i>	Presenters	2	20%
		Callers	2	20%
Total			10	100%

Radio Jambo’s “*Patanisho*” exhibited the highest number of privacy breaches, with presenters responsible for 30 per cent of the total violations. In “*Patanisho*,” the violation of privacy was particularly evident in cases where intimate details of individuals' lives were broadcast without explicit consent. For example, in one episode, a wife revealed:

Excerpt 10: “*Mume wangu amekuwa akiongea na wanawake wengine, na nimeona meseji kwenye simu yake.*”

The presenter, rather than ensuring that such personal details remained private, amplified the issue by asking:

Excerpt 11: “*Na hizo meseji, zinasema nini haswa? Hebu utuambie ili tupate picha kamili.*”

The encouragement to disclose even more intimate information violated the ethical principle of privacy, as it exposed personal conflicts to public scrutiny without

safeguarding the dignity of the individuals involved. This suggests a pattern where both presenters and callers may not fully observe privacy guidelines, possibly due to the program’s interactive and emotionally charged nature, which often involves personal disputes being aired publicly (McQuail, 2010).

Radio Maisha’s “*Kesi Mashinani*” showed fewer privacy concerns, with presenters accounting for 20 per cent of the total issues and no violations from callers. This could reflect a more structured editorial approach or stricter content moderation, aligning with McQuail’s (2010) assertion that editorial policies significantly influence ethical compliance in the media. However, there were a few instances where privacy was breached in “*Kesi Mashinani*,” particularly in discussions over legal cases involving families. In one episode, a land dispute spiralled into a public airing of family secrets, with the presenter asking:

Excerpt 12: "Kwa nini haukuwaambia ndugu zako kuhusu mikataba hii yote? Je, ulikuwa na sababu ya kuficha?"

Such probing questions about private family affairs were deemed to be in breach of the parties' privacy, as they revealed information that was not pertinent to the public interest but served to sensationalise the story.

Milele FM's "Hali ilivyo" demonstrated a balanced distribution of privacy breaches between presenters and callers, each contributing 20 per cent of the total cases. This balance suggests that both parties might equally influence the ethical standing of the program, highlighting the challenge of managing live content where spontaneous disclosures are standard (Bertrand, 2018). Overall, the "Hali ilivyo" of Milele FM demonstrated a better commitment to privacy in some cases. When discussing health-related issues, the presenter took care to anonymise personal details.

Excerpt 13 "Tutasikia kuhusu mgonjwa wa saratani ambaye tutamuita Bwana X."

The host said during one episode. The approach ensured that sensitive information was discussed without compromising the individual's privacy. The program's adherence to privacy in this instance contrasts with the more intrusive practices observed in other shows.

According to the *Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics* (SPJ, 2014), respecting privacy is a critical obligation for broadcasters, particularly in formats that involve public participation. However, the interactive programs covered in this study, such as call-in shows, often blur these ethical lines, leading to unintended privacy violations. This corroborates the findings by Couldry and Hepp (2018), who reported that the participatory nature of modern media increases the likelihood of ethical breaches as audiences engage more directly with content creation. The findings support the

notion that radio presenters play a pivotal role in either upholding or compromising privacy standards, echoing the observations by Rosenstiel (2014), who emphasises the journalist's duty to minimise harm while delivering news and entertainment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Market competition significantly influences adherence to media ethics among Kenyan radio presenters, driven by competitive anxiety and a focus on sensationalism for ratings and advertising revenue. This often compromises ethical standards, leading to breaches in fairness, objectivity, accuracy, and privacy. Program format, content type, and editorial oversight critically shape presenters' ethical adherence. The study reveals a complex ethical landscape where journalists navigate tensions between professional standards and external pressures, including media ownership, audience expectations, and financial constraints. Inadequate and irregular ethics training, often limited by funding, further undermines ethical consistency, particularly for non-traditional media personalities like comedians. The Media Council of Kenya's efforts to provide training are hampered by these challenges. This study contributes to media ethics literature by offering a detailed analysis of ethical issues specific to Kenyan morning radio shows, an underexplored area, highlighting the interplay of commercial pressures and ethical lapses.

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. 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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