



Article History  
 Received: 2025.10.01  
 Accepted: 2025.11.01  
 Published: 2025.12.01

Issue no: 01 | Vol no: 06 | December 2025: 68-77

## An Assessment of Internal Editorial Guidelines in Selected Radio Programs in Kenya

Daniel Kipchumba Ng'etich <sup>(1)</sup>

Josephine Khaemba <sup>(2)</sup>

Hillary Masaya Chakava <sup>(3)</sup>

(1,2) Egerton University, Kenya; (3) Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya.

Main Author's Email: [mwanahabaribora@gmail.com](mailto:mwanahabaribora@gmail.com)

### Cite this article in APA

Ng'etich, D. K., Khaemba, J., & Chakava, H. M. (2025). An Assessment of internal editorial guidelines in selected radio programs in Kenya. *Editon consortium journal of media communication studies*, 6(1), 68-77. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjmcs.v6i1.661>

### Abstract

This study evaluates the internal editorial guidelines of the selected radio shows in Kenyan radio programs, specifically focusing on 'Patanisho Show' on Radio Jambo, 'Kesi Mashinani' on Radio Maisha, and 'Hali Iivyo' 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 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 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. The study recommends the control of the 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, mass media, media training, radio show.



This article is distributed under the license of a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). It is permitted to be used, reproduced and distributed in line with Editon Consortium Publishing guidelines.



### 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 Julie (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.

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 Cooperation (KBC), which has recently expanded its brands in Nairobi and Mombasa, due to competition for audiences and the need to grow revenue.

This study provides critical gaps in existing literature, thus fostering further academic inquiry into media ethics and regulatory frameworks. Additionally, media managers can leverage the study's insights to enhance internal editorial policies. This can enhance more structured and ethical programming that ultimately benefits audiences by promoting responsible journalism and content integrity.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **In-House Editorial Policies and their Role in Enhancing Ethical Journalism**

An editorial policy serves as a foundational set of guidelines that a news outlet adheres to, encapsulating the ideals and principles of the organisation. It serves as a compass for editors, aiding them in making consistent and informed decisions in their day-to-day operations. Recognising the paramount importance of content consistency, media houses strive to uphold their editorial policies, despite facing a myriad of internal and external influences that can pose challenges to maintaining such consistency (Van Drunen & Fechner, 2022). Whether a media organisation boasts a small or large staff, and regardless of their level of expertise, the development and implementation of robust editorial policies are instrumental in ensuring the calibre and uniformity of content. Such consistency not only enhances the quality of content but also fosters increased engagement, interaction, and efficiency in content creation processes.

Editorial guidelines play a pivotal role in ensuring that every piece of content produced aligns with the established standards in terms of voice, tone, grammatical usage, and format (Van Drunen, 2021). These guidelines serve as a rulebook for the content team, providing them with clear directives on how to effectively achieve specified goals and objectives (Bodo, 2019). A well-defined content governance plan must invariably incorporate sound editorial policies to facilitate seamless content creation and management (Van Drunen, 2021). While the establishment of editorial guidelines necessitates an initial time investment, the benefits accrued in terms of streamlining content creation

processes and minimising disruptions quickly justify this investment.

It is essential to differentiate between organisational tone and voice, as they represent distinct concepts in content creation. The tone pertains to the way a message is conveyed, reflecting the emotional nuance and attitude embedded within the content (Lai, 2024). Conversely, the voice encapsulates the overarching identity and persona that the organisation seeks to project (Van Drunen, 2021). Balancing and harmonising voice and tone across content can be challenging, requiring clear communication and understanding among team members to ensure consistency and alignment with the organisation's identity and objectives.

EVN Report underscores the importance of journalistic integrity by urging its journalists to abstain from disseminating content that is false, misleading, or distorted, including headlines that lack substantiation from corresponding text (EVN Report Editorial Guidelines, 2021). The outlet emphasises the principles of fairness by incorporating relevant background information, contextual details, and ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives in published stories to maintain balance and comprehensiveness (EVN Report, 2021).

Additionally, EVN Report's editorial policy encompasses key tenets such as objectivity, transparency, accountability, and humanity, which guide journalists in their reporting endeavours (EVN, 2021). On the other hand, Radio New Zealand (RNZ), a prominent media outlet based in New Zealand, prioritises the dissemination of accurate and reliable information to its audience (Radio New Zealand Editorial Policies, 2022). RNZ's editorial guidelines mandate adherence to stringent standards of accuracy, ensuring that content is devoid of any false or misleading information (Radio New Zealand, 2022). Furthermore, RNZ emphasises the importance of providing comprehensive context and treating topics, events, individuals, institutions, and audiences with fairness, ethics, and balance (Radio New Zealand Editorial Policies, 2022). The outlet acknowledges the sensitivity surrounding certain topics such as violence, sex, bereavement, trauma, privacy, gender, religion, and taste, and emphasises the necessity of handling such subjects with utmost care and respect for others' rights.

EVN Report prioritises journalistic integrity and ethical reporting by urging its journalists to refrain from disseminating false, misleading, or distorted content, including headlines lacking substantiation from corresponding text (EVN Report Editorial Guidelines, 2021). The outlet emphasises the principles of fairness by incorporating relevant background information, contextual details, and ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives in published stories to maintain balance and comprehensiveness (EVN Report, 2021). Additionally, EVN Report's editorial policy encompasses key tenets such as objectivity, transparency, accountability, and humanity, which guide journalists in their reporting endeavours (EVN, 2021). Moreover, EVN (2021) promotes the right to reply when discussions centre on allegations of wrongdoing or devastating criticisms of individuals or institutions, while also allowing the use of songs with potentially controversial content, provided they are approached with careful consideration and sensitivity.

Radio New Zealand (RNZ), a prominent media outlet based in New Zealand, prioritises the dissemination of accurate and reliable information to its audience (RNZ, 2022). RNZ's editorial guidelines mandate adherence to stringent standards of accuracy, ensuring that content is devoid of any false or misleading information (RNZ, 2022). Furthermore, RNZ (2022) emphasised the importance of providing comprehensive context and treating topics, events, individuals, institutions, and audiences with fairness, ethics, and balance. The outlet acknowledges the sensitivity surrounding certain topics such as violence, sex, bereavement, trauma, privacy, gender, religion, and taste, and emphasises the necessity of handling such subjects with utmost care and respect for others' rights (RNZ, 2022). RNZ also alerted the audience in advance of potentially sensitive content and refrains from advocating for any specific religion or belief system while publishing religious-related content.

Southern Cross Austereo, an Australian regional radio network founded in 2004, expanded into television programming in 2007 after purchasing Southern Cross Broadcasting. The network provides high-quality service to its audience and communities, ensuring compliance with legal obligations regarding local content quotas for its commercial radio licensing areas (Southern Cross Austereo Corporate Policy, 2020). The editorial policy of Southern Cross Austereo emphasises the delivery of honest and impartial reporting free from political, racial,

commercial, or other bias (Southern Cross Austereo, 2020). Journalists are encouraged to stay updated on copyright rules, avoid plagiarism, and have a comprehensive understanding of media law and the Commercial Radio Code of Conduct (Southern Cross Austereo Corporate Policy, 2020). Additionally, the policy instructs journalists to seek advice from Southern Cross Austereo's legal counsel on reporting court cases and other sensitive legal issues, as well as presenting locally important and breaking news in alignment with the network's brand (Southern Cross Austereo, 2020). Journalists are expected to exercise editorial freedom responsibly, acknowledge and rectify any mistakes promptly, and ensure that editorial content is distinguishable from advertising, with commercial interests not influencing content selection.

Southern Cross Austereo (SCA), an Australian regional radio network, prioritises responsible and respectful coverage, especially when dealing with sensitive or graphic news events, recognising the potential presence of younger audiences during live programming (Southern Cross Austereo Editorial Policy, 2020). The network's editorial policy underscores the importance of being sensitive and respectful while covering distressing or graphic news events and emphasises the significance of being aware of times when children and teenagers are more likely to be exposed to live broadcasts (Southern Cross Austereo, 2020). Furthermore, SCA's policy addresses objections from listeners, allowing them to voice their concerns regarding news or content through an online complaint form available on each of the network's radio station websites, as stipulated in Section 10 of the Radio Code.

Nation Media Group (NMG), founded by His Highness Aga Khan in Kenya in 1959, stands as East and Central Africa's largest independent media organisation, boasting publications like Taifa Leo, the first Kenyan Swahili newspaper, and the Daily Nation and Sunday Nation, which were initially published in 1960 (Nation, 2020). NMG's editorial policy is firmly rooted in the commitment to uphold the highest professional and ethical standards, with journalists being tasked with reporting impartially, accurately, and fairly, presenting stories from all angles to cater to public interest (Nation,

2020). The policy underscores the importance of obtaining feedback from individuals or organisations negatively referenced in stories and emphasises the necessity of promptly updating or correcting reports found to be unreliable, deceptive, or distorted. Furthermore, the policy provides guidelines on the use of anonymous sources, confidentiality, obscenity, tone, and taste, ensuring alignment with media regulatory guidelines and advocating for the avoidance of publishing content that may be offensive, vulgar, or indecent unless it holds substantial news value.

### METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design that included content analysis and in-depth interviews. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of ethical considerations in radio broadcasting, examining adherence to professional standards, factors influencing ethical behaviour, and internal editorial policies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The research design was suitable for this study because the researcher analysed radio shows to discover ethical violations through words.

The study targeted local radio programs from three radio stations that are aired once every weekday. 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 covers aspects influencing the ethical standards and evaluation of media houses' internal editorial standards.

Thematic analysis was employed as a qualitative method to explore and interpret the underlying themes and patterns within the content of selected radio programs from Kenyan radio stations. Unlike content analysis, which focuses on quantifying specific elements, thematic analysis delves deeper into the meanings and patterns embedded within the data. The approach involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data, allowing for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the content. Thematic analysis was employed to extract qualitative data from interviews. 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**

**Evaluation of guidelines from a participant's perspective**

Radio remains one of Kenya's most influential media platforms, with programs such as *Patanisho* on Radio Jambo and *Hali ilivyo* shaping public discourse. These shows operate under internal editorial guidelines designed to promote ethical journalism, safeguard privacy, and ensure accountability (Peel & Adagala, 2017). However, the effectiveness of these guidelines is often undermined by challenges such as inconsistent enforcement, sensationalism, and the influence of external factors. The interview participants were asked to rate the internal editorial guidelines in the selected radio stations.

**Table 2: Evaluation of Internal Editorial Guidelines in Selected Radio Shows**

How would you rate the internal editorial guidelines in the following shows? In your opinion, are presenters strictly following these editorial guidelines? Why or why not?
<b>Participant: Radio Presenter</b>
1. "Editorial guidelines exist, but market pressure sometimes influences our enforcement to keep the audience engaged."
<b>Participant: MCK</b>
2. " <i>Patanisho</i> is fairly structured regarding editorial standards and media ethics, though it sometimes bends the rules to keep the audience engaged." [Context of Radio Jambo]
<b>Participant: Caller RM</b>
3. "I am sure they have their editorial guidelines, but whether they are strictly followed sometimes depends on the presenter." [Context of Radio Maisha]
<b>Participant: Radio presenter</b>
4. "The editorial guidelines are flexible enough to allow debate, but this sometimes results in ethical grey areas." [Context of Milele FM]

Several consistent themes emerge from these qualitative results. All respondents acknowledge that guidelines exist, but are implemented with varying degrees of strictness. Terms like "flexible," "bend the rules," and "sometimes depend on the presenter" suggest inconsistent adherence to formal policies. Secondly, two participants explicitly mention "keeping the audience engaged" as a rationale for selectively enforcing guidelines, suggesting that audience retention often takes precedence over strict ethical adherence. Third is the presenter's discretion. The observation that guideline adherence "depends on the presenter" indicates significant individual agency in ethical decision-making despite institutional frameworks. Finally, ethical ambiguity. The mention of "ethical grey areas" acknowledges that the flexibility in guidelines creates situations where ethical boundaries become blurred rather than clearly defined.

These findings align with Plaisance (2013), who identified the gap between institutional ethical codes and individual ethical decision-making. This tension is reflected in the observations about the presenter's discretion and selective enforcement. Plaisance notes that "codes of ethics serve more as aspirational documents than enforceable standards," which aligns with the described implementation patterns.

Moreover, Bowen (2004) has documented how organisational climate influences ethical behaviour more than formal policies. The results suggest that radio stations have developed what Bowen calls "ethical permissiveness" – an organisational culture that tacitly allows guideline deviation when commercially expedient. Ward (2019) emphasises media ethics as an ongoing negotiation process rather than rigid rule-following. This underscores the gap between the availability and enforcement of principles of ethical codes, including the 26 principles of ethics (MCK, 2014). The description of guidelines as "flexible enough to allow debate" reflects this process-oriented view of ethics, though the "ethical grey areas" suggest the challenges of this approach.

The findings suggest radio shows prioritise substantive ethics (audience engagement) over procedural compliance. This corroborates Wasserman (2013), who posits that "ethical outcomes often take precedence over ethical processes in commercial media. While the principles of the codes are not specific to either print or broadcast media (MCK, 2014), the pattern of selective

enforcement aligns with what Ward (2019) terms "ethical fading" – the gradual normalisation of guideline exceptions. This process is evident in comments about "bending rules" becoming standard practice when prioritising audience engagement.

These findings have several implications. For example, this finding raises questions about the effectiveness of self-regulatory frameworks and internal editorial guidelines in selected radio stations when commercial pressures are present. Also, the variation in presenter adherence suggests the importance of ethical leadership within broadcasting organisations. Additionally, the consistent justification of flexibility for audience engagement indicates how audience expectations shape ethical boundaries.

### SWOT Analysis of Internal Editorial Guidelines

#### 1. Strengths of Internal Editorial Guidelines

One of the key strengths of internal editorial guidelines in Kenyan radio is the emphasis on privacy and informed consent. Programs like *Patanisho* handle sensitive topics, such as family disputes and reconciliation efforts. The producers ensure that participants explicitly consent to having their personal stories broadcast. By obtaining consent, they align their practices with ethical journalism standards, minimising harm to participants while maintaining audience engagement (Media Council of Kenya, 2023). This approach reflects an awareness of the potential risks associated with airing personal issues and underscores the importance of safeguarding individual dignity.

Additionally, editorial guidelines often emphasise content regulation to align with audience expectations. For example, *Hali ilivyo*, which addresses societal issues such as poverty and unemployment, focuses on factual reporting rather than sensationalism. The structured delivery of these programs ensures that discussions are grounded in reality and provide actionable insights to listeners. The media house's commitment to accuracy not only builds audience trust but also ensures compliance with the MCK's Code of Conduct for broadcast journalism, which prioritises fairness and objectivity in reporting (MCK, 2023). Consequently, such adherence to structured and ethical reporting ultimately enhances the credibility of the programs. This adherence fosters a stronger relationship between the media and its audience while upholding professional journalism standards.

Moreover, many Kenyan radio stations align their internal editorial policies with the regulatory standards set by the MCK. Some regulatory standards include adhering to the watershed period, which restricts explicit or obscene content during hours when children are likely to be listening (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2020). This alignment demonstrates a collective effort to uphold ethical standards across the industry, fostering public trust and maintaining a sense of professionalism in broadcasting. Programs such as *Patanisho* and *Hali ilivyo* demonstrate this commitment by moderating potentially controversial live interactions to ensure they adhere to established guidelines (Kimani, 2022). Another notable strength is the capacity for moderation of real-time content. Programs that feature live calls or audience interactions rely on editorial teams to filter inappropriate content before it reaches the airwaves (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2020). For instance, in *Patanisho*, call-screening mechanisms are used to avoid airing offensive or defamatory statements. The mechanisms help maintain the program's integrity and ensure compliance with internal and external standards.

### 2. Weaknesses of Internal Editorial Guidelines

Despite their strengths, internal editorial guidelines in Kenyan radio face significant challenges, particularly in enforcement. Many shows feature hosts and presenters who lack formal training in journalism. The MCK (2023) has reported that untrained individuals, including comedians, often run popular morning shows, increasing the likelihood of ethical violations. For example, some hosts use sensational language to boost ratings, compromising the station's credibility and eroding public trust. The reliance on untrained hosts highlights a critical gap in the implementation of editorial guidelines (MCK, 2023). The gap can be addressed through targeted training programs, and stricter accreditation processes are essential to ensure that all media personnel adhere to ethical standards, thereby enhancing the overall quality and credibility of radio broadcasting in Kenya.

Sensationalism and clickbait practices also undermine the effectiveness of internal guidelines. To attract audiences, some shows prioritise shocking or exaggerated content over journalistic integrity, as provided in the guidelines, thus violating them. For instance, promotional headlines for programs often misrepresent the depth of discussions, leaving listeners disappointed when the content does not match the hype. The practice not only misleads audiences but also contravenes ethical journalism principles that

emphasise truthfulness and accuracy (Otieno, 2021). Misleading information can distort public perception, erode trust in media institutions, and contribute to the spread of misinformation. For instance, exaggerated or sensational reporting, such as framing ordinary conflicts as major crises, may incite unnecessary panic or polarisation among audiences.

Furthermore, inaccuracies in reporting can harm the reputation of individuals and communities involved, leading to legal repercussions for the media house. Ethical journalism serves as a cornerstone for democracy and informed decision-making; therefore, any deviation from its principles undermines the media's role as a trusted source of information. As Otieno (2021) argues, adherence to these principles is a professional obligation and a moral responsibility to society.

Another significant weakness is the lack of robust accountability mechanisms within many media houses' editorial guidelines. The MCK (2023) has identified instances where explicit content is aired during the watershed period, violating internal and external policies. Inadequate monitoring systems and weak penalties for violations allow such breaches to persist. For example, a recent case involved a morning radio show airing sexually explicit jokes during school commute hours, drawing widespread public criticism but resulting in minimal consequences for the offending station (Kimani, 2022). The lack of severe consequences embedded within the guideline reflects broader systemic challenges in enforcing broadcasting standards in Kenya. Weak enforcement mechanisms and inconsistent monitoring make it challenging to hold offenders accountable. Moreover, the leniency displayed in this case sets a concerning precedent, potentially emboldening other broadcasters to overlook ethical guidelines (Kimani, 2022). Such incidents erode public trust in media regulation and highlight the urgent need for media houses' editorial guidelines reforms, including stricter penalties, enhanced monitoring systems, and better training for media personnel to uphold ethical broadcasting standards.

External influences, particularly from media owners, pose significant challenges to enforcing editorial guidelines. Media owners often prioritise commercial gains or political affiliations, dictating the editorial direction of programs to align with their interests. The interference compromises the integrity and objectivity of

shows like *Hali ilivyo*, where investigative reporting may be suppressed to protect the interests of influential stakeholders. For example, a high-profile investigative report exposing corruption in a government-funded housing project was reportedly halted by a station's management due to pressure from influential advertisers linked to the project (Nyong'o, 2023). Such actions hinder journalistic independence and contribute to a culture of self-censorship among reporters who fear reprisal from their employers against editorial guidelines that explicitly advocate freedom of reportage. The influence of media ownership further risks alienating audiences who value unbiased and ethical reporting. When programs favour specific political or commercial agendas, public trust in the media diminishes. A notable case is a widespread criticism a leading radio station faced during Kenya's 2022 general elections, where the station's coverage was accused of biased reporting in favour of a particular political party against the media house's guideline of fair reporting. Listeners took to social media to voice their dissatisfaction, resulting in a temporary decline in audience ratings and advertising revenue (Mutua, 2022). Subsequently, stakeholders must enforce strict editorial guidelines to prevent conflicts of interest. Additionally, equipping journalists with resources to resist external pressures, such as whistleblower protections and independent editorial boards, can help safeguard journalistic integrity. Empowering reporters to pursue stories without undue interference enhances the quality of content and ensures that the media fulfils its role as a watchdog of society.

### 3. Opportunities for Internal Editorial Guidelines

Internal editorial guidelines present several opportunities that can enhance ethical journalism and improve the credibility of Kenyan radio stations. One significant opportunity is the integration of digital technologies in content moderation and compliance monitoring. Advances in artificial intelligence and automated systems provide mechanisms for real-time content filtering, helping to prevent violations of editorial guidelines. AI-driven tools can screen live calls for offensive language, ensuring adherence to ethical broadcasting standards (Ndungu, 2023). Additionally, digital analytics enable media houses to track audience engagement and feedback, facilitating adjustments that align with public expectations and regulatory requirements.

Another opportunity lies in the professionalisation of media personnel through targeted training programs. Establishing structured workshops and certification

programs in collaboration with institutions like the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) and journalism schools can equip presenters and producers with the necessary skills to navigate ethical dilemmas effectively. Training in investigative reporting, fact-checking, and ethical broadcasting can reinforce adherence to editorial guidelines while enhancing content quality (MCK, 2023). Furthermore, the accreditation of radio presenters can serve as an industry benchmark to ensure that individuals handling public discourse meet professional journalism standards.

Strengthening partnerships between media houses and civil society organisations provides an avenue for promoting accountability and transparency in journalism. Organisations advocating for media ethics and press freedom can collaborate with radio stations to establish independent oversight committees. Such committees can review compliance with editorial guidelines, provide improvement recommendations, and act as mediators in cases of ethical violations (Otieno, 2022). Enhancing third-party oversight mechanisms can bolster public trust and demonstrate a commitment to responsible journalism.

Additionally, audience-driven engagement models allow media houses to strengthen their editorial policies. Establishing structured listener feedback forums, such as community advisory panels or digital polling systems, can help identify areas where editorial guidelines need reinforcement. Public engagement fosters accountability and allows radio stations to tailor content that is both ethical and reflective of societal needs. For example, integrating community radio stations into policy discussions ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in shaping ethical broadcasting practices (Kimani, 2023).

Expanding the reach of ethical broadcasting through regulatory incentives presents another opportunity. The Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) and MCK can introduce recognition programs and funding opportunities for radio stations that consistently uphold high ethical standards. Incentives such as reduced licensing fees or priority access to broadcasting infrastructure can encourage adherence to internal editorial guidelines. Recognising ethical journalism through awards and certifications can further motivate media houses to maintain integrity in their programming (Nyong'o, 2023).

#### 4. Threats to Internal Editorial Guidelines

Despite the potential benefits of internal editorial guidelines, several external and systemic threats challenge their effectiveness. One major threat is political interference in media operations. Politicians and influential stakeholders often pressure radio stations to shape narratives that align with their interests, undermining editorial independence. For instance, media houses risk being coerced into biased reporting in politically charged environments, compromising ethical journalism standards (Mutua, 2022). Political influence can result in the suppression of investigative stories, leading to a loss of public trust in media institutions.

Commercial pressures also threaten the enforcement of editorial guidelines. The reliance on advertising revenue often compels media houses to prioritise profit over journalistic integrity. Advertisers sometimes influence program content by discouraging critical coverage of specific topics that could negatively impact their brand image. The financial dependence on corporate sponsors creates a conflict of interest, where stations may hesitate to report objectively on issues involving their key advertisers (Otieno, 2021). This challenge underscores the need for diversified revenue streams to reduce vulnerability to commercial manipulation.

The proliferation of social media and digital platforms presents another significant threat to traditional editorial standards. With the rise of online news consumption, misinformation and unverified content often gain traction before editorial teams can verify facts. The pressure to compete with fast-paced digital media sometimes leads to the relaxation of editorial checks, increasing the risk of disseminating inaccurate or sensationalised information (Ndungu, 2023). Additionally, social media influence can override editorial policies, as audience demands for viral content push radio stations to prioritise sensational reporting over ethical journalism.

Weak enforcement mechanisms further threaten the integrity of internal editorial guidelines. Regulatory bodies such as the MCK and CAK often lack the resources or authority to impose strict penalties on violators. Instances of media houses breaching ethical standards without facing significant consequences create a culture of impunity. For example, some stations continue to air explicit content during watershed periods despite repeated warnings, highlighting the ineffectiveness of current enforcement strategies

(Kimani, 2022). Strengthening monitoring frameworks and imposing stricter penalties can help address these regulatory gaps.

The evolving nature of media consumption habits also threatens adherence to traditional editorial guidelines. The younger audience increasingly prefers digital streaming services and social media platforms over conventional radio. This shift challenges media houses to adapt their editorial policies to emerging digital formats while maintaining ethical standards (Nyong'o, 2023). Failure to address these evolving consumption trends may lead to declining audience engagement and reduced influence of traditional editorial guidelines in shaping public discourse.

Finally, the lack of public awareness and advocacy for ethical journalism weakens the effectiveness of editorial guidelines. Many listeners may not fully understand their rights to fair and accurate reporting, making it challenging to hold media houses accountable. Strengthening media literacy programs and public campaigns on ethical journalism can empower audiences to demand responsible broadcasting practices. Increased civic engagement can be crucial in ensuring that editorial guidelines remain relevant and enforceable in an ever-changing media landscape (MCK, 2023).

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** The analysis reveals that the nature of the program, its format, and editorial oversight significantly impact the presenters' adherence to the four principles under study. The study made several important additions to the field of media ethics. The study shows that there is a need to strengthen each media house's editorial policies and hold individual journalists accountable for violations. Additionally, the internal editorial guidelines in the selected radio shows exist within a complex ecosystem where formal policies interact with market pressures, individual discretion, and audience expectations. Guidelines are generally viewed as flexible frameworks rather than rigid rules, with enforcement varying based on commercial considerations and presenter judgment.

**Recommendations:** Media houses should establish independent editorial oversight committees to enhance adherence to internal editorial guidelines and uphold ethical journalism. Another area that requires further research is the impact of media ownership on journalistic ethics. The study touched on the influence of media

owners in shaping editorial content, but more research is | needed to understand the full extent of the influence.

### REFERENCES

- Bodó, B. (2019). Selling news to audiences: A qualitative inquiry into the emerging logics of algorithmic news personalization in European quality news media. *Digital Journalism*, 7(8), 1054–1075. 10.1080/21670811.2019.1624185
- Bowen, S. (2004). Organisational factors encouraging ethical decision making: An exploration into the case of an exemplary. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 52, 311–324.
- Communications Authority of Kenya. (CAK). (2020). Programming code for free-to-air radio and television services in Kenya. Retrieved from <https://www.ca.go.ke>
- Githinji, M. K. (2021). *Media training and journalism competence in Kenya: Perspectives from Standard Group media senior managers*.
- Jhumur, G. (2014). Ethics of Indian news media: Aberrations and future challenges. *Global Media Journal Indian Edition*, 5(2).
- Kimani, E. (2022). The importance of accountability in Kenyan media. The Star. Retrieved from <https://www.the-star.co.ke>
- Kimani, J. (2022). *Broadcast ethics under scrutiny: The challenge of enforcing watershed rules in Kenya*. Media Watch Kenya.
- Lai, P. (2024). *Academic guides: Scholarly voice: Tone and audience*. Academicguides.waldenu.edu. <https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/formandstyle/writing/scholarlyvoice/toneaudienc>
- Media Council of Kenya (MCK). (2023). Ethics in media training and accreditation challenges. Retrieved from <https://www.mediacouncil.or.ke>
- Media Council of Kenya. (2023). Media Council of Kenya: Annual report on media training and ethics. Retrieved from [www.mck.co.ke](http://www.mck.co.ke)
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation (4th ed.)*. Jossey-Bass/ Wiley.
- Mutua, P. (2022). *Media bias during elections: The case of Kenya's 2022 general elections*. African Media Institute.
- Nahida B. N. (2014). Media ethics: Different perspectives. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(1), 8–12.
- Nation. (2020). 50-year story of the nation media group. Nation. <https://nation.africa/kenya/kenya-50/50-year-story-of-the-nation-media-group-914704>
- Nyong'o, S. (2023). Media ownership and the erosion of editorial independence in Kenya. Centre for Media Governance.
- Otieno, R. (2021). Editorial independence and the role of media houses. *Journal of Kenyan Media Studies*.
- Peel, M. A. O. C., & Adagala, N. (2017). *An Assessment of Radio Talk Show Presenters' Handling of Content against the Media Council of Kenya's Laid Down Professional And Ethical Standards: A Study of Selected FM Radio Stations*.
- Plaisance, P. L. (2013). *Media ethics: Key principles for responsible practice*. Sage Publications.
- Radio New Zealand. (n.d.). Editorial standards. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/editorialstandards>
- Southern Cross Austereo. (2020). Editorial standards policy. [Corporate policy document].
- Van Drunen, M., & Fechner, D. (2023). Safeguarding editorial independence in an automated media system: The relationship between law and journalistic perspectives. *Digital Journalism*, 11(9), 1723-1750, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2022.2108868
- van Drunen, M. (2021). Editorial independence in an automated media system. *Internet Policy Review* 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2021.3.1569>.
- Ward, S. J. (2019). Journalism ethics. In *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 307–323). Routledge.
- Wasserman, H. (2013). *Press freedom in Africa: Comparative perspectives*. Routledge.