



Journalists' Perceptions of Ethical Issues in the Use of Artificial Intelligence for News Reporting

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Abstract

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalism is transforming news production while raising ethical concerns relating to accuracy, originality, privacy, plagiarism and professional judgement. This study explores journalists' perceptions and experiences of ethical issues associated with the use of AI in news reporting in Taraba State, Nigeria. Guided by Rest's Four-Component Model of Moral Behaviour, the study adopted a qualitative case study design. Nine journalists were purposively selected from media organisations in Taraba State and interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The interview data were analysed through narrative analysis, with attention to participants' experiences, interpretations and professional responses to AI-assisted journalism. Findings revealed that journalists possessed practical knowledge of AI applications, including ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot and automated transcription tools, although the depth of knowledge varied. Participants identified ethical concerns relating to inaccurate information, plagiarism, originality, privacy, over-reliance on AI and the potential erosion of independent editorial judgement. Their experiences further showed that AI-generated information could appear credible while containing inaccuracies and that the convenience of AI-generated writing could create a temptation to copy content without sufficient modification. Journalists primarily regulated these challenges through fact-checking, editing, rewriting and maintaining human control over final editorial decisions. The study concludes that responsible AI integration requires clearer newsroom guidelines, continuous professional training and sustained human editorial oversight. Further research should examine AI-related ethical practices across media organisations, platforms and regions in Nigeria.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, journalism ethics, journalists, moral behaviour, newsroom policy, news reporting, Nigeria

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming contemporary society, reshaping how organisations produce, process, distribute and consume information. Across sectors such as healthcare, finance, education and communication, AI technologies are increasingly being integrated into professional practices (Afjal, 2025). Journalism has been particularly affected, as AI is becoming embedded in news gathering, information verification, content generation, editing, transcription, distribution and audience engagement (Shi & Sun, 2024). Algorithms and generative AI systems can now generate and summarise news content, analyse large datasets, support fact-checking and optimise content distribution, thereby altering conventional approaches to news production (Tariq et al., 2024). In Nigeria, journalists are increasingly encountering and adopting AI-enabled tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot, automated transcription applications and other generative AI technologies to improve efficiency and respond to the demands of an increasingly digital and fast-paced news environment (Tijani et al., 2026; Shadrach et al., 2026).

The integration of AI into journalism offers several potential benefits, including increased speed, productivity, efficiency and capacity to process large volumes of information (Sonni et al., 2024). However, these benefits are accompanied by significant ethical concerns. AI-assisted



journalism raises questions about misinformation, algorithmic bias, transparency, plagiarism, copyright, authorship, accountability, originality and the preservation of editorial independence (Al-Kfairy et al., 2024). The possibility of publishing inaccurate or misleading AI-generated information also creates concerns about professional responsibility and public trust (Mathew & Narayanan, 2025). Similarly, the increasing integration of AI into journalism raises ethical concerns relating to data bias, privacy and the adequacy of existing regulatory frameworks (Al-Zoubi et al., 2024).

The ethical implications of Artificial Intelligence in journalism have attracted growing scholarly and professional attention, particularly concerning transparency, accountability, bias, privacy, human oversight and the responsible integration of AI into newsroom practice (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024; Porlezza & Schapals, 2024). However, much of the existing literature has focused on the technological applications of Artificial Intelligence in journalism, including newsroom adoption, automation, changing journalistic practices and the broader implications of AI for the future of journalism, with comparatively less attention to journalists' lived perceptions and experiences of the ethical issues arising from its everyday use and how practising journalists perceive and negotiate the ethical challenges associated with AI use. This gap is particularly important in Nigeria, where journalists operate within a rapidly changing digital media environment characterised by increasing technological adoption, professional pressures and evolving regulatory responses to emerging technologies (Shadrach et al., 2024). Understanding how journalists themselves perceive the ethical implications of AI is therefore essential to determining how the technology can be integrated without undermining established principles of journalistic practice. Against this background, this study examines journalists' perceptions of ethical issues associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence in news reporting, with particular reference to journalists in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the discourse on ethical AI adoption and provide insights that can inform newsroom policies, professional training and broader frameworks for responsible AI use in journalism.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore journalists' perceptions and experiences of the ethical issues associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in news reporting in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study specifically seeks to:

1. Explore journalists' knowledge of the use of Artificial Intelligence in news reporting in Taraba State.
2. Examine journalists' understanding of the ethical issues associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence in news production.
3. Explore the ethical concerns journalists encounter or perceive in the integration of Artificial Intelligence into journalistic practice.
4. Examine how journalists regulate the ethical challenges associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence in newsrooms.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and

Several scholars and institutions have approached Artificial Intelligence (AI) from different but overlapping perspectives, reflecting the difficulty of capturing such a broad and rapidly developing field within a single definition. Russell and Norvig conceptualise Artificial Intelligence through the idea of intelligent agents that receive percepts from their environment and perform actions in pursuit of specified objectives, while Winston frames AI as the study of



computational processes that enable machines to perceive, reason and act (Russell & Norvig, 2009; Winston, 1992, as cited in OECD, 2019). The OECD defines an AI system as a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers from the inputs it receives how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments (OECD, 2024). (OECD, 2019). UNESCO describes AI systems as information-processing technologies capable of behaviours associated with learning, reasoning, perception, prediction, planning and control, while emphasising that such systems may operate with varying degrees of autonomy (UNESCO, 2021). These definitions converge around three important characteristics: the processing of information, the performance of tasks associated with human cognitive abilities, and the production of outputs that can inform or influence action. They differ, however, in emphasis: Russell and Norvig foreground intelligent behaviour, the OECD stresses inference and outputs, while UNESCO places greater emphasis on the range of technologies, autonomy and their social and ethical implications. This convergence and variation suggest that AI is better understood as a broad technological domain than as a single, fixed technology.

Drawing these perspectives together, AI can therefore be understood in this study as an evolving collection of computational systems, methods and applications designed to process information, learn or infer from data, perform cognitive or communicative tasks, and generate outputs that assist or influence human action and decision-making. This is particularly relevant to journalism because AI does not appear in newsrooms in one uniform form; rather, it encompasses different applications such as machine learning, natural language processing, automated transcription, recommendation systems and generative AI, each performing different functions within the news-production process (Park & Akintade, 2026).

Ethical Issues in the use of AI News Reporting

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalism presents several ethical issues because AI is increasingly being incorporated into activities across the news-production process, including data analysis, automated writing, format transformation, content personalisation and fact-checking (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024). Accuracy and misinformation constitute a fundamental concern because AI-generated content can produce plausible but inaccurate information, making human verification essential before publication (Kumar, et al., 2025). Closely related is algorithmic bias, which arises when AI systems reproduce or amplify biases embedded in their training data or design, potentially influencing the selection, framing or representation of news (Elhosary, 2026). Transparency is another concern, particularly regarding whether audiences should be informed when AI has substantially contributed to the production or modification of news content (Piasecki, et al., 2024). Lack of transparency can make it difficult for audiences to understand how information was produced and may complicate assessments of its credibility and provenance.

Another important ethical dimension concerns accountability and human editorial judgement. Traditional journalism places responsibility for published information on identifiable journalists and media organisations; however, AI-assisted production can complicate responsibility when content is generated or substantially modified by an automated system (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024). The issue is therefore not whether AI can perform journalistic tasks, but whether journalists retain meaningful oversight and remain responsible for decisions concerning what is published. Authorship and originality also become problematic where AI contributes substantially to the production of news content, raising questions about whose



intellectual contribution should be recognised and whether AI involvement should be disclosed (Van Dalen, 2024). Similarly, plagiarism and copyright concerns arise from questions surrounding the sources of AI-generated material and the ownership or permitted use of content incorporated into AI-assisted outputs. These issues challenge conventional understandings of journalistic authorship and professional responsibility.

AI adoption also raises concerns about privacy, professional autonomy and employment. AI systems may process large quantities of personal and publicly available information, creating questions about the collection, processing and protection of personal data (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024). At the professional level, extensive dependence on automated systems may alter journalists' roles and potentially reduce the exercise of human judgement in aspects of news production (Sonni et al., 2024). Concerns about employment and the changing nature of journalistic work are therefore connected to the broader question of how technological efficiency should be balanced against human professional agency (Van Dalen, 2024).

Review of Empirical Studies

Several studies on the subject of AI and ethical issues associated with journalism exist. The literature consistently identifies bias, privacy, misinformation or misrepresentation, transparency, accountability and the absence of clear institutional guidelines as major ethical concerns. For example, Al-Zoubi et al. (2024), based on interviews with journalists at Al Mamlaka TV in Jordan, identified data bias, privacy violations and inadequate regulatory frameworks as significant challenges to ethical AI integration. Similarly, Gutiérrez-Caneda et al. (2024), drawing on interviews with media professionals and researchers, found tensions between technological advancement and professional journalism ethics, particularly regarding changing journalistic roles, transparency and the need for institutional and regulatory guidance. More recent evidence from four African countries, including Nigeria, further shows that journalists encounter ethical dilemmas when incorporating AI into news production, with responses ranging from optimism to pragmatism and concern about the implications of AI for journalistic practice (Park et al., 2025). Considered together, these studies suggest that the ethical challenges of AI are not confined to a particular technological application or national media system; rather, they arise from the interaction between AI capabilities and established expectations of accuracy, accountability, professional competence and public responsibility. At the same time, the studies differ in emphasis, with the Jordanian research foregrounding privacy and bias, the African study highlighting journalists' experiences and ethical dilemmas in AI-assisted news production, and the broader international study emphasising institutional and regulatory preparedness.

The literature also reveals an important distinction between awareness and ethical preparedness. Evidence from Nigeria suggests that journalists are increasingly familiar with and receptive to AI technologies, but awareness does not necessarily translate into clearly established ethical practices. Sholola et al. (2024), for instance, found substantial awareness and use of AI among journalists in Kwara State and reported generally positive perceptions of its contribution to journalism, while recommending further training and public awareness concerning AI's role in journalism. More recent qualitative evidence from Nigerian newsrooms similarly shows that journalists are using AI for tasks such as transcription, copy-editing and preliminary drafting, while organisational responses to AI remain uneven (Park & Akintade, 2026). This finding is important when considered alongside studies from other contexts because it suggests that the central problem may not be resistance to AI, but the capacity of journalists and media organisations to incorporate it responsibly. Gutiérrez-Caneda et al. (2024) similarly emphasised the importance of professional



competencies, human supervision and organisational responses to AI. The evidence therefore points to a developing implementation gap: journalists may be willing to use AI and recognise its practical benefits, yet the professional knowledge, organisational policies and regulatory structures required to guide its ethical application may not develop at the same pace. This raises an important question about how individual journalists interpret and negotiate ethical decisions when formal institutional guidance is absent or insufficient.

Another group of the literature demonstrates that the ethical implications of AI vary according to the type of content and journalistic task involved. Voinea (2023), focusing specifically on AI-generated imagery, highlighted risks associated with misinformation, manipulation of audience perception, journalistic integrity and public trust, and emphasised verification and clear labelling as safeguards. This focus differs from studies examining AI more broadly because synthetic visual content presents distinctive problems concerning authenticity and the evidential function traditionally attributed to journalistic images. The broader studies, however, show that similar concerns extend to textual and other AI-assisted processes, including content generation, editing, verification and distribution (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2024; Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024). Gondwe (2025) adds an audience dimension by examining perceptions of AI-generated news across ten African countries, finding that audiences' responses were shaped by concerns relating to trust, bias and transparency. Taken together, these findings suggest that AI ethics in journalism is multidimensional: concerns about accuracy and authenticity affect content, transparency concerns affect the relationship between journalists, AI systems and audiences, while accountability concerns affect responsibility for decisions and published outputs. However, much of the existing literature examines these issues either from institutional perspectives, through professional-level perceptions, or from the standpoint of audiences, leaving less attention to how individual journalists themselves make sense of and navigate these ethical tensions in everyday reporting.

Methodologically, much of the existing evidence is concentrated in specific institutional settings, such as a government-affiliated television station in Jordan (Al-Zoubi et al., 2024), Nigerian newsrooms (Park & Akintade, 2026), or broader professional and expert samples (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024). Other studies adopt quantitative approaches that establish levels of awareness or general perceptions without providing sufficient depth on how journalists understand and negotiate particular ethical dilemmas (Sholola et al., 2024), while studies based on audience research examine public perceptions rather than professional newsroom experiences (Gondwe, 2025). Thus, although the literature establishes that AI presents substantial ethical challenges for journalism, it provides comparatively limited contextualised evidence on how practising journalists interpret these challenges within their own professional routines. There is also limited evidence from Nigeria beyond the few emerging studies, particularly from contexts outside the major media centres. This study therefore builds on the existing literature by examining journalists' perceptions, experiences and ethical reasoning regarding AI-assisted news reporting in Taraba State. Its qualitative focus provides an opportunity to move beyond measuring awareness or general attitudes to understand how journalists themselves interpret ethical issues and navigate them within their professional practice.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Rest's Four-Component Model of Moral Behaviour, developed by James Rest to explain the psychological processes through which individuals recognise, evaluate and act upon moral issues. The model challenges the assumption that ethical behaviour



depends solely on moral reasoning, proposing instead four distinct but interrelated processes: moral sensitivity, moral judgement, moral motivation and moral character (Rest et al., 1986; Rest et al., 1999). Moral sensitivity involves recognising the moral dimensions of a situation and considering how possible actions may affect others; moral judgement involves determining which course of action is ethically justifiable; moral motivation concerns prioritising moral values over competing interests; and moral character refers to the capacity to translate an ethical decision into action despite pressures or obstacles. Thus, Rest's model provides a useful framework for examining not only whether journalists recognise ethical problems associated with AI, but also how they evaluate those problems and respond to them in practice.

Applied to this study, moral sensitivity concerns journalists' ability to recognise ethical implications in AI-assisted news production, such as inaccurate or misleading outputs, bias, privacy violations, inadequate transparency, plagiarism and threats to editorial independence. Moral judgement concerns how journalists determine whether particular uses of AI are ethically acceptable by weighing competing considerations such as speed, efficiency, accuracy, professional responsibility and editorial integrity. Moral motivation relates to the extent to which journalists prioritise professional values including accuracy, fairness, transparency and accountability when these values compete with deadlines, productivity pressures or organisational expectations. Moral character, the action-oriented component, concerns journalists' capacity to implement ethical decisions through practices such as verifying AI-generated information, editing or rejecting unreliable outputs, maintaining human oversight and resisting inappropriate uses of AI. Accordingly, the model enables the study to move beyond identifying the ethical issues journalists perceive and to examine the process through which they recognise ethical problems, evaluate appropriate responses, prioritise professional values and translate those values into newsroom practice.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which allows for an in-depth exploration of human experiences, perceptions, and interpretations through non-numerical data (Islam & Aldaihani, 2025). This approach was considered suitable for generating rich, exploratory insights into journalists' perceptions of the ethical issues associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in news reporting. A single case study design was employed, focusing on journalists operating within Taraba State. The target population comprised journalists working in established media organisations within the state. A homogeneous purposive sampling technique was utilised to select participants who shared relevant characteristics, such as years of experience in journalism, level of exposure to AI tools, and active engagement in news reporting. Consideration was also given to approachability and availability. A total of nine (9) journalists consented to participate in the study, which falls within Creswell's (2011) recommended range of 6 to 35 participants for qualitative research. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted both virtually and in person, allowing flexibility in capturing nuanced responses and participants' experiences. Narrative analysis was used to analyse the interview data. Interview transcripts were carefully reviewed to identify participants' accounts, experiences, interpretations and perspectives, while attention was given to the sequence, context and meaning of their narratives. The analysis focused not merely on isolated responses but on understanding how participants constructed and explained their experiences of AI use and the ethical challenges they encountered in journalistic practice.

Table 1. Profile of participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Working experience
Participant 1	F	42	6
Participant 2	M	38	5
Participant 3	M	49	15
Participant 4	M	36	14
Participant 5	F	31	19
Participant 6	M	22	5
Participant 7	F	26	14
Participant 8	M	28	12
Participant 9	F	51	15

Data Presentation and Research Findings

This section presents a summary of the study's findings based on insights drawn from interviews conducted with journalists in Taraba State. The findings are organised in line with the study's key research questions, focusing on journalists' experiences and perceptions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) use in news reporting, their understanding of associated ethical issues, and how they perceive and navigate the ethical challenges arising from the integration of AI into journalistic practice.

Journalists' Knowledge of Artificial Intelligence in News Reporting

The first objective explored journalists' knowledge of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in news reporting in Taraba State. Several participants demonstrated a broad understanding of AI as a technology capable of performing tasks that ordinarily require human intelligence. Participant 1, for instance, explained that *"AI is technology that allows computers or machines to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as understanding information, generating content and assisting with decision-making."* This account suggests that the participant understands AI in terms of its capacity to process information and perform cognitive tasks rather than merely regarding it as a particular software application. Similarly, Participant 3 observed that *"AI has become part of journalism because there are tools that can help journalists research, write, edit and even transcribe interviews."* The narrative indicates an awareness of AI as a collection of tools that can be integrated across different stages of news production.

The interviews further revealed participants' familiarity with specific AI tools. Participant 2 stated that *"I know ChatGPT very well, and I have also come across Grammarly and QuillBot. These tools can help you to improve your writing, generate ideas and correct grammatical errors."* This response demonstrates practical knowledge of generative and language-based AI applications and their potential relevance to journalistic work. In a related account, Participant 5 explained that *"Sometimes you may have a long interview recording, and AI transcription tools can help you convert the voice into text much faster."* The participant's account reflects an understanding of AI beyond text generation and points to its application in routine newsroom tasks such as transcription.

Participants also demonstrated knowledge of AI through their descriptions of how it could assist with news gathering and content preparation. Participant 4 noted that *"AI can assist a reporter when doing research because it can bring together information and help you understand a subject quickly, but the journalist still has to check the information before using it."* This narrative is particularly significant because it combines knowledge of AI's utility with an awareness of the journalist's continuing responsibility to verify information. Similarly, Participant



7 remarked that *“For me, AI is more of an assistant. It can give you ideas or help you organise your story, but it should not replace the journalist’s judgement.”* The account suggests that some participants conceptualise AI as a support technology rather than an autonomous substitute for professional journalism.

The data, however, suggest that the depth of knowledge was not uniform among participants. While some journalists were able to identify several applications of AI, others appeared to associate the technology primarily with popular generative AI platforms. Participant 6, for example, stated that *“When we talk about AI in journalism, I mainly think of ChatGPT because that is the tool I have used personally.”* Although this demonstrates awareness of generative AI, it also suggests a relatively narrower understanding of the wider range of AI applications available within journalism. In contrast, Participant 8 explained that *“AI is not only about ChatGPT. There are applications for transcription, editing, translation, searching for information and even recommending content to audiences.”* This broader account indicates a more developed understanding of AI as an ecosystem of technologies supporting different newsroom functions.

Participants’ knowledge also extended to the limitations of AI-generated outputs. Participant 9 observed that *“You cannot just copy what AI gives you and publish it because sometimes the information may not be correct. The reporter has to verify it and make sure that the facts are right.”* This narrative demonstrates an important dimension of practical knowledge: understanding that AI-generated information requires professional scrutiny. It suggests that some journalists recognise the distinction between AI-assisted content production and journalistically verified news production, with human editorial judgement remaining essential.

The participants’ accounts therefore indicate that journalists in Taraba State possess knowledge of AI at different levels and through different forms of professional exposure. At the basic level, participants were able to identify familiar AI applications, particularly ChatGPT and language-editing and transcription tools. At a more advanced level, some participants demonstrated an understanding of AI as a broader set of technologies capable of supporting research, information processing, transcription, writing, editing and other newsroom activities.

Journalists’ Understanding of Ethical Issues Associated with AI Use in News Production

The second objective examined journalists’ understanding of the ethical issues associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in news production in Taraba State. A prominent issue emerging from the participants’ narratives was the accuracy and credibility of AI-generated information. Participants recognised that AI systems can produce information that appears credible but may contain factual errors. Participant 1 explained that *“One of the ethical problems is that AI can give you information that is not completely correct, but because the way it is written looks convincing, a journalist may publish it without checking.”* This account demonstrates an understanding that the ethical problem is not simply that AI can make mistakes, but that journalists may inadvertently transfer those errors to the public if adequate verification is not undertaken. Another ethical concern identified in the narratives was plagiarism and originality. Participants recognised that reliance on AI-generated material could create uncertainty concerning the originality of journalistic content. Participant 5 explained that *“If a journalist simply copies what AI produces and presents it as his own work, there is a problem of originality and possibly plagiarism.”* This suggests that participants understood ethical responsibility not only in relation to factual accuracy but also in relation to the ownership and originality of published material.



Participant 2 similarly stated that *“AI can help you write, but the journalist should still contribute something original and should not just copy and paste everything from the machine.”*

The interviews also revealed concerns about privacy and the inappropriate handling of information. Participant 3 stated that *“Journalists have to be careful about the information they put into AI tools, especially when it involves confidential sources or private information.”* This demonstrates an understanding that AI use may create ethical risks beyond the published news story itself. The concern centres on what information journalists submit to AI systems and whether confidential journalistic material, personal data or sensitive sources may be exposed in the process. Another concern raised was issue of over-reliance on AI. Some participants feared that excessive dependence on AI could weaken journalists’ critical thinking and independent professional judgement. Participant 7 stated that *“If journalists become too dependent on AI, they may stop doing the thinking themselves. You may just accept what the machine gives you because it is faster.”* This account suggests that the ethical concern extends beyond individual inaccuracies to the possibility that routine dependence on AI could gradually alter professional practice. Participant 4 similarly noted that *“AI should assist the journalist, not become the journalist. If you allow it to make all the decisions, then you are losing the human judgement that journalism requires.”*

The narratives further revealed concerns about privacy and protection of confidential information. Participants were cautious about entering sensitive journalistic information into AI platforms. Participant 5 explained that *“You have to be careful with confidential information because when you put it into an AI platform, you may not know what happens to that information afterwards.”* This concern was particularly relevant to information involving sources, unpublished stories and personal data. The narrative indicates that journalists perceive AI integration as raising questions about whether existing professional obligations concerning source protection and confidentiality can be adequately maintained when external AI platforms are used.

Journalists’ Experiences with Ethical Concerns in AI Integration

The third objective explored the ethical concerns journalists encounter or perceive in the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalistic practice. One of the experiences repeatedly described by participants concerned the accuracy of AI-generated information. Participants explained that AI could provide information that appeared credible but subsequently proved to be inaccurate. Participant 1 narrated an experience in which an AI-generated response contained information that required further checking: *“There was a time I asked the AI to give me information on a particular issue, and the answer looked very convincing. But when I went back to check the facts, I discovered that some of the information was not correct.”* The experience demonstrates why participants regarded verification as an essential part of AI-assisted journalism. Rather than accepting AI-generated information as authoritative, journalists had to subject it to the same, and sometimes greater, scrutiny expected of information obtained from other sources.

A similar experience was reported by Participant 4, who explained that *“Sometimes the AI gives you names, dates or information that you cannot immediately confirm. If you are in a hurry, you may be tempted to use it, but that can create a serious problem for the story.”* This narrative illustrates the practical tension between AI-induced efficiency and journalistic accuracy. The technology may save time during information gathering, yet the speed it offers can create pressure to accept information before adequate verification has been completed. For the participants, therefore, the ethical problem was not simply that AI could make mistakes but that newsroom deadlines could make those mistakes easier to overlook.



Participants also narrated experiences concerning AI-generated writing and originality. Participant 2 explained that *“I have used AI to help me arrange an idea or improve the way something is written. But sometimes the language it gives you is so complete that you may be tempted to take it as it is.”* The participant's experience points to a subtle ethical challenge: AI can make journalistic writing easier while simultaneously creating the temptation to surrender too much of the writing process to the technology. Participant 5 similarly stated that *“The temptation is to copy and paste because the machine has already done the work. But if you do that all the time, you begin to question whether the work is still really yours as a journalist.”* The concern here extends beyond plagiarism to the preservation of journalistic authorship and professional originality.

Journalists' Regulation of Ethical Challenges Associated with AI Use

The fourth objective examined how journalists regulate the ethical challenges associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in newsrooms. The participants' indicated that regulation of AI-related ethical challenges occurred largely through journalists' individual professional judgement and established journalistic practices rather than through clearly defined institutional AI policies. A major strategy described by participants was independent verification of AI-generated information. Journalists explained that they did not regard information generated by AI as automatically suitable for publication. Participant 1 stated that *“Whenever I use AI to get information, I don't just take it and put it into the story. I check the information from other sources and confirm the facts before I publish.”* This account demonstrates that verification serves as an important professional safeguard against misinformation and inaccurate AI-generated outputs. Similarly, Participants also emphasised human editorial oversight as an important means of regulating AI-assisted content. Participant 7 explained that *“I don't allow AI to have the final say in my story. Whatever it produces, I read it, edit it and make sure it agrees with what I have gathered myself.”* This account suggests that journalists perceive AI as an assistive rather than autonomous technology. Human intervention remains necessary to ensure that AI-generated or AI-assisted material conforms to professional standards.

Another approach involved avoiding direct copying of AI-generated material. Participants described modifying AI-generated text rather than publishing it unchanged. Participant 5 stated that *“I may ask AI to help me organise an idea, but I don't normally publish exactly what it gives me. I rewrite it, add my own information and verify the facts.”* This practice demonstrates an attempt to address concerns about originality, authorship and plagiarism. It also reinforces the participants' perception that AI should support journalistic work without replacing the journalist's intellectual and editorial contribution.

Discussion of findings

The first finding revealed that journalists in Taraba State demonstrated substantive knowledge of AI and its applications in news reporting, although the depth of knowledge varied among participants. Journalists identified tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot and automated transcription applications and described their application to research, drafting, editing, transcription, headline development and organising story ideas. Some participants demonstrated a broader understanding of AI as a range of technologies supporting different stages of news production, while others associated it mainly with familiar generative AI applications. Participants also recognised the limitations of AI-generated outputs and the need for human verification. This finding is consistent with Sholola et al. (2024), who reported high awareness and use of AI tools among journalists in Kwara State. However, the present study extends this evidence by showing



that journalists' knowledge encompasses not only awareness of AI tools but also practical understanding of their applications and limitations. Within Rest's Four-Component Model, this finding relates primarily to moral sensitivity, as knowledge of AI and its potential consequences provides the basis for recognising situations in which its use may create ethical implications for journalistic practice.

The second finding showed that journalists understood AI-related ethical issues principally in terms of accuracy, misinformation, plagiarism, originality, privacy, confidentiality, over-reliance and human editorial responsibility. Participants recognised that AI-generated information could appear credible while containing factual errors and that copying AI-generated material could raise questions about originality and professional integrity. They also expressed concern about entering confidential information into AI platforms and about excessive dependence on AI weakening independent journalistic judgement. These findings correspond with Voinea (2023) and Al-Zoubi et al. (2024), who identified concerns relating to journalistic integrity, credibility and responsible AI use. The present study contributes to this literature by demonstrating how journalists in Taraba State interpret these concerns within their own professional context. The finding is particularly relevant to moral judgement in Rest's model because participants did not merely identify ethical problems; they evaluated different forms of AI use and distinguished between legitimate assistance, such as editing or transcription, and practices they considered ethically problematic, such as unverified publication or wholesale copying of AI-generated content.

The third finding demonstrated that ethical concerns became particularly evident through journalists' practical experiences with AI-assisted news production. Participants narrated instances in which AI-generated information appeared convincing but proved inaccurate when checked, while others described the temptation to reproduce polished AI-generated text because of its convenience and time-saving benefits. They also expressed concerns about excessive dependence on AI, loss of independent professional judgement and the inability of some AI-generated outputs to adequately reflect local contexts. These experiences reveal a tension between the efficiency offered by AI and the professional obligations of journalists to verify information, maintain originality and exercise editorial judgement. The finding reinforces the concerns identified by Voinea (2023) and Gutiérrez-Caneda et al. (2024) regarding the implications of AI for journalistic integrity and professional practice, but adds an experiential dimension by showing how such concerns are encountered within journalists' everyday work. In relation to Rest's model, the finding reflects the interaction between moral sensitivity and moral judgement, as journalists recognise ethical consequences arising from actual encounters with AI and subsequently evaluate how they should respond to them.

The fourth finding established that journalists regulate AI-related ethical challenges largely through individual professional judgement and established journalistic practices rather than comprehensive institutional AI policies. Participants described verifying AI-generated information against other sources, reviewing and editing AI-assisted content, rewriting generated material, adding independently gathered information and retaining human control over final editorial decisions. These practices indicate that journalists attempt to prioritise accuracy, originality, accountability and professional responsibility over the convenience and speed provided by AI. The finding is consistent with Anyango (2025) and Gutiérrez-Caneda et al. (2024), who identified limited institutional guidance, inadequate training and the rapid evolution of AI as challenges to responsible integration. Within Rest's model, this finding corresponds most directly with moral



motivation and moral character: journalists prioritise professional ethical values and translate those values into action through verification, editorial oversight and responsible use of AI. However, the reliance on individual judgement also reveals an institutional gap, suggesting that personal ethical commitment currently plays a significant role where formal newsroom guidelines are limited. This underscores the need for clearer organisational policies and continuous professional training to support consistent and responsible AI use in journalism.

Conclusion

The study found that journalists demonstrated practical knowledge of AI applications but identified concerns relating to accuracy, plagiarism, privacy, over-reliance and loss of editorial judgement, while relying largely on verification and professional judgement to manage these challenges. The findings imply that responsible AI integration in journalism requires stronger institutional guidelines, continuous professional training and sustained human editorial oversight. However, the study was limited by a single qualitative case study design and focus on journalists in Taraba State, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other media contexts. Further research should examine AI use across different Nigerian media organisations and compare journalists' experiences across regions, media platforms and levels of institutional AI regulation.

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