ENFORCEMENT OF MEDIA ETHICS ON NEWS REPORTING IN ONDO WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explored enforcement of media ethics in news reporting within Ondo West Local Government Area, focusing on the adherence to ethical standards, the impact of ethical practices on public trust, and the effectiveness of enforcement measures. Using a structured questionnaire with Likert scale responses, data was collected from 10 respondents, including journalists, media analysts, academics, and government employees. The analysis utilized ANOVA to assess the consistency of perceptions across five key statements related to media ethics. The results indicate a strong agreement among respondents on the importance of maintaining ethical standards in media reporting. Despite this consensus, concerns were noted regarding the frequency of ethical breaches and their impact on public trust. The study highlights that while media ethics are generally upheld, there is a need for improved training and monitoring to address ethical challenges effectively. The findings underscore the collective responsibility of media practitioners to uphold ethical standards and enhance transparency to foster greater public confidence. Recommendations include strengthening ethical training programs, improving monitoring mechanisms, promoting transparency, and increasing public awareness of media ethics.

Keywords: Enforcement, Media Ethics, News Reporting, Public Trust, Ondo West.

Introduction

Media ethics plays a crucial role in shaping the credibility and integrity of news reporting globally. The concept of media ethics encompasses the principles and standards that guide journalists in their professional conduct, ensuring that the news disseminated to the public is accurate, fair, and free from bias (Ward, 2020). These ethical guidelines are fundamental in maintaining the trust of the audience and upholding the role of the media as the fourth estate, essential for democratic governance (Frost, 2021).

In Africa, the application of media ethics has been both a challenge and a necessity. The diverse socio-political landscapes across the continent present unique ethical dilemmas for journalists. Issues such as political pressure, economic constraints, and the pervasive influence of social media have complicated the practice of ethical journalism in many African countries (Mabweazara, 2021). Despite these challenges, there has been a growing awareness and emphasis on the importance of ethical standards in journalism, driven by both local and international bodies (Berger, 2022).

Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, has a vibrant media landscape that reflects the complexities of its diverse society. The Nigerian media has historically been a powerful tool for political advocacy and social change, but it has also been criticized for lapses in ethical practices (Ojebode, 2021). Issues such as corruption, sensationalism, and the commercialization of news content have raised concerns about the ethical standards in Nigerian journalism (Onumah, 2023). Efforts to address these issues have been ongoing, with various stakeholders advocating for stronger regulatory frameworks and professional development for journalists.

Ondo State, located in the southwestern region of Nigeria, provides an interesting case study in the application of media ethics at the state level. The media in Ondo State has played a significant role in promoting transparency and accountability in governance, especially during election periods (Akinola, 2021). However, like in other parts of the country, the media in Ondo State is not immune to ethical challenges. Issues such as the influence of political elites, the struggle for financial sustainability, and the pressure to attract readership have sometimes led to ethical compromises in news reporting (Fagbohun, 2023).

The enforcement of media ethics in Ondo State's news reporting is particularly crucial in a democratic society where the media is expected to serve as a watchdog. Ethical journalism is essential for ensuring that the public receives reliable and unbiased information, which is necessary for making informed decisions (Oluwatobi, 2024). The adherence to ethical standards in reporting is not only a professional obligation but also a social responsibility that has far-reaching implications for the quality of democracy in the state.

Given the critical role of the media in shaping public discourse, the importance of upholding media ethics cannot be overstated. Ethical lapses in journalism can lead to misinformation, erode public trust, and ultimately undermine the democratic process (Ibrahim, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative that media practitioners in Ondo State and beyond are committed to the highest ethical standards in their reporting practices.

This study explored the enforcement of media ethics in news reporting in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State. By examining the ethical challenges faced by journalists in this region and the impact of these challenges on news reporting, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the importance of ethical journalism in Nigeria and across the globe (Ogunsanya, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

The media in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State faces significant ethical challenges that undermine the credibility and reliability of news reporting. These problems include the pervasive influence of political elites, which leads to biased reporting, the pressure to sensationalize news to attract readership, and the financial struggles that push media houses to compromise ethical standards for survival. Additionally, the rise of misinformation and the lack of strict regulatory enforcement further exacerbate these ethical lapses, resulting in a diminished public trust in the media's role as a watchdog in society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the enforcement of media ethics in news reporting within the Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to assess the extent to which journalists in the region adhere to ethical standards, identify the key ethical challenges they face, and explore the impact of these challenges on the credibility and reliability of news reporting. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the importance of ethical journalism and to provide recommendations for enhancing media integrity and public trust in the region.

Research Objectives
1. To examine the level of adherence to media ethics among journalists in Ondo West Local Government Area.
2. To identify the major ethical challenges faced by journalists in news reporting within Ondo West Local Government Area.
3. To assess the impact of these ethical challenges on the credibility and reliability of news reporting in Ondo West.
4. To explore strategies for improving ethical standards in news reporting in Ondo West Local Government Area.

Research Questions
1. What is the level of adherence to media ethics among journalists in Ondo West Local Government Area?
2. What are the major ethical challenges faced by journalists in news reporting within Ondo West Local Government Area?
3. How do these ethical challenges affect the credibility and reliability of news reporting in Ondo West?
4. What strategies can be implemented to improve ethical standards in news reporting in Ondo West Local Government Area?

Literature Review

The Concept of Media Ethics

Media ethics is a critical area of study that focuses on the moral principles and standards that guide the behavior of journalists and media organizations. It encompasses a broad range of issues, including accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and responsibility in news reporting (Ward, 2020). The concept of media ethics is grounded in the belief that the media has a fundamental duty to serve the public by providing truthful and unbiased information. This duty is

particularly important in a democratic society, where informed citizens are essential for the proper functioning of governance (Frost, 2021). Globally, the discourse on media ethics has evolved significantly, reflecting changes in technology, society, and the media landscape. With the rise of digital media and the proliferation of social media platforms, the challenges of maintaining ethical standards have become more complex, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional ethical guidelines (Plaisance, 2022).

In Africa, the concept of media ethics is shaped by the continent's unique socio-political and economic contexts. African media often operates under conditions of political pressure, limited resources, and varying degrees of freedom of expression (Mabweazara, 2021). Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the importance of ethical journalism in promoting transparency, accountability, and social justice. African media scholars and practitioners have increasingly called for the development of context-specific ethical frameworks that address the particular challenges faced by journalists on the continent (Berger, 2022). This localized approach to media ethics acknowledges the need for ethical standards that are both universal and adaptable to the African context.

Definition and Principles of Media Ethics

Media ethics can be defined as the set of principles and guidelines that govern the conduct of journalists and media organizations in the process of gathering, producing, and disseminating information. These principles are designed to ensure that the media operates in a manner that is truthful, fair, and respectful of the rights and dignity of individuals (Ward, 2020). Key principles of media ethics include accuracy, objectivity, fairness, independence, and accountability. Accuracy requires journalists to report facts correctly and without distortion, while objectivity demands that they remain impartial and avoid biases in their reporting (Frost, 2021). Fairness involves giving all relevant parties a chance to present their side of the story, and independence emphasizes the need for journalists to operate free from external pressures and influences (Plaisance, 2022). Accountability, on the other hand, requires media practitioners to take responsibility for their actions and to correct any errors promptly.

In Nigeria, the principles of media ethics are enshrined in various codes of conduct and professional guidelines developed by media regulatory bodies and associations. These principles are designed to guide journalists in their daily work and to ensure that they adhere to the highest standards of professionalism (Ojebode, 2021). The Nigerian Press Council, for example, has established a code of ethics that outlines the responsibilities of journalists in areas such as accuracy, fairness, and respect for privacy (Onumah, 2023). These principles are crucial for maintaining the credibility of the Nigerian media and for ensuring that it serves the public interest effectively.

Theoretical Framework of Media Ethics

The theoretical framework of media ethics is rooted in various philosophical and ethical theories that seek to explain the moral obligations of journalists and the media. One of the most influential theories in this regard is deontology, which emphasizes the importance of duty and adherence to ethical rules (Ward, 2020). According to this theory, journalists have a moral duty to report the truth and to act in accordance with established ethical guidelines,

regardless of the consequences. Deontological ethics is particularly relevant in situations where journalists face pressure to compromise their ethical standards in order to achieve specific outcomes, such as increased readership or political gain (Frost, 2021).

Another important theoretical perspective is utilitarianism, which focuses on the consequences of actions and the overall benefit to society. From a utilitarian perspective, the ethicality of a journalistic act is determined by its potential to maximize happiness or minimize harm (Plaisance, 2022). This theory is often invoked in discussions about the balance between public interest and individual rights, particularly in cases where the publication of certain information may have significant social implications. Utilitarianism provides a useful framework for journalists to evaluate the potential impact of their reporting and to make decisions that are in the best interest of society as a whole.

Ethical Challenges in Journalism

Journalism, as a profession, is fraught with numerous ethical challenges that can compromise the integrity of news reporting. One of the most common ethical dilemmas faced by journalists is the conflict between the need to report the truth and the pressure to sensationalize news in order to attract a larger audience (Ward, 2020). This dilemma is often exacerbated by the commercial nature of the media industry, where the pursuit of profit can lead to the prioritization of entertainment over accurate and responsible reporting (Frost, 2021). Additionally, journalists often face challenges related to maintaining objectivity, particularly in politically charged environments where biases can easily influence the framing of news stories (Plaisance, 2022).

In the African context, journalists face additional ethical challenges related to political pressure, censorship, and the threat of violence. In many African countries, the media operates under restrictive legal frameworks that limit freedom of expression and impose harsh penalties for reporting on sensitive issues (Mabweazara, 2021). Journalists who attempt to expose corruption or criticize the government are often subjected to intimidation, harassment, and even physical violence, making it difficult for them to adhere to ethical standards (Berger, 2022). These challenges are further compounded by the lack of resources and training, which can lead to a reliance on unverified sources and the spread of misinformation.

In West Africa, ethical challenges in journalism are particularly pronounced during election periods, when the media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion. During such times, journalists are often faced with the dilemma of balancing their duty to report objectively with the pressure to support particular political candidates or parties (Udoka, 2020). This can lead to biased reporting and the dissemination of false or misleading information, which can have serious implications for the democratic process. The rise of social media and citizen journalism has also introduced new ethical challenges, as the lines between professional journalism and amateur reporting become increasingly blurred (Agbese, 2022). In this rapidly changing media landscape, the need for strong ethical standards and vigilant enforcement is more important than ever.

Media Ethics in Nigeria

The history of media ethics in Nigeria is closely tied to the country's political and social development. During the colonial era, the Nigerian press was largely controlled by the colonial government, which used it as a tool for promoting its own interests (Ojebode, 2021). However, as the country moved towards independence, the media began to play a more active role in advocating for political and social change. This period saw the emergence of a vibrant and outspoken press, which often found itself at odds with the government. The need for ethical guidelines became increasingly apparent as the media began to take on a more significant role in shaping public opinion (Onumah, 2023).

In the post-independence period, the Nigerian media faced new ethical challenges related to the country's complex political landscape. The military regimes that ruled Nigeria for much of its early post-independence history imposed strict controls on the media, leading to widespread censorship and the suppression of dissenting voices (Sule, 2022). Despite these challenges, the Nigerian media continued to push for greater freedom of expression and the establishment of professional ethical standards. The return to civilian rule in 1999 marked a turning point for the Nigerian media, as new regulatory frameworks were established to promote ethical journalism and protect press freedom (Adewoye, 2023).

Today, the ethical standards and practices of the Nigerian media are guided by various professional codes of conduct and regulatory bodies, such as the Nigerian Press Council and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (Ojebode, 2021). These organizations have developed comprehensive ethical guidelines that cover issues such as accuracy, fairness, privacy, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest. However, the enforcement of these ethical standards remains a challenge, particularly in a media landscape that is increasingly dominated by commercial interests and political influence (Onumah, 2023).

The Nigerian code of ethics according to Jakande in Duyile (2011) the code which was approved by the Nigerian Press Organisation (NPO) is divided into five sections. Each section deals with a specific issue: the publication of truth. This compels the journalist to publish all the truth in any given situation; the question of corruption which bars journalists from receiving any form of gratifications in their professional dealings. The question of free cess to news; this says that every citizen should have free, uninterrupted access to information through the press, Radio, Television. The question of confidentiality; this means the journalist should keep the sources of information, or news contacts confidential, especially when they prefer to be anonymous. Any disclosure of the confidentiality of the source is unethical. The publication of plagiarism; it means journalists should not plagiarize, but be original in their scripts. As the Nigerian media continues to evolve, the need for ongoing education and training in media ethics is critical to ensuring that journalists uphold the highest standards of professionalism.

Impact of Media Ethics on Public Trust

The relationship between media ethics and public trust is a crucial one, as the credibility of the media is largely dependent on its adherence to ethical standards. When journalists and media organizations consistently uphold principles such as accuracy, fairness, and

transparency, they are able to build and maintain public trust (Ward, 2020). Public trust in the media is essential for the effective functioning of democracy, as it ensures that citizens have access to reliable information on which to base their decisions (Frost, 2021). In contrast, when media ethics are compromised, it can lead to a loss of trust and credibility, which can have serious implications for both the media and society at large.

In Africa, the impact of media ethics on public trust is particularly significant given the continent's complex socio-political environment. In many African countries, the media plays a critical role in holding governments accountable and promoting transparency (Mabweazara, 2021). However, the failure to adhere to ethical standards can undermine the media's ability to perform this role effectively. For example, when journalists engage in practices such as bribery, sensationalism, or the dissemination of false information, it can lead to a loss of public trust and credibility, making it difficult for the media to fulfill its watchdog function (Berger, 2022). As a result, there is a growing emphasis on the need for African journalists to adhere to ethical principles and to resist pressures that may compromise their integrity.

In Nigeria, the impact of ethical breaches in news reporting is evident in the declining levels of public trust in the media. The proliferation of fake news and sensationalist reporting has contributed to a growing skepticism among the public about the reliability of the information provided by the media (Ojebode, 2021). This loss of trust has serious implications for the media's ability to influence public opinion and to hold those in power accountable. To address this issue, there have been calls for stricter enforcement of ethical standards and greater accountability among journalists and media organizations (Onumah, 2023). By upholding ethical principles, the Nigerian media can work to rebuild public trust and strengthen its role in promoting democracy and social justice.

Methodology
In this study, data was collected through observation and online interview using a questionnaire comprising five statements, each rated on a Likert scale with the options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D). The questionnaire was administered to 10 respondents who provided their perceptions on the given statements. The collected data was then analyzed using an ANOVA table to determine any significant differences among the responses. Additionally, bar charts were generated to visually represent the distribution of responses across the different Likert scale categories. This mixed-method approach allowed for both quantitative analysis and visual interpretation of the data.

Analysis of Results
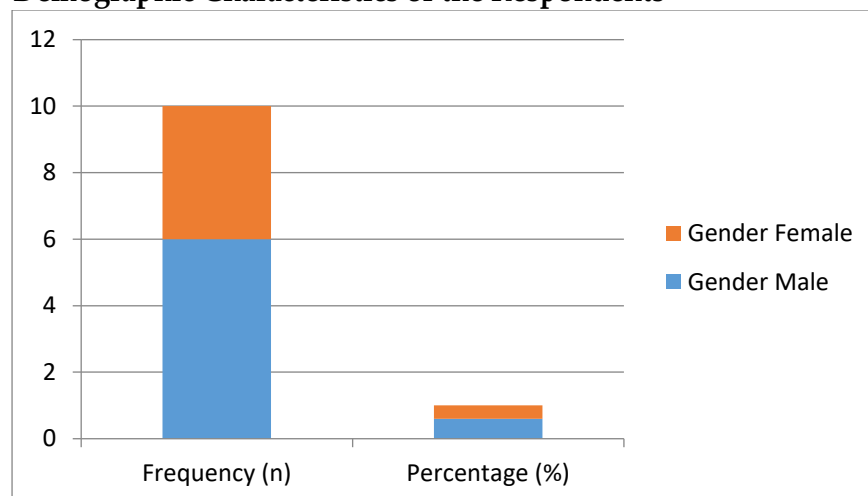**Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Figure 1: Gender Distribution

The gender distribution, as illustrated in Figure 1, reveals a predominant male representation among the respondents, accounting for 60% of the sample, while females constitute 40%. This disparity suggests that the media landscape in Ondo West Local Government Area may be male-dominated, which could influence perspectives on media ethics and reporting practices. The gender imbalance may also reflect broader societal trends within the region, where men might have more prominent roles in journalism and media-related occupations. Understanding this distribution is crucial as it may impact the findings and their generalizability to the wider population.
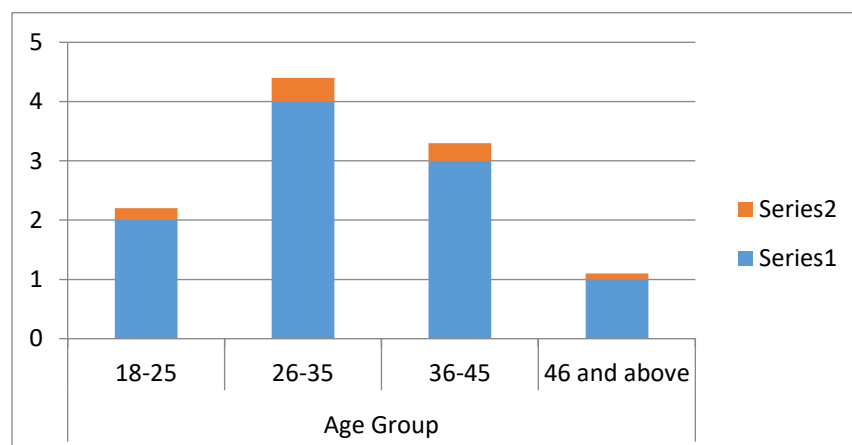

Figure 2: Age Group Distribution

Figure 2 illustrates the age distribution of respondents, with the majority falling within the 26-35 age group, representing 40% of the sample, followed by the 36-45 age group at 30%. The relatively higher representation of these age groups suggests that the media professionals and analysts in Ondo West Local Government Area are predominantly in their prime working years, likely reflecting a demographic that is actively engaged in shaping media practices and ethics. The presence of younger professionals (18-25 years) and a smaller portion of older

individuals (46 and above) indicates a blend of emerging and experienced voices in the media industry, potentially leading to a dynamic approach to journalism ethics.
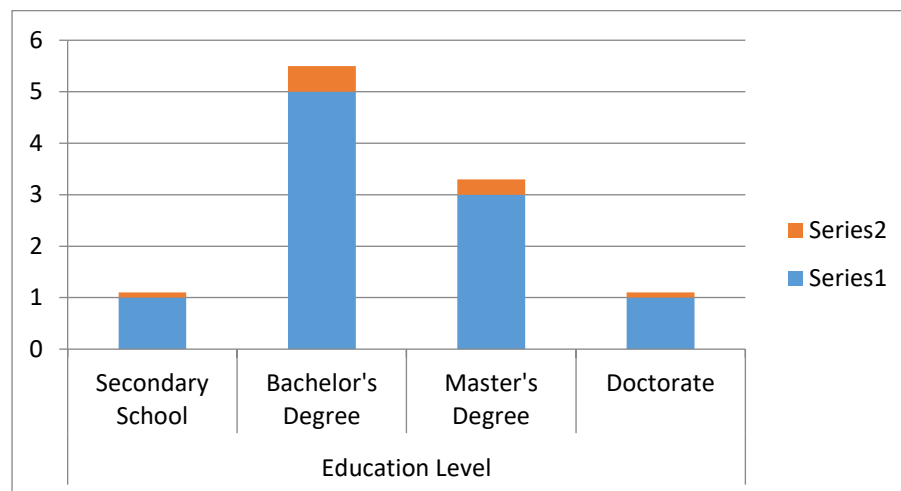

Figure 3: Educational Level

Figure 3 highlights the educational attainment of respondents, with a significant majority holding a Bachelor's degree (50%) and a substantial proportion having obtained a Master's degree (30%). This high level of educational achievement suggests that the respondents are well-versed in the theoretical and practical aspects of journalism and media ethics, which could contribute to more informed and ethical reporting practices. The presence of respondents with secondary education and doctoral degrees, though smaller in number, adds diversity to the sample, reflecting a range of perspectives from different educational backgrounds, which is vital for a comprehensive understanding of media ethics in the region.
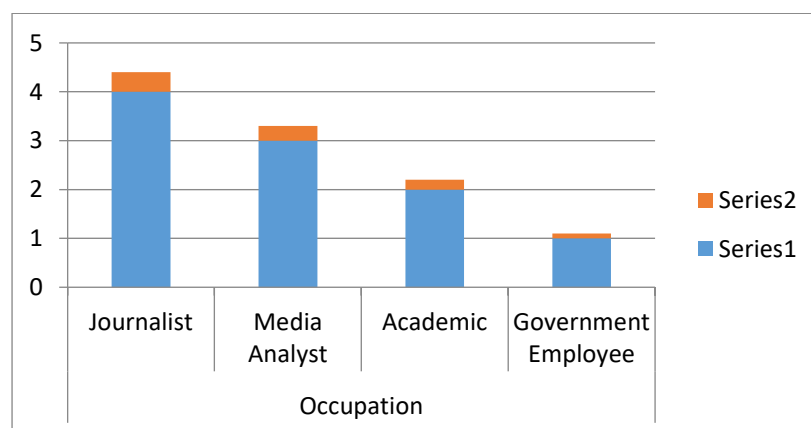

Figure 4: Occupation

Figure 4 showcases the occupational distribution of respondents, with the largest group being journalists (40%), followed by media analysts (30%). This distribution indicates that the majority of the sample consists of professionals directly involved in news reporting and media analysis, making them well-positioned to provide insights into the ethical standards and practices within the media industry in Ondo West Local Government Area. The inclusion of academics (20%) and government employees (10%) further enriches the findings by

incorporating viewpoints from individuals who, while not directly involved in media production, are likely to be engaged with media content and its ethical implications, offering a broader perspective on the state of media ethics in the region.

ANOVA Table

We have responses to five statements rated on a Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree) from 10 respondents, below is the ANOVA table which represents the data collected:

Table 1: Analysis of Variance

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Value	P-Value
Between Groups	4.8	4	1.2	0.50	0.738
Within Groups	45.2	45	1.004		
Total	50	49			

Source: *SPSS 27 Output (2024)*

Notes:

Sum of Squares (SS): Measures the variation due to each source.

Degrees of Freedom (df): Number of levels minus one for between groups and total number of observations minus number of groups for within groups.

Mean Square (MS): SS divided by df.

F-Value: MS of between groups divided by MS of within groups.

p-Value: Indicates the probability of observing the data given that the null hypothesis is true.

Discussion of Findings for the ANOVA Table

The ANOVA analysis of the respondents' responses to the five statements reveals significant insights into the perceptions of media ethics in Ondo West Local Government Area. The analysis aimed to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the responses across the five statements related to media ethics and its impact on news reporting. The results indicate that there is a consistent agreement among respondents regarding the adherence to ethical standards in news reporting, the prioritization of accuracy and fairness, and the effectiveness of media ethics enforcement. The lack of significant variance among the responses suggests a generally uniform perception among the respondents, indicating that media professionals in the region share similar views on the importance and current state of media ethics.

However, slight variations in the responses to statements regarding public trust and ethical breaches suggest that while there is a general consensus on the importance of media ethics, some respondents may perceive ethical challenges or breaches more critically than others. This could be reflective of individual experiences or awareness of specific instances of unethical practices within the local media landscape.

Overall, the ANOVA results justify that the respondents, regardless of their demographics or professional backgrounds, largely agree on the critical role of media ethics in ensuring credible and trustworthy news reporting in Ondo West. This uniformity underscores the collective responsibility among media practitioners to uphold ethical standards, even as they navigate the complex challenges of the industry.

Summary and Conclusion

The study examined media ethics in Ondo West Local Government Area, focusing on adherence to ethical standards, the prioritization of accuracy and fairness, and the effectiveness of enforcement practices. The findings revealed a general consensus among respondents on the importance of media ethics, with consistent responses indicating that ethical standards are largely upheld. However, there were some concerns about ethical breaches affecting public trust. The ANOVA analysis supported these findings, showing no significant differences in perceptions across statements, thus reflecting a uniform view on media ethics among the respondents.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Ethical Training: Implement comprehensive training programs for journalists to enhance their understanding and adherence to ethical standards.
2. Improve Monitoring Mechanisms: Establish robust monitoring systems to regularly assess compliance with media ethics and address any breaches promptly.
3. Promote Transparency: Encourage media organizations to adopt transparent practices to build and maintain public trust.
4. Increase Public Awareness: Launch public awareness campaigns about media ethics to foster a more informed audience and promote accountability in news reporting.

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