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Gambia**

Morolake O. Adekunle, Femi Onifade and Abdul Rashid Gbambu



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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** This paper examines how media ethics and news media financing interact in the setting of a nascent economy. The study focuses on the significance of ethical standards in journalism and how obstacles to funding might have a detrimental effect on them. Issues interrogated include how media ethics are violated, how financial hardships have contributed to the phenomena, the causes of the paucity of funding, and how the news media can navigate the daunting terrain of shrinking financial resources.

**Methodology:** The study collected data from both primary and secondary sources. While interviews with 15 seasoned media professionals provided the primary data, recent literature provided the secondary data.

**Findings:** The results of this study reveal that many media organisations are underpaying their employees, failing to facilitate skills acquisition training for staff, lacking editorial guidelines, hiring underqualified staff to cut costs, and failing to adequately provide the staff with the logistics needed for news gathering, all of which compromise professionalism and drive the phenomena of sensational reporting, partisanship (especially during elections), one-sided reporting, inadequate source attribution, language decorum, inaccurate reporting, lack of skills for covering highly sensitive topics like those relating to children, domestic violence, court proceedings, etc., invasion of people's privacy, and acceptance of freebies by journalists are all examples of how ethical standards are broken.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Innovative advertising campaigns aimed at small businesses, grants for the promotion of current development issues, the creation of content that would draw viewers from outside of Gambia, increased media organization collaboration to cut production costs, the creation of high-quality content, being more inventive to create content that various populations can relate to, and the Media Council's advocacy for government subvention to news media organization's were suggested as solutions to funding challenges faced by the media.

**Keywords:** *Media Ethics, Media Financing, Fledgling Economy, Ethical Compromise, Innovation*

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## List of Abbreviations

AFP- Agence France-Presse

GMC- Gambia Press Council

GPU- Gambia Press Union

UNESCO-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

RSF- Reporters sans Frontieres(Reporters Without Borders)

EJN- Ethical Journalism Network

## INTRODUCTION

The press is often referred to as the “fourth estate” and is considered as important as the executive, legislative, and judicial arms of government in terms of its impact. In a fledgling economy especially, the role of mass media is critical in promoting democracy and acting as a catalyst for economic growth. The news media can strengthen citizens’ participation in governance by serving as a bridge between the government and the governed through the creation of various interactive platforms and channels of expression for government representatives and the citizenry. This, no doubt, promotes participatory governance and builds social cohesion. To promote economic growth, the media can play a monitoring role of guiding government’s economic policies and facilitating the participation of various interest groups in economic decision making (World Bank, 2002). Moreover, the media can help in reaching diverse markets with product promotion.

However, to be effective, the news media must operate within the orbit of untainted professionalism with strict adherence to ethical principles to avoid losing its integrity with reduction in its clientele level and becoming a threat to social harmony and development. The unfortunate reality is that challenges of media financing often threaten compliance with ethical standards.(Council Of Europe, 2015) With rapidly evolving technologies and the increasing demand for information, the need for media financing sources has become more apparent than ever.

How can the media in a developing nation thrive financially without compromising ethical standards? What are the challenges and how can these be surmounted?

This study has identified the barriers to the successful financing of media organizations in The Gambia, a small West African nation, and provided recommendations that will help overcome these challenges. By offering insights into the existing financing models, the study has contributed towards better resource allocation and management of media organizations in this fledgling economy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Mass Media and the Gambian Economic Context

The Gambia is a small nation located on the West Coast of Africa. The Gambia's economy is primarily agrarian, with agriculture being a vital sector that contributes significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs a large portion of the population. However, the sector is vulnerable to climate change, as erratic rainfall patterns and droughts can negatively impact agricultural productivity, posing risks to food security and livelihoods. Tourism also plays a crucial role in The Gambia's economy. Tourism contributes to foreign



exchange earnings, employment opportunities, and infrastructure development. However, the sector has faced challenges, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with travel restrictions and reduced tourist arrivals affecting revenues and employment.

Remittances from Gambians living abroad are a significant source of income for many families and contribute to the country's economy. These financial inflows support consumption, investment, and development projects, acting as a lifeline for many households. However, remittances can be subject to global economic conditions, impacting the country's overall economic stability. The Gambia faces several economic challenges that hinder its development. High poverty rates, limited infrastructure, unemployment, and an underdeveloped private sector are among the key obstacles. Access to quality education and healthcare remains limited, further hindering social and economic progress (World Bank, 2023; heritage.org, 2023).

Within this context, the nation with a population of 2776,490 has nine community radio stations, 38 FM radio stations, one government-owned Television station, four private traditional television stations, four upcoming online television stations, and four newspapers. All these media outlets compete for advertisements.

The media in The Gambia has a self-regulating body, Gambia Press Council, established in 2018 by the Gambia Press Union. There is a code of conduct for journalists launched in 2016, though the regulations are often flouted. (Worldometers, PURA, UNESCO, 2022; GMC, RSF, 2023).

### **Media Ethics**

Media ethics are ideals and principles that govern how people and organizations engage in the creation and dissemination of media content. These ideals encompass truthfulness, correctness, justice, objectivity, dependability, responsibility, self-control, and decorum which are prerequisites to protecting and increasing public trust (IFJ 2019, Melisande 2009).

Immanuel Kant in 1785, captures journalistic ethical conduct in these words, "Act on the maxim that you would want to become universal law". This means the principles upon which an individual's actions are based must be acceptable to fellow human beings everywhere. (Johnson & Cureton 2022)

Ward (2011) summarizes media ethics as the use of freedom of speech in a responsible way and he refers to media ethics as applied ethics while Tilak (2020) describes it as being concerned with how a moral media person should behave. In the words of Jennings (1999) describes it as making a distinction between what you could do and what you should do. According to her "Unless journalists grapple with the 'should' question, written codes of ethics are meaningless".

Media ethics take into account the commitment of media professionals to their audience and the community they serve, as well as their obligation to respect the diversity of perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs among their audience. In this regard, Media practitioners have a duty to seek out the truth and report it with decency and compassion while taking cultural, social, and political values into consideration. Media ethics tries to prevent any monopoly over information diffusion; upholds pluralism as opposed to control over media content that is typical of authoritarian regimes; it maintains objectivity by providing different sides of an issue (Jenning 1999, Ward, 2011) which empowers audiences to formulate their own judgments and increases levels of truthfulness in reporting.

Ethical decisions must be made in two areas, viz, the content of the news story or pictures; and the way the content is gathered. Essentially, journalists must respect people's privacy and dignity and refrain from endangering them in their reporting (Tilak 2020, Hulick G).

Media ethics, because they offer a foundation for responsible journalism, aid in ensuring that the news and information delivered to the public are accurate and trustworthy, and help in protecting the rights of those who are the topic of media coverage, have become very crucial in this dispensation when the news media is facing a credibility crisis. Media Ethics overall, have become very pivotal as journalism has become everybody's business. For the traditional news media, upholding ethics might just be their distinct identity.

### **Evolution of Media Ethics**

The religious texts of the Torah, Bible, and Quran are the first sources for the study of ethics, spelling out moral conduct for the individual in the bid to avoid harm to self, others, and society as a whole. Aristotle's "The Art of Rhetoric" and John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty", however, established the groundwork for moral concerns in the media. Ethical norms have evolved alongside the intellectual, social, political, and technical changes that have taken place in modern cultures. We have various socio-cultural epochs of journalism and their related growth of media ethics.

**The Enlightenment Period:** The Enlightenment period occurred in the 18th century and brought about a change in thought that influenced the growth of journalistic ethics. Journalists began to see the value in reporting the news in a fair and balanced manner as a result of the revolution's emphasis on reason, logic, and universal rights.

**The Industrial Revolution:** Journalism was profoundly affected by the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. The advent of the printing press and other technologies allowed for the mass production of newspapers. As a result of this upheaval, sensationalism and "yellow journalism" became more prevalent, necessitating the establishment of ethical standards to protect the credibility of the news media.

**The Civil Rights Movements of the Mid-Twentieth Century:** Significant social and political developments, especially civil rights movements, occurred around the middle of the twentieth century. The obligation to combat institutionalized bias also had a significant impact on the development of journalistic ethics. Journalists were instrumental in exposing injustice, advocating for change, and giving a voice to underrepresented groups (Humphrey, 1992; Kaplan, 2002).

**The Digital Revolution:** There has been a major shift in media ethics as a result of the digital revolution brought on by the proliferation of the internet and other digital technologies. The dissemination, consumption, and sharing of news and information have all been profoundly affected by this revolution. It has created problems like fake news, a violation of personal privacy, and the proliferation of false information. Issues such as guaranteeing responsible online behaviour and setting ethical guidelines for social media use have presented challenges for media organisations in the digital era.

**The Revolt for Social Justice:** Media outlets have become increasingly sensitive to issues of social justice and diversity in recent years. This uprising has shed light on the media's historical bias against and dehumanising portrayal of underrepresented groups, which has persisted for decades. It has questioned the reliability of mainstream media's narratives and called for a more balanced portrayal of diverse points of view. There is now more demand than ever for the

media to address issues of diversity, inclusiveness, and fairness and to embrace ethical practices that respect individual privacy.

**Fighting misinformation and disinformation:** This has become a priority in the media, marking a significant shift in media ethics. An increased awareness of the media's and its consumers' ethical obligations in verifying and reporting the truth has arisen in response to the quick dissemination of misleading information through digital platforms. The media has recently adopted more stringent fact-checking procedures and more transparent reporting practices. Furthermore, there has been pressure on social media platforms to take action against the spread of disinformation by enacting policies and algorithms that give more weight to trustworthy sources and identify possibly erroneous material.

The application of cutting-edge technologies, such as AI and deep fakes, is another pressing problem in media ethics. Concerns regarding the possible exploitation of emerging technologies in the media industry have been rising in recent years. Since the first INFOethics Congress was held in 1997, UNESCO has made it a priority to discuss the moral and ethical implications of the worldwide information society.

The media landscape globally is facing great challenges from the new media which has negatively impacted income generation resulting in a compromise of ethical standards. This situation is worse in small economies globally due to smaller markets (Deuze & Daphna, 2001; Ward, 2011; Aznar, 2020; Sagwon & Wei, 2022; and Feng, 2022).

Regulation for objectivity or unbiased reporting; privacy and confidentiality; respect for diversity and inclusion in promoting diverse voices and perspectives in media representation; challenging stereotypes; and offering inclusive coverage; transparency and accountability in reporting practices; and holding journalists and media outlets accountable for their actions are all hallmarks of recent media ethics revolutions.

### **Principles of Media Ethics**

The protection of free expression and the right to receive information without arbitrary barriers is a cornerstone of media ethics. The media has a responsibility to its audience for fair and accurate reporting, which means conducting extensive research, checking facts, and presenting both sides of an issue.

Fairness and independence are vital to the trade of journalists. There is a need to avoid letting their own prejudices or conflicts of interest colour their coverage of news events as part of media ethics. Journalists have a moral obligation to maintain the confidentiality of their sources and to preserve the privacy of their interviewees and other people whose information they have access to.

Transparency and accountability are also stressed as the need for media outlets and journalists to be open and honest about their processes and practices, including where they get their information and whether or not they have any conflicts of interest.

An awareness of and respect for the wide variety of cultures, religions, and points of view represented in the world today is required of media professionals; so also is the upholding of the value of diversity and inclusion. Ethics in the media promotes pluralism and inclusiveness by discouraging the consolidation of media ownership and working to make media outlets available to all members of society (EJN, UNESCO)

Appropriate management of commercial pressures and corporate influence is essential. Media ethics discusses the potential for conflicts of interest due to advertising, sponsorship, and corporate ownership, while also stressing the importance of preserving editorial independence and upholding journalistic integrity.

Importantly, journalists need to be productive, so they should study on their own. In journalism, as in any other profession, hard labour is pivotal to getting good, correct stories (Jennings, 1999; Wards, 2005; SPJ, 2014; Azna, 2020; and Plaisance, 2021). The importance of responsible journalism that serves the public good, democracy, and local communities is emphasised by media ethics because of the media's influential position in society. Journalists and other members of the media are held to high standards of ethical conduct and are expected to act in accordance with these guidelines and standards at all times.

### **Ethical Theories and Frameworks**

Several theories and frameworks have been established to aid in formulating moral judgments. We will discuss some of the most important ones:

**The Utilitarian Theory:** According to utilitarianism, the right thing to do is the one that results in the most enjoyment or utility for the most individuals. It considers potential outcomes of a decision and works to increase positive outcomes while decreasing negative ones.

**Deontology:** In deontological ethics, the morality of an action is judged independently of its effects. It considers the motivations behind an individual's conduct, such as their duty to obey the law or respect for another's rights.

**Virtue Ethics:** Virtue ethics focuses on the development of moral character traits and emphasizes the importance of cultivating virtues such as honesty, integrity, and compassion. It looks at the overall character of a person rather than specific actions.

**Rights-based Ethics:** This framework is based on the belief that individuals have fundamental rights that should be respected and protected. It focuses on the moral obligation to respect the rights of others and considers issues of justice and fairness.

**Feminist ethics:** This is a branch of ethics that aims to achieve gender parity and which criticises established ethical frameworks for ignoring the unique viewpoints and experiences of women. It stresses the significance of compassion, concern, and interpersonal connections in formulating moral judgments.

**Environmental Ethics:** This examines the moral implications of human interaction with the natural world. The intrinsic worth of the natural world and the duty to conserve it for future generations are taken into account.

**Ethical Relativism:** This holds that moral standards are not universal and may change depending on who you ask, according to ethical relativists. Ethical judgements, according to this view, should be made in light of one's own cultural or personal norms rather than any external standard (McLaren, Tilak, Lindemann, and Nielsen).

These theories and frameworks offer unique insights into ethical decision-making and guide people and businesses through thorny moral quandaries. When making moral decisions, it is vital to think about different ethical systems and compare their merits and shortcomings.

## **Challenges Faced by Journalists**

### **Media Ownership and Control**

Concerning how the news is reported, those who own and control the media wield considerable influence. When the majority of media is owned or controlled by a small number of individuals or organizations, it can affect the way in which the public receives news and information and raise a number of ethical concerns.

Media ownership and control may have multiple effects on the media. Concentration of media ownership can foster bias and the advancement of particular agendas as political and business magnates who own media outlets may use their power to promote their agenda at the expense of others. This threatens to undermine journalism's ethical obligation to give fair and balanced coverage of issues. (Medes, 2013).

Commercialization and sensationalism driven by a focus on profit-making may compromise fair news reporting. Corporate ownership of media outlets typically leads to a decline in journalistic integrity as corporate interests take precedence over journalistic principles. This jeopardizes the public's access to factual information because it can lead to the spread of sensationalized or misleading content. Consolidated ownership of the media has the potential to stifle alternative viewpoints and diminish pluralism in the news industry. When a few powerful groups own most of the news outlets, it becomes challenging for underrepresented communities to have their opinions heard. The ethical aim of giving multiple viewpoints and fostering democratic discussion might be hampered by this lack of plurality. Moreover, journalistic objectivity can be compromised when there are conflicts of interest between the proprietors of various media outlets. For instance, when media outlets are owned by people with financial or personal ties to the issues they cover, they may be tempted to censor or falsify information to safeguard those ties. Transparency, independence, and accountability are all ethical norms that could be jeopardized by these conflicts.

Editorial control and self-censorship is another undesirable outcome of owners or corporate executives having influence over publication decisions including who gets published; journalists may feel pressured to suppress their own opinions. Reporters may experience an obligation to consider the owners' interests and their own or risk termination or punishment in another form. Their ethical obligation to serve the public good by exposing the truth and holding power accountable may be compromised if they are subjected to such demands.

Media ownership and control is a complex issue; not all news outlets compromise on principles. Despite ownership influences, many media outlets persist in upholding ethical standards and providing credible and impartial information. However, focus on the issue of media ownership concentration persists because of the threat it poses to both media integrity and the watchdog function of the press. (Chari, 2009; and Addo, 2023).

### **Confidentiality and Privacy**

Privacy and confidentiality are significant ethical issues within the media. It is the responsibility of journalists to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of the information provided by their sources are protected. Critical ethical considerations pertaining to media privacy and confidentiality encompass the simultaneous protection of individuals' privacy rights and the public's interest in the information disclosed by journalists. This entails withholding private information from the government unless a compelling public interest exists. In the absence of an urgent public interest concern, reporters are required to exercise



discretion when discussing private matters such as the lives, relationships, or health of individuals. Journalists ought to obtain the informed assent of subjects prior to disseminating personal information or exploiting photographs. Obtaining authorization to perform interviews, capture images, or create recordings is an illustration of this. Consent should be completely voluntary, and recipients should be fully informed of any and all potential consequences associated with providing it.

Journalists must consistently bear in mind that subjects retain the prerogative to withdraw their assent at any given moment. It is the ethical obligation of journalists to protect the confidentiality of their sources. In the interest of the public, the assurance of privacy encourages the disclosure of classified or otherwise sensitive information. In order to safeguard the well-being and identity of their sources, journalists ought to exercise reasonable caution, notwithstanding legal obligations or demands that they reveal their identities. In addition to the potential deterrence of future informants or whistleblowers, source confidentiality violations carry severe repercussions (Hulnick, 2022).

Avoiding injury is of the utmost importance. Journalists are required to evaluate the potential benefits of their work against the potential consequences when disseminating news. It is their duty to weigh the potential public interest benefit of the information against any damage it could cause to particular individuals or organisations. In order to mitigate the risk of harassment, discrimination, and threats to individuals' wellbeing, it is critical to refrain from divulging any personally identifiable information. It is reasonable to have concerns regarding the ethical implications of employing covert video recording or other types of surveillance technology. Journalists ought to exercise prudence when implementing these methods, and exclusively when doing so serves an imperative public objective that cannot be otherwise fulfilled. Given the significance of the narrative and the absence of alternative means to obtain the information, the potential invasion of privacy ought to be justified.

Furthermore, it is imperative that journalists safeguard cultural nuances and conventions when reporting on individuals or groups. They must consider the potential impact that their narratives may have on individuals of various faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. Cultural sensitivity facilitates the avoidance of derogatory or stereotypical portrayals of individuals or groups. Ensuring adherence to these ethical standards is crucial for upholding the rights and dignity of subjects, which are fundamental to preserving public confidence in the media. In order to uphold journalism's integrity and professionalism when dealing with delicate subjects like privacy and confidentiality, it is imperative that media organizations establish and strictly enforce unambiguous codes of conduct and standards. (Barrett- Maitland & Lynch, 2020; AFP, 2016)

When examining media ethics, sensationalism and entertainment can generate numerous concerns and exert a significant influence. Journalistic responsibility and ethics that are compromised for the sake of sensationalism and entertainment value must be avoided at all costs. Integrity and dependability ought to serve as the foundational tenets, while augmenting the emotive impact of a story through embellishment and omission of pertinent details should not be considered a viable alternative. Important to journalistic ethics are the dissemination of accurate information and the telling of the truth; however, sensationalism undermines these values. The dissemination of inaccurate or inflated information can occur due to sensationalism. In pursuit of shock value or emotional appeal, media outlets may sensationalise or manipulate stories, thereby obscuring or misrepresenting their context or significance. This

phenomenon erodes public confidence in the media and has the potential to sow doubt and miscommunication regarding complex issues.

It is incumbent upon journalists to prioritise the public interest over personal gratification when disseminating news. This can be achieved through a variety of means, as enlightening and educating the public about significant matters is not entertainment's primary purpose. Sensationalism can undermine the journalistic duty to provide accurate and informative coverage, which is both a responsibility to the public and to the journalists themselves.

News sensationalism frequently results in the exploitation of those involved in the events it reports. Prioritising sensationalism or dramatic narratives may cause media organisations to overlook the potential damage that may befall individuals. Ethical concerns have been expressed regarding sensationalised reporting on personal crises, accidents, and catastrophes, as it may invade the privacy of individuals and exploit their grief. A diversionary effect can result from sensationalism's propensity to emphasise the most sensational stories to the exclusion of the most crucial or consequential ones. This has the potential to divert attention from more urgent social, political, or economic issues. Journalists with an ethical compass ought to consider the wider implications of stories rather than solely focusing on sensational headlines.

Public confidence in the media and its reporting is diminished when sensationalised stories predominate. Placing entertainment value above responsible and ethical journalism exposes the media to the potential criticism of being unreliable, biased, or driven by sensationalist motivations. This may result in distrust, disinterest, and scepticism regarding the media as a whole.

In the course of reporting on conflicts, journalists frequently incorporate their own viewpoints alongside those of the disputing parties, adopting an editorial stance or directing attention towards specific themes or aspects of the dispute while disregarding others. Their conduct will determine the course of the conflicts, given that they are presently engaged in combat (Puddephatt, 2006; Henshaw & Ingram, 1999).

In order to preserve their credibility, the media must prioritise the public interest over sensationalism and entertainment. Journalists' credibility and trustworthiness are predicated on their adherence to professional standards, exhaustive fact-checking, utilisation of reliable sources, and impartial and unbiased reporting.

### **Media and Social Media Ethics**

The proliferation of digital and social media has resulted in the emergence of new moral dilemmas. Due to the power and reach of the internet, media and social media ethics have become a pressing issue in the modern era. There are Important factors that must be given proper attention in relation to social media ethics.

Most importantly, precision and fact-checking before content is shared are essential for establishing trustworthiness. To prevent the dissemination of incorrect or misleading information, it is incumbent upon media organizations and people to place a premium on credible sources and conduct fact checks.

News organizations and social media users must disclose biases and conflicts of interest. Sponsored content, collaborations, and financial relationships must be disclosed if they

influenced the information provided. Trust is built by giving the audience all the information they need to make a decision.

Due to online anonymity, evaluation of information sources is crucial. Cross-referencing and checking sources will help to prevent spreading misinformation, conspiracy theories, and lies.

Social media outlets depend on user-generated content, which raises ethical issues. Consequently, it is imperative to preserve users' privacy and acquire permission before using their content. Exploitation or misapplication of user-generated content may violate ethics.

Media and social media must fight cyberbullying and online abuse ethically. Media, including the audience, cannot support or condone violence or harassment. For a healthy discourse and the protection of people, a safe and respectful online environment must be created. Ethical media practices promote diversity and inclusion throughout media production and presentation. It is of utmost importance that media and social media users commit themselves to the creation of a more inclusive online community as diversity and inclusion help to maintain and promote the media's credibility.

Since engagement with influencer marketing is widely gaining popularity on social media, there is a need for its ethical use. Influencers should be careful to only endorse companies and services they trust in sponsored content. Deception, such as omitting to disclose sponsorships, can damage audience trust.

Another ethical demand is for the media and social media users to respect others' intellectual property by seeking permission before using copyrighted content or making attribution according to the nature of the copyright. (Sangwon & Wei, 2022; Deuze, & Daphna, 2013.)

### **Global Perspectives on Media Ethics**

Due to regional and cultural differences in social, political, and historical circumstances, global viewpoints on media ethics range widely.

Early in history, the Code of Journalistic Ethics was adopted by the 1926 Pan-American Press Council in Munich. In 1954, during its congress, the International Federation of Journalists adopted a declaration of the duties of journalists which forbids unprofessional behaviours like using incorrect methods to Information, documents or photographs, violations of professional secrecy in relation to news sources, the acceptance of payment to publish or suppress news items. In 1971 in Munich, six journalists trade unions adopted a declaration of the duties and rights of journalists which clearly spelt out the duties and responsibilities of journalists as well as their rights.(Jones, 1980). Much later, in 1973, The Society of Professional Journalists created their own code of ethics based on four principles of seeking the truth and reporting it, minimizing harm, acting independently and being accountable. Organizations like UNESCO and Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (1993) have come up with codes of ethics for the Media.

From a worldwide vantage point, however, a few recurring themes and guiding concepts have emerged. The right to freely share one's thoughts, beliefs, and criticism is widely recognised as a basic human right around the world. By avoiding hate speech, incitement to violence, or defamation, for example, ethical media practices protect and promote free speech while acknowledging its boundaries and obligations.

Also, serving the public interest and holding power accountable are important cornerstones of media ethics around the world. Journalists have a responsibility to feed readers with news that

is reliable, complete, and fair so that they can make educated judgments. The media is widely acknowledged to play a key role in ensuring accountability among governments, corporations, and public people.

Media pluralism and independence are highly regarded around the world. Ethical media practices prioritise a pluralistic media landscape, open to a variety of viewpoints and free from political or financial interference. Fostering democratic societies and encouraging a variety of opinions depend critically on the existence of an independent press.

Human rights, privacy, and respect for individuality are all central to the principles of media ethics. Reporters are expected to be mindful of cultural norms and be careful not to cause any unwarranted distress or intrusion when covering stories that involve personal matters or controversial subjects.

Respect for sources' privacy and safety is another universal value. Ethical media practices include protecting the privacy and safety of those who provide information. Journalists have a responsibility to shield their sources from harm and create a secure space where those who have information that is in the public interest can share it without fear of retaliation.

Ethical media requires avoiding prejudice, stereotypes, or biases based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or any other trait. Journalists have a responsibility to combat prejudice and give a voice to the underrepresented by advocating for diversity in the media.

Ethics in the media around the world stresses the significance of double-checking facts and sources before publishing. Journalists have a responsibility to get their facts straight, using reputable sources and offering context while writing their stories. Responsible reporting that does not inflame tensions or incite violence is a matter of journalistic ethics, especially in crisis zones. Reporters covering war zones have a responsibility to tread carefully since their work can have a direct impact on civilians and reconciliation efforts (EJN, AFP, 2016)

The public's ability to understand and critically evaluate news and other media is highly valued in media ethics. Individuals can better evaluate media material, identify prejudice, and hold media organizations accountable for ethical norms if media literacy efforts are promoted and public engagement is encouraged.

While there are many similarities across international discussions of media ethics, it is important to take into account regional differences while analysing specific ethical practices. The global implementation and interpretation of media ethics are shaped by local differences and challenges (Couldry, 2008; UNESCO 2020)

### **Impact of Media Financing on Media Ethics in Small Economies**

Studies have shown that the impact of media financing on media ethics in small economies is a complex and multifaceted issue. Media organizations, particularly in small economies, often face significant financial challenges that can influence their editorial independence, objectivity, and adherence to ethical standards.

Understanding the interplay between media financing and media ethics is crucial to grasping the potential implications for journalism and society at large. Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer findings indicate that corruption in the media is an area of concern in many developing countries such as Lebanon, Yemen, Pakistan, Bolivia, Zimbabwe,



Ukraine, Malawi, Senegal, Peru, Afghanistan, Thailand, Palestine, Zambia, South Sudan, and Malaysia (Transparency International, 2010/2011).

Perspectives gathered from these scholars: Karikari, 2007; Banda, 2013; Ogunsola, 2014; Meseret, 2015 and Addo, 2023 show that media financing affects the media in many areas.

**Independence and Autonomy:** Media financing can have a direct impact on the independence and autonomy of media organizations. In small economies, media outlets may rely heavily on advertising revenue or financial support from powerful individuals or entities. This dependence can create pressures to tailor content or coverage to appease financial backers, potentially compromising journalistic integrity and ethics.

**Commercial Interests vs. Public Interest:** Media financing can create tension between commercial interests and the pursuit of the public interest. In small economies, media outlets may prioritize revenue generation to sustain their operations, potentially leading to sensationalism, biased reporting, or the neglect of critical issues. This can undermine media ethics, as the media's role as a watchdog and provider of accurate and diverse information may be compromised.

**Lack of Diverse Funding Sources:** Limited financial resources in small economies can result in a lack of diverse funding sources for media organizations. This lack of diversity can create vulnerability and reliance on a few financial backers, increasing the potential for undue influence and compromising media ethics.

**Professional Development and Training:** Insufficient financial resources in small economies can restrict media organizations' ability to invest in professional development and training opportunities for journalists. This limitation can impact the quality of reporting, investigative journalism, and adherence to ethical guidelines.

**Sustainability and Quality Journalism:** Media financing challenges can hinder sustainability and the ability to invest in quality journalism. Lack of resources may result in understaffed newsrooms, low salaries for journalists, and limited investment in equipment and technology. These factors can contribute to a decline in journalistic standards and ethical practices.

According to Mendes (2013), Corrupt practices are more likely to flourish in the media when incomes are low. Journalists' ethical reporting may take a back seat to concerns about salary and pleasing their superiors if they work in an environment where both are scarce. Staff turnover is high in African newsrooms in part because journalists are departing for higher-paying public relations jobs. Despite low wages, journalists in such situations are more likely to take extra compensation in the form of gifts, entertainment, or bribes in exchange for positive coverage, and the lure of higher salaries may also influence their coverage of potential employers.

Understanding the impact of media financing on media ethics in small economies requires a comprehensive analysis of the specific economic, political, and social contexts at play. Balancing financial viability with journalistic integrity is essential to ensure a vibrant media landscape that serves the public interest and upholds ethical standards.

## The Study in the Gambia

### Data Collection Methods

The study collected data from both primary and secondary sources. While secondary sources involved an examination of recent literature, primary sources involved interviews with seasoned 15 media professionals in The Gambia who were purposively chosen.

### Data on the Interviewees

**Table 1: Distribution of Interviewees by Gender**

Male	female
8	7

**Table 2: Length of Media Practice**

Years	Number of interviewees
5-10	2
11-15	12
Above 15	1

The views of the interviewees were sought on violation of media ethical standards and how financial hardships have contributed to the phenomena, the causes of the paucity of funding, and viable coping strategies that news media agencies can adopt in the face of shrinking financial resources.

## FINDINGS

The results of this study reveal that media organizations in The Gambia face serious funding problems as the cost of news production continues to escalate. As an interviewee expressed the concern, “the cost of newsprint continues to escalate, so also is the cost of logistics; the government needs to do something about it.”

Another interviewee said, ‘The situation of dwindling resources of the traditional media organisations is not helped by the public’s poor perception of the media, since part of media ethics is upholding the truth, the traditional media must be actively involved in fact-checking to counter the lies on social media outlets’

According to some of the interviewees, media organizations in The Gambia underpay employees, fail to facilitate skills acquisition training for staff, lack editorial guidelines, hire underqualified staff to cut costs, and fail to adequately provide the staff with the logistics needed for news gathering, all of which compromise professionalism. An interviewee opined, “Media owners are not ready to spend money on their employees, they underpay them and don’t sponsor them for training.”

Another interviewee asserted, “When logistics support are inadequate, it affects the output of the reporter, there will be inaccurate reporting and other undesirable effects”

However, an interviewee would not blame media owners, “The income from advertisements keep dwindling, media owners are struggling to stay afloat”

The challenges of poor remuneration, lack of sponsorship for further training and inadequate logistics support result in the phenomena of sensational reporting, partisanship (especially during elections), one-sided reporting, inadequate source attribution, lack of language decorum, inaccurate reporting, lack of skills for covering highly sensitive topics like those relating to children, domestic violence, court proceedings, etc., invasion of people's privacy, and acceptance of freebies by journalists are all examples of how ethical standards are broken.

### **Recommendations**

Study participants recommended ways of financing the operations of the media without compromising ethical standards. Innovative advertising campaigns aimed at small businesses in the context of a dearth of big private businesses and grants for the promotion of current development issues were suggested. The creation of high quality content that would draw viewers from outside The Gambia, including innovative content that various populations can relate to would help to increase patronage. It was also recommended that media organizations collaborate to cut production costs. Meanwhile, the government should respond proactively to the Media Council's advocacy for government subvention to news media organizations while non-profit organizations funding sources be explored to provide a more sustainable and independent financial base for media outlets thereby reducing reliance on potentially compromising sources of funding.

Media outlets should explore more income generating opportunities offered by social media platforms in the face of the stiff competition from social media news outlets which has culminated in shrinking markets.

It is expected that the findings will contribute to the understanding of the challenges facing news media financing and media ethics in a developing economy context and offer insights into strategies for enhancing ethical journalism practice while ensuring viable funding sources for news media in The Gambia.

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