

Assessment of Student Journalists' Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards in Selected Higher Institutions in Ogun State

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ABSTRACT

Ethical journalism is central to media credibility, demanding accuracy, fairness, truthfulness, and independence. Anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory, this study examines the extent of compliance with ethical standards among student journalists in selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Student media serve as training grounds for emerging journalists, yet questions remain about how well ethical principles are internalized amidst pressures of sensationalism and digital immediacy. A quantitative survey design was adopted. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample of 285 respondents was drawn from a population of 1,816 Mass Communication students at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Babcock University, and Southwestern University through proportional and convenience sampling. Data were gathered with a validated questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression (SPSS v.23). Findings revealed significant positive relationships between ethical principles and compliance with journalism standards. Accuracy ($\beta = .443$, $R^2 = .196$, $p < .001$), fairness ($\beta = .510$, $R^2 = .260$, $p < .001$), and truthfulness ($\beta = .529$, $R^2 = .280$, $p < .001$) predicted compliance, while independence ($\beta = .590$, $R^2 = .348$, $p < .001$) emerged as the strongest determinant. The results show that student journalists demonstrate considerable adherence to ethical norms, with independence exerting the greatest influence. The study contributes to media ethics scholarship by offering insights into the ethical orientations of emerging journalists in a developing democracy. It recommends integrating structured ethics modules into journalism curricula, institutionalizing codes of practice in campus media, and fostering mentorship by professional journalists to reinforce responsible reporting.

Keywords: Truthfulness, Accuracy, Fairness, Independence, accountability

INTRODUCTION

In democratic societies, journalism functions as a cornerstone of freedom, civic engagement, and social accountability. Ethical journalism is centred on truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, independence, and accountability which is indispensable for fostering public trust (Alade et al., 2025; Social Responsibility Theory). Yet, the rise of digital media has intensified ethical pressures, increasing the prevalence of misinformation and sensational reporting that erode media credibility. While professional newsrooms operate under regulatory frameworks and editorial oversight, student journalists in tertiary institutions often lack such structured systems. Consequently, they may be more susceptible to ethical lapses (Alade et al., 2025). Reports

indicate persistent awareness of ethical norms among Nigerian journalists, but adherence remains inconsistent due to editorial pressures, political influence, and weak enforcement mechanisms (AphriaPUB).

Campus journalism in Ogun State—spanning Olabisi Onabanjo University, Babcock University, and Southwestern University—serves as a training ground for future media professionals. Nonetheless, institutional censorship and harassment of student reporters have emerged as significant concerns. In many universities, attempts to hold authorities accountable lead to intimidation, sanctions, or disruption of student publications—a clear infringement on press freedom and ethical practice (Premium Times NigeriaCampus Reporter).

Moreover, scholarship on media ownership influence highlights the precarious position of ethical norms when economic or proprietorial interests overshadow editorial independence (journal.kiut.ac.tz.) This challenge, combined with the democratization of media production (particularly digital platforms), places student journalists who operate without professional gatekeeping at heightened risk of engaging in sensationalism, biased reporting, or plagiarism.

Given the normative importance of journalism ethics and the emerging threats in campus contexts, this study is essential. It systematically examines the extent of ethical compliance, focusing on accuracy, fairness, truthfulness, and independence by student journalists in Ogun State within the framework of **Social Responsibility Theory**. By doing so, it fills a gap in media ethics research, particularly regarding the ethical orientation of emerging journalists in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Furthermore, the study's insights will inform targeted strategies to strengthen journalism education, institutional support, and mentorship, thereby reinforcing ethical reporting practices and enhancing media credibility from the grassroots upward.

Statement of the Problem

Ethical journalism is central to sustaining credibility, yet its practice among student journalists in Nigerian tertiary institutions remains under-examined. In Ogun State, where student media platforms in institutions such as Olabisi Onabanjo University, Babcock University, and Southwestern University shape campus discourse, recurring ethical breaches—sensationalism, plagiarism, misinformation, and biased reporting—raise questions about integrity and professional preparedness (Adeyemi & Olasunkanmi, 2019). Despite ethics being embedded in journalism curricula, many student journalists lack consistent adherence to these standards, largely due to weak supervisory structures and the absence of campus press councils.

This challenge is compounded by declining audience trust. Research shows that students often perceive campus media as unreliable and biased, undermining the relevance of student journalism as a credible voice within higher education communities (Bello & Ajayi, 2019). The digital shift further complicates the landscape, as student reporters increasingly publish instantly on blogs and social media without adequate verification, prioritizing speed and visibility over accuracy and accountability (Lawal & Uche, 2021).

Addressing these gaps is critical. Without empirical assessment of compliance and trust, institutions cannot effectively strengthen journalism education or foster ethical maturity among emerging journalists. This study, therefore, investigates the extent of ethical compliance among student journalists in Ogun State, providing evidence to guide training, policy, and institutional reforms.

Objective of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

To examine the accuracy of news reporting among student journalists in tertiary institutions across Ogun State.

To assess the extent to which student journalists uphold fairness and balance in their news coverage.

To investigate the level of truthfulness and thoroughness applied by student journalists in information verification prior to publication.

To evaluate how student journalists maintain journalistic independence and manage potential conflicts of interest in their reporting.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Ethical Journalism

Ethical journalism represents the normative framework of values, standards, and obligations that guide journalistic practice toward the pursuit of truth, fairness, and accountability. It extends beyond mere legal compliance, functioning as a moral compass that ensures journalism fulfils its democratic mandate of informing the public responsibly (Ward, 2018; McBride & Rosenstiel, 2020). At its core, ethical journalism requires practitioners to balance freedom of expression with professional responsibility, ensuring news does not mislead, incite, or cause harm. Globally, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics (2017) remains a widely referenced standard. Its four enduring obligations—seek truth and report it, minimise harm, act independently, and be accountable and transparent—remain crucial, especially in the digital age where misinformation and algorithmic bias increasingly shape public knowledge (Tandoc, 2019; Napoli, 2020). UNESCO (2022) similarly stresses that ethical journalism is indispensable in societies grappling with disinformation and polarisation, given its role in sustaining trust and democratic resilience.

In the Nigerian context, ethical journalism is continually tested by ownership interference, political pressures, weak enforcement of codes, and precarious economic conditions. Okoro and Daramola (2020) highlight the persistence of brown-envelope journalism (accepting inducements for coverage) as corrosive to trust. Uche and Ngwoke (2021) further argue that unethical practices undermine public confidence, escalate conflict, and weaken democratic culture. For student journalists, ethical journalism is not an abstract concept but a formative necessity. Campus-based media often represents the first structured space where professional practices are tested. As Ogunleye and Salihu (2022) caution, ethical lapses at this stage risk becoming entrenched in later professional careers. Thus, grounding students in ethics from the outset helps strengthen democratic culture, particularly in politically sensitive contexts such as Nigeria.

Principles of Ethical Journalism

Ethical journalism is anchored on core normative principles recognised globally by professional associations, regulatory bodies, and journalism educators. Within Nigeria, these principles underpin the NUJ Code of Ethics and inform training curricula.

Truth and Accuracy

Accuracy is the cornerstone of ethical journalism. Journalists must verify, contextualise, and communicate facts clearly. Ekwueme and Eze (2021) note that inaccuracies not only mislead but irreparably erode trust. For student journalists, fact-checking and triangulation are especially vital in a digital environment dominated by rumours and viral misinformation (Posetti & Matthews, 2018).

Independence

Independence is one of the most critical yet fragile principles. Journalists are expected to resist political, commercial, or personal pressures. However, in Nigeria, ownership structures—dominated by political and business elites—routinely undermine editorial autonomy (Oyero, 2018). For students, independence is tested through both institutional censorship and peer pressure. University authorities often suppress unfavourable reporting, leading to self-censorship (Salawu & Hassan, 2019), while peer groups and campus unions pressure student journalists to align with partisan narratives. These pressures compromise editorial freedom, fostering dependency and limiting professional growth (Oladeinde & Olorunyomi, 2019). Developing independence therefore requires not only training but structural protection of campus press freedom.

Fairness and Impartiality

Fairness demands giving voice to all sides of a story. McBride and Rosenstiel (2020) stress that multiple perspectives help reduce bias. In student contexts, fairness helps prevent polarisation and protects marginalised groups.

Accountability and Transparency

Ekpu (2022) underscores that acknowledging mistakes and making corrections is essential for credibility. Transparency fosters public trust. For students, this principle nurtures habits of reflective practice.

Humanity and Sensitivity

Ethical journalists must minimise harm and avoid discriminatory language. Adeleke and Salihu (2023) note that many student reporters, eager to “break” stories, overlook potential harm.

Responsibility to the Public

Journalism is a public trust. Umechukwu (2019) argues that reporting should prioritise public interest above institutional or personal agendas. Student journalists, by extension, must serve as campus watchdogs.

Ethical Journalism Practices in Nigeria

While Nigerian journalism is formally guided by the NUJ Code of Ethics, Press Council regulations, and NBC guidelines, enforcement remains weak. Studies show widespread professional breaches such as sensationalism, biased reporting, and inadequate verification (Ojebuyi & Ekeanyanwu, 2017). Digital transformation has exacerbated these problems. Ajiboye and Omotunde (2021) report that competition for online visibility often leads to unverified stories and clickbait headlines. The rise of **algorithmic influence**, where digital platforms prioritise engagement-driven content, further incentivises sensationalism over accuracy (Napoli, 2020).

Ownership and political interference compound ethical lapses. Oso (2017) found that media owners dictate editorial direction to serve partisan objectives. Among student journalists, censorship by university management and fear of sanctions encourage self-censorship (Salawu & Hassan, 2019). Peer pressure similarly biases coverage, as students may be compelled to support factional agendas. These forces collectively weaken independence, turning ethical principles into ideals rather than practices.

Despite these challenges, NGOs such as the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ) and the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) have introduced training in ethics and fact-checking (Olatunji & Adedokun, 2022). However, Ekwueme and Okoro (2021) emphasise that while knowledge of ethics is widespread, application remains limited because external pressures—whether institutional, peer-based, or algorithmic—distort editorial judgement.

Compliance in Media Practice

Compliance refers to adherence to ethical frameworks such as the NUJ Code, NBC Code, and Press Council Act. While awareness of these frameworks is high, actual adherence is inconsistent. Uche and Ngwoke (2018) note that more than 60% of journalists admit compromising under external pressures. Among students, compliance is undermined by weak editorial structures, censorship, and lack of mentorship. Digital media poses new obstacles: misinformation spreads rapidly, while algorithmic amplification privileges sensational content over verified news (Tandoc, 2019). This environment pressures student journalists to prioritise speed and virality over accuracy (Uko, 2020). Strengthening compliance therefore requires not only ethical training but also institutional protections and digital literacy to navigate algorithmic environments.

Understanding Student Journalism

Student journalism comprises reporting, editing, and publishing by students, often through campus press clubs or departmental journals. It is both educational and civic, fostering skills and accountability (Asemah, 2011; Oso & Pate, 2011). However, it faces challenges such as poor funding, limited tools, censorship, and lack of mentorship (Elebeke & Edeoga, 2020). Salawu and Hassan (2019) highlight that fear of victimisation leads many students to practise self-censorship.

Digitalisation has widened both opportunities and risks. Social media and blogs amplify student voices but expose them to cyberbullying, misinformation risks, and disciplinary sanctions (Adeyemo & Chukwu, 2022). Moreover, algorithmic systems amplify divisive or sensational content, shaping what student journalists produce and how audiences consume it (Napoli, 2020). As such, ethical reasoning and resilience to institutional and peer pressures are crucial for student journalism in the digital era.

Challenges to Ethical Compliance Among Campus Journalists

Barriers to ethical compliance among student journalists are multifaceted. They include: inadequate training and mentorship (Okoro & Ugwuanyi, 2021); weak editorial structures (Obot & Batta, 2012); peer and political pressures (Akinfeleye, 2018); financial constraints (Eze & Asogwa, 2013); institutional censorship (Oladeinde & Olorunyomi, 2019); and digital pressures such as misinformation and algorithmic influence (Tandoc, 2019; Napoli, 2020). These challenges underscore the need for stronger training, policy frameworks, and protections to nurture ethical student journalism.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored primarily on Social Responsibility Theory, complemented by Deontological Ethics, to interrogate ethical journalism in Nigeria's contemporary media environment, especially in the context of student journalism.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility Theory, derived from the Hutchins Commission Report of 1947, asserts that freedom of the press is inseparable from responsibility. It emphasises that while journalists enjoy liberty to disseminate information, such freedom must be exercised with a duty to accuracy, fairness, balance, and accountability to society (McQuail, 1993). The theory situates journalism not merely as a private enterprise but as a social institution obligated to safeguard democracy and maintain public trust.

In the digital era, this responsibility is heightened. The spread of misinformation and disinformation threatens social cohesion, while algorithm-driven content delivery prioritises popularity over truth (Tandoc, 2019; Napoli, 2020). Social Responsibility Theory thus extends beyond traditional editorial values to encompass digital literacy, fact-checking, and algorithmic awareness as part of ethical obligations. For student journalists, the principle of responsibility demands not only resisting peer and institutional pressures but also navigating an environment where viral content and platform incentives may distort ethical judgement. By reinforcing accuracy and accountability, Social Responsibility Theory remains highly relevant in an era where unverified content can spread globally within minutes.

Deontological Ethics

Deontological Ethics, rooted in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), holds that morality is determined not by outcomes but by adherence to duty and principle. For journalists, this translates into obligations such as truth-telling, fairness, respect for autonomy, and refusal to compromise integrity, regardless of pressures or consequences (Nasello & Triffaux, 2023).

In the Nigerian student journalism context, independence becomes central to a deontological framework. Student journalists face strong pressures from campus authorities who may censor dissenting voices, as well as from peers who push partisan narratives (Salawu & Hassan, 2019; Oladeinde & Olorunyomi, 2019). A deontological perspective insists that ethical duties—such as reporting truthfully and resisting manipulation—must be upheld even in the face of such constraints. Similarly, in the digital landscape, where algorithms reward sensationalism, deontology emphasises resisting the lure of engagement-driven content in favour of principled reporting.

Integrating the Framework

Together, Social Responsibility Theory and Deontological Ethics establish a dual foundation for this study. Social Responsibility highlights the institutional and societal role of journalism in promoting accuracy, fairness,

and democratic accountability, while Deontology underscores the individual moral duties of journalists to uphold integrity and resist pressures, whether from authorities, peers, or algorithms.

Applied to student journalism in Nigeria, this theoretical framework foregrounds the tension between independence and institutional/peer control, and between ethical responsibility and the challenges of digital misinformation and algorithmic influence. It thus provides a robust conceptual basis for understanding how ethical principles can be preserved in an increasingly complex media ecosystem.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research design using the survey method to investigate compliance with ethical journalism practices among student journalists. The population, as of May 2025, consisted of 1,816 Mass Communication students across three institutions in Ogun State: Southwestern University (42), Babcock University (774), and Olabisi Onabanjo University (1,000), ensuring representation from both private and public universities. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 328 respondents was determined and proportionately distributed: Southwestern (8), Babcock (140), and Olabisi Onabanjo (180). A convenience sampling technique was employed to select respondents within each university. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to capture students' perceptions of ethical principles such as truthfulness, fairness, accuracy, and independence. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics to test hypotheses and examine relationships between variables.

Data Presentation/Analysis & Discussion of study

A total of 328 (Three Hundred and Twenty-Eight) copies of the questionnaire designed for the purpose of this study were distributed. 285 copies of the questionnaire representing 87% were returned and validated. Hence, this data presentation was premised on the validated copies.

Research Question 1: What is the level of accuracy in news reporting among student journalists in tertiary institutions in Ogun State?

H01: There is no significant relationship between the level of accuracy in news reporting and student journalists' compliance with ethical journalism standards in Ogun State tertiary institutions. S

Table 5a ANOVA & Model Summary for the Test of Significant Relationship Between Accuracy in News Reporting and Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model		Sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
	Regression	662.554	1	662.554	68.907	0.000 ^b
	Residual	2721.109	283	9.615		
	Total	3383.663	284			

R= 0.443^a

R Square = 0.196

Adjusted R Square = 0.193

Table 4.6a indicates the ANOVA and model summary statistics for the test of significant relationship between accuracy in news reporting and compliance with ethical journalism standards

Table 5b Linear Regression Coefficients for the Influence of Accuracy in News Reporting on Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant) Accuracy	50.440	2.140	.443	23.572	<.000
	1.020	.123		8.301	<.000

Dependent Variable: Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Objective One sought to assess the level of accuracy in news reporting among student journalists in tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The descriptive findings (Table 1) revealed a mean composite score of 3.47 (SD = 0.30), suggesting that respondents generally agreed they uphold accuracy in their reporting, bordering on “strongly agree.” This finding underscores that student journalists demonstrate a commendable level of compliance with ethical norms regarding factual correctness. Specifically, the highest-rated indicator showed that a large majority (93.7%) strive to correct factual errors once noticed (Mean = 3.72), reflecting accountability and responsibility. Similarly, high agreement was observed in the use of credible sources (Mean = 3.46), attribution to reliable sources (Mean = 3.46), and double-checking facts before publication (Mean = 3.49). These outcomes highlight a strong orientation toward accuracy and credibility. However, the comparatively lower mean score (3.21) for avoiding exaggeration or distortion suggests that sensationalism remains a subtle but lingering challenge, consistent with literature noting that students and even professional journalists sometimes embellish stories to attract attention (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).

Beyond the descriptive statistics, the regression analysis provided deeper insights into the predictive relationship between accuracy and ethical compliance. The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship ($\beta = .443$, $t = 8.301$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of accuracy in reporting are strongly associated with stronger compliance with ethical standards. The model explained 19.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.196$) in ethical compliance, meaning accuracy is an important, though not exclusive, predictor of ethical journalism practices. The remaining variance suggests that other factors—such as institutional pressures, ownership influence, or peer practices—also play roles, echoing the findings of Okoro and Ugwu (2019) who observed that accuracy is central but not sufficient on its own in ensuring ethical reporting.

These findings are in line with earlier works emphasizing that accuracy is the cornerstone of journalism ethics. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) stress that journalism’s first obligation is to the truth, while Schudson (2019) argues that the credibility of journalism is anchored in fact-checking, verification, and correction. Similarly, Oso (2012) asserts that the Nigerian press, both student and professional, must embrace accuracy to counteract the erosion of trust in the media. The present findings corroborate these scholarly arguments, showing that student journalists not only recognize but actively practice accuracy-driven reporting.

When situated within the theoretical framework, the results align with both Social Responsibility Theory and Deontological Ethics. From the perspective of Social Responsibility Theory (McQuail, 1993), student journalists demonstrate awareness that their reporting must balance press freedom with accountability, ensuring that the public receives factual, verified, and reliable information. Their willingness to correct errors and attribute information to credible sources reflects adherence to the social obligation of truthfulness and fairness. Meanwhile, from the lens of Deontological Ethics (Kant, 1785/1996), the students’ consistent efforts to double-check facts and avoid deliberate distortion highlight their commitment to duty-bound principles, where ethical decisions are driven not by outcomes but by adherence to truth-telling as a moral duty (Nasello & Triffaux, 2023).

Taken together, the findings suggest that student journalists in Ogun State exhibit a high degree of accuracy, which significantly contributes to their compliance with ethical standards. This affirms the continuing relevance of accuracy as a fundamental pillar of journalism, while also highlighting the need for further capacity building to address lingering issues of exaggeration and sensationalism. In sum, the results validate prior scholarship while extending the argument that journalism education—when grounded in ethical frameworks—can foster a

new generation of journalists who uphold credibility in a politically and digitally complex Nigerian media environment.

Research Question Two: To what extent do student journalists uphold fairness and balance in news reporting?

H02: There is no significant relationship between adherence to fairness and balance and student journalists' compliance with ethical journalism standards in Ogun State tertiary institutions.

Table 6a. ANOVA & Model Summary for the Test of Significant Relationship Between Fairness and Balance and Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model		Sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	878.942	1	878.942	99.309	0.000 ^b
	Residual	2504.721	283	8.851		
	Total	3383.663	284			

R= 0.510^a

R Square = 0.260

Adjusted R Square = 0.257

Table 6a indicates the ANOVA and model summary statistics for the test of significant relationship between fairness and balance and compliance with ethical journalism standards

Table 6b Linear Regression Coefficients for the Influence of Fairness and Balance on Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant) Fairness	51.278 .987	1.701 .099	.510	30.147 9.965	<.000 <.000

Dependent Variable: Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Objective Two examined the extent to which student journalists uphold fairness and balance in news reporting. The descriptive results (Table 4.3) revealed a mean composite score of 3.41 (SD = 0.36), suggesting that respondents generally agreed they practice fairness and balance in their reporting. This indicates that student journalists demonstrate a fairly strong commitment to impartiality and equitable representation of views in their stories.

Specifically, respondents reported high levels of avoiding biased language (Mean = 3.47; 90.5% agreement) and separating personal opinion from news reporting (Mean = 3.46; 95.8% agreement), both of which are central to balanced journalism. Similarly, a majority noted that they strive to cover all sides of controversial issues fairly (Mean = 3.42) and provide opportunities for all relevant parties to speak (Mean = 3.39). However, the lowest-rated dimension concerned the consideration of minority views in sensitive issues (Mean = 3.33), indicating that while fairness is upheld broadly, inclusivity of marginalized voices remains a weakness. This pattern mirrors the observations of Nwabueze (2015), who argued that minority perspectives are often underrepresented in Nigerian journalism.

The regression analysis provided further insights by testing the relationship between fairness and ethical compliance. The results showed a statistically significant positive relationship ($\beta = .510$, $t = 9.965$, $p < .001$), suggesting that greater fairness and balance in reporting are associated with stronger compliance with ethical journalism standards. The model explained 26% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.260$) in compliance, which is substantial compared to the accuracy dimension (19.6%), showing that fairness is an even stronger predictor of ethical journalism among student journalists in Ogun State. The remaining 74% of variance highlights that while fairness is central, other factors—such as institutional culture, media ownership, peer influence, or external

pressures—also play key roles in shaping ethical behaviour. These findings are consistent with the broader literature that frames fairness and balance as cornerstones of journalistic ethics. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) emphasize that fair representation of diverse voices enhances credibility and public trust, while Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) note that balanced reporting strengthens journalism’s legitimacy as a democratic institution. In the Nigerian context, Okoro and Odoemelam (2013) also stressed that fairness and balance are essential for countering bias, especially in a politically charged environment.

When examined through the theoretical framework, the results align with both Social Responsibility Theory and Deontological Ethics. From the perspective of Social Responsibility Theory (Hutchins Commission, 1947; McQuail, 1993), fairness and balance are vital in ensuring that the media serves the public interest by providing pluralistic perspectives and avoiding sectional bias. The students’ demonstrated efforts to avoid biased language and give parties a chance to speak suggest they are internalizing this responsibility. From a Deontological Ethics standpoint (Kant, 1785/1996), fairness is a duty-bound obligation of journalists, irrespective of consequences. The students’ inclination to separate personal opinion from factual reporting illustrates adherence to this moral duty.

In summary, the findings indicate that student journalists in Ogun State uphold fairness and balance to a significant extent, with the regression analysis confirming its strong predictive power in shaping compliance with ethical journalism standards. While their practices reflect commendable alignment with global journalistic principles, challenges remain in ensuring inclusivity of minority perspectives. This reinforces the argument that continuous journalism education and training are necessary to deepen students’ understanding of fairness as both a professional responsibility and a moral duty.

Research Question Three: Research Question 3: How truthful and thorough are student journalists in verifying information before publication

H03: There is no significant relationship between truthfulness and verification of information before publication and student journalists’ compliance with ethical journalism standards in Ogun State tertiary institutions.

Table 7a ANOVA & Model Summary for the Test of Significant Relationship Between Truthfulness and Verification and Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model		Sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
	Regression	947.121	1	947.121	110.006	0.000 ^b
	Residual	2436.543	283	8.610		
	Total	3383.663	284			

R= 0.529^a

R Square = 0.280

Adjusted R Square = 0.277

Table 4.8a indicates the ANOVA and model summary statistics for the test of significant relationship between truthfulness and verification and compliance with ethical journalism standards

Table 7b Linear Regression Coefficients for the Truthfulness and Verification on Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	49.211	1.813		27.146	<.000
Truthfulness and Verification	1.127	.107	.529	10.488	<.000

Dependent Variable: Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Objective Three focused on the extent to which student journalists uphold truthfulness and verification of information before publication. The descriptive analysis produced a composite mean score of 3.36 (SD = 0.32), indicating that respondents generally agreed they demonstrate truthfulness and thoroughness in verifying facts

prior to disseminating reports. The relatively low standard deviation further suggests consistency across responses, reflecting a shared ethical orientation toward responsible reporting.

Among the specific indicators, the highest mean scores were recorded for relying on first-hand information or evidence before reporting (Mean = 3.39) and prioritizing accuracy over being the first to publish (Mean = 3.38). These findings suggest that students value credibility and factual correctness over the pressure to break news quickly, which is especially significant in today's digital media environment where speed often overshadows accuracy. Similarly, respondents agreed on verifying facts from multiple sources (Mean = 3.36) and avoiding the publication of rumours or unverified information (Mean = 3.35). The lowest-rated item—reviewing reports to avoid misinformation (Mean = 3.32)—still fell within the “Agree” range, reinforcing an overall culture of verification and factual accountability among the students.

The regression analysis further confirmed this relationship by showing a statistically significant positive association between truthfulness and compliance with ethical standards ($\beta = .529$, $t = 10.488$, $p < .001$). This indicates that the more student journalists emphasize truthfulness and verification in their reporting, the greater their overall adherence to ethical journalism. The model accounted for 28.0% of the variance in compliance ($R^2 = 0.280$), which is higher than both accuracy (19.6%) and fairness (26.0%), suggesting that truthfulness and verification are the strongest predictors of ethical compliance among the variables measured. The rejection of the null hypothesis ($p < .05$) further strengthens this conclusion.

These findings resonate strongly with the Social Responsibility Theory, which emphasizes that the press must provide truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent accounts of events as part of its accountability to society (Hutchins Commission, 1947; McQuail, 1993). The students' prioritization of factual correctness over speed reflects this obligation, showing alignment with the public-interest role of journalism. From the lens of Deontological Ethics, truth-telling is a moral duty independent of external outcomes (Kant, 1785/1996). The students' insistence on fact-checking, reliance on credible sources, and rejection of rumors illustrates their adherence to this categorical imperative of journalism practice.

Empirical evidence further supports this outcome. Ward (2015) stresses that truthfulness is the foundational principle of journalistic integrity, while Craft, Vos, and Wolfgang (2016) argue that verification practices enhance credibility and trust in media institutions. Similarly, Abubakar (2020) underscores that in contexts like Nigeria—where misinformation and political influence can easily distort public narratives—the journalist's duty of truth-telling becomes even more critical.

In summary, the findings reveal that student journalists in Ogun State strongly uphold truthfulness and verification practices, and this dimension emerges as the most powerful predictor of compliance with ethical journalism standards. This not only underscores the centrality of truth-telling in journalistic ethics but also highlights the resilience of these future journalists against the lure of sensationalism and speed-driven reporting.

Research Question 4: Do student journalists maintain independence and avoid conflict of interest in their reporting?

H04: There is no significant relationship between maintenance of journalistic independence and avoidance of conflict of interest and student journalists' compliance with ethical journalism standards in Ogun State tertiary institutions.

Table 8a ANOVA & Model Summary for the Test of Significant Relationship Between Journalistic Independence and Conflict of Interest and Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model		Sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
	Regression	1178.046	1	1178.046	151.154	0.000 ^b
	Residual	2205.617	283	7.794		
	Total	3383.663	284			

$R = 0.590^a$

R Square = 0.348

Adjusted R Square = 0.346

Table 8a indicates the ANOVA and model summary statistics for the test of significant relationship between journalistic independence and conflict of interest and compliance with ethical journalism standards

Table 8b Linear Regression Coefficients for the Influence of Journalistic Independence and Avoidance of Conflict of Interest on Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	48.274	1.624		29.724	<.000
Independence and Avoidance of Conflict	1.174	.095	.590	12.294	<.000

Dependent Variable: Compliance with Ethical Journalism Standards

Objective Four examined the extent to which student journalists uphold journalistic independence and avoid conflicts of interest in their reporting. The descriptive findings yielded a composite mean score of 3.39 (SD = 0.35), indicating general agreement that respondents maintain independence and avoid compromising relationships or influences. The relatively low standard deviation suggests consistency across responses, reflecting a shared ethical orientation toward impartiality and professional boundaries.

Looking at individual items, the highest level of agreement was recorded for avoiding gifts or favors that might influence reporting (Mean = 3.44), underscoring awareness of the risks of inducements and corruption in journalism. Respondents also strongly agreed on remaining objective despite personal relationships (Mean = 3.38), reporting without undue influence (Mean = 3.38), and disclosing potential conflicts of interest (Mean = 3.38). The lowest-rated item, though still within the “Agree” range, was not allowing personal affiliations or beliefs to affect news judgment (Mean = 3.35). This highlights that while students are mindful of independence, subtle biases rooted in personal affiliations remain a potential challenge—an issue also noted by Shoemaker and Reese (2014) in their work on newsroom influences.

The regression analysis strengthened these descriptive insights by revealing a statistically significant positive relationship between journalistic independence and ethical compliance ($\beta = .590$, $t = 12.294$, $p < .001$). This means that higher levels of independence and avoidance of conflict of interest are strongly associated with greater compliance with ethical standards. The model explained 34.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.348$) in ethical compliance—the highest predictive power among all the dimensions examined (accuracy, fairness, truthfulness, and independence). This underscores the centrality of independence in determining the ethical behavior of student journalists in Ogun State. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a significant relationship.

These findings align with Social Responsibility Theory, which emphasizes that journalists must serve the public interest free from undue influence, whether political, commercial, or personal (Hutchins Commission, 1947; McQuail, 1993). By avoiding gifts, inducements, or biases from personal affiliations, student journalists demonstrate a recognition of their duty to society rather than to external actors. From a Deontological Ethics perspective, independence represents a categorical duty to act impartially and truthfully, regardless of pressures or incentives (Kant, 1785/1996). The students’ responses suggest a commitment to this moral imperative, even though challenges remain in managing personal biases.

Empirical studies support these findings. Schudson (2001) and Hanitzsch (2007) argue that independence is a cornerstone of professional journalism, ensuring credibility and trust. In Nigeria, Abubakar (2020) notes that conflicts of interest—often arising from political patronage, corruption, or ownership influence—are among the greatest threats to ethical journalism. Thus, the students’ rejection of inducements and emphasis on objectivity reflect an encouraging alignment with global professional standards.

In summary, the results demonstrate that student journalists in Ogun State tertiary institutions are strongly committed to maintaining independence and avoiding conflicts of interest, making this the most influential predictor of ethical compliance among the dimensions studied. Their practices not only reflect a recognition of ethical boundaries but also underscore the importance

CONCLUSION

The study examined ethical journalism compliance among student journalists in Ogun State, focusing on accuracy, fairness, truthfulness, and independence. Findings show high adherence to ethical practices such as fact-checking, source credibility, balance, and avoidance of conflicts of interest. Regression results confirmed significant positive relationships, with independence emerging as the strongest predictor of compliance ($R^2 = 0.348$). These results align with Social Responsibility Theory and Deontological Ethics, underscoring that ethical journalism thrives on accuracy, fairness, truthfulness, and above all, independence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities should strengthen ethics training, institutionalize fact-checking, and promote fairness, truthfulness, and independence in student reporting. Professional bodies (NUJ, NPC) should mentor students, while policies discouraging gifts or inducements must be enforced. Further research should explore other determinants of compliance.

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