

Research Article

Ethical Sustainability and Artificial Intelligence Information Sourcing Among Journalists in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study investigated Ethical sustainability and Artificial intelligence information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State. The study emphasises the importance of a balanced approach that promotes adoption and innovation while safeguarding human rights and fostering responsible AI development in Rivers State. The study is based on the Social Responsibility and Technological Determinism Theories. The study employed a survey research design with a questionnaire for data collection, using a total of 459 registered journalists as both the population and sample size. Data obtained from the research instrument were analysed using a Weighted Mean Score on a 4-point Likert scale. The result obtained revealed that the level of awareness of Rivers State journalists on the use of artificial intelligence for information sourcing is significantly high; artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State is effective since it saves time, cost and enhances faster decision-making among journalists and fairness, honesty, fact-checking and objectivity were among the major ethical issues Journalists in Rivers State considered when sourcing information from AI. The study recommends that there should be an Artificial Intelligence literacy/ training that focuses on AI applications, benefits and limitations in journalism practice; journalists should be an Artificial Intelligence literacy/ training that focuses on AI applications, benefits and limitations in journalism practice and should be an established set of clear guidelines for AI usage in journalism practice, emphasising fairness, honesty, fact-checking and objectivity.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Ethical Consideration; Information Sourcing; Journalists; Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism has transformed the media landscape globally, and Nigeria is no exception. With the increasing adoption of AI tools in newsrooms, there are concerns about ethical sustainability, and the responsibility of AI use has come to the forefront. Lateef et al. (2022) established that AI technology is applied in trend forecasting, decision making, content generation, processing large volumes of data, aiding in trend analysis, combating misinformation, and providing support to journalists by freeing them from mundane tasks in Spain. According to Noain-Sánchez (2022, Chris 2025), in the USA, UK and Germany, AI plays a significant role in journalism practice, such as greater efficiency by producing more content with fewer human resources and automated content production and personalized distribution. Also, South African journalists use AI tools for tasks like transcription, research, idea generation and fact-checking in media practice with total compliance to ethical considerations (Chris, 2025).

Ethical sustainability is primarily concerned with what is morally right or wrong in human conduct. Ugo et al. (2023) opine that ethics are the practices that lead to trust in the platforms where users actually are. They are the established codes of conduct that guide a profession. In media practice, several ethical considerations or behaviors guide the activities of the media practitioners. The adoption of AI in journalism among Rivers State journalists is at its early stages, with limited investments and experts hindering widespread implementation. However, some media industries are leveraging AI to improve their operations, like automated news production, content personalisation, fake news detection or checking.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) particularly, has transformed journalism by redefining the way journalists' source, verify, produce, and disseminate information to the public. AI-powered applications such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and Microsoft Copilot now play pivotal roles in assisting journalists for information retrieval, translation, fact-checking, analysis of data, and even content generation. These technologies have improved newsroom efficiency significantly by reducing the time required for the usual journalistic tasks and enabling journalists to analyse large volumes of information more effectively (Beckett, 2019; Marconi, 2020).

Despite the advantages of AI adoption in journalism practice in Rivers State, it has raised ethical concerns among journalists. The duties of Journalists are to gather, process and disseminate information to the public. This information includes all reports, news and happenings concerning daily life. It covers all information regarding government, politics, foreign affairs, weather, accidents, environment, crimes, business, labour, and education, among others. This raises ethical questions on how this information that is relayed to the public is sourced and disseminated, especially vis the AI. According to Ugo et al (2023), it is very pertinent for journalists to ensure that they incorporate media ethics, which include objectivity, fairness, truth, accuracy, integrity, and privacy in their practice. However, due to the stiff competition in different media houses, and the rush to meet deadlines, journalists tend to violate some of the aforementioned, which brings about ethical considerations during filling, news gathering, processing and reporting. There have been allegations of not complying with the ethical principles of journalism.

The worrisome aspect of this in Rivers State is the invasion of privacy; some journalists in Rivers State sometimes seem not to abide by their code of ethics, which prohibits invasion of privacy. This may be violated through intrusion, misuse of information, interception of information and information matching. The level of awareness of AI in the information sourcing, the effectiveness of the use of AI and the ethical issues associated with the adoption and use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State, have become a source of worry and concern. It is on this premise that investigates ethical sustainability and Artificial intelligence information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Nigerian journalism presents both opportunities and challenges. The use of AI, on one hand, enhances news production efficiency, facilitates data-driven reporting, and combats misinformation. However, a lot of concerns have arisen regarding job displacement, data privacy, and the potential spread of deep fakes and misinformation through the use of AI. It has been observed that the adoption of AI in Nigerian journalism raises significant ethical concerns, including AI automation, which may lead to job losses in the media sector, potentially displacing human journalists. Again, Nigeria faces a shortage of skilled AI professionals, hindering innovation in the media industry, and there is an absence of clear AI regulations in Nigeria, which poses challenges in ensuring ethical AI use and data privacy.

The level of awareness and adoption of AI among Rivers State journalists, and the ethical sustainability and responsible AI use, is not clear. Also, the challenges and opportunities associated with AI adoption in Rivers State journalism, as well as the compliance with ethical principles and regulations while using AI as information sources, have not been ascertained. Although previous studies focused on Artificial Intelligence on the journalism perception of experts, expectations, and agenda. None of the studies focused on the ethical sustainability and Artificial Intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State. The study investigates ethical sustainability and Artificial intelligence information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study

1. Identify the level of awareness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State.
2. Determine the effectiveness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State.
3. Find out the ethical issues associated with the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists.

Research Questions

These research questions were raised in the study

1. What is the level of awareness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State?
2. What is the effectiveness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State?
3. What are the ethical issues associated with the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists?

Ethical Responsibilities

Some aspects of a journalist's job are not subject to any kind of law but are just as important. Journalists must strive to present an accurate, well-balanced explanation of the stories they cover. For example, they have an obligation to present all sides of an issue and to conduct extensive research and talk to several sources knowledgeable about the subject (Domingo, 2017). If they present only popular opinion, or if they conduct minimal research without fully exploring the subject, they don't give readers and viewers the information they need to understand the implications of the event or issue. Journalists must also be honest with the people they interview, telling them before talking to them what the article is about and that they plan to quote them in the piece.

Ethical Challenges in Information Sourcing by Journalists

Journalists and media organizations have been using social media, leading to ethical issues. For instance, a tweet by a journalist can be considered either his personal opinion, that of his organisation, or both. Journalists sourcing information online raise questions about the ethical implications for both the message conveyed to the audience and the online platform employed (Ekeli & Enobakhare, 2013). Changes in the sourcing of information have led to alterations in news-gathering and dissemination processes. For example, new accountability mechanisms such as newsroom blogs are online (Umoh, 2025).

News is very powerful and can affect someone, even spurring them to react. Yes, journalists do use social media as a source of news, but sometimes they get fake news. News cannot be taken out after it is released, so the credibility of news is very important in journalism. Nsereka (2019) observes that social media in Nigeria are confronted with credibility issues. It does not help that there are more opportunities for the internet and information to be wrong, for misinformation to be spread, or for information to be misapplied. With the ability of several features to interact between the user and the source in a more credible manner, new media and the credibility of information on the web can increase (Nwala & Oruwari, 2023). However, Nwala et al. (2020) listed several ethical problems of social media platforms as follows: lack of fact-checking and editorial oversight; lack of logical coverage of topics; rumour and lie dissemination; privacy invasion; plagiarism and copyright violations; lack of accountability; and deception, manipulative practices, and undisclosed conflicts of interest.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Canvilhas (2022) explored the State of play and expectations regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence and Journalism in the Portuguese Sports Media. The main objective of the study was

to analyse the current State of AI use in sports media houses in Portugal. The study was conducted using a survey research design. The study found that sports journalists in the country had knowledge of AI but had not targeted its use in newsrooms due to economic and professional constraints. The study relates to the current study, as both studies use journalism practices around the world as examples of AI use. The previous study, however, was centered on the use of AI in Portuguese sports journalism practice. It leaves a gap in the ethical sustainability of AI use. The present study was aimed at examining ethical sustainability and Artificial intelligence information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State.

In another development, Christ (2025) found that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a boon to industries, and processes are being made faster, easier and more productive by using AI. This study used a Web-based questionnaire. The outcomes showed that AI is already being used to automate several aspects of the journalistic process, assist with investigative reporting and fact-checking, and personalize user experiences for reporters, among other things. The study, however, found a low level of integration of AI among the respondents. Further, challenges related to internet connectivity costs and a lack of skilled personnel to manage AI were cited as barriers. Both studies examined the use of AI in journalism practice worldwide, which is relevant to the current study. The former study, however, focused on the use of AI, which has been increasingly adopted across industries and has boosted productivity. It leaves a gap in the ethical sustainability of AI use. This study examines ethical sustainability and information sourcing using artificial intelligence among Rivers State journalists.

The study by Umoh (2025) examined ethical issues in Nigerian news headlines. The study shows that, despite Nigeria failing to meet journalistic standards, the system is considered a platform for individuals and other professionals to thrive. From this premise, however, it reveals that all unethical practices are carried out because of the level of poverty in the country. In addition, the researcher found discrepancies in practice regarding the rules and regulations. The study is related to the current study, as both focus on ethical issues in the use of AI in Nigeria. The previous study, however, was concerned with ethical violations in Nigerian journalism headlines. It leaves a gap in the ethical sustainability of AI use. The present study examines the ethical sustainability and information sourcing practices of journalists in Rivers State using Artificial intelligence.

In 2023, Ugo and his colleagues studied the Ethical issues in internet-based journalism practice in Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted for the population (5944) and sample (165) of Registered Journalists in Nigeria, while themes, narratives, analysis, and interpretation of data were used for data methods, and non-participant observation was employed. According to the results of this research, online journalism platforms have proven useful for collecting and sharing news via X, Facebook, and Telegram. The study also found that awareness of media law among practitioners of internet-based journalism platforms in Nigeria is low, as the majority of practitioners are not trained journalists. The study is related to the foregoing research because both studies dealt with the same topic (Ethical issues in internet-based journalism practice in Nigeria). But the earlier studies had mostly focused on ethical issues in internet-based journalism practice using Artificial Intelligence. It creates a space for ethical AI use. This current study

explores the issues of ethical sustainability and sourcing of information on Artificial Intelligence (AI) by journalists in Rivers State.

Omosotomhe (2018) did research on the Utilisation of social media for News Gathering and Dissemination by Journalists in Edo State. A survey research design was adopted, and the population comprised registered journalists of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Edo State who regularly attend the union's meetings and indicated their knowledge of the concept of social media, totaling 200. It was established that the acceptance of social media among journalists continues to grow by the day as more and more journalists and media organisations adopt it. As mentioned, social media has a great impact on the entire news process. Nearly all journalists are active on one form of social media or another, or on all of them. Nearly all journalists are active in one social media platform or another—or all of them. News monitoring has also taken place on social media platforms, serving as a major means of updates on emerging stories.

Ekeliand Enobakhare (2013) conducted research on social media and the Changing Nature of Journalism Practice in Nigeria. A survey research design was used, and the total population of 600 registered journalists in Edo State was adopted; however, only 50 journalists were sampled. The study established that both social media and the mainstream media are seen predominantly as co-operators and are seen to supplement and complement each other. Social media helps journalists update information, disseminate it in a timely and accurate manner, and cross-check their facts. Again, the study revealed that social media poses ethical, economic, Reliability, and deadline problems to the mainstream media. The study was related to the present study because both examined ethical issues in Internet journalism practice in Nigeria. The previous research, however, focused on ethical issues in the practice of internet-based journalism. It creates a space for ethical AI use and sustainability. The current study focuses on ethical sustainability and the sourcing of information about journalists' use of Artificial Intelligence in Rivers State.

Ammina and Sally (2021) reviewed the emerging role of Artificial Intelligence in the journalism agenda in Africa. Most research on the impact of AI in newsrooms has been conducted in the Western world, and its implementation has largely been dominated by Western media. While there is some information on the use of AI in newsrooms' countries of origin, very little is known about the newsrooms across the continent that are adopting AI technologies. The study is also connected to the previous study, which covered ethical issues surrounding AI and journalism agendas in Africa. The previous research, however, focused on Artificial Intelligence and the journalism agenda in Africa. It leaves a wrinkle in the ethical sustainability of using AI. This study examines the ethical sustainability and the use of Artificial intelligence for information sourcing among the journalists of Rivers State.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Responsibility Theory

In 1963, F. S. Siebert, T. B. Peterson, and W. Schramm presented their social responsibility theory. The social responsibility theory demands that the press abide by laws laid down by legitimate authorities (Ekeli and Enoboakhare 2018). The theory treats freedom as a civil liberty

rather than a right. The press should, therefore, have respect for the rights and privileges of others. Social responsibility of the Press is the right of the Press to carry out its basic social functions, within the constraints of the law. This theory postulates that freedom is concomitant with obligations.

The critics believed that the press, as a constituent of government, has the right to criticize the government in power, but has serious responsibilities to ensure that society doesn't collapse due to its functioning. This criticism prompted the establishment of the "Hutchins' Commission" in the United States of America in 1947 for examining the issue of press freedom. The recommendations provided the basis for the social responsibility theory.

The theory is pertinent to the study as journalists are expected to be held accountable and responsible to the public. The journalists thus source information through AI and take into account ethical considerations, including fairness, truth, respect, accuracy, objectivity, and honesty. While giving the media a chance to self-regulate in local and established institutions, McQuail also said that the media must take up its responsibility appropriately. The media should also reflect its society's plurality by providing access to various points of view and granting the right to reply.

Technology Determinism Theory

This theory was put forward by Marshall McLuhan in 1963. According to Umoh (2025), the majority of existing new media and journalism studies formulate their research theories around technological determinism. He suggests that technological determinism suggests that technology affects how society works. New media undoubtedly have changed traditional news processes. Overall, this theory positions technology as the engine of social change. The theory states that media technologies shape how we, as individuals in a society, think, feel, and act, and how a society operates as we move from one technological age to another. In another way, McLuhan predicted that we would be in the midst of a revolution and that the world would never be the same due to the advances in technology.

The theory of technological determinism affects journalists' thinking and information sourcing. This theory is that the wheel is an extension of the foot, the book is an extension of the eyes, clothing is an extension of the skin, and the electric circuitry is an extension of the central nervous system. This means Rivers State journalists can benefit from AI to enhance their information-sourcing process. The implication of this is that technology has changed people's ways of living and advanced society in the journalism profession.

METHODOLOGY

This type of study used a survey research design. One reason for using a survey research design is that it aims to obtain and/or use sample data in an investigation to document, describe, and explain the existence or non-existence of a condition or phenomenon under study. This design aims to explore the ethical issues associated with journalists' use of social media for newsgathering in Rivers State. The population of this study is all the registered journalists in Rivers State. There are 459 registered journalists in Rivers State (as of 2025, according to the

office of the State Chairman of the NUJ Rivers State chapter). Thus, the study population comprises 459 registered journalists in Rivers State.

This study used a census sample that is the same as the population. Having a manageable number of individuals in a population is the reason for using a census in a study. If a population is small and easily managed, the census sample is frequently employed. Therefore, the sample size is also 459, and the population size is 459.

There was no need for a sampling technique since the entire population were studied. The population of the study is 459. Therefore, 459 questionnaires were given to the registered journalists in Rivers State. In this work, the major research instrument employed is the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two sections: Section A covers demographic variables, including age, gender, marital status, education level, etc., and Section B covers psychographic variables. The questionnaire was well structured, with 12 of its items on a modified 4 points Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, To arrive at the decision of respondents on each of this questionnaire item, the decision rule adopted is taken as: $4 + 3 + 2 + 1$ divided by 4 = 2.5. This means that the answers to any questionnaire question from 2.5 upwards indicate that 100% of the participants agreed that a specific statement was accurate. However, of the 12 items in the questionnaire, only items 1, 2, 3, and 4 were used to answer research question 1, which deals with the level of awareness of artificial intelligence in the information sourcing of journalists in Rivers State. Consequently, item 5-8 which sought to determine the effectiveness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State were used to answer research question 2 of the study, while items 9, 10, 11 and 12 which sought to find out the ethical issues associated with the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists, were used to address research question 3 of the study.

Data Presentation

Table 1: The level of awareness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State

S/N	The level of awareness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
1	The level of awareness of AI for information sourcing is very high.	201	120	80	31	1354	3.1	Agreed
2	The level of awareness of AI for information sourcing is high	200	150	50	31	1,381	3.2	Agreed
3	The level of awareness of AI for information sourcing is low.	60	70	120	181	1,354	2.0	Disagreed
4	The level of awareness of AI for information sourcing is very low.	92	93	121	125	1,014	2.3	Rejected

The Data Table 1 indicates that the level of awareness of Rivers State journalists on the use of artificial intelligence for information sourcing is significantly high.

Table 2: The effectiveness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State

N/S	Effectiveness of AI in SA information sourcing		A	SD	D	Total	Mean	Remark
5.	The use of AI for information sourcing saves me time and cost.	200	150	50	31	1,381	3.2	Agreed
7	The use of AI for information sourcing helps in faster decision-making.	220	140	40	31	1,322	3.1	Agreed
8	The use of AI for information sourcing enhances supplier management.	80	65	141	145	942	2.2	Disagreed
9	The use of AI for information sourcing improves compliance.	55	65	150	161	876	2.0	Disagreed

The data in Table 2 suggests that the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State is effective since it saves time, cost and enhances faster decision-making among journalists.

Table 3: The ethical issues associated with the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists

S/N	The ethical issues associated with AI in information sourcing	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
9.	Fairness is the ethical issue that Rivers State journalists consider when sourcing for information on AI.	200	150	50	31	1,381	3.2	Accepted
10	Honesty is the ethical issue journalists consider when sourcing information on AI	140	220	31	40	1,322	3.1	Accepted
11	Fact-checking is the ethical issue journalists in Rivers State consider when sourcing information on AI.	180	120	60	71	1,271	2.9	Accepted
12	Objectivity is one of the ethical issues journalists in Rivers State consider when sourcing for information on AI	30	121	159	121	1,233	2.9	Accepted

The Data in Table 3 shows that fairness, honesty, fact-checking and objectivity were among the major ethical issues Journalists in Rivers State considered when sourcing information from AI.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Research Question: 1 What is the level of awareness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State?

The study findings revealed that Rivers State journalists' awareness about the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing is high. This study is consistent with previous studies by Omosotomhe (2018), which found that acceptance of social media among journalists continues to rise as more journalists and media organisations embrace it. Ugo et al. (2018) found that online news sites are useful for obtaining information from AI, Telegram, and other social media profiles. AI is currently being used to automate various aspects of journalism, such as generating titles, headlines, and lead sentences, as well as providing reporters with support for investigative reporting, fact-checking, and the creation of tailored user experiences. Despite some obstacles to AI integration (Christ, 2025), journalists can still leverage this technology to benefit their reporting. While challenges remain, journalists have opportunities to leverage AI in their reporting to support their work.

Research Question 2: What is the level of awareness of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State?

The study also revealed that the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State is effective because it saves time and costs and enables faster decision-making. The results of this study corroborate an earlier study by Ekeli and Enobakhare (2013), which found that journalists are being pressured by the journalism industry to rely on social media. But the majority of journalists in Rivers State today get their information online. But again, Omosotomhe (2018) reported that AI has also emerged as a significant means of monitoring and updating information to build stories. They discovered that, for journalists, AI is almost a weapon for accessing breaking news, which in the past used to be posted as soon as it happened via citizen journalism and internet-connected devices and mobile phones. The platforms have also simplified media activities, which has helped journalists' work (Omosotomhe, 2018).

The findings of Ekeli and Enobakhare (2013) revealed that online and mainstream media are predominantly seen as co-operators that supplement and complement each other. AI helps journalists update information, disseminate it in a timely and accurate manner, and cross-check their facts. Ekeli & Enbakhare(2013) also found that the way to report news has changed with the advent of social media, as most events, even breaking news, now involve social media tools that allow people to connect at the instant of the event, and these tools are fairly inexpensive and easy to use, allowing anyone to publish or access information. Journalists' work with social media networking tools has become easier and satisfactory (Umoh, 2025).

The results are in line with the social responsibility theory in the study. The theory was that: “Press means free press”, which meant the press had to serve its basic social roles and had to do so in the context of the law. This theory postulates that freedom is concomitant with obligations.

Research Question 3: What are the ethical issues associated with the use of artificial intelligence in information sourcing among journalists?

It was also noted that the investigation revealed that fairness and honesty, fact-checking and objectivity were the big ethical concerns of Journalists in Rivers State when sourcing information from AI. The results of this study also support the findings of previous studies by Omosotomhe and Olley (2018), which found that most journalists in Nigeria adhere to the rules of fairness and objectivity in their work. They also found out that Nigerian journalists are fair in the journalism practice. In his study, Umoh (2025) found that journalists have public profiles on social networking sites where they read and look for news and ideas to publish. More so, the findings of Kuru and Nsereka(2016) revealed that journalists use onlineplatforms to monitor, disseminate and promote news stories, saving time and to quickly file reports on environmental clean-up projects. Also, sports journalists in the country had knowledge of AI, but had not targeted using it in the newsrooms due to economic and professional constraints (Canvilhas, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that journalists in Rivers State have adopted the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for information sourcing due to a high level of awareness of AI. The use of AI in information sourcing among journalists in Rivers State has proven effective, as it saves time, reduces costs, and enhances faster decision-making. However, journalists continue to recognize fairness, honesty, fact-checking, and objectivity as essential ethical considerations when using AI for information sourcing. The study contributes to the growing body of research on AI in journalism by highlighting both the opportunities and challenges associated with AI adoption in the media industry. It also provides valuable insights for journalists, policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to maximize the benefits of AI while minimizing its associated risks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Artificial intelligence literacy and training programmes should be organized to improve journalists' understanding of AI applications, benefits, limitations, and ethical use in journalism practice.
2. Journalists should utilize AI tools to identify relevant information sources, trends, and patterns that support informed decision-making and enhance the quality of news content and professional practice.
3. Clear guidelines and ethical standards for the use of AI in journalism should be established, emphasizing fairness, honesty, fact-checking, transparency, and objectivity.

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