

TOWARD ACCOUNTABLE ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA: A CONTEXT-ADAPTIVE HYBRID GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into journalism is restructuring editorial production, accountability, and regulatory oversight. While AI enhances efficiency and innovation, it simultaneously diffuses responsibility across hybrid human–algorithmic systems and exposes governance gaps, particularly in emerging media contexts. This study examines how AI reshapes ethical accountability in Nigerian journalism and evaluates the adequacy of existing regulatory frameworks relative to structured global regimes. Drawing on qualitative document analysis, the findings reveal multidimensional governance deficits, including regulatory incompleteness, institutional capacity asymmetry, and epistemic misalignment arising from non-localised datasets. Although Nigeria has introduced emerging AI-related policy and legislative initiatives between 2025 and 2026, including provisions within the Digital Economy and E-Governance framework, significant implementation and institutional capacity gaps persist. The article argues that the central challenge is not technological adoption but accountability recalibration under conditions of regulatory and infrastructural constraint. It proposes a context-adaptive hybrid governance framework that clarifies editorial liability, embeds risk-proportionate oversight, strengthens technical capacity, and foregrounds epistemic localisation. By situating AI governance within Global South institutional realities, the study advances a capacity-sensitive model of democratic media regulation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Media Ethics, AI Governance, Regulation, Journalism Accountability, Global South.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence has moved from the periphery of technological experimentation to the centre of contemporary media production. What was once limited to automated financial reports and data-driven sports summaries has evolved into a complex ecosystem of generative systems, algorithmic curation tools, synthetic media production, and predictive analytics embedded within newsroom infrastructures (Pierson, Robinson, Fanni, Steinkogler, Milan, and Zampedri, (2023). AI now participates not only in accelerating content production but in shaping editorial priorities, audience targeting, verification processes, and the distribution of news itself. Journalism, historically defined by human judgment, professional gatekeeping, and normative accountability, is increasingly mediated by computational systems whose operations are often opaque.

This transformation presents both opportunity and disruption. On one hand, AI promises efficiency, scalability, and innovative storytelling formats capable of sustaining journalism within economically fragile media environments. On the other hand, it destabilises long-standing assumptions about authorship, transparency, and responsibility. When algorithmic systems assist in generating headlines, recommending story angles, or personalising content flows, the locus of editorial agency becomes less clearly identifiable (Floridi, Cowsls, Beltrametti, Chatila, Chazerand, Dignum, and Vayena, (2018). The ethical architecture of journalism, traditionally anchored in identifiable human actors, must now contend with distributed decision-making systems that complicate attribution and accountability.

The implications extend beyond newsroom workflow. Synthetic media and automated content generation challenge the epistemic foundations of public communication by blurring distinctions between authentic reporting and fabricated narratives. In environments already characterised by misinformation and declining institutional trust, the diffusion of AI-generated content intensifies concerns about credibility, verification, and democratic deliberation (Leibowicz, 2025). The central issue is therefore not simply technological adoption, but governance: under what normative and regulatory conditions can AI be integrated into journalism without eroding its democratic function?

While global debates increasingly focus on algorithmic transparency, bias mitigation, and regulatory oversight, the governance of AI in journalism remains uneven across institutional contexts. Much of the emerging scholarship and policy development is situated within highly regulated media systems, where digital governance frameworks are comparatively consolidated. Less attention has been devoted to contexts where technological adoption may outpace regulatory preparedness and where media systems operate under distinct political-economic constraints. Recent regional discussion further underscores these concerns. Findings from Thomson Reuters Foundation survey data reveal growing anxieties among African media practitioners regarding algorithmic opacity, newsroom displacement, and weak institutional safeguards surrounding AI adoption. Similarly, the Media Council of Kenya's 2025 call for ethical, inclusive, and locally grounded AI development reflects an emerging continental recognition that AI governance frameworks must be context-sensitive rather than imported wholesale from highly industrialised media systems. This asymmetry raises pressing questions about how AI-mediated journalism unfolds in environments marked by infrastructural limitations, evolving professional norms, and fragmented digital policy regimes (Park, 2023).

Nigeria provides a particularly instructive site for examining these tensions. As one of Africa's most dynamic media landscapes, it is characterised by rapid digital adoption, entrepreneurial newsroom practices, and intense political communication activity. Yet its

regulatory architecture for emerging technologies remains in formation. Since 2024, Nigeria has witnessed increasing legislative and policy attention toward artificial intelligence governance through initiatives such as the National Digital Economy and E-Governance Bill and the Digital Sovereignty and Fair Data Compensation Bill. These developments signal an emerging regulatory consciousness around digital technologies and AI-driven systems. However, the practical outcomes of these initiatives remain largely situated at the level of policy formulation, with limited evidence of comprehensive implementation or institutional enforcement mechanisms (Umeora, 2025). The integration of AI into Nigerian journalism therefore occurs within a context where institutional safeguards, professional guidelines, and policy coherence are still developing. This as Gbaden, Gambo, and Shem (2024) observe, creates a governance gap that is analytically significant: innovation advances, but the normative frameworks required to anchor it are uneven.

Artificial intelligence in journalism is therefore not merely a technological development but a reorganisation of ethical authority and institutional accountability. In contexts where regulatory consolidation remains incomplete, the challenge is not simply adoption but governance: how to reconcile computational efficiency with democratic responsibility (Cath, 2018).

Accordingly, this study addresses three interrelated questions:

1. How does AI integration reshape ethical responsibility and professional accountability in journalism?
2. What regulatory and institutional gaps characterise AI governance in Nigeria relative to emerging global frameworks?
3. What governance model can reconcile AI innovation with democratic accountability in media systems?

By foregrounding governance rather than technological determinism, the article advances an institutional analysis of AI-mediated journalism in a Global South context, situating innovation within broader questions of regulatory capacity.

Context of the Study

The integration of artificial intelligence into journalism represents one of the most consequential shifts in contemporary media production. Across global news ecosystems, AI systems now participate in tasks ranging from automated content generation and headline optimisation to data-driven investigation, audience analytics, and algorithmic recommendation. What began as experimental newsroom automation has evolved into infrastructural incorporation: AI tools are increasingly embedded in editorial workflows rather than deployed as peripheral innovations. This transformation is not merely technical; it reconfigures professional routines, editorial authority, labour relations, and the epistemological foundations of journalistic practice. In technologically advanced media systems, AI adoption has been accompanied by institutional recalibration. News organisations in Europe and North America increasingly integrate AI within established professional norms, investing in hybrid models where machine efficiency complements human editorial judgment. Yet even within these contexts, tensions persist between automation and autonomy, speed and verification, optimisation and public interest. The debate is no longer whether AI will shape journalism, but under what ethical, regulatory, and organisational conditions it will do so. “Recent enforcement developments, including Nigeria’s \$220 million fine against Meta for data and consumer protection violations, suggest emerging regulatory willingness to discipline digital platforms despite persistent institutional limitations (Reuters, 2024; Reuters, 2025).”

The Nigerian media landscape presents a markedly different but equally significant terrain. While awareness of AI tools among journalists is relatively high, routine integration into

newsroom practice remains uneven. Structural constraints, including unstable digital infrastructure, limited capital investment, and persistent precarity within media labour markets, shape the pace and depth of technological adoption (Bello, Salaudeen, and Umeaku, 2023). AI experimentation is visible in areas such as fact-checking support, transcription, and generative drafting, yet these practices often occur without comprehensive institutional frameworks to guide accountability, transparency, or editorial oversight. Studies further indicate increasing awareness and experimentation with AI journalism among Nigerian journalists despite infrastructural and institutional constraints (Nwanyanwu & Nwanyanwu, 2021; Salaudeen & Umeaku, 2023; Agbasimilo & Enahoro, 2025).

This asymmetry between technological possibility and institutional preparedness reflects broader political-economic realities. In parts of Europe, AI governance is increasingly embedded within formal regulatory architectures that seek to balance innovation with fundamental rights protection (AI Maintaining Interoperability through Value-Sensitive Standardisation, 2025). By contrast, Nigeria's regulatory environment remains comparatively fragmented, with digital policy development often reactive rather than anticipatory (Gbaden, Gambo and Shem, 2024). Consequently, AI adoption in Nigerian journalism unfolds within a context where professional norms are evolving more rapidly than regulatory safeguards.

These divergent institutional settings matter analytically. AI is not introduced into a vacuum; it interacts with pre-existing structures of ownership concentration, advertising dependence, political influence, and professional culture. In highly regulated systems, governance debates focus on compliance, transparency, and algorithmic accountability. In less consolidated regulatory environments, the central concern shifts toward capacity, resource asymmetry, and the risk of technological adoption without normative consolidation. Thus, the ethical implications of AI in journalism cannot be understood solely as technical questions of bias or accuracy; they are inseparable from the institutional ecologies within which news is produced.

Positioning Nigeria alongside more structured governance environments therefore provides not a binary contrast between "advanced" and "developing" systems, but a comparative lens through which to examine how institutional density shapes ethical outcomes. The study proceeds from the premise that AI governance in journalism is contingent upon infrastructural capacity, regulatory coherence, and professional culture. Understanding these contextual variables is essential to assessing both the opportunities and vulnerabilities that AI introduces into contemporary news practice.

Literature Review

1 Evolution of Media Ethics in the AI Era

Media ethics has historically been grounded in principles such as truth, objectivity, independence, accountability, and the minimization of harm, reflecting journalism's role as a public trust within liberal-democratic societies (Umeora, 2025). In the analog era, ethical responsibility resided primarily in identifiable human actors: editors, reporters, and publishers, operating within professional codes and institutional hierarchies. Even the early stages of digital transformation altered distribution and speed more than moral agency, as editorial judgment remained largely human-centered.

The integration of artificial intelligence into journalism marks a deeper structural transition. Unlike earlier digital tools, AI systems now participate in content generation, curation, moderation, and personalization, complicating conventional assumptions about authorship, transparency, and accountability. Ethical agency is increasingly distributed across socio-technical

systems whose operations are often opaque. Consequently, the ethical question extends beyond how journalists should act to how algorithmic systems should be designed, governed, and audited. The rise of synthetic media, particularly deepfakes, further destabilizes journalism's evidentiary foundations by blurring distinctions between authentic and fabricated content (Udoh, Nsude, and Oyeleke, 2022). At the same time, AI systems trained on skewed or culturally limited datasets may reproduce structural inequalities, misinterpret context-specific communication, and marginalize underrepresented voices (Mohammed and Shehu, 2023; Gbaden, Gambo and Shem, 2024). Concerns over surveillance, privacy, and informational autonomy also intensify as AI-enabled analytics become embedded within media operations (Cath, 2018).

These developments require more than a simple extension of traditional professional codes. They demand a broader socio-technical framework capable of addressing automated decision-making, distributed accountability, and platform-mediated public communication (Uche, Obiora and Nwabuidike, 2025). Emerging indigenous initiatives such as M-ATLAS and NKENNEAI further demonstrate growing local efforts toward culturally responsive AI systems and language inclusion within African digital ecosystems (M-ATLAS, 2025; NKENNEAI, 2025).

2 Benefits and Transformative Potential of AI

Despite these concerns, AI offers significant opportunities for journalism. Automation improves newsroom efficiency by handling repetitive and data-intensive tasks, potentially enabling journalists to focus more on investigative and interpretive reporting (Gbaden, Gambo and Shem, 2024). Evidence from Enugu State indicates that AI-assisted tools have enhanced productivity in drafting, analytics, and editorial workflows (Okoye, Obi and Egele, 2024). AI also strengthens data journalism and fact-checking through large-scale pattern detection, anomaly identification, and misinformation tracking beyond human capacity (Udo, Nsude and Oyeleke, 2022). Personalization algorithms may increase audience engagement by tailoring content to user preferences (Abdullahi, 2023; Isangula, 2025). However, such systems can also narrow exposure to diverse perspectives, reinforcing echo chambers and epistemic fragmentation (Kalu, 2025). AI's transformative potential is therefore inherently ambivalent. While it expands journalistic capacity and innovation, it also intensifies ethical vulnerabilities. Its democratic value ultimately depends on transparency, accountability, and effective governance.

3 Ethical and Contextual Challenges

Artificial intelligence generates ethical and contextual risks that are neither technologically neutral nor evenly distributed across media systems. AI-driven moderation systems, often trained on globally aggregated datasets, frequently struggle to interpret culturally embedded meanings, satire, idiomatic expressions, and context-specific political speech. As a result, legitimate discourse may be misclassified as harmful or misleading, deepening communicative inequalities and marginalizing already underrepresented voices (Martin and Waldman, 2023).

The proliferation of synthetic media presents an additional epistemic challenge. Deepfakes and AI-generated audio-visual content weaken the credibility of journalistic evidence by making fabricated material increasingly difficult to distinguish from authentic reporting (Leibowicz, 2025). This erosion of trust extends beyond individual stories to the wider information ecosystem, where audiences may either accept manipulated content as factual or become skeptical of legitimate reporting. Recent scholarship also emphasizes the importance of inclusive and transparent AI governance frameworks within African media systems (Ade-Ibijola & Okonkwo, 2023; Aloamaka & Omozue, 2024; Yeung & Dodds, 2024).

These concerns are compounded by the commercial pressures shaping digital journalism. AI integration often occurs within competitive environments that prioritize speed, visibility, and

engagement metrics. Automated drafting and real-time publishing systems may accelerate newsroom productivity, but without adequate oversight they can also amplify inaccuracies and weaken verification standards (Uche, Obiora and Nwabuidike, 2025).

The risks are particularly pronounced in many Global South contexts where regulatory frameworks, technical infrastructure, and institutional safeguards remain underdeveloped. News organizations frequently lack the financial and technical capacity to audit algorithmic systems effectively, increasing dependence on opaque platform technologies (Dralega, Musvitiy and Akpojiyi, 2023). Consequently, the ethical implications of AI are shaped not only by technology itself but also by political economy, governance capacity, and infrastructural resilience.

4 Recent Evidence from the Global South

Recent evidence from the South Asia Algorithmic Gatekeeping Study (2024) highlights the uneven implications of AI-mediated journalism, particularly in Africa and South Asia, where algorithmic gatekeeping increasingly shapes news visibility and public discourse, often privileging commercially driven content over public-interest reporting. Also, findings from the Thomson Reuters Foundation (2025), reveal growing concerns about algorithmic opacity, weak regulatory safeguards, newsroom displacement, limited local participation in AI governance, and inadequate institutional preparedness within resource-constrained media environments (Shoola, Banjo, Saliu-Yusuf and Ogundeyi, 2024; Segun, Musah and Traoré, 2025). Collectively, these studies emphasize that the central challenge of AI in journalism lies less in technological adoption than in developing context-sensitive governance frameworks that ensure accountability, cultural relevance, transparency, and public trust.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of scholarship on AI and journalism, significant analytical gaps remain. Existing studies largely emphasize either technological innovation or the ethical risks of AI, including bias, misinformation, surveillance, and algorithmic opacity, with limited integration of ethical theory and regulatory analysis. Although emerging scholarship from the Global South has begun to address AI governance challenges in developing contexts, much of the literature remains disproportionately centred on Global North regulatory models and institutional realities (Park, 2023; Obianyo and Ater, 2024). Recent analyses, including the IAPP assessment of Nigeria's proposed AI Bills and comparative studies published through ScienceDirect, further demonstrate that AI governance concerns differ substantially across developed and developing nations: while advanced economies focus on algorithmic accountability, privacy, and compliance frameworks, developing contexts are more constrained by weak institutional capacity, fragmented regulation, infrastructural limitations, and uneven technical expertise. However, these studies rarely connect such structural disparities to journalism ethics and media governance in a theoretically integrated manner.

Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to how institutional capacity, enforcement mechanisms, and socio-political realities shape the practical governance of AI-mediated journalism in African media systems (Gbaden, Gambo & Shem, 2024). This study addresses these gaps by combining normative ethical inquiry with regulatory analysis through a comparative Global North–Global South framework that foregrounds institutional preparedness and context-sensitive governance.

Theoretical Framework

This study combines Social Responsibility Theory and Algorithmic Governance Theory to examine both the ethical and structural dimensions of AI-mediated journalism. Together, the

frameworks provide a complementary basis for analysing the ethical implications and governance dynamics of AI in journalism.

1 Social Responsibility Theory

Social Responsibility Theory provides the normative foundation for this study. Rooted in the Hutchins Commission tradition, the theory maintains that media freedom is inseparable from obligations to serve the public interest through accuracy, fairness, pluralism, and accountability (Godswill and Nsude, 2019). Journalism derives its legitimacy not merely from professional autonomy, but from its contribution to democratic discourse and informed citizenship. In the context of AI-mediated journalism, this normative foundation becomes especially significant. As automated systems increasingly participate in content production, curation, moderation, and dissemination, responsibility extends beyond individual journalists to include technological infrastructures, platform operators, and regulatory institutions. Social Responsibility Theory therefore provides a framework for evaluating whether AI integration strengthens or weakens journalistic ethics, public accountability, transparency, and trust within democratic communication systems.

2 Algorithmic Governance Theory

While Social Responsibility Theory establishes the ethical obligations of journalism, Algorithmic Governance Theory explains how computational systems restructure authority and decision-making within contemporary media ecosystems. Scholarship in this area demonstrates that algorithms shape visibility, prioritize information, and influence public discourse through embedded design choices, engagement metrics, and data-driven logics (Abdullahi, 2023; Pierson et al., 2023). In modern journalism, algorithms increasingly function as gatekeepers by curating news feeds, personalizing content, automating editorial processes, and determining informational prominence. This development redistributes communicative authority across journalists, technology companies, platform designers, and opaque computational systems. In emerging regulatory environments such as Nigeria, these transformations intensify concerns regarding accountability, regulatory oversight, algorithmic bias, and informational inequality. Algorithmic Governance Theory therefore provides the structural lens for analysing how AI systems shape institutional power relations, media regulation, and governance capacity.

Social Responsibility Theory provides the normative “why” of journalism by emphasizing accountability, public interest, and democratic communication, while Algorithmic Governance Theory explains the structural “how” by showing how AI systems redistribute power, shape visibility, and influence information flows. Together, the frameworks enable the study to analyse both the ethical implications and governance dynamics of AI-mediated journalism.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on systematic document analysis. A qualitative approach is appropriate for examining regulatory and ethical frameworks that require contextual and interpretive analysis rather than statistical measurement (Bryman, 2016). Since AI governance and media regulation are primarily articulated through laws, policy frameworks, and professional guidelines, documentary sources provide an authoritative basis for assessing institutional priorities, regulatory logic, and governance structures. Data were drawn from purposively selected Nigerian and international policy documents relevant to AI governance and journalism regulation. Nigerian sources include the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Act (2007), the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (2019), the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2024), the proposed Digital Economy Bill (2025–2026), and the Digital Sovereignty Bill (2025). These recent policy instruments were included because

they represent Nigeria's most current legislative and institutional efforts to regulate artificial intelligence, digital governance, and platform accountability, thereby providing the most authoritative basis for evaluating emerging regulatory gaps and governance priorities. International documents examined include UNESCO's AI governance guidelines (2021; 2023) and comparative European AI regulatory frameworks, including *Comparing Apples to Oranges: A Taxonomy for Navigating the Global Landscape of AI Regulation* (2025), alongside relevant scholarly literature." The documents were analyzed thematically through iterative close reading and coding. Core themes included transparency, accountability, algorithmic explainability, enforcement mechanisms, digital sovereignty, institutional capacity, and ethical safeguards. Comparative analysis focused on how these issues are addressed across Global North and Global South governance frameworks. To enhance analytical rigor, the study triangulated legal, policy, and scholarly sources to cross-verify interpretations. Policy texts were treated as expressions of institutional priorities and governance rationalities rather than neutral administrative documents. This approach enables a context-sensitive evaluation of how AI governance frameworks align with principles of journalistic responsibility and algorithmic oversight in Nigeria.

Findings

The findings address the research questions by examining how AI integration restructures professional accountability and by identifying the regulatory and institutional gaps shaping governance in Nigeria. The patterns that emerge provide the empirical basis for the normative framework developed in the discussion.

Document analysis indicates that AI governance in Nigerian journalism is characterized by accountability diffusion, institutional fragmentation, and evolving but uneven regulatory capacity.

1 Reshaping Ethical Responsibility and Professional Accountability (RQ1)

AI integration redistributes editorial agency across human and computational actors, thereby complicating traditional models of professional accountability. Existing governance instruments, including the NITDA Act (2007) and the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (2019), do not adequately address algorithmic transparency, synthetic media disclosure, or liability for AI-assisted content. Responsibility for automated outputs therefore remains normatively assumed but legally underdefined. Institutional oversight also remains organised along legacy sectoral divisions (Ejokema, Iyemeke and Itoko, 2025), despite AI systems operating across converged media environments. This fragmentation weakens accountability and obscures traceability.

The findings further show that reliance on non-local datasets creates risks of linguistic distortion, cultural erasure, and epistemic misalignment (Ade-Ibijola and Okonkwo, 2023; Isangula, 2025). AI systems trained predominantly on Western datasets often fail to reflect Nigerian linguistic diversity and socio-cultural contexts, thereby reproducing representational inequalities within digital journalism.

However, emerging local initiatives demonstrate attempts to address these challenges. Projects such as M-ATLAS and NKENNEAI reflect growing efforts to develop culturally adaptive and linguistically inclusive AI systems tailored to African realities. These initiatives represent early responses to epistemic misalignment by prioritizing indigenous language representation, contextual data training, and locally grounded AI development. Their emergence suggests increasing recognition that AI accountability in Nigeria must also involve epistemic and cultural localization rather than merely technical regulation.

Collectively, these findings show that AI reshapes journalism's ethical architecture by diffusing accountability, obscuring decision-making processes, and redefining epistemic authority within the media ecosystem.

2 Regulatory and Institutional Gaps in AI Governance (RQ2)

The restructuring of accountability occurs within a regulatory framework that remains structurally incomplete. Nigeria's digital governance instruments were not originally designed for generative AI or algorithmic journalism. Although policy awareness is increasing (Gbaden, Gambo and Shem, 2024; Obianyo and Ater, 2024), regulatory responses remain fragmented and unevenly institutionalized (Haruna and Atuluku, 2025). Institutional capacity constraints further limit effective oversight. Technical expertise for algorithmic auditing and AI compliance monitoring remains underdeveloped (Umeora, 2025), creating a gap between formal regulatory authority and operational capability.

Nevertheless, recent developments indicate emerging enforcement willingness. Notably, Nigerian regulators imposed a reported \$220 million fine on Meta between 2024 and 2025 over data privacy and consumer protection violations, signaling a growing readiness by institutions such as NITDA and related regulatory bodies to enforce digital governance standards against major technology platforms. This development challenges assumptions that Nigeria lacks regulatory assertiveness entirely and suggests a gradual transition from symbolic regulation toward more interventionist oversight.

Comparatively, regimes such as the EU AI Act embed enforceable transparency obligations and risk-based classification systems (Isangula, 2025), whereas Nigeria's approach remains largely developmental and principle-driven (Shoola et al., 2024). This divergence reflects broader asymmetries in institutional capacity and technological infrastructure within the global AI governance landscape. Overall, Nigeria's AI governance gap remains multidimensional: legal incompleteness, fragmented oversight, limited technical capacity, and evolving enforcement structures intersect to produce vulnerabilities in AI-mediated journalism.

3 Governance Model: A Context-Adaptive Hybrid Framework (RQ3)

The evidence suggests that neither wholesale adoption of external regulatory templates nor unrestricted technological experimentation is viable. Instead, effective governance requires a context-adaptive hybrid framework that combines global AI accountability principles with Nigeria's institutional realities, developmental priorities, and socio-cultural context.

Discussion

The findings reinforce Floridi et al.'s (2018) argument that AI governance is fundamentally an accountability problem rather than a purely technical one. While Floridi et al. theorise accountability within consolidated regulatory ecosystems, this study shows that AI integration in Nigeria produces accountability diffusion within conditions of regulatory incompleteness. Editorial responsibility is distributed across hybrid human–algorithmic systems, yet oversight remains anchored in legacy instruments such as the NITDA Act (2007) and the NDPR (2019), both of which lack explicit provisions for algorithmic journalism. The study therefore extends UNESCO's (2021) emphasis on transparency and human oversight by demonstrating that such principles require institutional scaffolding to become operationally effective.

Consistent with Gbaden, Gambo and Shem (2024) and Obianyo and Ater (2024), the findings confirm persistent regulatory lag in emerging technology governance. Rather than treating fragmentation descriptively, however, this study conceptualises it as a structural accountability gap produced by sectoral disarticulation, weak enforcement capacity, and technical oversight deficits. This aligns with Atmaja's (2024) argument that Global South regulatory systems operate within institutional asymmetries that constrain coherence. The contrast with the EU AI Act's enforceable risk-classification model further illustrates Floridi et al.'s (2018) claim that risk-based

governance presupposes mature enforcement infrastructures. Institutional capacity therefore emerges not merely as an implementation variable but as a constitutive condition of effective AI governance.

The findings also support Park's (2023) caution against uncritical regulatory transplantation. Importing comprehensive external frameworks without institutional consolidation risks symbolic compliance, while regulatory minimalism risks democratic erosion. The proposed Context-Adaptive Hybrid Governance Framework synthesises UNESCO's (2021; 2023) principles of proportionality and human oversight with Floridi et al.'s (2018) accountability logic, recalibrated to Nigeria's structural realities. By clarifying human editorial liability in AI-assisted journalism, adopting risk-proportionate oversight, strengthening technical capacity, and embedding epistemic localisation, the framework advances calibrated rather than mimetic governance.

Nonetheless, a context-adaptive framework may attract criticism for potentially institutionalising a two-tier governance structure in which journalists in the Global South operate under weaker protections than their counterparts in the Global North. Critics may argue that adaptive regulation could legitimise lower accountability thresholds under the guise of contextual realism, thereby reproducing global inequalities in digital rights, media freedom, and algorithmic transparency. These concerns are significant, particularly given the GFMD's 2025 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Session on Ethical AI in the Global South, which emphasised that AI policies must uphold media freedom and human rights rather than dilute global standards through uneven regulatory adaptation. This study acknowledges such concerns but contends that capacity-insensitive regulation often produces symbolic compliance rather than meaningful accountability.

Theoretically, the study extends AI governance scholarship by reframing media AI regulation as accountability recalibration under institutional constraint, positioning capacity as a normative determinant in governance design, and foregrounding epistemic sovereignty within democratic AI discourse in the Global South. As UNESCO (2021) argues, safeguarding human agency in AI-assisted journalism requires governance architectures scaled to institutional realities so that computational acceleration does not outpace democratic accountability.

Conclusion

This study argues that AI integration in journalism represents a structural reconfiguration of accountability rather than a neutral technological shift. In Nigeria, AI-assisted journalism operates within a governance environment marked by legal gaps, institutional fragmentation, and weak technical oversight, widening the disconnect between innovation and regulation. To address this, the study proposes a Context-Adaptive Hybrid Governance Framework that recalibrates human responsibility, embeds risk-sensitive oversight, strengthens institutional capacity, and foregrounds epistemic localisation. Rather than promoting either regulatory transplantation or laissez-faire experimentation, the framework advances context-sensitive governance grounded in democratic accountability and institutional realism. The study also contributes to global AI governance debates by showing that effective regulation cannot be separated from institutional capacity or epistemic context. In emerging media systems, democratic resilience depends on ensuring that accountability mechanisms evolve alongside technological transformation. Nonetheless, the study is limited by its reliance on document analysis rather than primary data from journalists, editors, or regulators. Rapid legislative developments in Nigeria between 2024 and 2025 may also address some identified policy gaps, although implementation challenges will likely persist. Future research should therefore employ surveys, interviews, and newsroom-based

studies to examine how AI is being integrated into Nigerian journalism and how accountability gaps are perceived in practice.

Policy Implications

AI governance in Nigeria requires targeted statutory reform. While the NITDA Act (2007) and NDPR (2019) provide a regulatory foundation, they inadequately address algorithmic journalism, transparency, and AI-assisted editorial decision-making. The proposed National Digital Economy and E-Governance Bills should therefore include disclosure requirements for AI-generated content, clarify editorial liability, and mandate human oversight in automated news production.

Institutional reform is equally necessary. NITDA should develop newsroom-specific AI governance guidelines, including auditing standards and AI readiness frameworks similar to the Thomson Reuters Foundation's assessment model. Media organisations should also revise ethical codes to require disclosure and human review in high-risk editorial contexts.

Regionally, Nigeria should collaborate with the Kenya Media Council and other African regulators to develop continent-wide ethical standards for AI-assisted journalism, particularly on misinformation, algorithmic bias, transparency, and democratic accountability. Public AI literacy and sustained international cooperation will further strengthen democratic resilience in increasingly algorithmic media environments.

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