



## Religion as an Untapped Resource for Ethical Journalism in Tanzania

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### Abstract

This study explores the potential role of religion in shaping ethical journalism practices in Tanzania. Given its pervasive influence on social, political, and economic life, religion remains a powerful force in society—particularly during times of crisis. The persistent concerns surrounding unethical journalism and declining media credibility in Tanzania have prompted renewed interest in whether religious values can reinforce journalistic ethics. Most Tanzanian journalists identify with major faith traditions—African Religions, Christianity, and Islam—all of which emphasise truth and justice. Through the use of questionnaires and in-depth interviews with media stakeholders, this study investigates the central question: *How does the integration of religious values into journalism influence ethical journalism practices in Tanzania?* Using a mixed-methods approach, the article combines interviews and questionnaires with 84 respondents. Findings reveal that stakeholders are generally well-versed in journalism ethics and recognize the potential role of religion in reinforcing ethical standards. However, responses varied—some participants advocated for incorporating religious values into journalism, while others emphasised adherence to secular professional ethics. The study concludes by recommending the inclusion of religious ethics in journalism education, the promotion of religious dialogue within newsrooms, and the development of journalism practices that are both ethically sound and religiously sensitive.

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## Introduction

Journalism in Tanzania is facing a profound ethical crisis. Persistent violations of professional codes of ethics have significantly tarnished the credibility of the media. These violations manifest in various forms, including praise-singing (Media Council of Tanzania, 2024), single-source reporting (Tagalile, 2019; Katunzi & Spurk, 2020; Spurk & Katunzi, 2018), partisanship, biased reporting, misleading headlines (Tagalile, 2015; Meena, 2012), character assassination (Rioba, 2012), and corrupt practices such as bribery and conflict of interest (Bilau, 2022; Kothari, 2018). Furthermore, the principle of presumption of innocence is routinely ignored in court and police coverage (MCT, 2024). Newsrooms in Tanzania are also affected by poor editorial standards, a lack of qualified personnel, insufficient quality control mechanisms, and an overreliance on inexperienced editors (Katunzi & Spurk, 2020). Journalistic content increasingly relies on press releases, shallow business stories, and superficial reporting, rather than investigative journalism and critical analysis (Powell, 2017). This erosion in quality has contributed to a public loss of confidence in the media. As Kerunga et al., (2020) observe, unethical practices have undermined the credibility of media, particularly affecting newspapers (Katunzi & Spurk, 2020).

## Bribery, Corruption, and the Rise of 'Makanjanja'

Bribery and corruption are rampant in Tanzanian journalism and have been normalized within the profession. The terms *mshiko* (grip) and *bahasha* (envelope) are commonly used to describe kickbacks, tips, transport money, and other informal payments given to journalists (Mfumbusa, 2006; 2008). It is now common to see journalists soliciting money from newsmakers and event organizers at the end of media events.

This culture of inducements has birthed the phenomenon of *makanjanja*—individuals who pose as journalists to earn these incentives without professional training (Kothari, 2018). Alarming, some of those implicated in brown envelope journalism are highly educated, including holders of MA and PhD degrees. The rise of *makanjanja* is exacerbated by exploitative

labour practices, the use of untrained freelancers, and economic hardships that push journalists to depend on income from published stories. Consequently, distinguishing legitimate journalists from imposters becomes increasingly difficult. Kothari (2018) warns that if this trend continues, it will further erode public trust and render ethical codes unenforceable. Recent findings by the Media Council of Tanzania (2024) indicate a dangerous shift: younger journalists no longer view brown envelopes as bribes but as legitimate consultation fees—akin to those received by doctors and lawyers. This normalisation of corruption severely threatens the profession’s integrity.

### **Partisanship and Political Involvement**

Another ethical challenge emerges from journalists’ increasing involvement in partisan politics. Active political affiliations among journalists undermine objectivity and impartiality—core tenets of ethical journalism. During the 2020 general elections, several senior journalists openly vied for political positions while continuing to work in the media, contravening MCT guidelines requiring journalists with political ambitions to resign permanently from the profession (The Citizen, 2022). Tagalile (2015) lamented that some of these politically involved journalists were among the most experienced, whose departure left a gap in mentoring younger professionals.

The 2012 East Arumeru by-election saw blatant ethical violations, with journalists donning party attire, using party vehicles, and engaging in smear campaigns (Meena, 2012). Such actions not only compromised journalism’s neutrality but also posed a threat to democratic processes. Despite awareness campaigns and training efforts—such as the 2015 UNDP–Editors’ Forum workshops for 170 journalists—bias persists. Post-election media monitoring revealed that government-aligned dailies such as *The Daily News*, *Habari Leo*, and *Uhuru* prioritized ruling party coverage, often relegating opposition stories to inner pages or framing them negatively

(Election Monitor, 2015). In contrast, newspapers like *The Citizen*, *Mwananchi*, and *Nipashe* demonstrated more balanced reporting.

### **Ethics Enforcement and Systemic Challenges**

While the Media Council of Tanzania has established self-regulatory frameworks, including an Ethics Committee, enforcement remains weak. The Committee lacks legal authority to enforce its decisions, and some editors refuse to recognize its legitimacy, especially when members are not journalists themselves (Media Watch, 2005). For example, the editor of *Dira ya Mtanzania* ignored repeated summons to respond to defamation allegations in 2012. Although, the Ethics Committee ruled in favour of the complainant, the ruling was not enforced by the erring paper (Barazani, 2015). This lack of compliance is particularly concerning given that editors and media houses were involved in crafting the codes of ethics they now disregard (Rioba, 2012).

### **The Cultural Relevance of Ethical Frameworks**

Another pressing issue is the perceived disconnect between imported codes of ethics and local realities. Numerous scholars argue that dominant media ethics frameworks—largely Eurocentric—are ill-suited for African contexts (Mohammed, 2021; Mabweazara, 2018; Shaw, 2018; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017; Skjerdal, 2015; Wasserman, 2014). As such, African scholars have called for a hybridization of journalism ethics (Umejei, 2018), cross-cultural dialogue (Banda, 2009), and the de-Westernization of media standards (Ward, 2008). These approaches argue that journalism ethics should consider contextual realities—such as job insecurity, political pressure, limited press freedom, and sociocultural values, including religion (Pintak, 2013; Bilau, 2022). Wasserman (2014) underscores this by asserting that “dominant northern perspectives in media theory and ethics are themselves rooted in specific cultural conditions, despite occasional claims to universal validity” (p. 785). While journalism cultures share some global characteristics, significant differences remain, influenced by diverse

political, economic, technological, and cultural conditions (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017).

### **Toward Contextual and Ethical Journalism in Tanzania**

Given these multifaceted challenges, solutions must go beyond traditional codes of conduct. A pluralistic approach that incorporates various ethical frameworks, including religious values, may offer a more viable path forward. Mfumbusa (2004), echoing Boeyink's (1994) critique of ethics implementation in the U.S., argued that the necessary conditions for enforcing ethical codes did not exist in Tanzania. He proposed the inclusion of religious ethics in journalism as a complementary solution. Ward (2008) also emphasised the need for cross-cultural dialogue to expand and diversify ethical journalism globally. Similarly, Omojola (2008, as cited in Kothari, 2018) highlights the importance of structural support, job security, and respect from news sources as prerequisites for ethical journalism in Africa.

### **Religion as a Source of Ethical Renewal**

Religion plays a vital role in the social, moral, and spiritual lives of Tanzanians but remains marginalized in journalism discourse. Values drawn from African Traditional Religions, Christianity, and Islam could serve as powerful tools in revitalizing ethical journalism. These religious traditions, which emphasize truth, justice, compassion, and responsibility, have historically shaped Tanzanian social welfare. If meaningfully integrated into journalistic practice, they could help foster a more ethical media environment. This study therefore argues for a re-evaluation of the role of religion in journalism. Rather than viewing religion as incompatible with professional standards, it can be seen as a complementary ethical framework that aligns with the cultural and moral foundations of Tanzanian society. Religion, when thoughtfully applied, may offer a powerful alternative to the dominant Western ethical paradigms and contribute to restoring credibility, professionalism, and public trust in Tanzanian journalism.

**Religion in Tanzania: A Conceptual Framework**

Religion holds a central place in the lives of most Tanzanians, shaping their moral outlook, cultural practices, and daily interactions. It manifests in multiple forms and influences both individual behavior and broader societal norms. As John S. Mbiti, a renowned scholar of African religion and philosophy, aptly observed, “Africans are notoriously religious,” adding that “religion permeates all departments of life to such an extent that it is not easy or possible to isolate it” (Mbiti, 1991, p. 1). Religion serves not only as a spiritual anchor but also as a powerful moral compass for individuals and communities. Aderibigbe (2015) highlights that due to Africa’s deep religiosity; people have evolved into religiously conscious communities, adhering to African Religions (AR), Christianity, or Islam. In the same view, Westerlund (1980) contends that Africans are both religious and collectivist. Meanwhile, Gomez (2013) asserts that indigenous spirituality functioned effectively prior to the introduction of foreign religions. The arrival of Christianity and Islam through colonial and missionary movements led to significant religious transformations, with conversions largely determined by which religion arrived first in a given locality.

This article focuses on the three dominant religious traditions in Tanzania: African Religions (AR), Christianity, and Islam. These are the most widely practiced belief systems among indigenous Tanzanians. However, there is no recent official religious demographic data. The last national census to include religion was in 1967, which reported Christians at 32 per cent, Muslims at 30 per cent, and AR adherents at 37 per cent (Omari, 1984; Mfumbusa, 2014; Sundqvist, 2017). Since then, religious statistics have been omitted from national censuses to avoid conflict and preserve national unity, following disputes between Christians and Muslims over population claims (Omari, 1984; Tanner, 2012; Becker, 2007).

Tanzania is a home to more than 120 ethnic groups, most of who adhere to the three aforementioned religions. Notably, African Traditional Religions continue to influence both Christianity and Islam, resulting in a form of

syncretism. Tanner (2012) notes that AR has been absorbed into both religions, influencing beliefs and practices, and blurring the lines between 'pure' Christianity or Islam. This syncretism is visible not only in community life but even within households, where members of different faiths coexist. As Omari (1984) suggests, this integration renders Christianity and Islam effectively 'indigenous' to Tanzanian society.

### **Religious Expressions in Tanzanian Life**

Tanzanians' religiosity is reflected in both symbolic artifacts and daily behavior. Physical expressions include churches, mosques, shrines, and religious dress such as Islamic robes, *buibui* (veils), and skull caps—although the latter are less commonly worn in public institutions. Religion also pervades civic life. Mesaki (2011) provides a comprehensive account of this:

Not only on a personal level but there are numerous illustrations demonstrating how religion has become part and parcel of Tanzanian society. These include the national anthem, the opening prayers of parliamentary sessions, the swearing-in of public officials using the Bible, Quran, or Constitution, religious broadcasts on national radio (TBC), the existence of a ministerial portfolio for religious affairs, the inclusion of religious education in school curricula, and recognition of Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays (p. 249).

Although the Tanzanian government maintains a secular stance—proclaiming that "the government has no religion"—religion remains integral to public life. Government involvement in religious matters often emerges when national unity or values are perceived to be at risk. For instance, Ng'atigwa (2020) observes that after the collapse of Ujamaa in the 1980s, a period marked by economic hardship, people increasingly turned to religion and religious gatherings (*mihadhara*) for consolation. Similarly, religion was instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the government urged citizens to return to their faiths and encouraged religious leaders to disseminate health information in spiritually trusted

ways. As Ndaluka et al. (2021) state, “religion slowed the spread of COVID-19 when it had been used as an instrument to provide credible health information in a theologically trusted manner” (p. 120). Religion is also a key agent of socialisation, especially in family and community settings. Through Sunday schools, madrassas, and initiation rituals, children are introduced to religious teachings and social norms. As Okon (2012) notes that parental faith often becomes the faith of the children, who are then socialised into rites of passage and moral behavior (p. 138).

### **Religion and Journalism Ethics**

Given the religious orientation of most Tanzanians, it is reasonable to assume that many journalists were socialised within these religious frameworks long before entering the profession. Accordingly, they would have internalised religious values such as honesty, justice, and accountability—principles that resonate with journalistic ethics. As Chioma & Johnson (2014) observe, “there is no doubt that in many situations religious ethics are important elements in building a solid foundation for mass communication and journalism practice” (p. 31).

Religious teachings emphasize moral responsibility and accountability, both essential to ethical journalism. Shao (2023) argues that “journalists who uphold their religious values are more likely to practice ethical journalism and serve the public with integrity” (p. 46). From a Christian perspective, Oosthuizen (2014) proposes that journalists guided by the principle of *agape*—selfless love—should strive to produce news that is timely, truthful, reliable, and engaging. This aligns with the journalistic principle of truth-telling, where any distortion of information is considered unethical. In Islam, journalists are urged to maintain professional integrity and follow a “decent style” in their reporting. They are expected to “avoid offensive language, obscenity, slander, gossip, and *fitna* (provocation or incitement), and to uphold the reputation of both the profession and the Islamic tradition” (Oosthuizen, 2014, p. 29).

African Religions, though largely oral in nature, also uphold a rich set of moral principles relevant to journalism. These include truthfulness, honesty, accountability, social responsibility, and the protection of public trust (Chioma & Johnson, 2014, p. 32). African Religions also discourage unethical practices such as sensationalism, gossip, misinformation, and manipulation. It promotes confidentiality, especially concerning sources, and encourages journalists to contribute to social harmony. In all three religions, the role of the journalist is implicitly that of a truth-bearer and a defender of justice and fairness. By aligning journalistic ethics with religious values, it becomes possible to enrich and reinforce professional conduct in a culturally grounded way.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

This study was prompted by the apparent failure of self-regulation mechanisms to sustain ethical journalism in Tanzania. It is an exploratory study that examined the perspectives of journalists and media stakeholders on the integration and influence of religion in journalism practice. The research was conducted in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza, two major urban centres that host significant media houses, journalism training institutions, and a large population of practicing journalists. Dar es Salaam, being the commercial capital, is the country's primary hub of news production, accounting for at least 20 per cent of all news coverage (Spurk & Katunzi, 2022). Mwanza, the second-largest commercial city, also hosts numerous regional offices of national media outlets. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for the triangulation of findings and the mitigation of limitations associated with relying solely on a single method (Creswell, 2014, cited in Kayungi, 2021). This approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), mixed methods enable researchers to explore complex issues from multiple angles and enhance the richness of insights.

**Sample size**

The study involved 84 media stakeholders, comprised of 75 journalists, selected through convenience sampling from their respective newsrooms to complete self-administered questionnaires. It also involved nine key informants, selected through purposive sampling for in-depth interviews comprising of editors, religious leaders, and officials from media institutions such as the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) and the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA).

**Sampling technique**

Due to restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, many journalists were working remotely, and physical access to newsrooms was limited in accordance with WHO guidelines. To address this, questionnaires were distributed to respondents to complete at their convenience, and were collected at a later date. The questionnaire data was primarily used to capture general trends and perceptions among journalists on the role of religion in ethical journalism.

**Data analysis**

The qualitative interviews were used to gain deeper insights from media leaders and stakeholders, and to complement and validate the questionnaire findings. The media houses represented in this study included Sahara Media Group, BBC Swahili (Tanzania), The Guardian Limited, and Tanzania Standard (Newspapers) Limited. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The researcher identified recurring themes and categories based on the theoretical framework and data collected. A process of pattern matching was applied to determine consistencies and deviations across different data sources. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Descriptive statistics were employed to generate frequencies that reveal common perspectives among respondents.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to conduct this scientific inquiry, the researcher observed all the required research ethics issues including acquiring needed research permit and keep abreast with the credibility of the study. The researcher ensured confidentiality of data obtained from the interviews and questionnaires. Since this study involved personal beliefs, the researcher did not force participants to comment on matters that they were unwilling to talk about. The researcher informed participants that the interviews and filling the questionnaires exercises would not attract any payments and interviewees had the chance to decide at any time they wished to discontinue. Moreover, during the data collection, the researcher ensured that data from interviewees were well captured and asked for clarification on matters for better understanding.

In this study, the interviewees were made to understand that recorded audio during the interviews would be used for verbatim quotations but would be kept anonymous. In order to get information at the conducive atmosphere, the researcher requested the institutions and respondents for their most convenient times and places, prior to the start of this entire research. For those reasons, the findings of this study are compiled and printed as a research report to be stored at the UDSM library to be used as a reference material for students and researcher in the fields of religion and media ethics and training in the country and the world.

**Findings and Discussion****Perspectives on the Role of Religion in Journalism**

The findings indicate that a majority of respondents recognise religion as having a functional role in promoting ethical journalism in Tanzania. All questionnaire respondents acknowledged that religious values influence various aspects of journalism practice.

**Table 1:** Respondents' Perception of the Functions of Religion in Journalism Practice

No.	Function of Religion	Frequency	Percentage
i.	Urges hard work	16	8.9%
ii.	Enhances honesty	23	12.9%
iii.	Influences discipline	22	12.3%
iv.	Influences objectivity	27	15.2%
v.	Promotes unity among journalists	13	7.3%
vi.	Emphasises coverage of development issues	15	8.4%
vii.	Encourages compliance with professional ethics	28	15.7%
viii.	Supports unity, stability and peace in the country	34	19.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>178</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field data, 2022

The most frequently cited function was the role of religion in promoting unity, stability, and peace in society (19.1 per cent), followed by its influence on compliance with professional ethics (15.7 per cent) and objectivity in reporting (15.2 per cent). These results suggest that journalists perceive religion not just as a personal belief system but as a framework that reinforces core journalistic values.

### Qualitative Insights

Interview data aligned with the questionnaire findings, highlighting religion's role as a moral compass that shapes individual behaviour and professional conduct. Respondents frequently referenced the concept of "fear of God" as a deterrent against unethical practices such as misinformation, sensationalism, or accepting bribes. An editor with *The Daily News* said that:

*If a journalist is a God fearing person then it is easier for them to comply with the guiding principles of our profession. Justice, for instance, is central to both religion and journalism. Justice is everywhere; it is even stated in the Bible. When you have a fear of God, you will not report information that damages someone's personality. It also gives you an understanding of*

*many worldly issues and thus enables us to live well by complying with the principles of the society around us.*

Religious principles were seen to support accountability, fairness, truthfulness, and social responsibility, all of which align with established journalistic ethics. An editor from Mwanza noted:

*Religion reminds journalists to adhere to the existing codes of conduct, for example, by balancing stories. It is a constant ethical checkpoint. Therefore, before a journalist reports a story he or she should seek guidance from his or her religion and then weigh its impact the society. I say this because when a journalist wants to report an issue, needs to evaluate its ethical implication or if it is worth reporting. Do not report for sake of reporting, otherwise you may be causing harm to people.*

Moreover, media stakeholders asserted that religions universally condemn falsehood and injustice, framing unethical reporting as a form of moral transgression. Editor of Nipashe narrates:

*Religion should guide journalists in evaluating the ethical implications of a story before publishing. It's not just about reporting; it's about doing no harm.*

### **Challenges to Ethical Journalism**

Respondents attributed the persistence of ethical violations to several factors, including: technological disruption and social media pressures, economic hardships and low journalist remuneration, negligence by editors and media managers and influx of inadequately trained graduates from journalism schools. An official from MCT explains:

*Ethical compliance must be consistently reinforced. Just as religions remind their followers daily to avoid sin, journalists also need constant ethical reminders. There are new entrants in the field from journalism schools every day who need to be*

*sensitised regularly. There is no way it will reach a time we can say that 'we have stabilised on ethics'.*

### **Religion as a Moral Foundation for Journalism**

The findings support the proposition that religious values can complement journalistic codes of ethics, offering a secondary layer of moral guidance. Religion was perceived not only as a source of ethical grounding but also as a mechanism for self-regulation when institutional mechanisms fall short. These conclusions resonate with Rioba (2012), who noted:

*Religion helps in guiding morality. Someone who is not religious may lack concern for public consequences, but religious journalists often feel personally accountable to a higher power (p. 146).*

Similarly, Okon (2012) argued that religion promotes social cohesion and moral discipline, both of which are critical to responsible journalism. Religious teachings whether from the Bible, Qur'an, or African belief systems promote justice, truth, and fairness, which are also foundational to journalism practice. Studies by Tittle & Welch (1983), and Weaver & Agle (2002), as cited in Parboteeah et al., (2008), affirm a strong correlation between religion and ethics. Religious systems often define societal norms and shape the ethical frameworks through which professions like journalism are practiced.

### **The Use of Religion in Journalism Practice**

Journalists who responded to the questionnaires indicated that they often draw upon religious values as a source of ethical guidance in their journalism practice in Tanzania. The findings reveal that religion plays a significant role in helping journalists uphold professional standards, particularly in promoting objectivity, fairness, and responsibility in their work. Table 2 presents the specific ways in which religion is applied in journalism practice.

**Table 2:** The Use of Religion in Journalism Practice

No.	Use of Religion in Journalism Practice	Frequency	Percentage
i.	Communal approach to issues	5	7%
ii.	Objectivity, fairness, and balance	31	41%
iii.	Good human relations with sources	13	17%
iv.	Use of acceptable language and content	5	7%
v.	Truthfulness in writing and presentation	26	35%
vi.	Prioritising human-interest stories	17	23%
vii.	Respect for authority in news sourcing	15	14%
viii.	Avoiding character and business assassination	8	11%
ix.	Avoiding incitement and harm in reporting	11	15%
<b>Total</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field data, 2022

From these results, objectivity, fairness, and balance emerged as the most cited applications of religion in journalism (41 per cent), followed by truthfulness (35 per cent) and a focus on human-interest stories (23 per cent). These results affirm the perceived alignment between religious morality and journalistic ethics. Several interview respondents noted that their religious beliefs influenced their editorial decision-making and journalistic performance. For example, some stated that they used their religious convictions to determine whether a story was ethical, newsworthy, or in the public interest. Editor in Mwanza narrates:

*I do not allow a story to air if it contradicts journalism ethics. If the story is newsworthy and can be improved ethically, I may allow it. For example, a school owner in Mwanza wanted publicity for supporting poor students. To me, it wasn't a matter of public interest—it was for self-promotion—so I ignored it.*

The findings suggest that journalists who incorporate religious teachings into their work tend to exercise greater responsibility and editorial discretion. This reflects a broader observation that religious values such as truthfulness, justice, and service to the public mirror the professional standards of journalism.

From an Islamic perspective, journalistic ethics are grounded in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and broader human experience, all of which emphasize truth-telling, justice, and commitment to the public good (Hamada, 2016).

Similarly, in Christianity, journalistic principles are derived from Biblical teachings. For instance, the Ten Commandments—particularly the commandment against bearing false witness—serve as ethical imperatives. Oosthuizen (2014: 23) asserts that “The ninth commandment, which states ‘you shall not give false testimony against your neighbour,’ has specific implications for media professionals.” The New Testament further promotes the concept of *agape*—unconditional love and care—which implies that journalists should publish news that is timely, accurate, understandable, and uplifting (Froneman, 1997). Thus, religious teachings, whether Islamic or Christian, can serve as supplementary frameworks for ethical decision-making in journalism.

### The Adoption of Religion in Journalism Practice and Ethical Challenges

To assess whether religion has positively influenced ethical journalism in Tanzania, respondents were asked if they believed religious values had helped improve media standards. Approximately 74 per cent answered “yes”, 10 per cent disagreed, and another 10 per cent said they “did not know”, while 7 per cent did not respond. The detailed insights are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Influence of Religion on Ethical Journalism Practice

No.	Influence of Religion on Ethical Journalism Practice	Frequency	Percentage
i.	Encourages balanced reporting	14	11.3%
ii.	Avoids presumption of guilt	1	0.8%
iii.	Integrate religion into journalism codes	6	4.8%
iv.	Include religion in journalism curriculum	5	4.0%
v.	Emphasize development and peace in reporting	30	24.2%
vi.	Promote objective reporting on public interest issues	25	20.2%
vii.	Strengthen the media's bridge role with the public	15	12.1%
viii.	Support truth-telling without fear or bias	17	13.7%
ix.	Give voice to the marginalised (e.g., elderly, women, PWDs)	11	8.9%
<b>Total</b>		<b>124</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Data, 2022

Interview data revealed mixed views. Some media stakeholders believed that religion could help restore ethical journalism, especially in the face of contemporary moral dilemmas. Senior editor argued that:

*There are things considered human rights today that contradict religious values—for example, same-sex marriages. Our religions define marriage differently. Also, labeling certain religious groups as terrorists is harmful. We need to use religion ethically and positively to uphold journalism values—not to promote discrimination.*

Others, however, maintained a more cautious view. A journalism scholar, trainer, and former newsroom manager noted that religion alone cannot change unethical practices unless individual journalists are personally committed to ethical conduct. A media researcher and scholar in Dar es Salaam contended that:

*Religion can remind journalists of their principles, but it cannot force them to change. Ethical commitment is personal. Just like in religion—going to church does not mean one believes. Ethics is a moral obligation, not a legal one.*

### **Integrating Religion in Journalism Education**

The study found divergent views on whether religion should be integrated into journalism education. Some respondents expressed concern that selecting one religion might lead to discrimination in a multi-faith society like Tanzania. Others argued that the time is not yet ripe and that deeper national dialogue is needed before such a step can be taken. However, a significant number of interviewees supported the idea that religious education—starting from childhood—could help shape ethically grounded professionals. An editor in Mwanza said:

*Teaching religion from early childhood differs from teaching it at 29. Those who grow up with religious values are more likely to internalise*

*them in their professions. That's how we produce professionals who fear God.*

Additionally, respondents proposed special forums or dialogue platforms between journalists and religious leaders to collectively address unethical practices. Religion has historically provided support in times of crisis—whether economic, political, or social—but is rarely consulted when journalism faces a crisis of credibility.

The study also confirms that Tanzanian journalists continue to face challenges such as low pay, economic instability, and professional insecurity, which contribute to ethical violations. As Schiffrin (2010) observes “many African journalists suffer from the devaluation of their profession, which has left them vulnerable and isolated.” (p. 100). Yet, as McMullen (2001) argues “Journalism is more than a satisfying career and essential public service; it is a calling—a vocation—and its thoughtful practice is a way of serving both humankind and God.” (p. 21).

### **Towards a Synthesis of Faith and Professionalism**

In the African context, where religion plays a central role in daily life (Mbiti, 1969), it is imperative to reconsider how religious values—drawn from Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Beliefs—can be synthesized into a framework that supports ethical journalism.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that the persistent violation of journalism ethics—leading to the erosion of media credibility in Tanzania—can be meaningfully addressed through the integration of religious values into journalistic practice. Findings from both the survey and interviews support the long-standing assertion by Mfumbusa (2004) that personal values, particularly those rooted in religious teachings, often have a greater influence on newsroom behavior than codified professional ethics. This view remains relevant today, as the data indicates that religion offers a

reservoir of ethical principles—such as truthfulness, justice, responsibility, and respect—that align closely with the core tenets of ethical journalism. Although religion has traditionally played a critical role in addressing social, political, economic, and health challenges—especially during times of crisis—its potential contribution to journalism practice remains underutilized. This study makes a novel contribution to journalism discourse by offering a clearer understanding of how religion can be deployed to enhance ethical standards and professionalism among Tanzanian journalists. There is, therefore, a pressing need for theoretical and practical exploration of how religious discourses can be integrated into journalism. Scholars, educators, and media stakeholders should work collaboratively to define relevant methodologies, content frameworks, and implementation strategies that align with contemporary journalism in Tanzania. This does not imply a wholesale rejection of Western theories that currently shape journalism education and practice. Rather, it suggests a critical reassessment of these paradigms to accommodate indigenous knowledge systems—including religious and traditional African values—that may be better suited to the local ethical realities of journalism in Tanzania.

Given the centrality of religion in the everyday lives of Tanzanians, the call to integrate religious values into journalism practice is both timely and contextually appropriate. A return to core religious principles—such as honesty, fairness, truth, accountability, and respect—signals a potential renaissance in African journalism, grounded in values that resonate more deeply with local realities. The inadequacy of dominant Western ethical codes in non-Western settings further reinforces the need to revisit, adapt, or reconstruct these codes to reflect indigenous values and ethical expectations. To restore public trust and make journalism more meaningful, coordinated and deliberate efforts must be undertaken. Media stakeholders should ensure that journalists are not only aware of their religious heritage but are also encouraged to embody and apply those values in their professional conduct. One way to facilitate this is by

integrating religious ethics into the curriculum of journalism and mass communication programs in Tanzanian institutions. Furthermore, targeted re-training initiatives—such as workshops, seminars, and short courses—should be designed for practicing journalists to reinforce ethical and religious values in the context of their work.

Equally important is the need to reorient Tanzanians and Africans more broadly toward the enduring relevance of African traditional values, which are often dismissed as outdated or uncivilized. These indigenous belief systems also promote ethical virtues such as truth-telling, communal responsibility, respect for authority, and moral conduct. Recognizing and revitalizing these traditions can help build a journalism culture that is both ethical and culturally grounded. This article not only proposes practical interventions for media practitioners and educators but also lays a theoretical foundation for ongoing dialogue on the role of religion in journalism in Tanzania. In doing so, it positions the country as a potential pilot case for the broader African continent in exploring the intersection of religion, ethics, and journalism practice. The study concludes that the moral teachings embedded in these faith traditions offer valuable foundations for ethical decision-making and professional integrity in journalism practice in Tanzania.

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