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AI, Media, and the Protection of Marginalised Voices in Nigeria: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a conceptual and normative analysis of how artificial intelligence is reshaping the production, circulation, moderation, and monetisation of media content in Nigeria. It offers speed, reach, translation, automation, and new creative possibilities, yet it can also weaken the truth-seeking role of the media by normalising synthetic content, thinning editorial judgment, and rewarding virality over verification. The paper argues that the central question is not whether AI can make communication more efficient, but whether AI-driven media systems in Nigeria will deepen or reduce structural and epistemic marginalisation. Structural marginalisation concerns unequal access to visibility, credibility, and amplification. Epistemic marginalisation concerns whose forms of speaking, reasoning, and knowing are recognised as meaningful in a multilingual society where local-language, oral, code-switched, and proverb-rich expression is often sidelined by English-dominant digital systems. Drawing on journalism studies, platform governance, algorithmic bias research, African communitarian ethics, and selected Western ethical traditions, the paper develops an integrated ethical framework through analytical synthesis rather than empirical fieldwork. It argues that welfare, dignity, reciprocity, virtue, solidarity, and participation must be considered together. On that basis, it proposes six practical commitments for AI in media in Nigeria: transparency, verification, inclusion, accountability, participation, and media literacy. The conclusion warns that, unless governance improves, Nigeria may move toward an increasingly stratified media ecology in which machine-legible, English-dominant content gains disproportionate institutional visibility while local-language and oral forms remain underheard. At the same time, the paper insists that translation and accessibility tools can help only when they are embedded in a broader politics of epistemic recognition rather than treated as technical substitutes for it, and it identifies priorities for future empirical research on local-language moderation, code-switching, oral communication, and synthetic media in fragile settings.

1.0 Introduction

Artificial intelligence now sits inside the machinery of contemporary communication. It helps generate headlines, summarise reports, transcribe interviews, translate text, recommend content, moderate posts, target advertisements, and increasingly produce synthetic images, voices, and videos that can circulate at scale (Broussard et al., 2019; Calvo-Rubio & Ufarte-Ruiz, 2021; Diakopoulos, 2019). In that sense, AI is no longer merely assisting media work from the edges. It is becoming part of the architecture through which public attention is organised.

This development has obvious attractions. Newsrooms under financial pressure are drawn to tools that promise speed and cost reduction. Platforms rely on automated systems to manage enormous volumes of content. Citizens use AI tools for search, drafting, explanation, and translation. Yet the same systems can erode the values that once justified trust in the media. When machines can generate endless plausible stories, cloned voices, and

persuasive images at negligible cost, media institutions risk drifting from verification to simulation, from editorial judgment to probabilistic output, and from public reasoning to engagement optimisation. AI may therefore do more than disrupt the media. If left unchecked, it may hollow out its truth-seeking role from within.

The danger is especially acute in Nigeria. The country has an energetic and increasingly digital public sphere shaped by social media, online news sites, radio, mobile messaging, influencers, and cross-platform circulation. At the same time, it is marked by sharp inequalities in literacy, income, infrastructure, language representation, institutional trust, and access to reliable information. Reports by the Centre for Democracy and Development on the 2023 election cycle describe a disinformation environment in which content moved rapidly across WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, broadcast discussion, and offline networks, while local-language moderation remained weak and cross-platform recirculation made correction difficult (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; Hassan, 2023). Under such conditions, AI does not enter a neutral environment; it enters an unequal one.

For that reason, the discussion that follows centres structural inequality rather than technical novelty alone. Marginalised voices are not simply those with fewer followers. They are groups whose participation, credibility, visibility, and amplification are systematically weakened by broader social hierarchies. In Nigeria, this includes many women, rural communities, poorer populations, low-literacy audiences, displaced or insecure communities, young people without institutional power, and speakers of local languages whose communicative forms are rarely treated as technologically central.

The argument also advances a stronger claim than the literature often makes. AI in Nigerian media may intensify not only structural marginalisation but also epistemic marginalisation, that is, the downgrading of certain ways of speaking, reasoning, and knowing. A society in which someone who lacks formal English fluency can still produce a brilliant Yoruba reflection on politics, community, or justice cannot afford communication systems calibrated mainly to standard English, platform-friendly brevity, and globally dominant datasets. When AI-mediated media cannot adequately hear such intelligence, the problem is not only technical exclusion. It is also a moral failure of recognition.

For purposes of reflexive transparency, this analysis is written from the standpoint of a Nigerian scholar concerned with media ethics, language inclusion, and democratic communication. It does not claim to speak for all marginalised communities in Nigeria, which are internally diverse and historically unequal. Rather, it aims to offer a critical framework for asking how AI-mediated media can recognise those communities more fairly without reducing them to objects of analysis. Its central contribution is to connect questions of media ethics, platform governance, algorithmic bias, and communicative justice within a single Nigerian-focused framework that is both conceptually integrated and practically oriented.

The paper first clarifies its analytical approach and contribution. It then examines how AI is changing the conditions of mediation. Next, it clarifies what marginalisation means in the Nigerian public sphere and considers misinformation, representation, and the problem of algorithmic deafness. It then develops an integrated ethical framework that places African communitarian ethics in genuine conversation with utilitarian, deontological, reciprocity-based, and virtue-ethical reasoning. Finally, it proposes a Nigerian agenda for governance and concludes with a future-oriented reflection on where present trajectories may lead.

1.1 Paper Type and Analytical Approach

This article is a conceptual and normative analysis rather than an empirical study or a systematic literature review. Its central purpose is to develop an integrated ethical framework for evaluating AI-mediated media systems in Nigeria through the linked lenses of structural and epistemic marginalisation. The framework is developed through analytical synthesis, bringing into conversation journalism studies, platform governance scholarship,

research on algorithmic bias, African communitarian ethics, selected Western ethical traditions, and limited illustrative Nigerian materials.

The literature and examples were selected for their relevance to four questions that organise the paper: how AI changes the conditions of mediation; how marginalisation operates in the Nigerian public sphere; how language, misinformation, and platform design can intensify communicative harm; and how ethical reasoning can guide governance and design responses. Nigerian references, including the 2023 election-cycle information environment and local-language moderation concerns, are used illustratively to ground the argument rather than to support causal claims based on original fieldwork. The framework should therefore be read as a theoretically grounded evaluative structure that future empirical research can test, refine, and operationalise.

2.0 AI and the Changing Conditions of Mediation

AI has already altered the logic of media production and circulation. In journalism, it supports drafting, editing, summarisation, transcription, translation, archiving, and discovery. On platforms, it ranks content, predicts relevance, detects policy violations, and personalises feeds (Broussard et al., 2019; Diakopoulos, 2019; Gillespie, 2018). In political communication and advertising, it allows actors to tailor messages to different audiences with increasing precision. In visual culture, generative systems can now produce synthetic photographs, voice clones, and videos that can be used for satire, creativity, propaganda, or fraud (Chesney & Citron, 2019).

These developments matter because they redistribute communicative power. Decisions once made by editors, reporters, or producers are increasingly shaped by systems trained on prior data and optimised for measurable outcomes. This does not remove human agency, but it changes where judgment sits and what kinds of judgment count. Visibility becomes partly a statistical matter. Credibility can be inferred from engagement. Relevance is predicted rather than argued. Public discourse is thus reorganised through infrastructures that are not always transparent to the people who inhabit them.

The key problem is that the goals of these systems are not naturally aligned with those of ethical communication. Recommendation systems often reward attention, emotional arousal, novelty, and repetition rather than depth, fairness, or public reason (Gillespie, 2018; O'Neil, 2016). Generative systems can produce fluent falsehoods or persuasive half-truths. Automated moderation can misread irony, political slang, code-switching, and locally meaningful expressions. The result is a media order in which scale improves while judgment may worsen.

It is important not to anthropomorphise the technology too quickly. AI systems do not autonomously decide to privilege virality over verification or English over local nuance. Those priorities are built into them through data selection, model design, product incentives, moderation policy, commercial pressure, and institutional neglect. The present concern is therefore not with machines in the abstract, but with AI-mediated communication systems as socio-technical arrangements shaped by human choices.

Once this is recognised, the question of marginalised voices moves from the margins of the discussion to its centre. The issue is not merely whether AI works efficiently. It is whether the new infrastructure of mediation distributes recognition and voice more justly than the older one, or whether it intensifies old asymmetries under the banner of innovation.

3.0 Marginalisation in the Nigerian Public Sphere

To speak of marginalised voices in Nigeria is to acknowledge that not all groups enter the public sphere on equal terms. Urban and elite voices are often more visible than rural and poor ones. English-speaking actors enjoy advantages over those who think and communicate primarily in Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Pidgin, Tiv, Kanuri, Efik, Ijaw, or other languages. Men often dominate public commentary. Youth may shape digital culture yet

remain institutionally unheard. Communities facing insecurity, displacement, disability, or low literacy often have little control over how they are represented.

Marginalisation in media has at least four dimensions. First, there is a visibility problem: some communities are barely represented. Second, there is a credibility problem: some voices are present but treated as less trustworthy or less authoritative. Third, there is a problem of amplification: some groups may speak, but their voices do not carry far. Fourth, there is a problem of misrepresentation: communities appear in the media mostly through stereotypes, panic narratives, or externally imposed frames. AI can intensify all four forms at once.

An original Nigerian reflection sharpens the point. In everyday life, one frequently encounters people who may not be fluent in formal English, may not be academically trained, and may nevertheless possess striking analytical and moral insight. Their intelligence may appear in Yoruba proverbs, Pidgin-inflected political commentary, oral narrative, radio discussion, or WhatsApp voice notes. If an AI-driven media ecology privileges only the forms of expression that are easiest to classify, transcribe, monetise, moderate, or quote in polished English, then it does not merely exclude certain people; it excludes certain modes of intelligence.

That is why the language question is deeper than translation. A system may translate words and still fail to grasp significance. It may recognise a sentence and still flatten its cultural force. It may transcribe speech and still misjudge what is morally or politically salient in it. The deeper issue is epistemic recognition: whose way of interpreting reality is recognised as knowledge at all. In the Nigerian context, a media order that cannot adequately hear mixed-language speech, orally transmitted testimony, or proverb-rich reasoning risks misjudging the social world it claims to mediate.

4.0 AI, Misinformation, and the Intensification of Harm

One of the most visible dangers of AI in media is its capacity to industrialise misinformation. Synthetic text, audio, and imagery can now be produced cheaply, quickly, and at scale, lowering the cost of deception and increasing the difficulty of verification (Chesney & Citron, 2019). In a country such as Nigeria, where information frequently circulates through layered channels that include social platforms, messaging apps, local radio, influencers, and community intermediaries, such materials do not remain online curiosities. They can shape offline fear, trust, and action.

The Nigerian electoral context illustrates the problem. CDD's election-cycle analyses describe an information environment in which false or misleading claims moved between WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, traditional media, and offline community networks; political actors and influencers played significant roles; and local-language moderation capacity remained limited (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; Hassan, 2023). The problem was not only that falsehood spread. It was that falsehood that became socially embedded in already existing cleavages of ethnicity, religion, partisanship, and mistrust.

Marginalised communities bear special risks in such an environment. They may have fewer reliable verification channels. They may depend more heavily on trusted informal networks, which are socially valuable but also vulnerable to manipulation. They may be more exposed to rumours concerning insecurity, health, religion, elections, or ethnic violence. They may also have fewer resources to rebut damaging narratives once they begin to spread.

A further danger is asymmetry. Falsehood is often vivid, emotionally charged, and easily shareable. Corrective speech is usually slower, more qualified, and less dramatic. Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) show that false news can spread farther and faster online than truth. In the age of generative AI, that asymmetry may widen. Marginalised communities can become targets of damaging synthetic content while their own testimony struggles to circulate.

Protection of vulnerable voices, therefore, requires more than generic concern about fake news. It requires close attention to the relationship between misinformation, inequality, and social vulnerability.

5.0 Representation, Language, and the Problem of Algorithmic Deafness

Questions of representation lie at the heart of AI ethics. Who appears in the datasets? Whose face, language, accent, name, and communication style become legible to the system? Whose experiences are assumed to be normal? Research on algorithmic bias shows that performance disparities often map onto wider social inequalities rather than appearing by accident (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Noble, 2018). In media systems, such disparities affect not only classification and recommendation but also the broader distribution of dignity and attention.

Nigeria's linguistic diversity makes this challenge especially urgent. A media ecology centred overwhelmingly on English cannot adequately represent the whole of Nigerian social life. Yet African languages remain under-resourced in NLP (Natural Language Processing), and low-resource language problems are not merely technical deficiencies; they reflect broader inequalities in attention, infrastructure, and participation (Nekoto et al., 2020). When AI tools perform poorly on local languages, dialects, mixed-language expressions, or regionally specific contexts, entire communities become less audible to the systems that increasingly shape public communication.

I use the phrase algorithmic deafness as a metaphor for institutionally produced technical misrecognition. The problem is not that AI literally fails to hear in a human sense. The problem is that data choices, model assumptions, business incentives, and weak local accountability combine to make socially meaningful forms of speech harder for the system to register fairly. A platform may appear inclusive because it serves large numbers of users, yet still misreads accent variation as noise, codes local political language as abuse, oral testimony as low-value content, or vernacular reasoning as inferior to polished English prose.

For that reason, translation alone cannot solve epistemic injustice. Translation can widen access and should not be dismissed, but a system has not truly recognised a community simply because it has converted its speech into a machine-friendly form. Recognition requires more than lexical conversion. It requires local evaluation criteria, community-informed moderation, participatory data practices, and respect for the communicative forms through which people actually make sense of the world. Multilingual support is therefore necessary, but not sufficient.

Protection of marginalised voices must involve more than after-the-fact inclusion rhetoric. It requires multilingual, culturally aware design, community-informed evaluation, subgroup auditing, and caution toward performance claims that mask systematic failures. Above all, it requires a shift in imagination: from asking whether AI can speak to Nigerians, to asking whether AI has been built to listen to Nigerians in the plurality of their actual speech forms.

6.0 An Integrated Ethical Framework for AI and Media in Nigeria

The practical principles usually proposed for AI governance in media, such as transparency or accountability, become stronger when grounded in deeper moral reasoning. However, no single ethical tradition is sufficient on its own. A more persuasive framework for the Nigerian case emerges when African communitarian ethics is not treated as an afterthought, but used to reinterpret the concerns raised by utilitarianism, deontology, reciprocity, and virtue ethics. The aim is not to replace one tradition with another, but to show how a Nigerian context of linguistic plurality, unequal recognition, and fragile trust changes what counts as ethical adequacy.

A first strand concerns welfare, but welfare understood relationally rather than merely statistically. Utilitarian reasoning usefully asks whether AI in media increases overall social well-being. Faster workflows, wider reach, translation support, and improved access may indeed benefit many people. Yet utilitarianism becomes morally thin when it measures benefit only in aggregate efficiency. African communitarian ethics, as illuminated by Mbiti's relational account of personhood and Metz's ubuntu-based moral theory, reminds us that social good cannot be reduced to averages if minorities are exposed to concentrated harms, public trust is corroded, or bonds of mutual recognition are weakened (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2007). By concentrated harms, the paper means harms that may appear limited in aggregate terms but fall repeatedly and disproportionately on already vulnerable groups, for example, when a platform improves moderation speed overall while repeatedly misreading local-language or code-switched political speech, or when English-dominant ranking systems leave rural and vernacular testimony comparatively underheard. In this integrated view, a system is not considered beneficial simply because it is efficient. It must also sustain a sense of belonging, solidarity, and shared social standing.

A second strand concerns dignity, duty, and reciprocity. Deontological ethics insists that people must not be treated merely as means to profit, engagement, extraction, or experimentation. The Golden Rule adds a concrete moral test: would designers, editors, platforms, and regulators accept being represented, moderated, ranked, misread, or publicly harmed in the ways their systems treat marginalised communities? African communitarian ethics deepens this point by stressing that to degrade another person's standing is not only to violate an abstract duty, but to damage the relationships through which persons are constituted and acknowledged. This matters in practical terms when women journalists, minority communities, or low-literacy audiences become especially exposed to synthetic impersonation, defamation, or the rapid circulation of false media that they are less well positioned to rebut. Together, these traditions imply that truthfulness, fair hearing, and non-instrumental respect are obligations, not optional extras.

A third strand concerns character, judgment, and public culture. Virtue ethics asks what kind of habits AI-driven media encourages. Does it cultivate truthfulness, fairness, prudence, humility, courage, and care? Or does it reward haste, sensationalism, carelessness, and indifference? African communitarian ethics complements this by insisting that good judgment is socially embedded. Media are part of the moral infrastructure through which a society acknowledges who belongs, whose pain matters, whose testimony counts, and who is entitled to be heard. In Nigerian conditions, this includes whether radio call-ins, WhatsApp voice notes, proverb-rich speech, and local-language testimony are treated as serious contributions to public reasoning or quietly downgraded because they are harder for automated systems to classify, transcribe, monetise, or moderate. A media order that repeatedly mishears or devalues such communities damages not only information quality but social solidarity itself.

Taken together, these traditions support six linked commitments for AI in Nigerian media. First, transparency is required because people deserve to know when automated systems shape the production, ranking, translation, or moderation of content. Second, verification is required because truth cannot be sacrificed to speed. Third, inclusion is required because linguistic and social underrepresentation is a moral failure, not a minor product defect. Fourth, accountability is required because institutions must not hide behind technology when harm occurs. Fifth, participation is required because communities should help shape the systems that affect them rather than being treated as passive data sources. Sixth, media literacy is required because citizens need practical capacities for checking, questioning, and contextualising AI-mediated information. These commitments do not sit alongside the ethical framework as add-ons; they are the practical expression of it and indicate how a more communitarian, context-sensitive evaluation differs from a purely efficiency-based model of media innovation.

7.0 Toward a Nigerian Agenda for Governance and Design

If these ethical considerations are taken seriously, then the Nigerian response to AI in media cannot be limited to importing abstract frameworks developed elsewhere. It must address the concrete realities of multilingual communication, weak trust in institutions, uneven digital infrastructure, the strength of informal networks, and the porous boundary between online and offline discourse. A context-sensitive governance agenda is therefore required.

At the level of media institutions, AI should assist rather than replace editorial judgment in matters involving public controversy, elections, insecurity, religion, ethnicity, health, or vulnerable communities. Newsrooms should disclose meaningful uses of AI, document verification steps for AI-assisted content, and maintain clear human responsibility for published material. The speed of production should never become an excuse for the abandonment of editorial ethics.

At the platform level, Nigeria needs stronger pressure for local-language moderation, more transparent appeals processes, and independent auditing of performance across linguistic and regional groups. A platform that performs well in English but poorly in the communicative environments where many Nigerians actually speak cannot plausibly claim to be neutral.

At the design and research levels, participatory approaches are essential. Work on low-resource African language technologies shows the importance of involving local communities in data creation, evaluation, and governance rather than treating them as passive sources of raw material (Nekoto et al., 2020; Ayana et al., 2024). Nigerian AI for media should similarly be shaped with communities, not merely deployed on them. Translation, transcription, and accessibility tools should therefore be pursued, but only within a broader framework of local evaluation, epistemic respect, and community oversight.

At the level of civic culture, media literacy must expand beyond simple warning slogans. Citizens need a practical understanding of synthetic media, recommendation systems, influence operations, platform incentives, and responsible verification practices. In a country where information often travels through trust networks, resilience depends not only on individual scepticism but also on community habits of checking, questioning, and contextualising.

8.0 Conclusion: Futures of Recognition

Artificial intelligence is not fated to destroy the media in Nigeria, but it could decisively weaken the media's capacity to serve truth, justice, and democratic inclusion if its development remains governed mainly by speed, scale, and market convenience. The central issue is not whether AI can generate more content, but what kind of public sphere it is helping to build.

The analysis has argued that AI in Nigerian media should be evaluated through the lens of structural and epistemic marginalisation. Structural marginalisation concerns who gains visibility, credibility, and amplification. Epistemic marginalisation concerns whose forms of speech and intelligence are recognised at all. In a multilingual society with strong oral traditions, unequal infrastructure, and fragile trust, these questions are inseparable.

A plausible warning therefore presents itself. If current trends continue, Nigeria may move toward an increasingly stratified media ecology. Machine-legible, English-dominant, platform-optimised content may gain disproportionate institutional visibility because it is easier to rank, quote, monetise, moderate, and archive. Meanwhile, local-language testimony, radio discussion, voice notes, proverbs, informal civic reasoning, and embodied community experience may remain socially vital yet comparatively under-recognised by automated systems. The danger is not a neat split between two sealed worlds, but a patterned hierarchy of legibility in which some forms of communication are continuously more visible to institutions and machines than others.

Another future remains possible. AI could widen access, strengthen local journalism, improve support for low-literacy audiences, and help mediate across languages, but only if those gains are embedded in a broader politics of recognition. Translation must not become a euphemism for assimilation into machine-friendly norms. Participation must not be reduced to consultation after design decisions have already been made. Inclusion must not be measured only by coverage statistics while communities remain misunderstood in substance.

Future research should therefore move beyond general claims about bias and efficiency to investigate AI moderation in Nigerian languages, the treatment of code-switching and oral communication, the role of synthetic media in fragile contexts, and methods for evaluating epistemic harm. This agenda should include interviews and surveys with journalists, moderators, creators, and media consumers, as well as studies of how Nigerians understand trade-offs among efficiency, fairness, solidarity, and inclusion in AI-mediated communication. The future of AI in Nigerian media should be judged not by how impressive the technology appears, but by whether it helps build a public sphere in which those at the margins are better heard, more fairly represented, and more fully recognised as co-authors of national life.

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