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# Exploring the Impact of Authentic Leadership on Socioeconomic Outcomes among Early-Career Media Professionals: An Empirical Study

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## Abstract

The study sought to determine the effect of authentic leadership on socioeconomic outcomes among young media professionals in Nairobi County, Kenya. Anchored on Social Influence Theory, the study adopted descriptive and explanatory research designs. Study population was 45 TV stations from which 244 respondents were selected. Data was obtained using a structured questionnaire and an interview guide. Response rate was 57.5% for quantitative data and 92% for qualitative data, which was analysed using descriptive and inferential techniques, and thematically, respectively. The study found that all the dimensions of authentic leadership were from moderate to high extent practiced and emphasized, with internalized moral perspective recording the highest mean score ( $M=3.952$ ,  $SD=0.824$ ). Correlation results revealed significant positive correlations between all authentic leadership dimensions and socioeconomic outcomes, with internalized moral perspective being the highest ( $r=0.635$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Regression results showed that self-awareness had the strongest relative effect on socioeconomic outcomes ( $B=0.635$ ,  $p<.05$ ). A strong positive relationship was established, suggesting that authentic leadership explained 58.1% of the variance in socioeconomic outcomes. Qualitative insights from key industry experts confirmed that these dimensions are actively practiced within the industry. The study concluded that authentic leadership, especially through self-awareness and moral conviction, has significant influence on socioeconomic outcomes among young media professionals in Nairobi County, Kenya. By combining statistical analysis with personal testimonies, it shows that authentic leaders can foster ethical behaviour, trust, and organizational norms through social influence channels.

**Key words:** *Authentic Leadership, Balanced Processing, Internalized Moral Perspective, Relational Transparency, Self-Awareness, Socioeconomic Outcomes.*

## 1.1 Introduction

Corporate scandals witnessed world over have raised increased interest in the study on ethics and morals in leadership. This is specifically so given ethical and moral failures have negative devastating impact on the well-being of present and future generations (Troisi et al., 2023). Since leaders have the capacity to influence others in countering and resisting the urge for corrupt ends, numerous studies have fronted authentic leadership as the solution to unethical practices (Gigol, 2020).

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Leaders inspire others to attain positive organizational outcomes when they are authentic, acting in consistent with their morals and values (Hollis, 2018; Northouse, 2019). Authenticity describes people who are aware of their feelings, thoughts, values, emotions, and desires, and act consistently based on this awareness (Caza et al., 2010; Chang et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2018). An emerging revelation in extant literature indicates that authentic leaders are however struggling to remain authentic in changing circumstances, which often present them with dilemmas and pressures opposed with their principles (Williams et al., 2021).

Scholars have operationalized authenticity through the dimensions of self-awareness, balanced processing, internal moral perspective, and relational transparency (Alavi, 2024; Jiewen et al., 2024; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Zheng, et al., 2024). Self-awareness is evidenced by having consistency between belief and actions. This includes a balanced awareness of personal capabilities and motivations (Alok, 2014). Second, balanced processing relates to the individual's ability to process and separate issues that affect their decisions. Those with this dimension have an open mind and assess issues from different perspectives, making objective decisions based on available evidence (Nichols & Erakovich, 2013; Peus et al., 2011).

The third dimension of authentic leadership is internalized moral perspective, serving as a moral compass to guide and determine how to resolve ethical dilemmas. Authentic leaders regulate their desires based on their moral values, implying that their moral code serves as a mirror to check and ensure consistent actions (Chang et al., 2020). Lastly, relational transparency refers to the ability to act consistently and remain accountable in different relational contexts. Authentic leaders are therefore deliberate about being honest to themselves everywhere, without seeking to appeal to different people (Peus et al., 2011). Overall, authentic leaders portray behaviours and actions that cultivate trust, enabling followers to develop strengths, expand their processing capacities, and instil a moral framework that guides decision-making.

### **1.1.1 Socioeconomic Outcomes of Authentic Leadership**

Socioeconomic outcomes refer to the measurable impacts of an individual's or group's social or economic conditions on their quality of life, opportunities, and wellbeing (Sacre et al., 2023). These outcomes are shaped by a complex interplay of factors such as education, employment, income, health, and social mobility. Additionally, they help assess how leadership traits, including authenticity, influence personal advancement as well as institutional and broader community.

Authentic leaders bring about socio-economic outcomes at the individual, organizational and societal levels. At the individual level, Northouse (2019) argues that they inspire others to act in par with their values and those of the organizations they lead. At this level, authentic leaders earn the trust of their followers giving rise to outcomes including morality, career success, and employee well-being. Morality implies that employees desire to act in ways that are beneficial for everyone, including whistle-blowing (Hannah et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2015). Career success may include the achievement of personal goals and objectives, such as promotion, pay rise, commendations or awards (Chughtai, 2018; Mrayyan et al., 2022). This outcome is however relative to employees because it is based on individual's intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions of success (Chang et al., 2020). Lastly, employee well-being describes the emotional state involving aspects of job satisfaction, job-related stress, and signs of other stress (Rahimnia & Sharifirad,

2014). Since authentic leader's actions are predictable, this grants their followers peace and stability.

Socioeconomic outcomes at the organizational level manifest in several forms. For instance, teams led by authentic leaders tend to emulate them. In that regard, Saleem et al. (2023) hold that a group, like its authentic leader, can collectively believe they can take on challenging tasks and consequently put in the necessary effort. Past studies have revealed a strong link between an empowering leadership style and success in organizations (Grošelj et al., 2020; Sanda & Arthur, 2017). A related organizational outcome is the spirit of trust that grows among team members. Authentic leaders encourage group effort, make followers feel valued, and deepen work relationships and shared expectation. All this results in high levels of engagement, commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviour (Boateng et al., 2018; Peus et al., 2011; Schoofs et al., 2024).

Considering society as the last frontier impacted by authentic leadership, outcomes can be viewed through corporate citizenship lens. An organization actively engaged in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) promotes itself by having a mutual concern for the social well-being of the people in their business environment (Ataniyazova et al., 2022). CSR manifests in actions going beyond obedience to laws, driven by a deep sense of moral responsibility to the public, including offering employment, and ethical or moral responses to societal challenges. This study holds that values, morals, and ethics are the drivers of CSR. Specifically, relational transparency may enable organizations to be open in the way they conduct business within their social contexts. Additionally, organizational self-awareness can strengthen an institution's understanding of its mission, vision, and values, enabling it to identify areas of alignment with community interests. This alignment allows organizations to extent their impact beyond profit making to foster shared values and contribute positively to the society (Kipasika, 2024).

### **1.1.2 Young Media Professionals in Kenya**

A report by Media Council of Kenya (2021) estimates that in a typical day, between 58% and 74% of Kenyans aged above 15 years consume mass media either viewing, watching or listening. Despite this high engagement, only 23% of consumers expressed "a lot of trust" in the media, marking a decline from previous statistics. This trend is of concern, given the public relies on mass media to deliver accurate information across all spheres. This study focussed on young professionals working in the mass media industry, a sector that offers a fitting context for examining the role of authenticity due to its public visibility. Professionals targeted were those born between 1981 and 1996 (aged 28-43), slightly older than Kenya's official youth age bracket of 18 to 35 years (Matheka et al., 2013). According to Galdames and Guihen (2020), young professionals tend to change jobs frequently, exhibit certain biases, and prefer roles that offer flexibility and better work-life balance. Furthermore, these professionals navigate complex interactions where authentic leadership can empower them to collectively believe in their capabilities and demonstrate collaborative efforts despite structural constraints. This study provides important contextualization that deepens the understanding of how leadership theories manifest in real-world newsroom settings.

### **1.2.1 Statement of the Problem**

Kenyan media industry continues to grapple with systemic ethical challenges, especially concerning accountability and professionalism. Despite the existence of codes of ethics and regulatory frameworks, elite-media outlets have been criticised for compromised objectivity and declining journalistic standards (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019). The Media Council of Kenya's latest updates to its code of practice reflect an urgent response to these concerns, aiming to address the evolving dynamics of digital media and restore public trust through participatory and inclusive ethical reforms (Bwire, 2025; Media Council of Kenya, 2024).

A significant contributor to these ethical lapses is the demographic composition of the media workforce, predominantly made up of young professional: 96.5% as of 2017 (Ireru, 2017). Alarming, over half of this group admits to engaging in corrupt practices, with many expressing willingness to continue if consequences were avoidable (EACC, 2019). This raises critical questions about the moral resilience of emerging media leaders and underscores the need to understand why some young professionals resist unethical temptations. The 2023-2024 State of the Media report emphasizes the importance of cultivating ethical behaviour to counteract these trends and reinforce press freedom and integrity (Media Observer, 2024).

Authentic leadership has emerged as a promising framework to address these challenges. By fostering a psychologically safe and values-driven environment, authentic leaders can influence ethical behaviour and productivity across individual, organizational, and societal levels (Gigol, 2020; Women Work, 2021). However, scholarly gaps exist in understanding how young professionals can develop ethical resilience among complex socio-political and economic pressures. Moreover, scholarly literature remains fragmented, with limited integration of behavioural, gender, and generational perspectives needed to construct a holistic framework for investigating authenticity in leadership (Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015). Addressing these gaps is essential for designing interventions that foster ethical leadership and sustainable media integrity in Kenya and comparable contexts.

## **2.0 Theoretical Review**

Three theories presented in this section provide conceptual foundation for the study. The first two explain the nature and dynamics of authentic leadership, highlighting its roots in personal identity and leadership authenticity. The later theory offers a lens through which to understand the socioeconomic outcomes associated with authentic leadership, emphasizing the role of interpersonal influence and group dynamics in shaping broader impacts. Together, the theories create a cohesive structure for interpreting both the formation and consequences of authentic leadership within organizational and societal contexts.

### **2.1.1 Authentic Self Theory (AST)**

Authenticity has philosophical roots in the works of Martin Heidegger, who emphasised the importance of "being-toward-death" as a means of living authentically and reclaiming one's individuality from the anonymity of the "they-self" – the rejection of societal conformity (Heidegger, 1962). Rooted in psychology and philosophy AST emanates from seminal contributions of Avolio and Gardner (2005), George (2003), and Kernis (2003). It emphasizes the

development and expression of the “true self”, being self-aware, genuine and aligned with one’s core values. It posits that authenticity flows from self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive psychological capacities like optimism and resilience. Contemporary research shows that self-authenticity significantly enhances followers’ moral intention and self-actualization at work (Karbasi et al., 2024; Schoofs et al., 2024).

The theoretical foundations of AST however remain contested in respect of its conflating measurement tools as well as conceptual ambiguity (Helmuth et al. 2024; Turman, 2024). Critiques also highlight that frameworks of authenticity often ignore how marginalized leaders navigate authenticity amid code switching and impression management. The later perspective stresses the importance of placing power, identity, and context at the core of the theory. It also emphasizes the need to approach authenticity as a dynamic and evolving concept, rather than a static trait.

### **2.1.2 Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT)**

Rooted in organizational behaviour and leadership studies, ALT builds on the idea of authentic self, applying it specifically to leaders. Proponents of ALT embrace five critical aspects of seeking goals with passion, living out personal values, leading with personal conviction, maintaining lasting relationships, and demonstrating self-control (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; George, 2003; Margiadi & Wibowo, 2020). Authentic leaders have a strong moral compass, helping them do what is right even when their emotions or instincts might pull them in conflicting directions. As a result, they earn the trust of their followers, who become confident that their leaders have no pretences or falsehoods.

Though criticised for lack of adequate research on developmental aspects, deployment in organizational contexts, outcomes, and sustainability (Williams et al., 2021), the theory explains the behavioural configurations that enhance a leader’s awareness of self, ethical perspective, the ability to consider various aspects of an issue, and transparency in relationships (Sarkar, 2019). In sum, ALT holds that self-aware leaders possess knowledge about who they are and who they are not, and apply that awareness to their own advantage and those they lead. They are also open and transparent in their relationships; remain predictable even in different contexts; and can balance how they process complex issues and situations, aware of long-term consequences.

Together, the above two theories provide insights broadening the understanding of authenticity in leadership, emerging from a developmental process rooted in values and psychological fulfilment, to being a situated adaptive practice that must respond to identity, power, and measurement realities. In organizational terms, this implies leaders should cultivate authenticity not just through self-alignment and ethical consistency, but also by modelling adaptive transparency. They should also acknowledge contextual realities and recognize followers’ growing agency.

### **2.1.3 Social Influence Theory (SIT)**

Social Influence Theory first introduced by Kelman (1958) posits that individuals’ attitudes and behaviours are shaped by three principal processes namely, compliance, identification, and internalization, depending on whether influence stems from social pressure, affiliation motives, or personal conviction. Compliance occurs when an individual adopts an attitude or a behaviour in order to gain approval of others, often without truly believing in it. This could be driven by external

rewards or punishments. Identification moves further in having an individual emulate the attitudes or behaviours of others they admire or aspire to resemble. Internalization represents the level where an individual integrates into their value system adopted beliefs or behaviours perceived as intrinsically rewarding or aligned with personal convictions.

SIT theory thus illustrates how social forces, whether subtle or direct, can shape people's thoughts or behaviours. Miller and Croft (2022) applied this framework in an athlete recruitment setting, demonstrating that informational social influence (digital media and program marketing) often superseded normative social influence (family or peer expectations) in shaping decisions. This implied that technology and access to timely, credible information amplify informational pathways of influence.

Critiques of SIT however point that it understates contextual factors, lacks clarity on intentionality, and gives limited attention to power dynamics and cultural variations. Nevertheless, Liu et al. (2019) emphasizes that the theory explains how influence is filtered through ones' social environment (such as media, family, peer network) to shape behaviour. For example, when authenticity is modelled and socially reinforced, individuals can internalize it, raising personal well-being and productivity. In organizations, this can enhance identification, trust, collaboration and performance. At the societal level, value-driven norms and actions that encourage ethical behaviour and inclusive growth can be adopted, leading to positive economic and social progress.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

The study adopted a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to maximize maximum yield in results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A convergent parallel design was employed, which allows for the concurrent collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Razali et al., 2019). Data was collected from two main respondent groups: young media professionals and industry experts. Quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 233 respondents, including news reporters, presenters and editors selected via multistage sampling process from a randomly selected pool of 45 television stations in Nairobi. In parallel, researchers obtained qualitative data through interviews with 11 senior managers, who were identified as industry experts and purposely selected for their insights.

Instrument reliability was confirmed via internal consistency using Cronbach alpha, while face and content validity were employed to ensure relevance and consistence respectively (Connell et al., 2018; Rosli et al., 2021). Confirmatory Factor Analysis demonstrated strong model adequacy, with all factor loading exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.5, supporting construct validity. Composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs surpassed the 0.7 benchmark, indicating high internal consistency. Average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.5, confirming convergent validity across constructs. Discriminant validity was established as the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with other constructs, affirming that each construct is empirically distinct. These findings support the reliability and validity of the measurement model. Diagnostic tests ascertained data compliance to regression assumptions. Descriptive and inferential statistics analysed quantitative data, while the qualitative aspects were analysed through content analysis.

## 4.0 Results and Discussions

The key findings followed by a critical interpretation of their implications are presented. The discussions explore how the results align with existing literature, highlights patterns and anomalies, and offers possible explanations for the observed outcomes. Statistical evidence, along with theoretical and qualitative findings offer a comprehensive understanding of the data and its significance to the study's objectives.

### 4.1.1 Descriptive Analysis

This analysis provides a foundational overview of the dataset, summarizing its main characteristics through measures including central tendencies and variability. This preliminary exploration helps to contextualize the data and identify notable patterns or irregularities. It thus serves as a vital step in preparing for deeper inferential analysis to understand variable relationships.

#### 4.1.1.1 Authentic Leadership

Respondents rated statements on a Likert scale of 1-5, reflecting their level of agreement or perception for each variable, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the data, highlighting trends and variations in responses. The results are summarised as follows:

#### 4.1.1.2 Self-Awareness

On aggregate, respondents reported a moderate to high level of agreement ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 0.775$ ) on the self-awareness scale. The statement "accepting one's feelings" received the highest score ( $M=4.382$ ,  $SD = 0.685$ ). This reveals an advanced level of emotional intelligence, crucial for navigating complex organizational dynamics (Goleman, 2014). Leaders who accept their emotions are better equipped to remain authentic, particularly in challenging circumstances. Other statements followed in score: "seeking feedback" ( $M=4.064$ ,  $SD = 0.777$ ), "the ability to identify strengths" ( $M=4.060$ ,  $SD = 0.774$ ), and "acknowledging weaknesses" ( $M= 3.554$ ,  $SD = 0.894$ ). The lowest score attributed to "acknowledging weaknesses" suggests that respondents may experience difficulty admitting their limitations, which finding aligns with research by Oh et al. (2018) highlighting that societal and organizational pressures often compel leaders to present themselves as infallible, thereby hindering honest self-assessment.

Many of the industry experts agreed that there was evidence of self-awareness among young media professionals. For instance, asked whether they believed self-awareness contributed to authentic leadership, industry expert BD2 noted that,

"The first thing I think of is their character, if I can see consistency from who they are, from their work in their home and down to their leadership spaces be it in the office, or if they are ministers, whoever they are even if they are dignitaries the consistency of their professional and personal life."

Industry expert BD8 also noted, "So, there's that element of humility and because they're self-aware, they're confident in who they are and the decisions that they can make or the choices that they would go for". These statements underscore the importance of leaders being introspective in enhancing socioeconomic outcomes. It also aligns with previous studies establishing that self-

awareness is foundational for ethical decision-making and organizational success (Ashkanasy & De Cremer, 2023; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2021).

#### 4.1.1.3 Balanced Processing

This dimension was measured using five survey items, which recorded an aggregate mean score of 3.852 (SD = 0.774), suggesting a strong commitment to the dimension among respondents with moderate consistency across the items. The implication is that while respondents generally value diverse input, there may be room for strengthening behaviour such as actively seeking other's opinions. The highest mean score (M=4.219, SD = 0.748) for "listening to others' ideas before making decisions" highlights the respondents' emphasis on inclusivity and fairness. These are essential traits for ethical and transparent leadership, and the finding aligns with the work of Nichols and Erakovich (2013), who emphasized the importance of balanced processing in fostering trust and collaboration within teams. Saleem et al. (2023) also noted that leaders who practice balanced processing are better equipped to navigate complex ethical dilemmas; ensuring decisions are not only logical but also aligned with organizational values.

The respondents' ability to "avoid emphasizing their point of view at the expense of others" (M= 4.120, SD = 0.745) suggests a strong commitment to fairness and impartiality. Similarly, "I listen closely to the ideas of those who disagree with me" (M=3.768, SD=.770), which was slightly above average, showed a level of fair openness to dissenting views. This is crucial for inclusive decision-making. The lowest mean score (M=3.300, SD = 0.833) was recorded for "seeking others' opinions before decision-making", which although relatively lower, indicates room for improvement in actively engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. This is consistent with Peus et al. (2011), who noted that leaders often struggle to balance diverse viewpoints, particularly in high-stakes situations where their authority may be challenged. To strengthen "balanced processing", organizations could therefore implement structured decision-making frameworks that encourage collaborative dialogue and objective evaluation of information.

Indeed, many decisions in mass media often involve competing interests and hence pose ethical challenges. Balanced processing enables leaders to make informed, transparent, inclusive, and socially responsible choices. Commenting on balanced processing as a contributor to fostering trust and collaboration with stakeholders, industry expert BD6 said,

"They don't come through to me as know it all. They are open to multiple ideas. Then they have this ability of filtering or synchronizing this that to come up with a decision that at least, even those who made a contribution much as probably it didn't quite feature prominently, they felt so involved, that their ideas counted. That I was given an opportunity to share what I think, so that's how I look at it."

#### 4.1.1.4 Internalized Moral Perspective

This dimension with two survey items recorded the highest aggregate mean score (M=4.170, SD = 0.824). This highlights the respondents' strong commitment to aligning their actions with their moral principles, as evidenced by a high mean score (M=4.215, SD = 0.711) for the statement "My morals guide what I do as a leader." This finding is consistent with Amory et al. (2024) who argued

that ethical behaviour inspires trust among followers. The mean score for the second statement “I do not allow group pressure to control me” ( $M=4.124$ ,  $SD = 0.936$ ), further underscores the respondents’ moral resilience. Leaders who maintain their values in the face of external pressures are more likely to foster ethical organizational cultures (Gardner et al., 2005).

The strong emphasis on internalized moral perspective among respondents suggests that leaders are well positioned to act as role models, promoting ethical behaviour within organizations. Al Halbusi et al. (2023) hold this view, stating that when leaders have strong ethical standards, subordinates are more likely to internalize those standards and resist unethical shortcuts, even when under pressure. Leaders with integrity hence provide a stabilizing effect in environments where short-term pressures or temptations might otherwise tempt compromise.

Ethical lapses in mass media can potentially damage public trust and organizational reputation. Leaders with a strong moral compass are therefore needed in this industry to navigate related complex ethical dilemmas. Several industry experts confirmed the role of internalized moral perspective in the formation of authentic leadership. For instance, BD4 said,

“I think so because they have values that shape the world view and, they try to be themselves. You know when people say, what would Jesus do in a situation, but here they are saying, okay, whilst this might have worked elsewhere, what I'm dealing with is very unique, it's very different and I don't deal the way someone else did it. So, I want to do it myself, in the best way because for them they want to achieve the best outcome as possible. Industry expert BD9 commented: “There's a big opportunity for them to reproduce who they are and the people they lead and then there's that sort of like ripple effect from whatever these guys are.”

In summary, descriptive findings supported by industry expert insights highlighted the transformative potential of authentic leadership in fostering ethical decision-making, trust, and organizational success. However, some areas such as emotional transparency and stakeholder engagement in decision-making require further attention. Addressing these gaps through targeted interventions and a supportive organizational culture can help leaders fully realize the benefits of authentic leadership.

#### 4.1.1.4 Relational Transparency

The aggregate mean score ( $M=3.952$ ,  $SD = 0.784$ ) reflects a strong tendency among respondents to practice transparency in their professional relationships. Five standard statements were used as measures, and “I admit my mistakes to others” received the highest mean score ( $M=4.621$ ,  $SD = 0.633$ ), underscoring the importance of accountability in leadership. This aligns with Varga et al. (2025) who argue that transparency strengthens relational bonds and builds credibility. “I rarely present a false front to others” ranked second ( $M=4.275$ ,  $SD=.761$ ); followed by “Other people know where I stand on controversial issues” ( $M=4.202$ ,  $SD = 0.813$ ); “I let others know who truly I am as a person” ( $M=3.893$ ,  $SD=.767$ ); and finally, “I openly share my feelings with others” ( $M=2.768$ ,  $SD=.946$ ).

The relatively lower score for “openly sharing feelings” suggests a reluctance to express vulnerability. Leaders who struggle to express emotions may be perceived as distant or inauthentic,

which can hinder effective communication and reduce team cohesion. Studies reveal that transparency is influenced by societal and organizational norms, which may discourage leaders from exposing their emotions (Galdames & Guihen, 2020; Hofstede, 2001). Furthermore, practice reveals that hierarchical or competitive environments are often cautious about revealing personal emotions, fearing that their authority will be undermined. Addressing this gap requires cultivating a culture that values emotional openness as a strength, supported by training programs that enhance emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication skills for transformative outcomes (Gerhardt et al., 2025).

In mass media where credibility and stakeholder trust are paramount, relational transparency helps leaders manage public perceptions and maintain alignment between organizational goals and societal values. Industry expert BD10 highlighted this by stating:

“What I see out of them is there's a lot of empowerments. There is this sense of creating chances and opportunities for people to literally out train their master without them feeling insecure. Somebody who has the ability to look ahead and see what he is able to achieve with the people that they lead by bringing out the best of the potential they have within themselves. I think that is how I would look at authentic leadership because it is not necessarily about the person leading but more invested in the people that they lead.”

#### 4.2.1 Correlation Analysis

The relationship between the study variables was carried out using Pearson’s coefficient of correlation (*r*). The study followed recommendations by Akoglu (2018) for social science research that correlation values of  $\pm 0.40$  and above, between  $\pm 0.30$  and  $\pm 0.39$ , and below  $+0.30$  imply strong, moderate, and weak correlation respectively. Table 1 is a summary of the results.

**Table 1. Correlation Results**

		Socioeconomic Outcomes	Self-Awareness	Relational Transparency	Balanced Processing	Internalized Moral
Socioeconomic Outcomes	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	233				
Self-Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.610**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001				
	N	233	233			
Relational Transparency	Pearson Correlation	.625**	.223**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.001			
	N	233	233	233		
Balanced Processing	Pearson Correlation	.621**	.294**	.220**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.000	.001		
	N	233	233	233	233	
Internalized Moral Perspective	Pearson Correlation	.635**	.282**	.118	.213**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.072	.001	

	N	233	233	233	233	233
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Results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between all the dimensions of authentic leadership and socioeconomic outcomes among young media professionals. Self-awareness ( $r=.610, p<.05$ ) emerges as a foundational trait, aligning personal values with actions and enhancing ethical decision-making, leadership clarity, and career growth. Relational transparency ( $r=.625, p<.05$ ) fosters trust and psychological safety, enabling authentic engagement and ethical organizational cultures. These traits are shaped by early socialization and cultural norms, suggesting that leadership development is deeply embedded in personal and communal experiences. Balanced processing ( $r=.621, p<.05$ ) and internalized moral perspective ( $r=.635, p<.05$ ) further underscore the importance of ethical cognition and principled action in leadership. Leaders who engage in fair, reflective decision-making and uphold moral convictions contribute to inclusive policies, institutional credibility, and public trust, especially in sectors like media where ethical lapses have broad societal impact.

The strongest correlation observed with internalized moral perspective highlights the transformative role of integrity-driven leadership in fostering sustainable and equitable socioeconomic advancement. Collectively, these findings affirm that authentic leadership traits are not only personal assets but also catalysts for broader social and economic progress. Furthermore, the high Pearson correlation values across the dimensions reinforce the assumption of linearity, a crucial requirement for valid regression analysis (Stockemer, 2019).

#### 4.3.1 Regression Analysis

To assess the effect of authentic leadership among young professionals on socioeconomic outcomes, socioeconomic outcome was regressed on the dimensions of authentic leadership. The goal was to evaluate the individual and combined contributions of the dimensions to the outcomes and determine the statistical significance of their effects. The results are summarized in the following Tables.

**Table 2. Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.762 <sup>a</sup>	0.581	0.573	0.045

<sup>a</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Internalized Moral Perspective, Relational Transparency, Balanced Processing, Self-Awareness

The model summary reveals a strong positive relationship between authentic leadership and socioeconomic outcomes, with an R-value of 0.762. This indicates a substantial correlation, suggesting that authentic leadership significantly influences socioeconomic outcomes. The  $R^2$  shows that authentic leadership dimensions explained 58.1% of the variance in socioeconomic outcomes. After adjusting for predictors and sample size,  $R^2$  remains high at 0.573, confirming the robustness of the model. These results are consistent with studies arguing that authentic leadership fosters ethical practices, collaboration, and trust, leading to positive organizational and socioeconomic performance (Obuba, 2023; Lux & Lowe, 2025).

**Table 3. ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.799	4	0.450	79.062	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	1.297	228	0.006		
Total	3.096	232			

ANOVA results indicate that the overall regression model was highly significant ( $F=79.062$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), confirming that authentic leadership significantly predicts socioeconomic outcomes, and that the observed relationship was unlikely to have occurred by chance. This finding supports argument by Gardner et al. (2005) that authentic leadership significantly enhances interpersonal trust and ethical decision-making, contributing positively to socioeconomic metrics.

**Table 3. Beta Coefficients**

Dimension	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
Constant	4.113	0.109	-	37.874	0.000
Self-Awareness	0.215	0.028	0.635	7.679	0.000
Relational Transparency	0.298	0.041	0.621	7.268	0.000
Balanced Processing	0.312	0.043	0.615	7.256	0.000
Internalized Moral Perspective	0.305	0.043	0.610	7.093	0.000

Regression results indicate a statistically significant model where all the dimensions positively contribute to the dependent variable. The constant value of 4.113 is the baseline level of the outcome when all predictors are zero, and its high t-value (37.874) with a p-value  $<0.05$  confirms its significance. Among the predictors, self-awareness has the highest standardized coefficient ( $B=0.635$ ), indicating that it has the strongest relative effect on socioeconomic outcomes when controlling for the scale measurement. Its t-value (7.679) further affirm its importance and statistical significance ( $p=0.000$ ).

The effect of relational transparency follows closely with a standardized coefficient of 0.621. This suggests that for every unit increase in relational transparency, the outcome variable of socioeconomic outcomes increases by 0.621 units, assuming that other variables are held constant. Its significance is supported by a t-value of 7.268 and a p-value of 0.000. The findings affirm argument that relational transparency fosters trust and collaboration (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Transparent leaders create a culture of openness, where team freely contribute ideas, promoting higher engagement, innovation, and ethical practices.

Balanced processing and internalized moral perspective also show strong and significant contributions, with coefficients of 0.615 and 0.610 respectively. T-values above 7 indicate that they are meaningful predictors in the model, with p-values well below the 0.05 threshold. These results align with Northouse (2019), who identifies balanced processing as a hallmark of authentic leadership.

In summary, regression analysis demonstrates that all four dimensions are significant and positively associated with the outcome, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of the study constructs. The regression equation derived from the coefficients Table providing a concise representation of the relationship between the variables is thus expressed as follows:

$$\text{Socioeconomic Outcomes} = 4.113 + 0.635 (\text{Self-Awareness}) + 0.621 (\text{Relational Transparency}) + 0.615 (\text{Balanced Processing}) + 0.610 (\text{Internalized Moral Perspective}) + \varepsilon$$

From thematic analysis of qualitative data, findings revealed that authentic leadership significantly influences socio-economic outcomes through multiple interrelated mechanisms. Respondents emphasized that those authentic leaders who communicate expectations clearly and model moral behaviour inspire followers to emulate these values. This eventually grows a culture of integrity and motivation in the organization. Proximity to leadership and the presence of empathy and team spirit were also cited as critical enablers of success, with religious beliefs further reinforcing moral conduct. A recurring theme was the perception that authentic leaders actively shape social behaviour and provide tangible support, thereby enhancing follower's sense of purpose and community engagement.

Additionally, data highlighted the strategic role of authentic leaders in aligning CSR initiatives with both organizational goals and community needs. Respondents noted that self-aware leaders cultivate organizational consciousness, ensuring that CSR efforts are responsive to societal demands, sustainable and feasible. Their focus on both internal alignment and external impact underscores the integrative function of authentic leadership in promoting socio-economic development. The findings are consistent with recent scholarship highlighting the positive influence of authentic leadership on employee motivation, organizational ethics, and community engagement (Yagi et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022).

## 5.0 Summary, Discussion and Implications

The study sought to evaluate the effect of authentic leadership on socioeconomic outcomes among young mass media professionals in Nairobi County, Kenya. Authentic leadership dimensions were self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Descriptive, correlational and regression analyses revealed that each of the dimensions positively influences outcomes at the individual, organizational and societal levels, though the impact varies. These findings were supported by qualitative insights from key industry experts, who confirmed that the dimensions were actively practiced.

Specifically, descriptive analysis revealed that internalized moral perspective, reflecting a leader's commitment to ethical values and principles, had the highest mean score ( $M=4.170$ ,  $SD=0.824$ ). This means it is the most consistently practiced dimension among young mass media professionals in Nairobi County.

Despite internalized moral perspective scoring highest descriptively, regression analysis identified self-awareness as the most influential predictor of socioeconomic outcomes. This suggests that leaders who are self-aware - understanding their strengths, limitations, and influence, play a crucial role in shaping organizational trust and communication. Self-aware individuals tend to be more

predictable and transparent, which fosters a sense of psychological safety and trust among others. These qualities not only contribute significantly to individual employee wellbeing, but to positive organizational and societal outcomes.

Several implications emerge from these findings. The first touches on the need for organizations, particularly in the mass media industry, to prioritize development of self-awareness among emerging leaders. Since this is the most impactful predictor of socioeconomic outcomes, leadership development programs should include reflective practices, emotional intelligence training, and feedback mechanisms that help individuals understand their strengths, limitations, and behavioural patterns.

Another implication is the strategic value of ethical leadership, as evidenced by the high score for internalized moral perspective. This suggests that young professionals in Nairobi's media industry place strong emphasis on moral conviction and value ideals. To this end, organizations should embed ethical standards and value-based decision-making into their leadership frameworks. This will not only align with the expectations of the workforce but will also strengthen the organization's reputation and long-term sustainability.

The relatively lower scores for relational transparency and balanced processing imply that while these dimensions are present, they may require further reinforcement through targeted interventions. Leaders may benefit from training in skills such as active listening, open communication, and inclusive decision-making to enhance these competencies. Strengthening these areas can lead to more participatory leadership styles, which are crucial in dynamic, collaborative environments like media organizations.

Finally, the study underscores the broader socioeconomic impact of authentic leadership. By linking leadership behaviours to tangible outcomes, it highlights the role leadership plays in shaping not just organizational culture but societal wellbeing as well. The deployment of authentic leadership creates a ripple effect that strengthens community engagement and social responsibility. This alignment between internal leadership values and external CSR initiatives implies that organizations led by authentic leaders are well positioned to contribute meaningfully to societal well-being while maintaining strategic coherence. Ultimately, it reinforces the importance of investing in leadership pipelines that are competent, authentic, ethical, and socially conscious. These qualities are vital especially in contexts where moral guidance and community support are key to progress.

## **6.0 Limitations and Recommendations**

Researchers acknowledged several limitations in the study to help contextualize its findings and guide future research. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between authentic leadership and socio-economic outcomes. While associations were identified, longitudinal designs would be more appropriate for capturing the nature of these relationships over time. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduced a potential bias such as social desirability and common methods variance, which may have inflated the observed associations.

Second, the study's generalizability is constrained by its sampling frame. Data was collected from TV stations located in Nairobi County, which may not reflect the broader media landscape across Kenya or other sectors. Organizational culture, leadership norms, and socioeconomic dynamics may differ significantly in rural areas or in non-media industries. Future studies should consider expanding the geographic and sectoral scope to enhance external validity and capture a more diverse range of organizational contexts.

Third, the measurement model employed in the study was limited to four constructs of authentic leadership and three constructs of socioeconomic outcomes. While the constructs were grounded in existing literature, they may not fully capture the multidimensional nature of either domain. Future researchers are encouraged to explore alternative or expanded frameworks that incorporate behavioural indicators and contextual moderators.

Fourth, the exclusive use of single-source data, primarily from employees, may have introduced perceptual biases. Incorporating multi-source designs, including supervisor ratings, peer assessments, and objective behavioural metrics, would strengthen future findings. Such triangulation could validate the impact of authentic leadership on tangible outcomes and reduce the risk of mono-method bias.

Lastly, future research could consider integrating qualitative methods such as ethnography and narrative enquiry. These can enrich the understanding of how authentic leadership manifests itself in different organizational cultures. Furthermore, they would contribute to a more comprehensive and generalizable body of knowledge on the role of authentic leadership in socioeconomic development.

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