

Platformisation, Power, and AI Governance in the Newsroom: Insights From the Global South

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Abstract

Scholarship on AI and journalism in the Global South has highlighted how digital and data colonialism reproduce global hierarchies of power, labour, and knowledge, often through platform capitalism and externally controlled technological infrastructures. Yet limited empirical research examines how newsrooms in the Global South navigate these asymmetries in practice. This article analyses how Al-Masry Al-Youm, one of Egypt’s leading news organisations, integrates AI into editorial and technical operations under structural dependency. Drawing on in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, and technical staff, it examines how the newsroom adopts, adapts, and governs AI across data journalism, fact-checking, and generative applications. The findings show that reliance on global technology providers embeds forms of platform dependency within newsroom operations, while journalists and editors exercise bounded and situational agency through local adaptation, self-training, and the development of ethical guardrails that institutionalise responsible use. At the same time, AI adoption intensifies existing sustainability challenges, as journalistic content and labour increasingly support AI systems without corresponding financial return. To make sense of these findings, we introduce the concept of “defensive AI governance,” showing how AI adoption is managed through organisational practices of limitation, supervision, and infrastructural self-protection. By grounding this concept in organisation-level evidence from the Global South, the study contributes to debates on platform power, journalistic agency, and AI governance in journalism.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; data colonialism; Egyptian journalism; Global South; platformisation

1. Introduction

AI is becoming increasingly embedded in news production worldwide, prompting growing research examining its implications for journalism (Ioscote et al., 2024; Molla & Ahsan, 2025; Oh & Jung, 2025). In Global South contexts, this scholarship, often informed by broader political-economy critiques of datafication and platform power, has emphasised inequality, platform dependence, and structural constraint, highlighting how technological adoption often unfolds within asymmetrical systems of power dominated by Global North actors (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025). Despite expanding interest, however, existing research remains dominated by Global North contexts and tends to focus on industry initiatives, innovation narratives, or journalists' perceptions, with far less attention paid to how AI is governed within news organisations in practice.

Existing studies often describe *why* journalists feel optimistic or anxious about AI, or *whether* newsrooms experiment with certain tools, but they provide limited insight into the organisational-level internal rules, boundaries, and governance arrangements that shape everyday adoption (Ioscote et al., 2024; Molla & Ahsan, 2025). As a result, we know relatively little about how newsrooms decide what AI *should* or *should not* do, how risks are managed, and how editorial authority is maintained when AI systems enter newsroom workflow. These questions are especially salient in the Global South, where economic precarity, limited training opportunities, and dependence on externally developed tools constrain the scope of innovation (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025). Newsrooms in these contexts frequently rely on partnerships with global technology companies, philanthropic programmes, or externally provided infrastructures, generating forms of platform dependency that shape the direction, limits, and sustainability of AI experimentation. Yet organisational responses to these constraints—including rule-making, ethical policies, selective non-use, and institutional oversight—remain relatively under-studied.

This article addresses this gap through a qualitative single-case design of Al-Masry Al-Youm, a leading Egyptian news organisation that recently began experimenting with AI following participation in an international innovation programme. Drawing on interviews with journalists, editors, and technical staff, the study examines how AI is integrated into editorial and technical workflows, how ethical and procedural limits are imposed, and how sustainability concerns shape decisions about AI use, restriction, and access. The case is analytically significant not because it represents a technologically advanced newsroom, but because it illustrates how AI takes shape in contexts where journalistic freedom is constrained and where decisions about adoption intersect with broader questions of censorship, precarity, and economic sustainability (Elsheikh et al., 2024a).

Guided by this focus, the article addresses three research questions:

RQ1: How does AI enter and become institutionalised within a resource-constrained newsroom?

RQ2: What rules, boundaries, and governance mechanisms shape the everyday use of AI?

RQ3: How do journalists and editors negotiate autonomy, authority, and risk when working with AI technologies?

By examining these questions, the study advances three main contributions. First, it offers organisation-level empirical evidence on how platform power shapes AI experimentation from within the newsroom, extending debates on digital dependency beyond macro-level critiques. Second, it refines understandings of journalistic agency by showing how, in constrained environments, agency is enacted less through technological ambition and more through cautious experimentation, selective use, and the creation of protective boundaries around editorial work. Third, it contributes to emerging discussions on media sustainability by highlighting how generative AI intensifies pre-existing economic vulnerabilities through new forms of value extraction.

In bringing these findings together, we show how AI adoption in resource-constrained newsrooms can be understood through the lens of “defensive AI governance.” Defensive AI governance refers to organisational practices through which AI is adopted cautiously under conditions of dependency and vulnerability, with priority given to limitation, supervision, and institutional self-protection. Rather than seeking full automation, news organisations govern AI through boundaries, oversight, selective use, and risk containment in order to protect editorial authority, credibility, and sustainability. While developed from the Egyptian case, we argue that the concept is analytically transferable to other settings where organisations integrate AI under structural constraint.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on AI and journalism has expanded rapidly over the past decade, reflecting the growing presence of algorithmic systems across news production, distribution, and monetisation (Ioscote et al., 2024; Molla & Ahsan, 2025). While early research often focused on innovation narratives and technological potential, recent work has shifted attention toward questions of power, governance, and inequality. This shift is particularly evident in studies of journalism in the Global South, where AI adoption is commonly situated within longer histories of platform dependency, uneven development, and constrained organisational autonomy (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025). At the same time, newsroom-level research has examined how journalists and editors negotiate the introduction of AI through ethical rules, oversight arrangements, and hybrid human-machine workflows (Carlson, 2015; Oh & Jung, 2025). A parallel scholarship examines journalistic agency, highlighting how professionals adapt, resist, or rework technological change under conditions of precarity and uncertainty (Gondwe, 2023; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). The following review brings these three debates into dialogue, with particular attention to Global South and Arab-region contexts.

2.1. Platform Dependency and Data Colonialism

A prominent strand of research situates AI within broader critiques of platform capitalism and data colonialism, emphasising how technological systems are embedded within transnational infrastructures dominated by a small number of Global North actors (Coudry & Mejias, 2019; Kwet, 2019; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025). From this perspective, AI adoption in journalism is inseparable from longer histories of digital dependency, in which data extraction, infrastructural control, and software standards are shaped externally to news organisations themselves.

This work builds on earlier political-economy analyses of platformisation, which document how platforms such as Google and Meta structure news distribution, audience analytics, and advertising revenue, often

privileging scale, speed, and engagement metrics over editorial autonomy and sustainability (Lewis & Westlund, 2015; Poell et al., 2023). AI intensifies these dynamics by extending platform logics into newsroom workflows. Tools for content recommendation, audience analysis, verification, and generative text production are typically developed and governed outside the newsroom, offered through proprietary systems, licensing agreements, or innovation programmes (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022). Research from the Global South shows that these arrangements are particularly consequential in contexts where financial constraints and limited technical capacity restrict the development of in-house alternatives. Studies of AI innovation in journalism demonstrate that access to AI tools and expertise is frequently mediated through platform-led initiatives, philanthropic funding, or international partnerships (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2023; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025). Such programmes can enable experimentation and skills development, but they also situate AI adoption within externally defined trajectories, shaping which forms of innovation are viable and which remain inaccessible.

Scholarship on African, Latin American, and South Asian journalism highlights how this form of mediated adoption reinforces asymmetric power relations between news organisations and technology providers (Gondwe, 2023; Jamil, 2021; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022). News organisations often adapt workflows and editorial routines to fit available tools, absorbing the costs and risks associated with externally governed technologies. Studies of Arab-region media further corroborate these patterns. Research examining AI adoption in Arab newsrooms consistently identifies limited organisational resources, reliance on external vendors, and infrastructural inequality as defining conditions of AI use (Abdulmajeed & Fahmy, 2022; Al-Mimar et al., 2023; Harb & Arafat, 2024). AI initiatives are commonly introduced through short-term training programmes or partnerships with international organisations, rather than through long-term institutional investment (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; de-Lima-Santos et al., 2023). These dynamics are compounded by language constraints. Generative AI systems trained predominantly on English-language corpora frequently perform unevenly in minority and Global South languages, leading to increased verification labour and persistent concerns about accuracy and bias (Abdulmajeed & Fahmy, 2022; Gondwe, 2023; Harb & Arafat, 2024; Jamil, 2021; Mhlambi & Tiribelli, 2023; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022).

2.2. Newsroom AI Governance and Human Oversight

A second body of scholarship shifts analytical focus from macro-structural dependency to newsroom-level governance, examining how news organisations manage the integration of AI through internal rules, ethical frameworks, and forms of organisational coordination. This research is concerned with how editorial authority, accountability, and professional responsibility are preserved as algorithmic systems become embedded within news production processes (Diakopoulos, 2019; Dodds et al., 2025).

A central theme in this literature is the continued importance of human oversight. Numerous studies demonstrate that AI in journalism is typically implemented within hybrid human-machine arrangements, where automated systems support journalistic work but do not replace editorial decision-making (Carlson, 2015; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). Research has also examined the organisational conditions that enable or constrain effective governance. Studies show that uneven AI literacy across newsroom roles, along with organisational silos separating editorial, technical, managerial, and legal expertise, can weaken the development of shared standards and coherent governance strategies (Dodds et al., 2025; Oh & Jung, 2025).

Global South scholarship situates these governance challenges within contexts of material scarcity and institutional fragility. Empirical studies of newsrooms in Africa and South Asia highlight how limited training opportunities, high costs of proprietary tools, and lack of dedicated technical staff constrain the development of formal AI policies (Gondwe, 2023; Jamil, 2021). In such settings, governance often emerges incrementally through informal norms, professional judgement, and editorial gatekeeping rather than through codified organisational frameworks.

Arab-region research similarly documents constrained approaches to AI governance, while revealing sharp intra-regional inequalities. Wealthier Gulf states appear to exhibit more advanced experimentation linked to state-led digital transformation agendas and supported by relatively strong technical infrastructure and investment, whereas less-resourced settings display more tentative and fragmented adoption (Abdulmajeed & Fahmy, 2022; Harb & Arafat, 2024; Hassouni & Mellor, 2025). Harb and Arafat (2024) note that while awareness of AI's ethical implications is growing among Arab journalists and editors, organisational responses remain fragmented, shaped by cost barriers, weak institutional capacity, and uncertainty about appropriate use. Studies also note that responsibility for overseeing AI is frequently concentrated among senior editors or technically skilled individuals, rather than distributed across newsroom structures (Al-Zoubi & Fyadh, 2023; Hassouni & Mellor, 2025).

2.3. Journalistic Agency Under Structural Constraint

A third strand of scholarship addresses journalistic agency in the context of AI and automation. This literature emphasises the ways in which journalists actively negotiate, adapt, and sometimes restrict AI use in relation to professional norms, workplace hierarchies, and perceived risks (Carlson, 2015; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). Studies consistently show that journalists' perceptions of AI are shaped by role differentiation, professional seniority, and technical expertise. Journalists engaged in data journalism, verification, or computational reporting often view AI as a useful analytical support, while others associate it with deskilling, surveillance, and job insecurity (Munoriyarwa, 2024; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; Oh & Jung, 2025; Umejei et al., 2025).

Research in precarious media environments highlights how journalistic agency is shaped by economic vulnerability and organisational instability (Moussa & Abdulfattah, 2020). Studies of Southern African and South Asian newsrooms show that journalists frequently experiment with AI cautiously, incorporating tools into existing workflows while retaining human judgement as central to editorial decision-making (Jamil, 2021; Munoriyarwa, 2024). Across Global South contexts, journalistic agency is thus frequently expressed not through control over AI systems, but through selective use, non-use, and critical evaluation (Gondwe, 2023; Jamil, 2021; Munoriyarwa, 2024). Journalists adapt tools to fit professional norms, draw boundaries around acceptable applications, and rely on peer learning and informal knowledge sharing to navigate limited institutional support (Gondwe, 2023; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022).

Arab-region scholarship reports similar patterns of selective engagement. Surveys and interview-based studies indicate that journalists in Arab newsrooms combine pragmatic use of AI tools with scepticism about accuracy, bias, and political implications, particularly in sensitive reporting contexts (Harb & Arafat, 2024; Hassouni & Mellor, 2025). Concerns about language performance, censorship, and misrepresentation further encourage cautious approaches to AI use. Within Egypt specifically, AI adoption remains uneven, small-scale,

and often driven by individual journalists rather than coordinated organisational strategies (Arafat & Cooper, 2025; Elaasser et al., 2024). Existing studies highlight economic precarity, platform dependence, and limited institutional investment as key factors shaping how and why AI tools are introduced (Abdulmajeed & Fahmy, 2022; Badawy, 2021; Mansour, 2021). AI experimentation tends to prioritise speed and workload management rather than innovation, with automation confined to specific tasks such as translation, drafting, and basic analytics (Abdelrazaq et al., 2025). These constraints reflect wider structural pressures within the Egyptian media system, including low wages, financial instability, and reliance on global platforms for distribution and monetisation (Elsheikh et al., 2024b).

2.4. Towards an Organisational-Level Approach

Taken together, the three bodies of scholarship provide rich but partial accounts of how AI is entering journalism. Research on platform dependency and data colonialism offers a powerful structural lens, demonstrating how AI infrastructures are embedded within asymmetrical political-economic arrangements that limit newsroom autonomy and concentrate control in the hands of Global North technology companies (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Kwet, 2019; Lewis & Westlund, 2015; Poell et al., 2023). However, while this literature excels at diagnosing inequality and external control, it typically operates at a macro level with limited attention to how these constraints are actively translated into internal rules, limits, and decision-making practices once AI becomes part of everyday newsroom work (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025). As a result, platform dependency is well theorised as a condition of AI adoption, but less well understood as an object of organisational governance.

By contrast, newsroom-level research on AI governance and human oversight focuses explicitly on internal practices, examining how ethical codes, supervisory arrangements, and hybrid human-machine workflows are used to preserve editorial authority and accountability (Carlson, 2015; Diakopoulos, 2019; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). Yet while issues of dependency and sustainability are frequently acknowledged, they are typically treated as contextual background rather than as forces that actively shape why governance takes cautious, restrictive, or risk-averse forms in particular organisational settings (Al-Zoubi & Fyadh, 2023; Harb & Arafat, 2024).

Scholarship on journalistic agency addresses this gap partially by demonstrating that journalists do not encounter AI passively but actively negotiate its use in relation to professional norms, workplace hierarchies, and perceived risks (Carlson, 2015; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). At the same time, much of this literature conceptualises agency primarily at the level of individual journalists, roles, or perceptions. While structural constraint is recognised, there is limited analysis of how such negotiated practices become stabilised and institutionalised at the organisational level through shared norms, formal rules, sanctions, or infrastructural design choices (Munoriyarwa, 2024; Umejei et al., 2025). As a consequence, the relationship between individual professional judgement and collective organisational governance remains under-theorised.

What is therefore missing from existing scholarship is an organisation-level framework capable of capturing how platform dependency, governance mechanisms, and bounded forms of agency intersect as coordinated responses to AI adoption. This need is particularly acute in contexts marked by political sensitivity, economic precarity, and linguistic or infrastructural constraint, where AI is not simply a tool for optimisation but a

source of institutional and reputational risk (Abdulmajeed & Fahmy, 2022; Mhlambi & Tiribelli, 2023). Addressing this conceptual gap requires organisation-level research that traces how AI is governed in practice: how decisions about use and non-use are made, how responsibilities are allocated, how risks are anticipated, and how technological adoption is shaped by concerns about editorial authority, credibility, and sustainability. Through the lens of one Egyptian news organisation, we tell this story.

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative single-case design to examine how AI is integrated, governed, and negotiated within a single news organisation. A case design approach enables in-depth analysis of organisational practices and decision-making processes within their real-life context, particularly where technological adoption unfolds under conditions of institutional and economic constraint.

Al-Masry Al-Youm was selected because it combines historical significance within Egyptian journalism with recent organisation-level experimentation with AI. Established in 2004, the outlet describes itself as Egypt's first independent newspaper and built a strong reputation for investigative reporting on social, political, and economic issues, particularly during the Mubarak era. It served as a training ground for journalists and newsroom leaders, with many former staff later establishing or joining major digital news organisations such as Masrawy and El-Watan.

At the time of data collection, Al-Masry Al-Youm remained one of Egypt's most visible news brands, with approximately 19 million followers on Facebook, indicating continued relevance within the country's digital news ecosystem. In 2024, the organisation participated in the FT Strategies–Google News Initiative AI Launchpad, an international programme supporting publishers experimenting with AI in editorial and technical workflows. This participation positioned Al-Masry Al-Youm among the first Egyptian news organisations to formally engage with AI at an organisational level, making it suitable for examining how AI use is governed, restricted, and adapted inside the newsroom. Other Egyptian outlets were considered but excluded because AI use was either limited to isolated functions rather than organisation-wide governance, or had not yet been implemented during the data-collection period. As a result, they could not provide comparable insight into everyday organisational AI governance practices.

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews. AI use at Al-Masry Al-Youm spans analytics, audience interaction tools, fact-checking, data journalism, and technical infrastructure. Participants were selected based on direct involvement in AI use or decision-making and included technical staff, editorial leaders, and journalists using AI in daily work. A total of six interviews were conducted remotely in October 2025 via phone and FaceTime calls. Interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and were supplemented with follow-up conversations over messaging applications in the analysis stage. In some cases, participants shared screens showing AI tools and workflows used in the newsroom. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English for analysis. To support triangulation, supplementary materials were also collected, including internal policy documents, public announcements, and Al-Masry Al-Youm's published feature on its participation in the FT Strategies–Google News Initiative AI Launchpad.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Coding focused on identifying recurring patterns related to organisational and individual uses of AI, processes of local adaptation, ethical boundaries, and the implications of platform dependency. Analysis moved iteratively between interview transcripts and supplementary materials to identify convergent and divergent themes.

4. Findings

While journalists use AI tools in their daily work, such use is shaped, constrained, and given meaning by organisational structures, governance mechanisms, professional norms, and political-economic conditions. The findings therefore distinguish between organisational-level AI adoption and individual-level AI use, while foregrounding the organisation as the primary analytical actor. Across all themes, AI emerges as a site where platformisation, agency, sustainability, and political economy intersect in everyday newsroom practice.

4.1. *Platformised AI Adoption and Organisational Agency*

Participants consistently described AI as entering AI-Masry AI-Youm through platformised and externally mediated pathways rather than through internal technological development. AI adoption did not emerge from a single strategic plan, nor from a culture of innovation. Instead, it unfolded incrementally through exposure to tools, partnerships, and infrastructures controlled by global technology companies. This gradual entry shaped how AI was understood: less as a solution, but more as a structural condition imposed by platform power and requiring careful management.

Before the rise of generative AI, the newsroom had already incorporated automated systems for audience analytics, content recommendation, traffic monitoring, and verification. These systems normalised algorithmic decision-making and accustomed journalists to working within platform logics. As one senior editor explained: “We already had AI before—just not the kind people talk about now. These systems analyse readership behaviour and help us understand audiences.”

Formal engagement with generative AI intensified in 2024 through participation in the FT Strategies–Google News Initiative AI Launchpad. Editors framed this moment as an extension of existing practices rather than a rupture. The initiative was repeatedly described as a space for learning and testing under constraint, rather than for large-scale implementation. A senior editor explained: “It was a way to learn, not to rush. We wanted to understand what AI can do for journalism, and how to use it responsibly, not jump into it blindly.” This orientation to learning shaped organisational decisions about acceptable AI use. Learning was described as a way to ensure “responsible AI use” in a context where errors, bias, or misuse could directly damage journalistic credibility. In this sense, platformised partnerships were not simply forms of support for innovation; they became the primary route through which AI could enter the organisation, shaping what forms of experimentation were possible, what expertise counted, and which actors set the terms of engagement.

This emphasis on responsibility reflects a form of organisational agency that is exercised through caution and selectivity rather than autonomy. Participants emphasised that access to tools, mentoring, and expertise was externally mediated. A technical lead noted that “Almost everything we use comes from outside. Without these partnerships, we simply would not be able to experiment with these technologies.” AI adoption therefore unfolded through platformised entry points that enabled limited experimentation

while reinforcing dependency on Global North technology providers. Organisational agency was expressed not through control over technology, but through decisions about how, when, and to what extent AI would be allowed into newsroom processes.

4.2. Governing Generative AI Within the Newsroom

At the organisational level, AI use is governed through explicit rules, ethical framing, and institutional sanctions. Participants consistently distinguished between analytical AI and generative AI, treating the latter as a qualitatively different category because of its capacity to generate language, narratives, and meaning. A senior editor explained this distinction clearly: “Analytical AI helps us understand data. Generative AI produces text. That difference is crucial, because text is journalism.” Participants repeatedly linked this distinction to editorial authority: Because generative AI intervenes in language and meaning, governance becomes a newsroom-level responsibility rather than a matter of individual discretion. A senior editor described the organisational stance toward generative tools as “a personal assistant that needs supervision, not as a replacement for a journalist.”

Because generative AI directly intersects with editorial authority, organisational governance took the form of formal rules and penalties. These measures were designed to signal that AI use is not an individual choice but an institutional matter. One editor summarised the organisational position: “Use it responsibly—or face penalties.” A young journalist described how this governance was communicated internally: “The editor posted a notice explaining that misuse would lead to a three-day salary deduction, and that repeated violations could lead to more serious consequences.”

Beyond internal control, governance was also shaped by a conscious resistance to “AI-washing.” Participants described AI-washing as a growing practice in which media organisations exaggerate AI use to appear innovative. Editors rejected this strategy, framing it as a threat to credibility and professional integrity. As one editor explained: “Some organisations use AI just to attract sponsors or advertisers. But if it’s not based on real journalism, it destroys trust.” Participants reinforced this claim through widely circulated examples of misuse in Egyptian media, including synthetic videos of deceased public figures and a fabricated video of a former minister—currently imprisoned—appearing to speak in his own voice and image. They also criticised cases where journalists tried to “verify” a supposed marriage certificate of two public figures through AI tools rather than contacting sources directly.

This rejection of AI-washing was framed as part of the organisation’s social responsibility. Participants emphasised that credibility with audiences and advertisers is more valuable than symbolic innovation. Responsible innovation, in this sense, operates as both an ethical stance and a survival strategy.

4.3. AI as Organisational Infrastructure

AI use at Al-Masry Al-Youm is unevenly distributed and embedded within specific organisational functions rather than diffused across the newsroom as a whole. Participants emphasised that AI operates most clearly at the organisational level in departments such as data journalism, fact-checking, website infrastructure management, and the development of the newsroom chatbot. Across these sites, AI becomes institutionalised through concrete routines, tools, projects, and editorial decisions.

For example, in the Data Journalism and Fact-Checking Department, AI is used as an analytical support tool rather than an automated decision-maker. As we find in other contexts, AI was consistently framed as assisting journalistic work rather than replacing editorial judgement (e.g., Jamil, 2021). A data team lead explained: “We use AI models to identify patterns and speed up coding tasks, but every output is checked manually.” This was evident through a high-school exam cheating investigation, where AI and statistical modelling were used to analyse large-scale patterns in exam results. This project illustrates how AI expertise was integrated into newsroom workflows rather than outsourced as a stand-alone technical service. A freelance journalist with a computer science background who led the investigation explained: “I built a simple AI model that classifies names by gender and groups students into virtual ‘exam rooms’ to detect suspicious similarity patterns.” Here, AI functioned as a customised analytical tool developed in collaboration with specialised expertise, while interpretation and verification remained firmly under journalistic control. Another journalist illustrated this infrastructural logic of verification through an example of a widely shared video showing planes carrying Palestinian and Egyptian flags, claimed by several outlets to be from Sharm El-Sheikh during a peace summit. Using AI-supported verification tools, the journalist traced the video to an earlier upload, while contextual knowledge and editorial reasoning were needed to identify it as old footage from Al-Alamein rather than from the summit, underscoring that AI-supported verification does not replace journalistic judgement.

However, as research often finds (Abdulmajeed & Fahmy, 2022; Gondwe, 2023; Harb & Arafat, 2024; Jamil, 2021; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022), rather than reducing labour, AI in Global South contexts often introduces new forms of work due to language and technical constraints. Our participants highlighted Arabic-language incompatibility as a structural limitation of existing AI and data infrastructures: “If I feed Arabic data into R or Python, the script breaks. We have to translate it into English first, then feed it in, and then translate back—it doubles the time and effort for us” (data team lead).

One response to this dependency on Western technology was to develop fit-for-purpose AI software of their own. Ask Al-Masry Al-Youm is a chatbot designed as a semantic search and engagement tool rather than a content generator. Participants described the chatbot as one of the earliest newsroom-based Arabic-language AI systems in the region designed to provide conversational access to a news archive. In addition to answering questions, the system proposes follow-up questions to encourage deeper engagement with published stories. Editorial and technical staff emphasised that sensitive topics were carefully defined. A technical lead explained: “We put what we call guardrails. The system will not answer ‘how to make a bomb.’ It simply says: ‘I cannot answer this question.’” He added: “It also refuses politically loaded or false questions, such as assuming a former president is still in office.” These boundaries were framed as “editorial decisions rather than technical ones.”

Despite its cost, the chatbot was framed as a strategic investment in credibility and public trust. Participants linked the decision to sustain the chatbot to organisational reputation and long-term audience trust rather than short-term profit. A technical lead explained the organisational rationale for sustaining the tool after the pilot ended:

We decided to bear the cost. Not everything should be measured in money—being first matters. And we did see returns: Early analytics showed longer page sessions where the chatbot was active, which indirectly increased advertising revenue and covered about half the cost we pay.

Beyond the front-facing editorial work, participants also reminded us that AI plays a critical role in website infrastructure management. These systems operate largely invisibly in the background, shaping newsroom sustainability rather than editorial output. Technical staff described systems that monitor traffic, detect suspicious activity, manage server load, and optimise advertising placement: “Most journalists don’t see this part, but it’s what keeps the website running” (technical lead).

Taken together, these accounts show that AI at Al-Masry Al-Youm functions as organisational infrastructure rather than as a stand-alone technology. Its significance lies in how it reshapes newsroom routines, redistributes labour, and institutionalises editorial governance, while deepening the organisation’s dependence on platform-based infrastructures—for better or worse.

4.4. Individual AI Use Under Organisational Constraint

While our focus is predominantly on the organisational approach to newsroom AI integration, journalists at Al-Masry Al-Youm would frequently discuss their use of AI tools individually for tasks such as translation, summarisation, research, and SEO optimisation. However, these practices were invariably shaped by organisational rules, ethical expectations, and professional routines rather than as expressions of individual autonomy. In this newsroom, individual AI use is therefore best understood as organisationally conditioned, operating within clearly defined institutional boundaries and platform-dependent infrastructures.

A senior journalist explained the limits of individual discretion: “AI helps with speed, but it doesn’t make decisions. We don’t publish anything without human judgement.” Participants linked individual experimentation to uneven training opportunities and scarce institutional expertise. In this context, learning was described as largely self-directed and peer-based, rather than supported through formal organisational programmes. A data team lead described how this evolved into an informal organisational practice:

Good trainers never give you everything so that you keep needing them, so I teach myself by searching online how to do task X by AI, contacting the software support of the tool I need to learn, taking tutorials, and we all share these manuals—we even write manuals in Arabic for our colleagues.

Here, individual learning practices functioned as a collective resource, compensating for institutional gaps in training while remaining embedded within newsroom workflows, and the constraints of externally developed AI tools.

For younger journalists, the Gaza war marked a shift in how AI tools were perceived. Before this period, AI was generally treated as a technical aid without significant political implications. Following the war, concerns about bias became more salient. One journalist reflected: “After the Gaza war, I realised how biased these systems can be.” This awareness translated into concrete limits on use: “I would never ask ChatGPT about casualties or political facts in Gaza.” These accounts suggest that individual AI use is shaped not only by organisational rules, but also by politically informed professional judgement, particularly in contexts of conflict and high-stakes reporting.

4.5. Platform Power and AI-Driven Value Extraction

Concerns about sustainability and value extraction formed a consistent theme across interviews. Participants located AI within longer histories of platform dependency in Egyptian journalism, framing it as an intensification rather than a departure from existing power relations. Editors drew explicit parallels between AI and earlier experiences with social media platforms. One senior editor described the gap between engagement and revenue:

Our Facebook page has 19 million followers. In the last 28 days alone, we recorded more than one billion views. But the revenue we receive does not match these figures at all—it's crumbs compared to the effort.

Another editor elaborated on the instability of this model, stating that “it can stop at any moment. At first, they treat you like a king. Then they take it away once you become dependent. It's a model of control.” Participants warned that the same dynamic is now being reproduced through AI: “We expect something similar with AI—maybe worse. The same companies that trained us to depend on Facebook are now training us to feed their AI systems” (editor). This form of dependence was repeatedly described by participants using the metaphor of “a new kind of slavery,” capturing perceptions of extraction, loss of control, and the absence of viable alternatives.

Participants argued that generative AI threatens to deepen existing asymmetries by consuming journalistic content without directing audiences back to news organisations. A technical lead explained: “When Google's bots read our site, they index it and bring readers back. With AI bots, it's different. They take our content, peel off the context, and the reader never returns.” This shift has material consequences for sustainability. AI systems increase infrastructure costs while providing no guaranteed financial return:

Every piece of content costs money to produce. When AI consumes that content without any financial return, it threatens sustainability. AI bots read thousands of our stories—that means more data leaving our servers, more bandwidth, more cost. We even need to activate auto-scaling to keep the website from crashing. (technical lead)

In response, the newsroom has begun to explore infrastructural mechanisms to regain limited control. A technical lead described this as a new, tentative form of organisational leverage within platform dependency:

We can now monitor how much of our material is being read by AI systems, limit their access, and, in the future, negotiate payment for what they use. I could decide that OpenAI should not read more than 200 articles—or that if it reads more, it should pay a certain amount through Cloudflare.

However, participants emphasised the limits of such measures and the absence of collective bargaining power: “This issue is still immature here. There is no unified position and no real bargaining power” (technical lead).

Capacity constraints further complicate sustainability. A technical lead explained: “AI specialists are very few in Egypt, hard to reach, and even harder to retain. Most work abroad and are paid in foreign currency.” Despite these constraints, participants described efforts to ensure sustainability through partnerships,

experimentation, and social responsibility initiatives. These included participation in international programmes, collaboration with local start-ups, and attempts to develop local technological alternatives: “We’ve built a good reputation. Start-ups come to us to try their products for free—we give feedback and later negotiate discounts” (data team lead). Verification work was supported through membership of the Arab Fact-Checking Network. This was described as materially important because it provides access to paid tools that would otherwise be unaffordable and functions as a space for collective learning and professional exchange: “Through the network, we get access to paid verification tools, and we learn from each other about new misinformation patterns” (data team lead).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how AI is adopted, governed, and negotiated within a resource-constrained news organisation operating outside Global North media systems. Rather than approaching AI adoption as a purely technical or managerial process, the analysis situated it within the broader political economy of journalism in the Global South, where platformisation, limited resources, and institutional fragility shape the scope and direction of innovation.

The findings show that AI adoption in this newsroom is shaped less by ambitions of transformation and more by the need for containment, supervision, and institutional control. AI enters the newsroom as a condition that must be carefully managed amid political sensitivity, editorial authority, and economic vulnerability. Here, editors and technical staff do not simply “use AI,” but actively classify it, distinguish between analytical and generative applications, define boundaries, impose oversight, and institutionalise accountability. Journalists, meanwhile, engage in self-training and peer-based learning, adapting AI tools to existing professional norms while maintaining human judgement as central (see Gondwe, 2023; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022). AI becomes embedded through governance and rule-making rather than through automation or delegation of editorial authority.

These findings extend current scholarship in several important ways. First, prior research shows that news organisations in the Global South often depend on platform infrastructures, external funding, and innovation programmes (Abdulmajeed & Fahmy, 2022; Arafat & Cooper, 2025; de-Lima-Santos et al., 2023; Harb & Arafat, 2024). Our findings build on this literature by showing how these externally structured programmes become internalised into everyday newsroom governance. In the case of Al-Masry Al-Youm, the FT Strategies–Google News Initiative AI Launchpad did not just introduce generative AI; it informed the creation of sanctions for misuse, the categorisation of permissible versus impermissible tasks, and the structuring of editorial oversight. These outcomes push the literature beyond the idea of platform dependency as a macro-level structural condition and demonstrate how dependency becomes enacted at the micro-level of daily organisational life.

A second contribution speaks to debates around journalistic agency in the AI era. Research has emphasised that journalists’ authority becomes repositioned as they move into roles as supervisors, meta-editors, data managers, or “human-in-the-loop” actors (Carlson, 2015; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). These studies highlight that journalists rarely design or control AI systems; instead, they negotiate their place within automated or semi-automated workflows. Our study refines and extends these arguments by showing how agency is enacted through actions such as selective

use and non-use; refusal and boundary-setting; human verification to assert editorial authority; and scepticism grounded in the political realities of reporting in Egypt. This has echoes of the concept of “controlled change” (Dodds et al., 2026), a form of deliberate professional resistance that protects journalistic credibility and mitigates political and reputational risk.

Where much of the literature conceptualises agency as a continuum between augmentation and automation, our findings show that in constrained environments, agency takes on its own organisational form, anchored in limitation, oversight, and contextual sensitivity. This provides a more nuanced account of how agency operates when journalists lack infrastructural autonomy, extending research that highlights how resource scarcity and platform dependency shape the boundaries of journalistic decision-making (Gondwe, 2023; Harb & Arafat, 2024).

Our third contribution concerns media sustainability and AI-driven value extraction. Existing research documents how platform capitalism extracts economic value from journalistic labour, often without equitable return (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Lewis & Westlund, 2015). Recent scholarship has also shown that AI may intensify this extraction by using journalistic content as training data without compensation (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2023). Our findings from a Global South context further this debate by showing that sustainability concerns are no longer limited to financial models or editorial strategy. Instead, they are becoming infrastructural concerns. At Al-Masry Al-Youm, sustainability is negotiated at the level of server architecture, data access protocols, and guardrails. Technical staff monitor AI crawlers as part of infrastructural maintenance; they explore mechanisms to limit or meter AI access; and they view archives and content as assets requiring active protection from extraction. While scholarship has theorised how data colonialism reorganises social relations (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Kwet, 2019), it has said less about how individual organisations attempt to reclaim limited control through infrastructural decision-making. Our case shows how organisational agency can be claimed through forms of infrastructural self-protection.

Building on these contributions, we offer the concept of “defensive AI governance” to capture how AI is governed in a resource-constrained newsroom under platform dependency. Where much of the emerging debate on AI governance quite fairly focuses on the multi-stakeholder perspective containing tech companies, regulators, policymakers, and civil society (Dodds et al., 2025; Helberger et al., 2018; Timcke et al., 2024), our emphasis is at the organisational level. Defensive AI governance describes an organisational mode of AI adoption in which institutions integrate AI while prioritising protection over transformation. It emerges where organisations face heightened political, economic, professional, or infrastructural vulnerability. In such contexts, AI is treated as a technology that must be managed carefully rather than embraced uncritically. This concept consists of four defining criteria. The first is limitation, where AI use is restricted to selected tasks considered low-risk or operationally useful, while sensitive editorial functions remain under human control. Second is supervision: Human oversight remains central through checking, verification, approval procedures, or editorial review. Third is rule-based containment, where organisations create formal or informal norms, sanctions, guardrails, and internal expectations governing acceptable use. Fourth is infrastructural self-protection. Here, organisations seek to reduce extraction or dependency through technical controls, selective partnerships, or attempts to retain control over data, archives, and workflows.

These four criteria or attributes may appear in strong or weak forms across different newsrooms. Defensive AI governance can also apply where there are no strict formal rules, but journalists remain cautious, critically

assess AI outputs, and routinely review them before use. While the concept emerges inductively from our case, the patterns it describes resonate with findings across the Global South, where they consistently show journalists limiting the scope of AI applications, insisting on human-in-the-loop oversight, and exercising caution in politically sensitive or high-stakes reporting (Gondwe, 2023; Harb & Arafat, 2024; Jamil, 2021; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025). Research also documents the introduction of guidelines, ethical rules, and supervisory roles designed to contain risk and prevent misuse (Oh & Jung, 2025; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025)—practices that mirror our findings on sanctions, rule-making, and bounded use. In addition, work on platform dependency shows that resource-constrained newsrooms often adapt externally provided tools selectively, restrict their deployment, or rely on only the safest applications as a way of protecting autonomy and organisational sustainability (Arafat & Cooper, 2025; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022). Across these studies, elements of limitation, supervision, and infrastructural caution are evident, but they have not been brought together under a single conceptual frame.

Defensive AI governance can be distinguished from related but analytically narrower concepts in the existing literature. Platform dependency explains structural reliance on external infrastructures and resources (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2023; Poell et al., 2019), but does not specify how news organisations govern AI internally once dependency is taken as given. Human-in-the-loop governance focuses primarily on oversight of algorithmic outputs and decision-making (Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025), rather than on wider organisational strategies of containment, protection, and rule-making. Concepts such as controlled change capture negotiated professional adaptation to new technologies (Dodds et al., 2026), whereas defensive AI governance foregrounds institutional risk management and the deliberate construction of protective boundaries around editorial authority and sustainability.

The notion of defensive AI governance therefore offers a unifying lens that captures these tendencies, clarifying how newsrooms under structural constraint incorporate AI while actively seeking to protect professional authority and institutional viability. Conceptually, defensive AI governance builds directly on existing research on platformisation and the political economy of news, while shifting the level of analysis to organisational governance. Scholarship on platformisation and data colonialism has shown how Global South news organisations are embedded within asymmetrical technological and economic infrastructures controlled by Global North actors (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Kwet, 2019). At the same time, research on journalistic agency demonstrates that journalists actively negotiate AI use rather than adopting it passively, even under conditions of constraint (Carlson, 2015; Hassouni & Mellor, 2025; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). What defensive AI governance adds to these debates is an account of how such negotiations are not only individual or situational, but become institutionalised through newsroom rules, sanctions, approval processes, and infrastructural decisions. Rather than focusing on attitudes, perceptions, or adoption levels, defensive AI governance captures how platform power and economic vulnerability are translated into concrete organisational practices that limit, supervise, and stabilise AI use in everyday newsroom work. Although it may be most visible in resource-constrained Global South contexts like our case, the concept is not geographically limited, and can provide a foundation for future comparative and longitudinal research on AI governance under conditions of constraint.

The findings carry important practical implications. First, they highlight that responsible AI in journalism is inherently organisational. Clear rules, shared ethical boundaries, and institutional oversight reduce risk and help maintain consistency in AI use (see Dodds et al., 2025). Second, the findings remind us that addressing

AI-driven value extraction requires collective and regulatory approaches. No single newsroom—especially in resource-poor settings—can negotiate fair access or remuneration from global AI actors. A “many hands” approach (Helberger et al., 2018) involving unions, associations, regional alliances, and state-level regulators is needed to protect public-interest journalism. Our data showed glimpses of how this might benefit news organisations’ operation, but with nothing at this level in place, the imbalances in power between Global South news organisations and global technology companies are plain to see. At the same time, the findings point to a broader dimension of social responsibility for global technology companies and Global North institutions that shape AI infrastructures and innovation agendas.

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Conflict of Interests

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Data Availability

Due to privacy concerns, the interview data are not publicly available.

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