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# "AI's Good, but People Have Hearts": Artificial Intelligence in Data-Driven Journalism in Ghanaian Newsrooms

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## Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) offers tremendous potential to advance data journalism by empowering journalists to analyse massive datasets and produce insights for investigative reporting. Through the lens of the technology acceptance model and the social construction of technology theory, this study employed qualitative methods to investigate how Ghanaian journalists adopt AI tools in data journalism. The findings indicate that AI tools are primarily used to support research, idea generation, editing, story development, and visual data representation. Journalists also perceive AI as enhancing efficiency, accessibility, and storytelling capacity. These perceptions align with the perceived usefulness dimension of the technology acceptance model as AI is viewed as improving productivity and strengthening audience engagement and trust. However, several challenges, including high subscription costs, limited availability of context-specific datasets, and persistent ethical concerns, hinder the adoption of AI technologies in data journalism. We argue that these challenges highlight the social context within which technology is adopted, which the social construction of technology theory accounts for.

## Keywords

artificial intelligence; data journalism; Ghana; journalism; newsrooms

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary discussions about newsroom practices are incomplete without the consideration of the unique opportunities that artificial intelligence (AI) presents to newsrooms and in reshaping information creation, curation, and consumption (Adjin-Tettey et al., 2024; Diakopoulos, 2019). AI and other digital

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technologies have increasingly blurred the boundaries between media producers and consumers, with contemporary audiences acting as "produsers" who create and distribute content as fan activists, citizen journalists, and civic storytellers (Adjin-Tettey & Etrue, 2025).

Data-driven journalism is crucial because it allows journalists to navigate and interrogate stories so the public can be informed about the state of their communities and to unveil systemic wrongs (Danso & Mohammed, 2025). While journalists have been using data in their stories for as long as journalism has existed (Mutsvairo et al., 2020), notable developments in computing, agile development, mobile devices, and open-source software accessibility have created opportunities for data integration into storytelling in an unprecedented manner (Mutsvairo et al., 2020). AI can simulate human intelligence by learning from data, recognising patterns, and making decisions with little to no human intervention (Broussard et al., 2019). It allows data journalists to leverage large datasets to uncover stories and harness the power of data visualisation to present data stories in compelling and accessible formats (Danso & Mohammed, 2025).

Globally, there is growing demand for greater transparency, interactivity, and depth in news reporting (Gray et al., 2012). At the same time, journalists and media organisations increasingly recognise the potential of digital and AI-powered tools to automate routine tasks such as fact-checking, data scraping, and trend detection (Graefe, 2016). Although still in its developmental stages, data journalism is gaining ground among Ghanaian journalists, as evidenced by the increasing participation in data journalism training workshops aimed at strengthening in-depth reporting on developmental issues (Penplusbytes, 2015). While Ghana's 2024 elections reportage and some recent investigative reports by Ghanaian media houses, such as JoyNews, Citi FM, and The *Fourth Estate*, provide evidence for increasing data-driven reporting in Ghana (Bokpe & Krobea Asante, 2025; ChannelOne TV, 2024), the integration of AI in data journalism remains nascent (Adefioye, 2024). Some studies have revealed what may account for this. A recent study by Adjin-Tettey et al. (2024) on journalists' adoption of AI technologies found that Ghanaian newsrooms had not formally incorporated AI tools into newsroom practices, while journalists using AI did so in a non-complex manner, with major limitations being cost, language barrier, aversion to change, and ethical concerns. However, another study yielded that when it comes to data-driven stories, Ghanaian X users collaborate with allied data production specialists to convert raw data into data artefacts to tell compelling stories and elicit civic participation (Adjin-Tettey & Etrue, 2025), pointing to the influential role of peripheral actors in data journalism and how their efforts, propelled by data, drive civic discourse.

### *1.1. Problem Statement*

Ghana's media landscape is dynamic, with a robust tradition of watchdog journalism, a high degree of press freedom (Danso, 2025), and a growing need for digital innovation (Yawson & Mahmoud, 2024). Ghana has a thriving environment for digital innovation. While the media faces economic sustainability challenges, the procurement of AI tools could assist with the deep reporting expected of journalists. Despite these challenges, Ghana provides a useful case study due to its relatively stable democracy, access to information law (Adjin-Tettey, 2023), open media environment, and growing interest in technology adoption, unlike some African newsrooms that are still navigating foundational issues related to digitisation and freedom of information (Babatunde & Aare, 2025). Consequently, the promising prospect for AI use in data journalism in helping journalists to tell impactful investigative stories makes it imperative to ascertain how data journalism is being driven by AI and what kind of investments are being put in to ensure that data journalism benefits

from the affordances of AI technologies. Besides, AI technologies' potential to enhance journalistic productivity by enabling deeper investigative reporting and reducing operational costs (Rahman, 2024) positions them as an economic imperative for data-driven journalism. This is because credible stories told with verifiable data can help boost journalism to the point of raking in revenue for Ghanaian media houses, which are currently facing sustainability challenges (Yeboah-Banin & Adjin-Tettey, 2023).

By examining the use of AI in data journalism in Ghanaian newsrooms and assessing the opportunities and difficulties experienced by journalists and media organisations, this study aims to add to the expanding area of integration of technology into journalism. The article also offers insights into the preparedness, ability, and outlook of Ghanaian journalists regarding the integration of AI into data journalism and the kind of local solutions they perceive could help mitigate the challenges associated with appropriating technologies largely developed elsewhere to solve or even understand local problems. The following research questions grounded the study:

> RQ1: What are the current uses and perspectives about AI in data journalism among Ghanaian journalists?
>
> RQ2: What opportunities does AI present for enhancing data journalism in Ghanaian newsrooms?
>
> RQ3: What are the key constraints to the effective use of AI in data journalism in Ghana?

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Overview of Data Journalism*

Data journalism is finding stories of public interest in data and presenting them in the most appropriate form (Heravi, 2019). Through data journalism, a platform for the "resistance and power where voices are threatened to be silenced" (de-Lima-Santos & Mesquita, 2023, p. 110) is created, corruption is exposed, public spending is tracked, and complex issues are thoroughly analysed (Gray et al., 2012).

Coddington (2015) identified three overlapping forms of what he termed as data-driven journalism practices which sought to demarcate the boundaries of data journalism from other closely related genres: (a) computer-assisted reporting (CAR), a term that is closely associated with investigative reporting supported by the use of computers and computer applications; (b) data journalism, defined as broader than CAR and often associated with open-source tools and open data; and (c) computational journalism, described as algorithms and automation. Heravi and Lorenz (2020) submit that computational journalism, which emphasises computational methods and algorithms, is closely related to contemporary data journalism. Some journalists may lack the specialised data skills and technical knowledge required by data journalism (Appelgren et al., 2020). However, computational methods in data journalism give opportunity to journalists to combine algorithms, data, and social sciences epistemological methods and sift through and make meaning of vast amounts of structured and unstructured data while pursuing their stories (Flew et al., 2012).

In Africa, while the growth of data (computational and algorithmic) journalism has been uneven due to data illiteracy, shortfall in technical infrastructure, and constraints in access to reliable datasets (Mutsvairo et al., 2020), notable initiatives by entities such as Code for Africa have offered data skills training and collaborative reporting platforms that support investigative journalism grounded in data journalism (Code for Africa, 2024). In this study, data journalism refers to the computational and algorithmic aspects of data journalism. We seek to explore the current uses and perceptions of AI in data journalism among Ghanaian journalists, what opportunities AI presents for enhancing data journalism in Ghanaian newsrooms, and what factors constrain the effective use of AI in data journalism in Ghana.

### *2.2. AI and Data Journalism Integration*

AI can augment editorial decision-making (Diakopoulos, 2019) and help with the telling of complex and data-laden stories on topics such as climate, finance, and elections through the automation of data scraping, cleaning, visualisation, and even initiating story drafts (Graefe, 2016). AI helps journalists to be efficient and scale up their work (Hermida & Simon, 2025) and ultimately helps them with in-depth and investigative reporting on the aforementioned topics.

As with every technology, AI tools are context-driven with cultural and social biases and considerations. African media innovations often originate from hybridised practices that integrate local knowledge systems and informal networks with global tools (Mare, 2020). This calls into question localisation and algorithmic accountability when deploying AI tools for telling data-driven stories. It also suggests that AI adoption in African newsrooms must be contextualised, bearing in mind journalistic norms, differences in infrastructure, and the general socio-political atmosphere. It is therefore imperative that the use of AI in data journalism in the Ghanaian context is studied to ascertain what the experiences of Ghanaian journalists are and how they navigate them, and/or what their solutions are to address local challenges.

## 3. Theoretical Framework: Technology Acceptance Model and Social Construction of Technology Theory

This study is grounded in the technology acceptance model (TAM) and the social construction of technology theory (SCOT). Introduced by Davis et al. (1989), TAM is designed to explain and predict how users accept and adopt information technology. It is centred on two key factors: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU; Warsono et al., 2023). Tang et al. (2023) define PU as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance their job performance or effectiveness, and PEOU as the degree to which a person believes that using the technology will require no effort. These two perceptions shape the user's attitude toward using the technology, which in turn influences their behavioural intention to use it, ultimately affecting actual system use.

Some studies that have established the essence of TAM in journalism include Farhi et al. (2023), who found that perceived usefulness of data journalism among Emirati Social TV users had a significant mediating effect on acceptance, highlighting that users' expectations of beneficial outcomes strongly influence their acceptance of data journalism. Similarly, J. S. Lim and Zhang (2022) investigated the adoption of AI-driven personalisation on digital news platforms by integrating TAM with the perceived contingency model. The study found that the core variables of TAM also remained relevant in explaining user behaviour. The TAM provides a valuable

analytical framework for this study by helping us examine the dynamic relationships between PU and PEOU (as shown in Figure 1) to better understand the integration of AI in data journalism.

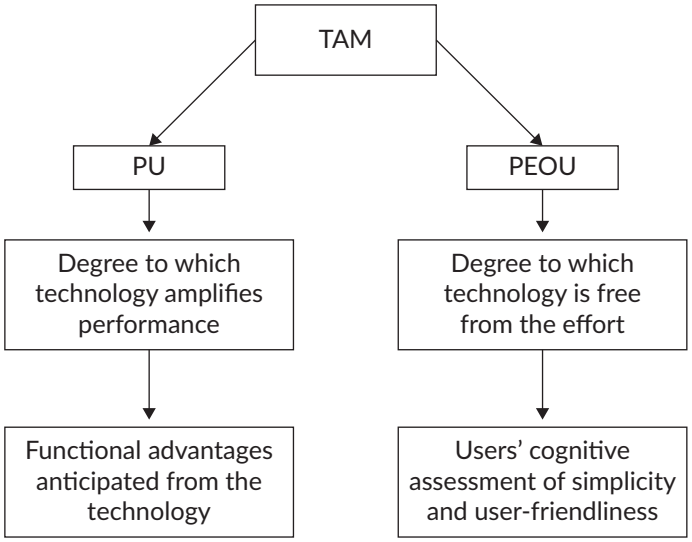


**Figure 1.** The TAM as conceptualised.

The SCOT supports and explains context-induced decision-making. Formally introduced in the 1980s (Pinch & Bijker, 1984), SCOT can be used to denote a research approach to study technical change in society, as well as the relationship between society and technology (Norcliffe, 2009). This study adopts the social construction of technology to denote the relation between society (Ghanaian journalists) and technology (AI use in data journalism). SCOT considers how users of technology have often adapted innovations for their own purposes, hence focusing on the nontechnical elements that surround technology (Bijker, 2001), such as the social context.

The fundamental tenet of SCOT is that new technologies develop through ongoing social interactions between various groups of players (in this case, journalists), rather than a set shape and purpose (Basu, 2023). This suggests that technologies are constantly flexible and may be shaped in a variety of ways, emphasising how people and social environments affect the acceptance of new technologies (Basu, 2023). In this study, the SCOT complements the TAM. Hence, rather than solely focusing on the technical aspects of the AI technology, such as ease of use and usefulness, SCOT explains that there are implicit political, economic, and other social pressures that shape technology adoption, as posited by social constructionism from which SCOT is derived. Therefore, in our examination of the application of AI in data journalism, the SCOT assists us in understanding the particular social circumstances and meanings that influence Ghanaian journalists' use of AI Technologies in data journalism.

## 4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, rooted in interpretivist epistemology, which emphasises meaning-making processes from the perspective of those involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach was chosen to capture participants' rich, contextual depth, and holistic perspectives (W. M. Lim, 2024) in light of the RQs of the study. Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection tool.

The semi-structured interview was chosen because it provides flexibility and adaptability, allowing researchers to stay on track while still exploring issues in greater depth (Ruslin et al., 2022).

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The inclusion criteria were that participants were journalists from reputable public or private media organisations in Ghana, practised data journalism, and had used computer-based or algorithmic tools to process, analyse, and/or present data for a news story. To capture diverse experiences across different operational contexts, we ensured that journalists from both urban and smaller-town settings who worked in radio and television stations and newspapers were part of the sample.

Interviews were conducted both in person and via telephone between October and November 2025 and depended on participants' availability and logistical considerations. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 40 minutes and one hour. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

At the end of the data collection, 26 participants had been interviewed. Saturation was also reached at that point, as no new themes emerged from the final interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Besides, 26 interviews were considered enough for qualitative research, as meaning saturation could be reached at 25 interviews, while theoretical saturation could be reached from 20–30 interviews (Wutich et al., 2024). Table 1 provides an overview of the participants.

**Table 1.** Participants' overview.

| | Portfolio | Media Organisation | Type of news organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | Journalist | Coastal TV | Private |
| P2 | Data and research analyst | Media General | Private |
| P3 | News anchor | Joy Prime | Private |
| P4 | Environmental journalist | Vision One FM and Light Television | Private |
| P5 | Data journalist | Adoa Television | Private |
| P6 | Editor | Joy News | Private |
| P7 | Sports journalist and administrator | Independent | Independent |
| P8 | Broadcast journalist | GBC | Public |
| P9 | News reporter | The Ghanaian Times | Public |
| P10 | Editor | JoyNews & Joy FM | Private |
| P11 | Broadcast journalist | Max TV | Private |
| P12 | Entertainment journalist | Media General | Private |
| P13 | Data journalist | EIB | Private |
| P14 | Journalist | GBC | Public |
| P15 | Senior data and research journalist | Joy News | Private |
| P16 | Journalist | GBC | Public |
| P17 | Reporter | GhoneTV | Private |
| P18 | Digital news production | Media General | Private |
| P19 | Data journalist | Joy News | Private |
| P20 | TV presenter | Joy Prime TV | Private |

**Table 1.** (Cont.) Participants' overview.

| | Portfolio | Media Organisation | Type of news organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| P21 | Journalist | Metro TV | Private |
| P22 | Data and research analyst | Joy News | Private |
| P23 | Entertainment journalist | Media General | Private |
| P24 | Journalist | The Fourth Estate | Not-for-profit/Public interest |
| P25 | Data and research analyst | Media General | Private |
| P26 | Chief reporter | Ghana News Agency | Public |

Data were analysed thematically, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, involving familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final narrative.

Before data collection, formal approval was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Education, Winneba (Approval number: SGS-EC-78–25). Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews were conducted and recorded. To ensure trustworthiness and rigour, the researchers employed strategies such as member checking and reflexivity, including allowing participants to review interview transcripts to confirm that the transcripts accurately reflected their views. The researchers also critically examined their own assumptions and biases during the interpretation of the data, ensuring that the findings are devoid of overly subjective interpretations. Participants' responses have been anonymised to protect their identities.

## 5. Findings

### *5.1. AI Tools Used by Journalists*

Journalists interviewed used various AI tools to support both routine newsroom activities and specialised forms of reporting, particularly data journalism. Participants generally perceived AI as enhancing the speed, accessibility, and analytical capacity of data-driven reporting, especially for data cleaning, visualisation, trend analysis, verification, and computational storytelling. P5's impression about the usefulness of AI was instructive: "AI is not bad. Our newsroom has adopted an editorial every week and through that, there is an opportunity to teach us how to leverage AI better." ChatGPT was the most popular AI tool, according to the word cloud analysis of AI tools cited during interviews; DeepSeek AI, Data Wrapper, Grammarly, Otter.ai, and Gemini also came in handy, as Figure 2 illustrates.

Participants' perceptions of AI were shaped largely by the extent to which the technologies simplified complex data journalism tasks. AI was viewed less as a replacement for journalists and more as a support system that enhances computational efficiency, accelerates data interpretation, and improves the presentation of quantitative information in accessible formats. Some of the named AI tools are conversational tools that combine natural language processing and machine learning to simulate human conversation and provide content based on instructions. Others serve as writing assistants, while others are meeting agents/assistants helping to translate speech to text and video, and yet others are audio and video generation tools. Some also mentioned the use of robotic cameras in their organisations. These cameras

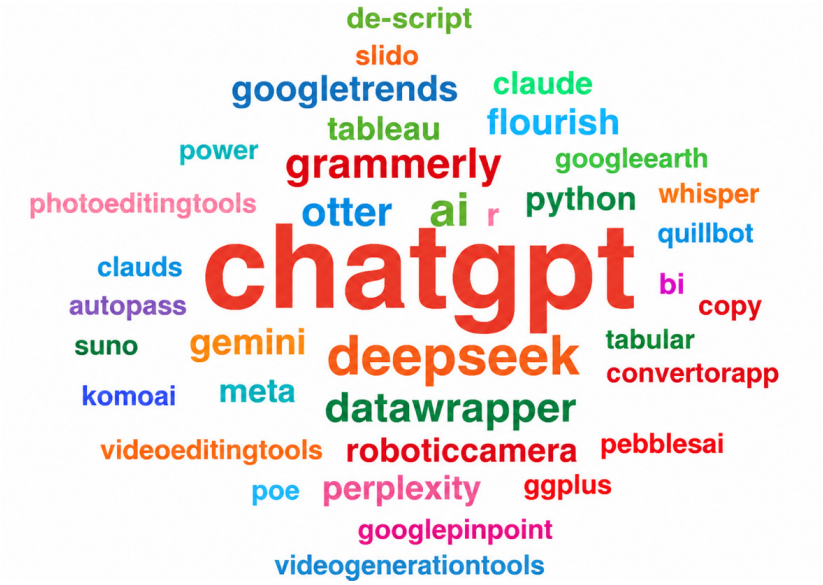


**Figure 2.** AI tools used by journalists.

have functionalities and mechanical abilities beyond traditional cameras and can provide a versatile and dynamic video capture experience while making movements, such as panning, tilting, zooming, and capturing every detail flawlessly, without human intervention. Although seemingly not a serious threat at the moment, robotic cameras' ability to perceive their surroundings, learn from mistakes, and make decisions on their own seems to pose a threat to humans who play such important roles in news organisations. Hence, we sought participants' views on the future of integrating AI into data journalism. The responses were varied but largely positive, as some thought that AI would augment but not replace journalists. The fears about displacement are borne out of the over-reliance on AI and journalists lazily making AI do their work, and losing their authenticity:

> AI was not there to see what happened. So, if you just pick the AI story based on what you have put inside, write a story about John Mahama's [the president] decision to appoint 60 ministers, or you put in John Mahama's speech, and tell AI, "using this speech, write a story"….The over-reliance means that the number of articles you see online is not authentic. (P13)

While AI adoption in data journalism may have several benefits, participants thought that "it can hallucinate. It can lie; it can make up things that don't exist" (P16), and should be adopted with careful optimism: "Let AI organise your work or help you do the work originally, but don't leave the work for AI to do….You see, there's a limit to human intelligence or human ability. AI is good, but people have hearts."

### 5.1.1. Purpose for AI Use in Data Journalism

Participants noted using AI tools for photo, video, and audio editing, proofreading, image generation, research, data cleaning, transcription, and pattern search in data to enhance their work. The AI technologies they used in their work appeared to be most frequently used for data visualisation. For projects related to data journalism, AI tools' ability to clean data, search for patterns, and visualise data is helpful and takes away the layer of work required to manually represent data in the telling of compelling stories. Participants' purpose for using

AI tools also reflected the tools they used the most, with ChatGPT being the most used tool, as seen in the word cloud representation in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** AI tools used by journalists.

A participant spoke about how some AI tools can tabulate and/or organise one's work, making it a useful tool for large amounts of data that must be organised and used to tell a story: "We have something called data labels and data frames, so if I draw a table scantily, I can just say, 'AI, put this in a well-organised table for me.' AI will do it very nicely" (P2). Beyond that, while AI helped journalists get the relevant information for their stories through research, some AI tools help journalists transcribe audio information and also edit their videos. Articles can also be scripted and grammar-checked with the aid of certain AI tools, providing the quality needed for stories. P2 also spoke about how ChatGPT and other tools like Komo AI, Effect AI, Copy AI, Poe, and Gemini can perform varied tasks, including assisting with research, simulation, website creation, and data analytics, among others. These cut down the extra layers of work required to carry out certain routine tasks, as P18 articulated, "It's an easier shortcut to getting the story done…these are easier tools that you can use to help in a line of work." Likewise, P21's words, "Those processes that were previously complex have become very simple, and AI is helping us advance the cause of journalism much faster," illustrate how AI comes in handy for different aspects of journalism, cutting down on the manual labour and man-hours required for developing story ideas, researching, executing and disseminating them.

The participants perceived AI as particularly valuable for data journalism because it reduces the technical barriers traditionally associated with data-driven reporting. Tasks such as organising datasets, identifying patterns, visualising statistics, and translating large volumes of information into audience-friendly formats were considered significantly easier to do with AI support. In this sense, AI is perceived not merely as a productivity tool but as a mechanism that democratises participation in data journalism among journalists with limited statistical or computational expertise. There was also the case of AI enhancing the editorial aspect of the work that journalists do that P17 spoke about: "It improves your writing skills, the language that is supposed to be used, and it gives accuracy when it comes to paraphrasing certain stories."

### 5.1.2. How AI is Used in Data Journalism

The use of AI in data journalism was fuelled by election reporting, when journalists used AI to simulate voter turnout, trend analysis, and verification of voter figures trickling in. Based on the data input, the AI system would flag suspicious and/or likely-to-be invalid results to help them with their reporting of valid results. Participants spoke about media houses like Citi FM and Joy News that deployed AI tools to process polling station results alongside historical voting data, helping journalists identify voting trends, predict possible outcomes, and even detect inconsistencies in vote tallies. AI also played a role in sentiment analysis, tracking voter concerns and misinformation on social media in real-time. The data gathered informed different initiatives, such as information verification and misinformation debunking on the part of news organisations. This, participants thought, helps improve the transparency and credibility of election coverage, which P2 suggested included the flagging of invalid data and the picking up of valid results that journalists can report on, and generally takes away anxieties around information vacuum, as P6 touched on: "In the past, journalists would spend weeks going through government reports, election results, or financial records manually. Now, AI can process these in hours or even minutes, helping us uncover stories that may have gone unnoticed." P12 also spoke about AI's utility in election coverage using the case of a constituency:

> You are able to get data about a particular constituency, the number of people who vote….You can tell people that this number of parliamentary candidates stood for the election in this constituency, this person got this number of votes, and you can also calculate in terms of percentages, who got what. (P12)

Health, environment, and other critical social issues, which require the inclusion and analysis of data trends, are also key thematic areas that AI supported in storytelling: "I've done a lot of data-related stories concerning social issues, especially the ones that have to do with a school feeding program. I've done some on HIV, I've done some on sex workers" (P2).

### 5.1.3. Data Journalism's Potential With AI

Time-saving and efficiency seemed to be two of the top reasons journalists used AI in their data-driven stories. Hence, by using AI in data journalism, journalists achieve maximum productivity within a relatively shorter timeframe and, in the process, minimise expense/resource requirements and effort. Referring to a particular data-driven story they worked on, P25 spoke about how AI facilitated the task, helping them to accomplish it within a short time: "I was able to accomplish this in five minutes. If I had done it manually, it would have taken me about three hours at a minimum." The efficiency component is also related to the simplification of news, which enhances accessibility of data-driven stories, as P22 alluded to: "Instead of reading lengthy articles, audiences can now grasp stories through infographics or news cards."

It was believed that AI would give journalists the chance to better inform their audiences, legitimise stories told, foster audience trust, and ultimately impact audiences by allowing them to incorporate data into storytelling with limited demand on time, even in situations where journalists themselves are not data savvy and/or are averse to data. P3 spoke succinctly about this: "People were not interested….But when some of the newsroom guys started discovering these AI tools, anytime there's a workshop on data journalism, they want to go."

With AI making data-driven stories more accessible to audiences, through data visualisation, animation, infographics, etc., in unprecedented ways, P24 put forward a strong point about AI's role in making hard data more accessible in news stories, enhancing the comprehension of critical economic and social issues embedded in large data sets:

> When you're working on a huge volume of data, how to visualise it and how to present it is usually a challenge. But with AI, when you key in your data, it's able to analyse and put the data in a concise and precise form for you.

The accessibility of public data, including AI-fed data, and the ease with which AI can help identify patterns and relationships within data and make predictions, among others, so that data-driven stories can be done, seems to have also accounted for the use of AI in data journalism. Some of the participants talked about how, in earlier years, it was difficult to get access to certain information and break it down into accessible narratives, and how AI has made it easy to do so presently: "Any public information you want right now in Ghana, I'm sure that with the click of any AI tool, you'll be able to have access to it….We would improve on our news production and our news broadcast" (P26). The usefulness of data in journalism and its potential to enhance journalists' capacity to do investigative stories is the reason P15 submitted that it must be treated as a national resource:

> Until we get to that point where we treat data as a resource, it will be difficult to get data at the centralised point for us to be able to get that one holistic AI that will solve issues like the way OpenAI and co are doing.

Another benefit of AI to data journalism, according to participants, is its ability to help with drawing comparisons with homogeneous data in other contexts. This helps to draw close comparisons and to look at how the same issues manifest in different contexts and to uncover underlying patterns and unique variations, reveal best practices and to benchmark performance, as P23 intimated:

> For instance, you are telling a story about Ghana, and you're able to get the data about a situation in Nigeria or even on the African continent, and any other continent. It also helps to draw that contrast for your viewers to know what's happening in other places. And if there is anything to learn from them.

Robotic technologies like drones, and their use of radio/satellite navigation systems and sensors that allow them to fly autonomously, are also helpful in providing an opportunity for journalists to tell data-driven stories about difficult-to-reach areas and/or issues. The drones help journalists to be able to cover and report important issues such as environmental degradation, natural catastrophes, and protests that journalists might not be able to physically be there to cover for varied reasons, including safety. This offers journalists better access, fresh viewpoints, and, at the same time, the desired security, for which reason P1 says robotics is a "positive influence of AI…and going to improve journalism."

### 5.1.4. Challenges With AI Use in Data Journalism

The thematic data analysis conducted yielded that cost, limited or the lack of relevant contextual data, the seeming opaqueness of sources of data in AI systems, and ethical concerns related to originality,

misinformation like hallucinations and deepfakes, and biases in AI systems resulting from flawed data training and the absence of guidelines on the use of AI in journalism were some of the challenges that interviewed journalists put forth as the challenges with using AI in data journalism. On cost, participants shared the view that most AI tools offer free versions but not access to the full range of features needed to do their work. While there is an opportunity to leverage the full features of AI that facilitate data journalism enterprises, the extended features come at a high subscription cost. And since AI tools are considered "add-ons to make the process simpler" and not "a prerequisite for discharging our duties, management does not prioritise investing in them" (P21). It is also important to point out that while well-resourced media houses may be able to afford full versions of AI tools that facilitate their work, "implementing AI technology requires investment, which can be a barrier for smaller media houses" (P6) who may not have the financial muscle.

Despite AI providing the opportunity to access data as well as facilitating the analysis and presentation, participants raised issues with the limited and sometimes the difficulty in accessing relevant data that allows journalists to do data-driven stories with the aid of AI. And rightly so, as P14 pointed out, "If AI doesn't really have data about that particular community or jurisdiction, it becomes difficult for AI to give you data about it." An example P23 used to illustrate this point was the difficulty in getting context-specific information, while abundant information from elsewhere is accessible to journalists in Ghana: "You can get figures from all over the world, but it is usually difficult to find data for our context…because sometimes our governments don't put out certain information that needs to be out there." P12 spoke about how this was because most AI technologies are designed elsewhere and fed with data from elsewhere, which he believes must be consciously pursued in the local context:

> China has come up with an AI of their own, so I believe that that AI has been abreast with information about that country, but it's difficult for that particular AI to have information on Ghanaian governance or let's say data journalism, because it wasn't manufactured or information in Ghana has not been inputted into that AI system to give out information to suit our preferences (P12).

There were concerns about the inability to scrutinise the source of data in some AI systems that do not now allow for appropriate attribution of what data is used, despite the impression AI developers give about model "openness." This opaqueness sometimes does not allow journalists to comply with the attribution principle in journalism. According to P22:

> Openness is important….There are so many things that are hidden, or we do not know….It has made it possible for us to have a premium version available for free. But we always have to be on the lookout for the geopolitical implications.

Without knowledge about the source of information, ethical concerns that journalists have in relation to misinformation became evident: "In this era of misinformation and disinformation, to be able to verify that the information you are getting is authentic and credible for use may be another challenge" (P9). There were also ethical concerns about delegating journalistic duties to AI systems, and the shortfalls in AI systems, including biases, that perpetuate misinformation. Some thought using AI would impact the creative abilities of journalists, particularly if it is heavily relied upon for journalistic duties: "As a journalist, you need to be authentic, genuine, creative, and organic with your writing. This is why we are mostly oriented, so we don't

lose touch with our organic work" (P11). When it comes to data journalism, these concerns are significant because inaccuracies in AI-assisted analysis, visualisation, or interpretation may compromise the credibility of quantitative reporting. Participants perceived that while AI enhances efficiency in handling large datasets, overreliance on automated systems may weaken critical editorial judgment, especially in situations when journalists must verify numerical claims, interpret statistical trends, and contextualise sensitive political or social data. The risks associated with hallucinations, biased datasets, and opaque algorithms are therefore viewed not simply as technological limitations, but as threats to the integrity and trustworthiness of data-driven journalism itself.

The lack of policies and guidelines, and the individualised use of AI in data journalism, news stories, or feature articles, is considered to "downplay its potential efficacy," according to P9. This is because without guidelines, some journalists may prefer not to use the tools to avoid any ethical breaches or any negative impact on their credibility and trust, although they may recognise AI's usefulness. And with AI systems sometimes perpetrating misinformation due to data bias, making "a story or script incomplete or inaccurate" (P4), some also stay away from AI systems.

Recognising these shortfalls, participants who still use AI in their work employ fact-checking and verification, ensure they get the right training, and consciously look for official data since they thought "primary data is ideal" (P1) to navigate the challenges. To get the right training that imbues the ethical dimensions of AI in journalism, P3 suggested that "organisations should be keen to invite experts to train their staff in data journalism." Some participants also suggested journalists take advantage of free online training programmes on online platforms like Coursera and training and fellowship programmes on data journalism, which sometimes incorporate the use of AI. They also suggested training offered by media development organisations like Penplusbyte, Media Foundation for West Africa, Dubawa, and other international organisations like Afrobarometer, Thomson Reuters Foundation, and United Nations Development Programme, which they themselves have benefited from.

With the understanding that "data journalism is the future" (P19) and that "the future is great with AI" (P20), a case for transparency about AI use in data journalism was also made by participants, with P7 saying that "you need to give credit….What did you use it for? Gathering of content, text translation, audio to text, text to audio, video transmission, data analysis…."

## 6. Discussion of Results

The findings of this study reveal the expanding role of AI in journalism, particularly within data-driven reporting. Journalists reported adopting a wide range of AI tools for different functions. Tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Gemini, Otter.ai, and Data Wrapper were among the most frequently cited, while others mentioned robotic cameras and drones that assist with audio-visual coverage. The tools enhance writing, transcription, translation, editing, proofreading, data cleaning, visualisation, and even content generation. Confirming earlier research that AI can augment editorial decision-making and simplify complex tasks, the study established that AI simplified the process of transforming rough tables into structured datasets and enabled quicker completion of tasks that would otherwise take hours. Journalists' use of tools such as ChatGPT, Data Wrapper, and Otter.ai aligns with Diakopoulos' (2019) observation that AI supports editorial work, ranging from idea generation to more advanced applications like algorithmic curation and

automated writing. Similarly, AI's ability to assist in fact-checking, content recommendation, and trend analysis resonates with Thurman et al.'s (2019) view, underscoring AI's transformative potential for information gathering and news consumption. Graefe (2016) emphasises AI's utility in automating data scraping, cleaning, and visualisation, which this study also highlights as vital for data-driven storytelling. Moreover, Hermida and Simon (2025) notes that AI enables efficiency and scalability in news production, a point echoed in participants' accounts of faster completion of tasks. The study's findings demonstrate a strong PEOU, as AI removes the complexity of technical tasks, making data journalism accessible even for those with limited statistical or data literacy. Journalists who traditionally avoided mathematics or data-intensive reporting found AI a gateway into data journalism, echoing Davis et al.'s (1989) argument that systems are adopted when they simplify complex tasks.

The study reveals that AI's application in data journalism is particularly evident during election coverage, where it is deployed for turnout analysis, result verification, and anomaly detection. Newsrooms such as Joy News and Citi FM leverage AI to compare polling station figures with historical voting data, enhancing both the accuracy and credibility of their reports. This finding reflects Foos' (2024) assertion that the rapid advancement of AI has reached a critical stage where its power and accessibility make it suitable for large-scale use in election reporting and campaign monitoring. Beyond elections, participants reported using AI in stories about health, education, and environmental issues. They also employ AI for sentiment analysis, misinformation detection, and data visualisation. The integration of AI into journalistic workflows, particularly in election coverage and broader data-driven reporting, clearly demonstrates an appreciation of PU of AI among journalists, as they consistently highlight AI's role in enhancing performance by providing speed, accuracy, and analytical depth. For instance, journalists confirmed how AI-facilitated real-time turnout analysis, anomaly detection, and misinformation monitoring directly improved both efficiency and credibility of reporting, aligning with Venkatesh and Davis' (2000) assertion that when individuals believe that technology will improve job performance, their behavioural intention to use the system is strengthened.

Journalists perceived AI as simplifying previously complex and time-intensive tasks, such as data cleaning, visualisation, transcription, and sentiment analysis, as well as democratising data journalism for practitioners without technical expertise, thereby reducing cognitive effort and lowering barriers to adoption. This aligns with the suggestion that PEOU shapes users' attitudes, which in turn predict behavioural intention and actual system use (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Findings also speak to the PU in TAM, as journalists saw AI not only improving their productivity but also strengthening audience trust and impact. Moreover, AI's ability to draw comparisons across contexts (P23) and facilitate reporting in inaccessible locations in the case of the use of drones (P1) highlights its role in broadening coverage possibilities. Such attributes make AI adoption desirable in newsrooms, reinforcing its fit within organisational and audience needs, a perspective also emphasised by Adjin-Tettey et al. (2024).

Despite the opportunities, journalists also pointed to barriers that hinder full adoption of AI. Key challenges include high subscription costs, inadequate context-specific data, ethical concerns such as misinformation, hallucinations, deepfakes, and biases, as well as the opacity of data sources, as revealed by P6, P9, P12, and P22. For smaller media houses, affordability remains a decisive factor in whether AI tools can be integrated into data-driven reporting workflows. The barriers identified by participants reflect the socially constructed nature of technological adoption within Ghanaian journalism. From a SCOT perspective, AI adoption is not determined solely by the technical efficiency of the tools, but by the institutional, economic, and

infrastructural conditions within which journalists operate. In Ghana, many media organisations face financial constraints, making the subscription costs associated with advanced AI tools prohibitive, particularly for smaller and independent newsrooms. Consequently, the adoption of AI in data journalism becomes partial, favouring well-resourced organisations over less-resourced media houses. These concerns echo Aiseng's (2026) argument that imported AI solutions often fail to capture local linguistic and sociopolitical realities, limiting their contextual relevance. Participants such as P11 cautioned that excessive reliance on AI could erode creativity and compromise journalistic integrity, concerns that align with wider debates around automation, algorithmic bias, and transparency in AI-driven decisions (Carlson, 2020).

These concerns are particularly significant within data journalism because the practice depends heavily on the accuracy, integrity, and traceability of datasets. Data journalism requires journalists to interpret quantitative evidence, verify datasets, and communicate statistical findings through visual and computational methods. Consequently, inaccuracies generated through AI hallucinations, opaque algorithms, or biased datasets can compromise not only individual stories but also the credibility of data-driven reporting itself. This is especially critical during election coverage, where AI-assisted turnout analysis and anomaly detection may shape public trust in electoral processes.

Additionally, the financial and infrastructural demands of AI adoption, particularly the need for robust data systems and upskilling, pose significant constraints, especially for low-resourced newsrooms, thereby increasing the digital divide (Lewis et al., 2019). From a TAM perspective, these barriers function as external variables that shape PU and PEOU. In this instance, affordability influences access, while ethical and contextual concerns undermine trust, ultimately affecting adoption intentions (Davis et al., 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Furthermore, behavioural intention to use AI was visible in participants' optimistic outlook, even amid challenges. Participants expressed the willingness to continue using AI if training, guidelines, and ethical safeguards were put in place. This shows that while perceived risks exist, the perceived benefits currently outweigh them, driving the gradual integration of AI in (data) journalism.

Some of the challenges associated with AI use in data journalism compromise the PU and PEOU of TAM, highlighting the social context within which technology is adopted and mitigating against adoption, which the SCOT accounts for. Hence, although AI in journalism offers benefits such as time-saving, improved productivity, democratised data journalism, and enhanced audience trust, consistent with PEOU and PU, factors such as high subscription costs, limited context-specific data, ethical concerns, and opaque data sources may hinder AI adoption in Ghanaian data journalism. Consequently, we submit that while the adoption of AI in data journalism in Ghana is enhanced by the usefulness and PEOU of the technologies, adoption can equally be undermined by challenges within the social context of the adoption process. Hence, using TAM to account for the use of AI in data journalism must be complemented by conceptualisations around the social context within which technology is deployed and used. It is for this reason that we argue that while TAM effectively explains journalists' positive attitudes toward AI through perceived usefulness and ease of use, the findings suggest that adoption of data journalism in Ghanaian newsrooms is also negatively mediated by broader socio-technical realities. SCOT therefore complements TAM by demonstrating that technological adoption is shaped not only by individual perceptions of efficiency, but also by institutional resources, newsroom cultures, infrastructural inequalities, and locally situated understandings of credibility, ethics, and professional practice.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has provided evidence for how Ghanaian journalists engage with AI tools for data journalism, with some of the most dominantly used AI tools being those that enhance research and visual representation of data-driven stories. The opportunities that journalists thought AI presents for enhancing data journalism are grounded in efficiency, accessibility, and storytelling enhancement, and sit closely with the PU in TAM, which in this instance shows up in the improvement of productivity, resulting in impact and the strengthening of audience trust.

The barriers associated with AI use in data journalism, some of which ultimately compromise PU and PEOU, call for measures that ensure the social aspect of AI adoption in data journalism, such as high subscription costs, inadequate context-specific data, and ethical concerns related to misinformation, hallucinations, deepfakes, and biases, are not overlooked. Based on these challenges, it is suggested that data related to journalism work, which is considered a public good, be made freely available. To overcome high subscription costs related to access to the premium version of AI tools, media houses, media development organisations, and civic-tech entities must collaboratively develop affordable and possibly zero-rated AI technologies that can support journalists' work, including data systems with relevant information. Media houses must also consider working collaboratively with technology organisations to deploy ethical AI systems that could facilitate their daily routines, while factoring in the socio-cultural contexts.

While this study's use of a qualitative approach provided in-depth insights into journalists' experiences, it may have introduced bias and subjective interpretations. Hence, future research could address this limitation by triangulating data, such as through content analysis of published news stories, to objectively evaluate the use of AI in data-driven journalism within Ghanaian newsrooms.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability

Data supporting the findings of this study can be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

### LLMs Disclosure

The authors used Grammarly to proofread and improve the article's readability. They then reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the manuscript.

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