

Transparency is a Double-Edged Sword: Stakeholders' Perception of GenAI Usage Disclosure in Kenyan Newsrooms

Bingbing Zhang ¹ , Kevin C. Mudavadi ² , and Chenghan Zhou ¹ 

¹ School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Iowa, USA

² Department of Communication, Georgia State University, USA

Correspondence: Bingbing Zhang (bingbing-zhang@uiowa.edu)

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has been increasingly adopted globally in journalism, raising critical ethical considerations, especially regarding the transparency of its usage in news production. Existing research shows that disclosing AI authorship or involvement in news writing affects news audiences' perceived trustworthiness and credibility, with most studies conducted in the Global North. However, current research has primarily focused on news audiences, overlooking other key stakeholders, such as journalists and policymakers, who also shape ethical norms and practices surrounding AI transparency in journalism. Furthermore, research on GenAI in journalism remains heavily focused on the Global North, leaving significant gaps in understanding how stakeholders in the Global South perceive and evaluate GenAI disclosure in journalistic content. In response, we conducted 94 in-depth interviews with six groups in Kenya—news audiences, journalists, policymakers, influencers, journalism educators, and information technology experts—to examine how stakeholders in Kenya perceive GenAI disclosure in journalistic content and the extent to which they trust news stories generated by AI or assisted by AI. Our analysis shows a “double-edged sword effect”: While most stakeholders advocated for transparency about GenAI use in journalism, many journalists expressed concern that such disclosure could undermine the perceived authenticity and credibility of news content. Such distrust stemmed from ethical concerns that overreliance on GenAI could lead to “less human” journalism and the spread of unverified or biased GenAI content. Stakeholders also expressed conditional trust that varies depending on the type of story, the level of GenAI use, and the nature of the content.

Keywords

AI disclosure; generative artificial intelligence; journalism; Kenya; transparency in news; trust in news

1. Introduction

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in journalism has fundamentally transformed news production and dissemination (Chiridza & Mare, 2026; Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026), prompting an urgent need for transparency and ethical oversight (Toff & Simon, 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). Current research offers divergent findings regarding the impact of disclosing GenAI in journalistic work, particularly regarding how such transparency influences audiences' perceptions of news trustworthiness (Toff & Simon, 2025). Although research on GenAI transparency in the Global South is emerging (Gondwe, 2025), the empirical contributions remain largely rooted in the Global North (e.g., Toff & Simon, 2025; Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024), limiting scholarly understanding of unique media contexts in the Global South. Additionally, existing research on GenAI transparency has mainly focused on audiences (Gondwe, 2025; Toff & Simon, 2025), leading to a significant gap in comprehending how other key stakeholders (e.g., journalists, educators, influencers, and policymakers) in the media landscape, who play a vital role in shaping ethical standards and professional practices, interpret this phenomenon.

Examining GenAI disclosure in Kenya is especially vital and timely for several reasons. Kenya is a key case study given its status as a leading digital hub in Africa, often described as the Silicon Savannah, owing to its high internet penetration and a competitive media landscape (GSMA, 2019). Kenya tops GenAI adoption, with 42.1% of internet users adopting automation tools such as ChatGPT more often than their counterparts in the US, China, and the United Kingdom (Mwangi, 2025). In fact, most (seven in ten) journalists in Kenya indicate that they are knowledgeable about AI chatbots, while 24.6% use them “sometimes” in their journalistic work (Mudavadi, 2025). Despite this technological maturity, Kenyan newsrooms are currently navigating a trust deficit worsened by the frequent misinformation and deepfakes on end-to-end encryption and open-access social media platforms (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019; Zhang et al., 2025). While major news outlets such as those from the Nation Media Group are experimenting with GenAI and implementing formal GenAI policies (Mwirigi, 2026), the media landscape remains torn between the efficiency of automation in news and ethical needs for human oversight. As such, examining GenAI in such contexts is vital because the local news environment depends on credibility to navigate digital disinformation and hallucinated synthetic content, making the responsible use of GenAI a matter of public interest and democratic stability.

This study focuses on two key ideas in this shift: the normative practice of transparency disclosure and its impact on news trust. Research shows that being transparent about GenAI involvement, especially through clear labels, is often perceived as crucial for maintaining credibility (Toff & Simon, 2025; Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). However, recent studies reveal a transparency dilemma: Simple GenAI labels can sometimes backfire, causing news consumers to doubt the credibility of news regardless of its quality (Ananny & Crawford, 2018; Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). In Kenya, where news consumption is influenced by a recent trend of media skepticism driven by declining trust in traditional media (Zhang et al., 2025), the effectiveness of disclosure hinges on how different stakeholders interpret the adoption or use of GenAI. By grounding this study in empirical work on transparency and trust, the present study examines whether disclosure serves as a bridge to trust or a barrier that heightens skepticism among those who perceive GenAI as a threat to journalistic integrity. To address these complexities, we conducted 94 in-depth interviews with a good mix of six urban and rural-based stakeholder groups in Kenya to examine their perceptions of GenAI disclosure in journalistic content and to investigate the extent to which such transparency influences their trust in news. By providing

evidence-based insights into these perceptions, our study advances research on AI transparency in journalism in the Global South.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. *Journalistic Transparency and Disclosure Practices*

Transparency refers to the “ways in which people both inside and external to journalism are given a chance to monitor, check, criticize and even intervene in the journalistic process” (Deuze, 2005, p. 455). It is often understood as a set of visible journalistic practices that make news production more open, such as explaining editorial decisions, linking to source materials, and correcting errors publicly (Karlsson, 2010). Although transparency can take participatory (i.e., allows audiences to observe, question, and contribute to news production), disclosure (i.e., explaining how and why news is produced), and ambient forms (i.e., supplementary contextual information such as hyperlinks; see Koliska, 2022), this study focuses on disclosure transparency, which concerns how journalists explain the process, tools, and decisions behind news production.

Prior research shows that disclosure transparency, particularly explanations of how and why a story is produced, can enhance perceived credibility and audience engagement (Curry & Stroud, 2021; Koliska, 2022). As a result, journalists have increasingly adopted disclosure practices, especially those that clarify news production processes (Chadha & Koliska, 2015). However, extending these practices to disclose the usage of emerging technological tools in journalism remains challenging. For example, research on the use of complex, difficult-to-interpret algorithms in news production identifies two key barriers to disclosure: limited business incentives and concerns about overwhelming audiences with excessive or technical information (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2017).

The growing adoption of GenAI in journalism introduces new challenges for transparency. GenAI is now used across multiple stages of news production, including information gathering, content creation, editing, and distribution, raising concerns about transparency and accountability (Zhang et al., 2026; Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). Its integration also complicates journalistic authority, as human-AI collaboration reshapes news production (Ashuri et al., 2026). Consequently, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on transparency in AI-assisted journalism, particularly disclosure practices such as labeling AI involvement in news production (Altay & Gilardi, 2024; Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). However, such practices remain underdeveloped. For example, a large-scale audit of U.S. newspapers found widespread AI use but minimal explicit disclosure and limited public-facing policy guidance (Russell et al., 2025).

2.2. *Stakeholders’ Perceptions of GenAI Disclosure in Journalism Practice*

Research on journalistic transparency has largely focused on Western contexts (Karlsson, 2010; Koliska, 2022), with limited attention to African settings. Kenya ranks among the top countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in AI readiness, referring to the capacity to adapt to the transformative impacts of AI (Lida et al., 2025). Although Kenya has begun developing governance strategies for AI deployment, technological innovation and algorithmic systems continue to raise accountability concerns (Ogola & Cheruiyot, 2022). These dynamics make transparency and accountability in GenAI-assisted journalism particularly salient in Kenyan

newsrooms. For instance, research in Sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya, found that journalists, while cautiously adopting GenAI, express optimism about its use in behind-the-scenes tasks but remain concerned about its role in content generation, particularly in contexts where misinformation and disinformation are prevalent (Chiridza & Mare, 2026; Madrid-Morales et al., 2025; Mudavadi & Mare, 2025; Umejei et al., 2025). More broadly, journalists and media organizations must continually balance professional agency, authority, and accountability amid technological change (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025).

Importantly, GenAI should not be understood merely as a tool, but as part of a broader sociotechnical process involving interactions among diverse actors (Lewis et al., 2025). These actors include journalists who produce news, technologists who develop AI tools for content creation, stakeholders such as educators and policymakers who guide industry standards, and audiences who play a central role in interpreting and responding to news (Lewis et al., 2025). Stakeholders in the news system have increasingly advocated for the integration of ethical AI, emphasizing that effective transparency and disclosure practices should be co-designed with their input (Venkatraj et al., 2025). Since stakeholders differ in their levels of trust in AI systems, their perceptions of disclosure and its impact on news credibility are likely to vary as well (Ananny & Crawford, 2018). Bhuiyan et al. (2021) highlight the importance of incorporating both journalistic and audience perspectives when designing transparency practices. Despite growing calls for ethical guidelines to govern AI use in African journalism (Zhang et al., 2026), little research has examined public perceptions of transparency, especially regarding the disclosure of GenAI use in Africa, let alone Kenya. Hence, we intend to examine how key stakeholders in the Kenyan newsroom perceive GenAI disclosure in journalistic content:

RQ1: How do stakeholders, i.e., journalists, audiences, educators, influencers, information technology experts (ITEs), and policymakers in Kenya perceive GenAI disclosure in journalistic content?

2.3. Transparency of GenAI Usage in Journalism & News Trust

Research on media trust shows that trust in news has declined in recent years compared to past years. For instance, a Pew Research Center survey shows that in 2025, only 56% of American adults report having at least some trust in information from news organizations, and it has been declining since 2016 (Eddy & Shearer, 2025). This decline is concerning, as trust is essential for journalism's role in informing the public. Trust in news involves "a trustor, the side that places trust, and a trustee, the side being trusted" (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, p. 505). Kohring and Matthes (2007) argue that trust in news media is multidimensional, involving judgments about how topics are selected, how facts are handled, how accurately events are described, and how journalists interpret what they report. It can also operate at different levels, including trust in "news media in general, media types, individual media brands, journalists, and media content" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 147).

Transparency in news production has been shown to influence perceived credibility and trust in news (Curry & Stroud, 2021; Koliska, 2022). Similarly, recent studies in the Global North examine the effects of GenAI disclosure on trust in news, particularly labeling AI involvement as a form of transparency (e.g., Ananny & Crawford, 2018; Toff & Simon, 2025; Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). While audiences generally favor and support such disclosure (Venkatraj et al., 2025), studies show that AI-labeled content is perceived as less trustworthy and less believable (Toff & Simon, 2025). This creates a dilemma: although disclosure is intended to build trust, it may instead undermine it (Ananny & Crawford, 2018). As Zier and Diakopoulos

(2024) argue, disclosure can backfire when there is a mismatch between the intent of transparency and how audiences interpret AI labels. These mixed reactions highlight the need to better understand how people make sense of GenAI disclosure and its impact on trust in news.

More importantly, existing research has largely focused on audience perspectives, primarily in Global North contexts (e.g., Toff & Simon, 2025; Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024), with limited attention to other stakeholders or to African settings. The way people are exposed to news has been shown to shape trust in institutions in Kenya (Zhang et al., 2025). In response to the growing use of AI in news production, journalists have been urged to disclose AI use, verify information, and maintain impartiality, as failing to do so can undermine transparency, credibility, and public trust (KNA, 2026). These expectations are also reflected in the Media Council of Kenya Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism, which, in Section 27 on emerging technologies, calls for the ethical use of AI that upholds transparency and trust (Media Council of Kenya, 2025). As such, publishing AI-generated content without disclosure goes against these professional guidelines. However, formal legal requirements around disclosure remain underdeveloped in Kenya. At the policy level, Kenya's Ministry of Information, Communications, and the Digital Economy has called for mandatory labeling of AI-generated media to address the risks of misinformation, digital manipulation, and declining public trust (Mboto, 2026). Research has begun examining how African news audiences perceive AI-generated news, and has found that transparency increases news trust (Gondwe, 2025). However, little is known about how other stakeholders in the Kenyan news system evaluate and trust AI-assisted or AI-generated news. Therefore, we ask:

RQ2: To what extent do Kenyan stakeholders trust news stories generated by or assisted by GenAI?

3. Method

We relied on 94 semi-structured interviews with six key stakeholders in Kenyan journalism conducted between May 27 and July 7, 2025, to answer our two research questions. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide a wide range of perspectives and their unique ability to uncover previously unexplored areas (Brennen, 2013), such as stakeholders' perceptions of GenAI. Examining stakeholders' perceptions of the disclosure of GenAI in Kenyan journalism is important for understanding their views on its use and its impact on news consumption and trust. Additionally, each stakeholder group interacts with and is affected by GenAI in unique ways. For example, adaptability to GenAI intersects with historical, infrastructural, and labor asymmetries in Kenya, factors that impact comprehension of GenAI usage or adoption in Kenya.

3.1. Sampling

Once our IRB was approved by the University of Iowa, we recruited participants (News Audiences = 17; ITEs = 15; Journalists = 21; Educators = 15; Influencers = 16; and Policymakers = 10) using purposive and snowball sampling. This process began with researchers tapping into their professional and personal networks to gauge their interest in participating. The purposive selection targeted individuals who have access to social media, use GenAI, and are Kenyans. At the end of this process, five declined, and one withdrew midway through the study. Notably, 10 others initially agreed but were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. With their permission, we audio-recorded Zoom interviews in English, Kenya's second official language. However, participants switched to Swahili, Kenya's first official language. Before

the interviews ended, participants were asked to recommend anyone in their networks and beyond who might be interested in participating. Despite our efforts to ensure gender parity, at the end of data collection, our sample included 56% women and 44% men, with the majority (24%) aged 25–29 years (Supplementary File 1). Because we assured participants that we would protect their identities, we use aliases and unique identifiers throughout this study to refer to them. After completing the interview, each participant was given an incentive of 1,000 Kenya Shillings (then approximately \$8 USD).

3.2. Interview Guide

We included specific questions for each stakeholder and common ones for all participants to enable comparisons and differences when analyzing and reporting the data. The interview guide includes six sections, designed to address gaps in GenAI research in Africa and build on insights from previous studies (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025). The first section included a brief introduction to the participants and their professions, followed by questions about their general understanding of GenAI and its relationship to (dis)information. Then, we discussed their views on the use of GenAI in newsrooms and journalism, including ethical concerns and regulatory issues. We concluded the interviews by inviting participants to share any additional thoughts. All our interviews lauded this as an important topic with a long-lasting impact on society.

3.3. Analysis

On average, interviews lasted 58 minutes for news audiences (min. = 30; max. = 105 minutes); 65 minutes for ITEs (min. = 42; max. = 108 minutes); 73 minutes for journalists (min. = 41; max. = 100 minutes); 64 minutes for educators (min. = 42; max. = 90 minutes); 60 minutes for influencers (min. = 36; max. = 89 minutes); and 63 minutes for policymakers (min. = 43; max. = 90 minutes). Because participants switched languages, all audios were transcribed by authors proficient in both Swahili and English.

A thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo (version 15), guided by a codebook developed through both inductive and deductive approaches over five iterative rounds. The first and second authors began by reading and rereading the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data, noting initial ideas without imposing predetermined categories. They then conducted line-by-line open coding, generating initial codes that closely reflected participants' meanings. While the research questions provided a general orientation, coding was also informed by existing literature (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025).

Throughout the process, the authors met regularly to discuss coding decisions, acting as “critical friends” to refine code definitions and resolve interpretive differences. Early stages of codebook development drew on interview guides and prior codebooks from misinformation research in Kenya and Senegal (Madrid-Morales et al., 2025). Subsequent iterations incorporated emerging insights from interviews, relevant literature, and frameworks (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025), and patterns identified during initial coding, leading to ongoing refinement and consolidation.

The final codebook comprised nine main themes (e.g., “GenAI awareness” and “GenAI in journalism and newsrooms”) and 67 subthemes (e.g., “disclosure of GenAI content” and “impact of GenAI disclosure on news trust”). This finalized codebook was then applied to code all 94 interviews.

4. Findings

4.1. Perception of GenAI Disclosure in Journalistic Content (RQ1)

Our analysis shows general support across stakeholders for disclosing GenAI content. Their support was grounded in several rationales: (a) disclosure as transparency is a core expectation; (b) disclosure as a means to maintain clear professional boundaries; and (c) conditional support for disclosure. We will break them down in the following paragraphs.

Disclosure is a core expectation of transparency: All stakeholder groups emphasized the importance of disclosure, framing transparency as a core expectation in journalism and arguing that the public has a right to know whether GenAI has been used in news production (AU02; AU03). For instance, a 29-year-old female engineer noted that “it is important for the public to know” (AU02), while a 36-year-old trader argued that journalists “should disclose so that the public can differentiate and know” (AU03) how news is produced. Educators compare disclosure with citation practices in academic writing, suggesting that “journalistic ethical principles or guidelines should be put in place that tell a journalist how to reference or indicate how the information was obtained” (E09). Similarly, influencers described disclosure as an expected professional practice rather than an optional gesture, emphasizing that “the audience has to know” (IF08) and that transparency signals openness and honesty to the public. ITEs also viewed disclosure as part of the responsibility of sharing public information, noting that if a post is AI-generated, audiences should be informed (ITE11). Journalists likewise framed disclosure as “a way of being transparent to your audience” (J06), emphasizing that audiences are entitled to understand the processes behind news production. Policymakers further underscored that transparency is essential for maintaining ethical journalism, arguing that “the consumer must be as fully informed as possible” so they can make informed decisions about how to interpret and use the information they receive (PM02).

Disclosure is also a means to maintain clear professional boundaries: Stakeholders emphasized disclosure as a means of maintaining boundaries between human journalistic authority and GenAI assistance. In their view, disclosure clarifies that GenAI functions as a tool rather than an author, thereby protecting journalists’ professional identity. Across groups, participants emphasized the importance of human oversight, editorial judgment, and what some described as the “human touch” in news production (IF04; ITE05; J02). For instance, stakeholders highlighted the need to preserve originality (AU17), authenticity and emotional depth (E13), and humanity in journalistic work (IF10). As a 45-year-old associate dean and researcher noted, “machines are smart but cannot surpass human intelligence” (E13). Similarly, a 32-year-old content creator argued that, when content is “100% AI without humanity, it’s just copy and paste” (IF10) and suggested that in such cases, journalists should disclose GenAI use because it is ethically important for audiences to know that no human perspective was added. Journalists likewise emphasized that although GenAI may assist with certain tasks, human accountability remains central to journalism. As a 47-year-old fact-checker explained, “disclosing helps even the reader or the consumer of that content know that beyond what the journalist did” (J02). Policymakers echoed this perspective, emphasizing the limits of GenAI’s ability to interpret human contexts. An urban-based information officer argued that GenAI “cannot express or interpret human emotions, and it cannot reliably identify bias. Those are tasks that require human judgment” (PM09). As such, disclosure is not seen as only a transparency practice but also as a signal that, despite GenAI assistance, human responsibility and editorial authority remain at the core of journalistic work.

Stakeholders show conditional support for disclosure: Across groups, stakeholders have expressed conditional support for disclosing the use of GenAI in news production. Rather than advocating for blanket transparency, participants repeatedly emphasized that disclosure should vary by topic, context, and the degree of GenAI involvement. For example, participants were more likely to call for explicit disclosure in hard news, such as politically sensitive reporting, public health crises, or national emergencies, than in softer content, such as summaries or explanatory visuals (AU11; ITE07). Journalists particularly distinguished between AI-assisted tasks such as summarization, translation, or background research and fully AI-generated content (J05; J11; J16). Minimal assistance was often viewed as acceptable without prominent disclosure, whereas more substantial generative involvement was seen as requiring explicit labeling (AU04; AU08; IF03). Participants also emphasized the importance of disclosure for AI-generated visual and audio content, including images, videos, and voiceovers, due to concerns about realism and the potential for visual manipulation (IF03; IF04; ITE08; J11). Visual content was perceived as particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation, making transparency especially important. As a 35-year-old influencer (IF04) explained:

I think they should [disclose the use of AI], especially when it comes to, let's say, using images and maybe videos and voiceovers. In terms of text, maybe from a newspaper perspective, they can or maybe they cannot. But especially with images, videos, and voiceovers, I think it's definite that they should say this information is generated by AI.

More importantly, stakeholders highlighted a key dilemma surrounding disclosure: Transparency may inadvertently trigger negative reactions or undermine audience trust. Several participants expressed concern that audiences may interpret AI disclosure as a signal that the content is unreliable. For instance, a 24-year-old female nurse suggested that news organizations might face “a lot of backlash” (AU11), while a rural-based part-time lecturer noted that “for now, it is risky to say that this is AI-generated content, because immediately people see AI-generated content, they close their minds” (E10). Similarly, a 25-year-old software engineer explained that acknowledging the use of GenAI might lead audiences to question the credibility of the information source (ITE10). Journalists also emphasized the professional risks associated with disclosure. A morning show host argued that disclosing the use of GenAI could undermine professional credibility and editorial trust within news organizations. Specifically, she shared, “If I’m always using AI-generating tools...the leadership of the station will not trust me...people will start questioning your professionalism” (J05). In addition, several journalists noted that formal disclosure practices are largely absent in Kenyan newsrooms, with J02 and J17 reporting that they had not yet encountered systematic GenAI disclosure in their organizations.

Stakeholder groups generally agree that disclosing GenAI use is important, but they differ in how and why it matters. News audiences prioritize the public’s right to know, viewing disclosure as a basic expectation of transparency in journalism (AU02; AU03). Educators, on the other hand, approach it from an ethical perspective, calling for clear guidelines or frameworks to guide journalists. For example, a female lecturer said: “They should disclose it, but maybe when they have clear guidelines from the Media Council of Kenya or if they have any framework they’re relying on” (E11). Influencers pay attention to the different types of AI-generated content (e.g., images, videos, and voiceovers) and emphasize crediting sources appropriately. ITEs emphasize disclosure as a means of protecting human creativity and originality, highlighting the boundary between human and GenAI work (IT05). Journalists generally support disclosure to maintain audience trust, but many worry it could backfire, leading them to consider carefully when and how to

disclose GenAI involvement (J05; J13). Policymakers, meanwhile, see a need for rules or legislation to make disclosure a standard practice (PM05; PM07).

4.2. Influence of Disclosure on Trust in News Stories (RQ2)

When asked whether disclosure of GenAI use would influence trust in a news story, stakeholders expressed four distinct perspectives. These included: (a) no impact on trust; (b) decreased trust, driven by skepticism; (c) conditional trust depended on contextual factors; and (d) increased trust with verification intentions.

Many participants indicated that knowing a story was generated or assisted by AI would not significantly alter their level of trust. For them, trust was primarily anchored in the credibility of the media institution or journalist, rather than the technological tools used in the production process. AU02 explained:

I have entrusted the media to provide me information, and if this person saw it fit and made this article with the help of ChatGPT, and they saw it fit to release it to the public, I think nobody in the media would just release something that they did not go through.

Similarly, E11 suggested that GenAI use is often a pragmatic decision rather than a credibility concern: “For me, I think it will not really affect me because I know maybe the journalist just used GenAI to save time, to be more creative...maybe in not a lot of time, and even maybe save money and costs.” IF02 also emphasized that the source of the information remains the key determinant of trust, stating that “what is important is that the person who got the original story is somebody I can trust, and the information is balanced.”

In addition, most of our participants described the use of GenAI as increasingly normalized in journalism, viewing it as another technological tool within the news production process, and human oversight and editorial judgment were seen as sufficient safeguards for maintaining credibility (AU01; E02; ITE12; PM07). For instance, a 30-year-old logistics noted: “I’ve embraced AI. I see how useful it could be, so I’d never judge anyone for using it” (AU01). Similarly, a 45-year-old newsroom technologist compared GenAI to other routine newsroom technologies:

If that journalist was well-trained....AI is just like any other technological tool. It’s like using a computer to help you type faster....But if the facts were wrong from the beginning, even if that journalist wrote that story on his or her own without any tools, the story will still be inaccurate.

These sentiments were echoed by a 43-year-old male technology and governance professional: “It won’t give me any bias because this is a tool that has been created to help our work become easier” (PM07). Notably, none of the Kenyan journalists interviewed expressed that GenAI disclosure would have no impact on trust, suggesting that journalists may be more sensitive to the potential reputational damage of GenAI use in journalism.

Other stakeholders indicated that GenAI disclosure could reduce their trust in a news story due to skepticism about GenAI, specifically the perception that it lacks “human-touch” and accountability (AU03; AU10; E12). For instance, AU03 noted that “knowing it will affect my trust in the content,” while AU10 said that “It’s like asking me, would you love me more if I’m lying to you? It will definitely affect my thinking and

my judgment, and probably I'll stop following you as a source." Some participants also raised concerns about GenAI's inability to handle sensitive social issues appropriately. A 27-year-old data science intern, for example, referenced the local issue of female genital mutilation in Kenya, arguing that GenAI lacks the human sensitivity needed to report on such topics and could potentially introduce bias (AU15). Influencers believed that GenAI assistance diminishes the originality and authenticity of content. As a 40-year-old male blogger explained, once audiences know a machine helped produce the work, "your perception about the whole piece changes" because it no longer reflects the creator's original thoughts (IF01). An urban-based data product manager argued that AI often produces low-value content because it is "not smart enough or creative enough" to generate truly meaningful material (ITE14). A content regulation officer suggests that GenAI-assisted content may appear less "authentic" and "original" (PM03).

Furthermore, many journalists themselves expressed strong skepticism, arguing that disclosure could undermine trust not only in the story but also in the journalist and the media organization (J01; J02; J04; J06; J11). Some described heavy reliance on GenAI as a form of "lazy" journalism (J01; J06). For instance, J01 viewed the use of GenAI as an indicator of shortcut reporting, while J06 said disclosure would make them question whether journalists are "too lazy" to write their own stories. Similarly, J05 stated that knowing a story was produced with GenAI would lead them to question the journalist's professionalism and training, asking whether the journalist had "really gone to school to study journalism." J11 added that disclosure might create bias against the media organization itself, as audiences may assume that writers rely excessively on GenAI rather than conducting their own research or applying their own judgment.

Some stakeholders also emphasized that the influence of GenAI disclosure on trust is highly contextual and cannot be reduced to a simple increase or decrease in trust (AU05; E01; IF10; ITE04; J21). Rather, trust depends on factors such as the news topic, the reporting context, and the degree of GenAI involvement. For example, a 31-year-old advocate explained that the acceptability of GenAI use varies by the type of news being reported (AU05). She suggested that AI might be appropriate for tasks such as visualizing events or clarifying logistical details, but would be far less acceptable for reporting on sensitive issues, such as national disasters or public health crises, including the Covid outbreak (AU05). Specifically, she noted, "AI would work in some circumstances; in others, it would never work" (AU05). Similarly, an assistant professor highlighted how contextual cues can shape perceptions of credibility, recalling how in some Kenyan communities, audiences distrust television reports when sources hide their identity, interpreting such signals as evidence of fabrication (E15). This indicates that disclosure practices can influence not only individual trust but also broader community perceptions of credibility.

Stakeholders also consider AI-assisted content that retains clear human editorial oversight more acceptable, whereas fully AI-generated content raises concern. For instance, E01 noted that trust depends on whether the journalist remains the originator of the idea: "If the journalist is the originator of the idea, that's good. But if they are using AI to generate the ideas for them, it gives me lower confidence." Similarly, E08 explained that trust could still be maintained when journalists collaborate with AI, as long as the information is truthful, while also acknowledging that AI can produce inaccurate information. E13 likewise argued that trust depends on whether AI use reflects overreliance and what specific tasks the technology is used for. Influencers emphasize the importance of maintaining a "human touch." As IF10 explained, the presence of human judgment and contribution makes AI-assisted content more acceptable, since many people now assume that AI tools are widely used. IT03 added that the AI system's sophistication also matters, with more

advanced models perceived as more reliable than outdated or poorly trained tools. ITE04 emphasized the importance of clarifying the level of GenAI involvement, arguing that partial versus full AI generation should be distinguished. AI-generated content does not necessarily mean the story is false, but it may still introduce “a semblance of mistrust” (ITE04). Journalists expressed similar views. For example, J21 noted that their familiarity with AI makes them more comfortable trusting AI-assisted stories, but they would be skeptical if an entire article were generated solely by AI.

Finally, disclosure increased trust but also verification intention, as some participants viewed the disclosure of GenAI use as a signal of honesty and accountability (E03; IF15; ITE11). For them, transparency about AI involvement demonstrated ethical responsibility and openness toward audiences. As E03 remarked, knowing that a journalist openly acknowledged GenAI use made them feel “proud” of the journalist for being “that honest” and transparent. Similarly, E05 argued that a journalist who discloses GenAI assistance may actually appear more trustworthy than one who does not, because disclosure indicates a willingness to be transparent about the production process. Participants also emphasized that clear attribution enables audiences to evaluate the credibility of content more effectively. For example, a 28-year-old influencer explained that knowing GenAI was used allows audiences to understand where the information originated and potentially trace or verify it themselves, which increases their willingness to trust the journalist (IF15). Likewise, a 30-year-old cybersecurity analyst noted that by identifying where GenAI was used, audiences can pay closer attention to potential limitations, such as missing context or overlooked local nuances, and therefore engage with the story more critically (ITE11).

Furthermore, many participants expressed that disclosure encourages more careful information consumption. Rather than rejecting AI-assisted news outright, these stakeholders described adopting a “trust but verify” approach (AU12; E14; IF11). For instance, E14 explained that disclosure could increase their trust in the journalist’s honesty but also motivate them to consult additional sources when the topic is important, such as health issues. AU12 argued that disclosure would not necessarily change their perception of the information itself but would prompt them to verify the details, particularly for sensitive topics. IF11 summarized it as “trust but verify,” while IF14 explained that they would still read the content but judge its credibility based on whether it contained misinformation. Journalists also described adopting more rigorous verification practices when encountering AI-assisted content. For example, J18 said they would carefully recheck data analysis or data visualization elements, while J17 noted that disclosure would prompt them to fact-check the information “twice or three times.”

Stakeholder groups differed in their views on how GenAI disclosure would affect trust in news. News audiences tended to focus first on the media outlet’s reputation and the story’s content, emphasizing the importance of verifying information and judging credibility based on what the news conveys (AU02; AU08). Educators generally believed that trust depends on how AI is used, emphasizing that journalists should protect the originality of ideas and human contribution; for them, AI use itself does not necessarily reduce trust if it is applied responsibly (E02; E11). Influencers felt that disclosure does not necessarily reduce trust; instead, they value authenticity, originality, and a human voice, often viewing disclosure as a sign of honesty (IF09; IF15). ITEs paid attention to technical details such as whether the model is up to date and whether the content is clearly labeled as AI-assisted or AI-generated (ITE03; ITE04). Journalists, however, were more skeptical and believed that disclosure would lower audience trust, even though many still supported transparency about the level of AI involvement and insisted that news should not be produced entirely by

GenAI (J05; J06). Policymakers also tended to think AI involvement could weaken trust and emphasized the need for explainable AI and clearer rules around disclosure (PM03; PM10).

5. Discussion

Our study is among the first to explore how different Kenyan stakeholder groups perceive GenAI disclosure in journalism and how these perceptions shape trust in news. The findings point to a nuanced and conditional stance toward disclosure. Stakeholders viewed disclosure as a transparency expectation and a way to preserve professional boundaries, but argue that disclosure should vary by topic, context, and extent of GenAI involvement. Importantly, the impact of disclosure on trust is not straightforward. Trust in GenAI-assisted or AI-generated news is shaped not only by disclosure itself but also by individuals' prior trust in media institutions and their broader attitudes toward GenAI. Participants also emphasized that trust varies depending on the type of story, the level of GenAI use, and the content.

We found that Kenyan stakeholders, especially news audiences, expect journalists to disclose their use of GenAI in journalistic work and view this as part of their right to know. This expectation aligns with broader norms of transparency in journalism, where both internal and external actors should be able to monitor and critique journalistic practices (Deuze, 2005; Karlsson, 2010). Across groups, participants emphasized a "human-in-the-loop" approach, highlighting editorial judgment and journalists' active involvement rather than full reliance on AI tools (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025; de-Lima-Santos et al., 2025). Hence, disclosure is not only about transparency but also about reinforcing professional boundaries and upholding journalistic authority (Ashuri et al., 2026; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025).

Importantly, Kenyan stakeholders expressed conditional support for GenAI disclosure, emphasizing that its appropriateness depends on the type of issue being reported. In particular, they were more concerned about AI use in covering sensitive social topics. For example, participants referenced female genital mutilation as an issue that requires deep cultural understanding and human sensitivity, arguing that GenAI may not fully grasp such complexities and could introduce bias if used in reporting. As a result, they felt disclosure is especially necessary in these contexts. Similar concerns were about political and cultural topics, where stakeholders believed AI involvement could shape narratives in problematic ways. Prior research has also shown that biased AI outputs can reinforce colonial perspectives and has called for more inclusive governance approaches, such as incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives in AI development and use (Ayana et al., 2024). Our findings echo this need, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive and ethically grounded AI practices in journalism (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025).

Regarding the influence of GenAI disclosure on trust in news, our findings suggest a double-edged sword effect. On the one hand, for stakeholders who already trust media organizations and view GenAI as a standard journalistic tool, disclosure does not significantly affect their level of trust. This reflects the idea that trust in news is multidimensional, operating at different levels such as trust in media institutions, journalists, and the content itself (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Our study shows that Kenyan stakeholders do not evaluate trust solely on the basis of news content but also consider the reputation of media organizations and the professional norms that guide their work. Moreover, trust in institutions in Kenya is shaped by multiple factors, with exposure to news playing an important role (Zhang et al., 2025).

On the other hand, many Kenyan stakeholders felt that GenAI disclosure could reduce trust, largely because GenAI is seen as lacking the “human touch.” While they support disclosure to distinguish between human- and GenAI-produced content, they also worry that GenAI involvement may weaken the originality and authenticity of news. This tension is reflected in prior research showing that labeling AI-generated news can lower perceived credibility and make content seem less believable (Toff & Simon, 2025). Journalists, in particular, were highly aware of this dilemma: Although they recognize that the public expects transparency, they are concerned that disclosure may ultimately undermine trust (Altay & Gilardi, 2024; Ananny & Crawford, 2018). Importantly, none of the Kenyan journalists suggested that disclosure would have no effect; instead, they consistently expressed sensitivity to the potential reputational risks of using GenAI, particularly the risk of eroding news trust. As journalistic epistemic authority has been challenged in this agentic era (Ashuri et al., 2026), journalists are not only increasingly aware of how it should be used (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026) but also how it should be disclosed.

Furthermore, Kenyan stakeholders emphasized that their trust in GenAI-disclosed news is conditional on both the topic and the degree of AI involvement. When GenAI is used as a supporting tool with clear human oversight, it is generally not seen as reducing trust; however, fully AI-generated content tends to raise skepticism and lower confidence. These concerns become more pronounced for sensitive topics, such as national disasters or public health crises, where stakeholders view “human-in-the-loop” as essential (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025). These findings point to the need for more nuanced disclosure practices. Rather than simple labels, stakeholders appear to expect contextualized explanations of how and why GenAI is used, as limited or unclear labeling may lead to misunderstanding and unintended backfire effects (Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). In addition, some participants viewed GenAI disclosure as a sign of honesty, which can increase trust in the newsroom. However, this increased trust does not eliminate skepticism; instead, it leads to greater efforts to verify information. This “trust but verify” practice indicates ongoing concerns about the potential for bias and misinformation in GenAI tools, which could undermine the accuracy and credibility of the news (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Umejei et al., 2025).

Overall, our study shows that Kenyan stakeholders hold conflicting views on GenAI disclosure and its impact on trust in news. Across groups, they emphasize the oversight of journalists in the news production process, highlighting the importance of a human-in-the-loop practice (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025). Stakeholders also highlight the need for cultural and issue sensitivity, particularly for topics prone to bias or misinformation, and often adopt a “trust but verify” mindset when engaging with AI-assisted or generated news. These findings offer important theoretical contributions to research on transparency and trust in the Global South, especially given the limited empirical work examining how African stakeholders perceive disclosure practices, despite ongoing policy and industry discussions (KNA, 2026; Mboto, 2026). At a practical level, the results suggest that simple labeling of GenAI use in news production may not be sufficient. Kenyan stakeholders expect more detailed, context-specific explanations of how AI is used and the extent of its involvement, particularly in relation to sensitive issues. The Kenyan journalism industry can explore whether providing such contextualized transparency can be more effective in maintaining trust in news.

Our study also has limitations that warrant acknowledgment. First, because of the interview-based design, this study does not directly test the causal effects of GenAI disclosure on trust; instead, it captures stakeholders’ perceptions of its influence. However, given that prior research has largely relied on experimental methods (Toff & Simon, 2025), our qualitative approach offers richer, more nuanced insights

into how people make sense of disclosure in real-world contexts. These findings can help inform future experimental designs, particularly in testing how different forms of labeling and varying levels of contextual information shape trust in news. Second, because we relied on snowball sampling, the sample may be drawn from relatively homogeneous social networks. For example, our sample is relatively highly educated and contains slightly more females than males, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader Kenyan population. In addition, because our results are based on self-reported interview data, they may be subject to social desirability bias and recall inaccuracies. Third, when discussing disclosure, we did not explicitly distinguish between AI-generated or assisted content, allowing participants to interpret and respond to these concepts more freely. While this approach enabled broader, more exploratory insights, it may also have blurred important distinctions between these categories. Future research could build on this by systematically comparing the effects of different types of AI involvement on trust in news.

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Data Availability

Data available upon reasonable request.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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About the Authors



Bingbing Zhang (PhD, Pennsylvania State University) is an assistant professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa. Her research areas include media effects, political communication, health/science communication, and emerging technologies. Her methodological expertise spans both quantitative and qualitative methods.



Kevin C. Mudavadi (PhD, Indiana University-Bloomington) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Georgia State University, USA. He examines how strategic messages are shaped within organizational and institutional contexts, especially during political shifts, technological disruptions, and information disorder.



Chenghan Zhou (MA, Marquette University) is an incoming PhD student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa, USA. His research interests center on journalism studies, political communication, government transparency, misinformation, and news trust.