

# Do Malaysian Newsrooms Jump on the AI Bandwagon? Empirical Evidence From Journalists' Perspectives

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## Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly promoted as a transformative force in journalism, yet most research on newsroom AI adoption remains concentrated in Western and other well-resourced media settings. This study examines how AI is interpreted, organized, and used in Malaysian newsrooms, offering insight from an emerging Southeast Asian media context. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 20 journalists across six Malaysian news organizations, the article investigates how national AI governance signals are translated into newsroom norms, how organizational resources and managerial priorities shape uptake, and how AI is incorporated into everyday reporting, editing, and verification. The analysis shows that AI adoption in Malaysian newsrooms is uneven and selective rather than uniform. First, national AI momentum has not yet produced strong newsroom-level governance; instead, the practice remains shaped by limited written rules, selective disclosure, and strong human accountability. Second, organizational capacity is patchy, with uneven access to tools, training, and infrastructural support across organizations and roles. Third, AI is used mainly in bounded, assistive tasks such as transcription, translation, summarization, and headline generation, while verification labor is redistributed rather than reduced. The findings identify a typology of newsroom responses—cautious minimalists, experimental pragmatists, and human-gated adopters—showing that Malaysian newsrooms are not simply “jumping on the AI bandwagon,” but engaging AI pragmatically under uneven governance and resource conditions.

## Keywords

AI; generative AI; journalism practice; Malaysia; newsroom governance

## 1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from being a peripheral innovation in journalism to a central question for newsroom strategy, editorial governance, and everyday newswork. Earlier discussions of automation in journalism focused largely on algorithmic content production (Thäsler-Kordonouri & Barling, 2025), structured-data reporting, and the broader implications of computational systems for professional authority and editorial judgment (Wölker & Powell, 2021). More recently, the spread of generative AI has extended these debates into routine newsroom functions such as background research, transcription, summarization, and audience-facing content adaptation, while simultaneously intensifying concerns around factual reliability, attribution, transparency, bias, and accountability (Wu et al., 2019). As a result, AI in journalism is no longer only a question of whether news organizations adopt new tools, but of how such tools are interpreted, governed, normalized, and contested within the institutional realities of news production (Mahony & Chen, 2025).

This question is particularly salient in Malaysia, where national AI development has accelerated through recent policy initiatives, governance guidance, and state-backed institutional capacity building. The country's AI push—including the articulation of national governance principles and the establishment of dedicated AI coordination structures—signals a broader ambition to mainstream AI across sectors, including media and communication (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation [MOSTI], 2024; Ministry of Digital, 2024).

Existing scholarship provides important foundations, but it remains uneven in at least three ways. First, much of the literature has concentrated on normative debates, industry forecasts, or journalists' attitudes toward AI, often emphasizing optimism, anxiety, or ethical concern without sufficiently examining the concrete organizational processes through which AI becomes embedded in work routines (Morosoli et al., 2026; Oh & Jung, 2025). Second, studies of digital transformation in journalism have long shown that technological adoption is mediated by professional norms, organizational hierarchies, and resource conditions rather than determined by technical affordances alone (Munoriyarwa, 2024; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025). However, this insight has not yet been adequately extended to generative AI in a way that systematically traces how governance signals are translated into newsroom-level rules, how managerial priorities shape access and uptake, and how journalists negotiate AI use in daily reporting, editing, and verification. Third, empirical evidence remains disproportionately concentrated in Euro-American settings, leaving the Global South—and Southeast Asia in particular—underexamined in research on AI-enabled newsroom transformation. This regional imbalance matters because the conditions under which AI is introduced are shaped not only by technology, but also by local media systems, uneven organizational capacity, language ecologies, platform dependencies, and differentiated professional risk.

This study addresses that gap through a qualitative, multi-site investigation of Malaysian newsrooms. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 20 journalists across six news organizations, the study examines three interrelated questions: how Malaysian journalists interpret national AI governance signals and translate them into newsroom-level rules and norms for AI use; how organizational resources and managerial priorities enable or constrain journalists' AI use in reporting, editing, and verification; and how journalists integrate AI into everyday newsroom routines, including the frictions, uncertainties, and workarounds that accompany such use. Analytically, the study uses governance, capacity, and craft as three sensitizing dimensions for organizing the analysis. These dimensions draw on existing research on AI governance, organizationally mediated technology adoption, and everyday journalistic practice, rather than constituting a new theoretical model.

The current study makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides a journalist-centered account of AI implementation in Malaysian newsrooms, extending scholarship beyond attitudinal or purely normative discussions toward a more grounded understanding of everyday practice. Conceptually, it links macro-level AI governance to meso-level organizational arrangements and micro-level routines of news production, thereby showing how policy signals are refracted through newsroom rules, managerial priorities, and situated professional judgment. Practically, it offers evidence relevant to both newsroom leaders and policymakers by identifying the institutional conditions under which AI use becomes more coherent, accountable, and workable—particularly in contexts marked by uneven resources, ambiguous disclosure norms, and evolving editorial expectations. In doing so, the article argues that the key issue is not whether Malaysian newsrooms are “jumping on the AI bandwagon,” but how AI is being selectively translated, negotiated, and normalized within the structural constraints of contemporary journalism.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *From Automation to Generative AI in Journalism*

Historical development of algorithmic technologies in journalism has progressed from relatively simple automation to increasingly complex generative systems. Initial computational journalism could largely be based on structured data pipelines to generate template news content, a technique called automated journalism or robot reporting by scholars (Siitonen et al., 2024). Such systems were generally confined to high-volume, formula-driven beats, such as financial performance and athletics, where the structured data could be used to generate the text with confidence. Although these tools proved to provide tangible increases in efficiency, they also brought into fundamental doubt the question of authorship and credibility and the editorial rationality underlying journalistic practice (Calvo-Rubio & Rojas-Torrijos, 2024).

With the advent of natural language processing functionality, automation was no longer limited to basic tasks. Systems such as those used by the Associated Press demonstrated that machine-generated prose could support large-scale routine reporting, although these systems still depended on pre-structured inputs and offered limited interpretive capacity (Dörr, 2016). Yet, these platforms were still reliant on pre-structured inputs and could not reason, interpret, or put into context anything other than what was set. Critics observed that this kind of system replicated the surface form of journalism and jettisoned its investigative and sense-making roles, raising the concern of hollowing out editorial labor (Peña Fernández et al., 2023).

The development of large language models, especially transformer-based systems, has significantly expanded the range of newsroom tasks that can be partially automated (Cotfas et al., 2025). In comparison to previous systems with rules, large language models are capable of producing contextually coherent, stylistically varied prose with little to no prompting, and can be applied to a wide range of tasks, including the writing of headlines, the transcription of interviews, and synthesizing background research (Al-Zoubi et al., 2024). Generative AI, therefore, blurs the line between structured and unstructured journalistic work, pushing automation further and into areas that were deemed to need human consideration (Munoriyarwa, 2024). At the same time, hallucination, bias, and uncertain provenance create new verification and accountability risks. More importantly, existing research has not sufficiently examined how these risks are managed under newsroom verification demands, time pressure, and uneven organizational capacity, making the practical incorporation of AI into everyday newsroom routines a key concern.

## **2.2. Governing AI in Journalism: Ethics, Transparency, and Accountability**

As AI becomes more embedded in newsrooms, transparency and accountability have become central concerns in responsible AI governance. Transparency involves not only disclosing machine-assisted or machine-generated content but also enabling editorial scrutiny of how AI outputs are produced (van Dalen, 2026). Transparency, in this respect, goes beyond the mere surface disclosure to include algorithmic explainability. Organizations should explain how AI outputs are produced and make them open to editorial scrutiny, as insufficient accountability may undermine audience trust in journalism.

Empirical studies of newsroom AI governance, however, suggest a substantial gap between normative principles and institutional practice. Drawing on 143 interviews across leading publishers, Simon (2025) shows that AI is being integrated across multiple stages of gatekeeping primarily to enhance efficiency, optimize workflows, and strengthen calculability within news organizations. Gómez-Diago (2025) similarly identifies selective disclosure, whereby organizations are more likely to publicize AI use associated with innovation than uses involving errors, bias, or system limitations. Transparency therefore remains situational and negotiable rather than a settled professional norm.

Accountability frameworks have been proposed as one response to these problems, drawing on media governance, professional ethics, and technology regulation to argue for more formalized oversight structures (Porlezza, 2023). Their implementation, however, is uneven because smaller and resource-constrained newsrooms may lack the personnel, expertise, and infrastructure required for extensive governance systems. Responsible AI governance may therefore be easier to institutionalize in well-resourced organizations. The key question for this study is consequently how broader governance principles are translated into workable newsroom rules, norms, and expectations under uneven organizational conditions.

## **2.3. Newsroom Adoption as Organizationally Mediated Change**

AI adoption in journalism should not be understood as a straightforward process of technological diffusion. The uptake of new technologies is shaped by the institutional contexts in which they are introduced, including editorial hierarchies, occupational cultures, commercial pressures, and technical infrastructures (Liesa-Orús et al., 2023). AI adoption therefore reflects organizational conditions rather than merely managerial decisions or technical upgrades (Booyse & Scheepers, 2024). Recent studies show that organizational size and resource availability shape AI adoption. Better-resourced newsrooms with dedicated technology teams tend to integrate AI more systematically, whereas smaller and local outlets often adopt it incrementally and under stronger financial or productivity pressures. As a result, AI adoption is filtered through existing organizational priorities concerning efficiency, labor, and journalistic quality.

Professional identity and occupational culture have had less systematic consideration in influencing adoption. Journalists' commitment to human judgment and editorial responsibility can generate resistance to AI, particularly where editorial control is at stake. At the same time, existing research often treats journalists as a relatively homogeneous occupational group, overlooking differences among reporters, editors, producers, and other newsroom roles. This intra-organizational variation is important for the present study because organizational resources, editorial authority, and managerial priorities may enable or constrain AI use differently across newsroom functions.

Emerging research from the Global South and Southeast Asia indicates that uneven AI adoption is shaped by organizational and structural conditions rather than by technological availability alone. Studies of Pakistani journalism identify organizational, technological, and professional constraints alongside perceived opportunities for AI-assisted newswork. Research in South African and broader Southern African newsrooms similarly describes AI uptake as slow and uneven, highlighting limited tool access, infrastructural inequalities, and shortages of technical expertise (Munoriyarwa, 2024). Cross-national research across Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa further shows that journalists' uses and expectations of AI are shaped by local organizational and technological environments (Umejei et al., 2025). Within Southeast Asia, Jalli (2025) documents how Malaysian journalists negotiate AI adoption, cultural sensitivity, professional identity, verification, and editorial control, while Salathong et al. (2025) show that AI use in Thai newsrooms remains concentrated in ideation, information synthesis, and patterned content, with wider integration constrained by reliability concerns, language limitations, and uneven AI literacy. These studies suggest that Global South adoption is better understood as a context-dependent process shaped by unequal infrastructures, institutional priorities, and professional norms rather than as simple technological delay. Building on this scholarship, the present study examines how governance, organizational capacity, and journalistic craft interact across six Malaysian news organizations.

#### ***2.4. AI in Everyday Newswork: Routines, Frictions, and Workarounds***

Beyond governance and organizational strategy, research increasingly examines how AI is incorporated into everyday journalistic labor. Rather than operating as a separate technological layer, AI interacts with established newsroom routines, deadlines, and editorial expectations. News production routines therefore provide a useful lens for understanding how AI reshapes reporting, editing, and verification practices (Abdulrauf et al., 2025).

Empirical data on AI-supported workflows have also found a steady behavior pattern that scholars refer to as productive friction: the sense of opposition or inconvenience which can, although temporarily disruptive, lead to reflection and skill acquisition in the practices of practitioners (Matsiola & Pilitsidou, 2025). For example, automated transcription may accelerate interview processing while generating errors that require human correction, redistributing rather than eliminating verification labor (Ting et al., 2024). Under intense deadline pressure, however, such friction may become an additional burden rather than a source of learning.

Workarounds constitute another important dimension of everyday AI use that has only recently begun to receive systematic attention. When AI tools do not adequately fit the demands of newsroom practice, journalists often develop informal compensatory strategies that depart from the intended uses envisioned by system designers (Ishengoma & Magolanga, 2025). These practices demonstrate both journalistic adaptability and the continuing mismatch between AI capabilities and professional requirements. What remains underexplored is how such routines, frictions, and workarounds are shaped by wider governance and organizational capacity. The present study addresses this gap by examining AI implementation as a negotiated newsroom practice rather than a purely technical or managerial process.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Setting

This study examines AI implementation in Malaysian newsrooms through a qualitative, multi-site design. The six organizations were selected purposively to maximize variation in organizational form, ownership, language, and production platform rather than to provide statistical representation of the Malaysian media sector. Together, they include a national news agency (BERNAMA), a public-service broadcaster (RTM), a commercial broadcast and digital news organization (TV9/Media Prima), an English-language legacy newspaper (*New Straits Times*), a Malay-language news outlet (Harian Metro), and a digital-first platform (Getaran). All six were actively engaged in news production and provided access to journalists involved in reporting, editing, broadcasting, or digital content production, where AI tools could potentially be incorporated. Selection also reflected feasible access through small-world sampling. This variation enabled the study to examine how AI governance, organizational capacity, and newsroom practice differ across institutional settings while remaining situated within the same national media environment.

Malaysia provides a particularly relevant context for this inquiry because AI adoption is unfolding amid intensified national attention to digital transformation, governance, and institutional capacity-building. Rather than assuming that national AI momentum translates directly into newsroom practice, this study treats news organizations as situated institutional environments in which external policy signals are interpreted, filtered, and operationalized through existing editorial routines, managerial priorities, and resource constraints. The selected organizations therefore offer an analytically valuable setting for exploring how AI is translated from a broad governance agenda into the practical realities of reporting, editing, and verification.

#### 3.2. Sampling and Participants

Participants were recruited using small-world sampling (Firdaus et al., 2024), a qualitative recruitment strategy developed specifically for journalism research. This approach is particularly suitable for studies of journalists because newsroom access is often shaped by professional trust, occupational sensitivity, and informal referral networks rather than by open or random access. Small-world sampling has been shown to support qualitative sample reliability and validity while enabling efficient and effective recruitment of journalists as research participants.

Recruitment began through initial professional contacts and was subsequently extended through referrals across organizations and newsroom roles. This approach made it possible to reach journalists occupying different positions in editorial and production workflows, while also capturing variation in seniority, gender, and professional experience. The final sample comprised 20 journalists drawn from six Malaysian news organizations. Participants included reporters, editors, producers, and digital or multimedia newswriters whose roles placed them in direct contact with newsroom decision-making and everyday content production. Participant details are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participants profiles.

| Pseudonym | Gender | News organization | Role area                | Years of experience |
|-----------|--------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Farah     | Female | Getaran           | Journalist               | 3                   |
| Amir      | Male   | Getaran           | Editor                   | 6                   |
| Nadia     | Female | Getaran           | Multimedia journalist    | 4                   |
| Hafiz     | Male   | Getaran           | News desk/editorial      | 8                   |
| Aina      | Female | BERNAMA           | Journalist               | 5                   |
| Rizal     | Male   | BERNAMA           | Senior journalist        | 10                  |
| Suraya    | Female | BERNAMA           | Sub-editor               | 7                   |
| Daniel    | Male   | BERNAMA           | Multimedia producer      | 4                   |
| Hani      | Female | BERNAMA           | News editor              | 12                  |
| Iman      | Female | RTM               | Broadcast journalist     | 6                   |
| Faiz      | Male   | RTM               | Producer                 | 11                  |
| Nurul     | Female | RTM               | Journalist               | 3                   |
| Shafiq    | Male   | RTM               | News editor              | 9                   |
| Liyana    | Female | RTM               | Digital content producer | 5                   |
| Melissa   | Female | NST               | Journalist               | 4                   |
| Jason     | Male   | NST               | Senior journalist        | 8                   |
| Priya     | Female | Harian Metro      | Copy editor              | 6                   |
| Arif      | Male   | Harian Metro      | News desk/editorial      | 7                   |
| Sofia     | Female | TV9/Media Prima   | Digital journalist       | 2                   |
| Kumar     | Male   | TV9/Media Prima   | Assistant editor         | 13                  |

Note: Some job titles have been slightly generalized to protect participants' identities while preserving their functional roles in newsroom production.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Ethical Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between February and April 2026 through telephone calls or online meetings, depending on participants' availability and preference. Potential participants were approached individually through the researchers' professional networks and subsequent referrals. Before each interview, participants received information about the study and provided informed consent. The interviews lasted an average of 67 minutes.

The interview guide was structured around three areas corresponding to the research questions: participants' awareness of national AI initiatives and newsroom-level governance; organizational resources, training, managerial priorities, and access to AI tools; and the everyday use of AI in reporting, editing, translation, transcription, and verification. Follow-up questions were used to explore specific experiences, errors, workarounds, disclosure practices, and professional boundaries.

Interviews were conducted in English or Malay according to participants' preferences. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Malay-language quotations selected for publication were translated into English and checked against the original transcripts to preserve their intended meaning. The study received ethical approval from the first author's university research ethics

committee. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and identifying information was removed from the transcripts and reported findings.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The interview data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) approach. Reflexive thematic analysis was appropriate because it identifies patterned meanings across participants' accounts while treating interpretation as an active, reflexive process. The analysis followed a hybrid logic, combining inductive attention to participants' accounts with three sensitizing dimensions: governance, capacity, and craft. These dimensions guided the analysis without functioning as predetermined coding categories.

Analysis proceeded recursively. Transcripts were read repeatedly for familiarization, followed by initial coding of participants' descriptions of AI use, opportunities, uncertainties, constraints, verification practices, and organizational conditions. Related codes were then compared and clustered into broader analytic categories. For example, codes concerning policy awareness, disclosure, and accountability informed governance-related categories; access to tools, training, and managerial support informed capacity-related categories; and routine assistance, verification burdens, workarounds, and professional red lines informed craft-related categories.

These categories were reviewed across participants, organizations, and newsroom roles and developed into the three main themes reported in the findings: uneven newsroom governance, patchy organizational capacity, and bounded and negotiated journalistic craft. Governance, capacity, and craft thus organized and refined the analysis, while their specific content emerged through engagement with the data.

Following theme development, a cross-case comparison examined variation in the breadth of AI use, willingness to experiment, trust in AI outputs, perceived verification costs, and degree of human oversight. This generated three recurring orientations: cautious minimalists, experimental pragmatists, and human-gated adopters. These are treated as ideal-typical orientations rather than fixed or mutually exclusive classifications. Analytic memos documented coding decisions, theme boundaries, and evolving interpretations, while disconfirming cases were examined to capture variation and avoid overstating commonality.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Governance: Translating National AI Momentum Into Uneven Newsroom Rules**

Across the interviews, journalists were generally aware of Malaysia's growing national focus on AI, but this policy momentum had not translated into strong formal newsroom governance. AI use remained shaped by limited written rules, unstable disclosure practices, and reliance on human editorial judgment, indicating partial and uneven institutionalization at the newsroom level.

#### 4.1.1. Policy Awareness Without Strong Internal Rule Formation

Journalists' awareness of national AI developments rarely translated into formal internal rules. Hani at BERNAMA referred directly to the government's *National Guidelines on AI Governance & Ethics*, a national policy guideline issued by the MOSTI and the National AI Office as signals for "responsible and transparent use of AI in news production" (MOSTI, 2024). Yet she acknowledged that "there are no written rules for it yet," with the newsroom instead relying on broad expectations not to use AI as a primary source and to exercise caution with sensitive inputs.

A similar dynamic appeared on TV9/Media Prima. Sofia said she had seen discussions around the *Malaysia National Artificial Intelligence Roadmap 2021–2025*, a government policy roadmap issued by the MOSTI, and understood that the government was trying to guide AI use "responsibly in Malaysia." Yet she immediately qualified this by noting that "we didn't receive very formal briefings about these policies in the newsroom." What existed instead were emerging informal norms: Journalists generally understood that AI should not replace reporting or verification.

At Getaran, Amir also described national AI developments as evidence of "the seriousness of the government" in confronting the AI wave more systematically. However, he noted that these policy signals were discussed only "roughly" and "not comprehensively" between editors and reporters. AI use was allowed, but only in a limited supporting role: "AI use is permitted, but not as a whole or 100 percent...for the final output, it still needs to be checked or edited manually by the editor." Formal policy translation therefore remained limited despite acceptance of AI-assisted work.

Even at RTM, where AI was publicly visible through an AI news anchor, internal governance remained provisional. Iman described the newsroom as learning through experimentation and "making improvements and corrections along the way," adding that "there isn't really a formal policy yet." Thus, even relatively visible AI adoption did not necessarily coincide with formalized newsroom governance.

#### 4.1.2. Selective Disclosure and Human Accountability

Disclosure did not emerge as a universal rule but as a form of boundary work through which journalists distinguished between acceptable backstage assistance and more visible or reputationally risky uses of AI. AI-generated visuals, avatars, or anchors were more likely to be disclosed, while uses such as grammar correction, rewriting, summarization, or transcription often remained undisclosed.

The clearest example came from RTM. Iman explained that the newsroom described its output as "delivered by an AI news anchor" rather than "generated by AI." This wording preserved a boundary between machine presentation and human editorial authorship. As she noted, "The scripts read by the AI anchor are still written and verified by our editors and journalists behind the scenes. The editorial judgment and responsibility remain entirely human."

Similar distinctions appeared elsewhere. Melissa at NST said disclosure was usually applied "particularly for pictures," while Arif at Harian Metro said AI use would be disclosed for images, but "for text, no," because written stories still passed through human gatekeeping. Sofia at TV9/Media Prima captured the ambiguity

directly: The uncertainty lies in “deciding when AI use becomes significant enough that audience should know about it.” Disclosure, then, remained interpretive rather than rule-bound.

Across organizations, participants repeatedly returned to a strong human-in-the-loop accountability principle, insisting that AI may assist but responsibility remains firmly human (van Dalen, 2026). Sofia stressed that “the responsibility for the story still lies with the journalist and the editor,” while Melissa at NST put it even more strongly: “You have 100% responsibility and accountability over how you use it.” This reflects a longstanding professional logic in journalism, where judgment, verification, and public responsibility remain tied to human actors. In the absence of stronger formal rules, responsibility for verification and acceptable AI use therefore remained largely with individual journalists and editors.

Overall, AI governance remained only partially institutionalized, shaped by informal norms, selective disclosure, and continued human editorial accountability.

## **4.2. Capacity: Patchy Resources and Managerial Priorities in AI Uptake**

AI uptake was shaped not simply by journalists’ willingness to use new tools but by uneven organizational capacity and managerial priorities. Access depended on subscriptions, training, workflow support, and guidance, making adoption an organizationally mediated process rather than straightforward technological diffusion. Some journalists relied on free tools and personal experimentation, whereas others had access to paid systems without corresponding governance or institutional support.

### **4.2.1. Uneven Organizational Capacity: Tools, Training, and Infrastructure**

A first pattern was the uneven distribution of tools, training, and infrastructural support across organizations. At one end were low-capacity settings where AI use remained highly individualized. Amir at Getaran described relying only on freely available tools: “I only use ChatGPT or Gemini when necessary.”

He added that the company had not offered any formal guidance on AI use. In this case, AI capacity was thin and ad hoc: Journalists could experiment on their own, but the organization itself had not yet embedded AI into newsroom infrastructure.

By contrast, better-resourced organizations had begun to provide paid tools, but institutional support still remained uneven. At RTM, Iman explained that the newsroom provided a paid version of ChatGPT and used a paid platform for generating the AI news anchor, with costs borne by the company. RTM also occasionally organized workshops and briefings to familiarize staff with AI use in media production. Yet greater access did not necessarily produce mature institutional support, as standardized oversight, auditing, and governance remained limited. Capacity therefore depended not only on tool provision but also on the organizational routines surrounding their use.

A similar intermediate pattern appeared at TV9/Media Prima. Sofia noted, “We do have Gemini Enterprise,” but added that formal rules and structured training remained limited, with learning occurring mostly through informal exchanges and ad hoc experimentation. Likewise, Hani at BERNAMA showed that capacity could also be uneven within organizations: While the fact-checking desk relied on open-source verification tools,

“the editors, sub-editors are given paid access to AI tools.” This suggests that AI capacity was therefore uneven both across organizations and within them, producing different levels of infrastructural embedding rather than a simple divide between adopters and non-adopters.

#### 4.2.2. Managerial Priorities and Uneven Adoption Across Newsroom Roles

Managerial priorities shape what becomes worthwhile. In this sub-theme, participants repeatedly linked AI use to practical newsroom pressures, especially speed, workload reduction, and output efficiency. Melissa at *New Straits Times* stated this most directly when asked what management wanted AI to achieve: “Definitely number one speed.” Arif at *Harian Metro* made the same point even more bluntly: “AI is used definitely for speed and meeting deadlines. That’s the ultimate goal.”

These accounts suggest that AI is often introduced not primarily as a transformative editorial innovation but as part of a broader logic of rationalization, in which new tools are valued for helping organizations accelerate workflow and stretch labor under deadline pressure.

Speed, however, was not the only priority. At RTM, Iman suggested that the AI news anchor was valued more for visibility and signaling innovation than for reducing labor. Although it did not substantially ease newsroom workload, it attracted public attention and enhanced RTM’s profile. Managerial priorities therefore varied: some organizations emphasized efficiency, while others used AI to signal modernization.

Adoption also varied across newsroom roles. Melissa observed that the online desk benefited “more than anyone else” because its work involved rapid uploading and engagement-oriented content, making AI particularly useful for repetitive and time-sensitive tasks. At BERNAMA, Hani’s account suggested that access to paid tools differed across roles, while Sofia at TV9/Media Prima noted that support for AI could vary by editor, with some encouraging its use and others resisting it. These accounts indicate that uptake was shaped not only by technical access but also by task demands and local editorial authority.

Overall, AI uptake reflected uneven organizational resources and managerial priorities rather than a uniform commitment to innovation. Adoption was concentrated where AI aligned most clearly with institutional pressures for speed, visibility, and efficiency, illustrating the negotiated interaction of journalistic, managerial, and technological logics.

#### 4.3. Craft: Negotiating Assistive, Bounded, and Friction-Filled AI Use

AI was rarely treated as an autonomous producer of journalism. Instead, journalists described it as an assistive, bounded tool used mainly for routine, lower-risk tasks such as transcription, translation, summarization, grammar correction, headline suggestions, and background preparation. This suggests a process of selective appropriation, in which AI is adopted where it fits newsroom routines but kept away from core editorial judgment. Rather than replacing journalistic craft, AI is being absorbed into it under continued human control.

#### 4.3.1. Low-Risk Support Tasks as the Main Entry Point

AI gained acceptance most easily in low-risk support tasks rather than in high-stakes editorial decision-making. Jason at NST described this quite explicitly: “Personally, I would use AI for, one, it’s like the basic grammar check. Number 2 is to come up with headlines. But even then, headlines are just suggestions.” He also noted that AI could be helpful for translation because it was capable of “humanizing translations,” even though errors could still slip through. This shows that AI was valued not as a replacement for writing, but as a tool for accelerating language-level refinement.

A similar pattern appeared in BERNAMA. Daniel explained that he used AI mainly for “idea generation, transcription, and translation,” adding that these tasks helped “streamline routine processes and save time, especially when working under tight deadlines.” In his account, AI’s role was fundamentally supportive: It handled repetitive, mechanical work so that he could focus on verification and refining the final story. At Getaran, Hafiz described an even narrower use, saying: “Mostly for translation, but it still needs to be checked and edited at the final stage.”

Thus, AI enters the newsroom most comfortably in tasks closest to clerical acceleration and linguistic assistance, not in areas where professional authority is most at stake. What is being automated, then, is not journalism as such, but selected support functions around it.

#### 4.3.2. Verification Drag and the Redistribution of Journalistic Labor

We use verification drag to describe the additional time, cognitive effort, and accountability work required to scrutinize or cross-check AI-assisted outputs. Unlike routine verification, it arises from uncertainties specific to AI-generated material, including inaccurate transcription, mistranslation, fabricated information, unclear sourcing, and unstable responses across prompts. AI may therefore accelerate initial production while creating additional verification work that offsets its efficiency gains.

Although participants acknowledged that AI could save time, they emphasized that it did not eliminate verification work. Instead, AI often shifted labor downstream by accelerating initial production while creating additional checking and validation before publication. Daniel at BERNAMA illustrated this clearly: A story that previously took about 40 minutes could be completed in roughly 20 minutes with AI-assisted transcription and translation, but the time saved was redirected toward “verification, fact-checking, and refining the narrative.” The efficiency gain therefore reflected a redistribution of effort from routine production to editorial checking rather than a simple reduction in labor.

The same tension appeared at TV9/Media Prima. Kumar used AI to “research background information of the sources,” “draft questions,” transcribe audio, and summarize reports, but stressed that “for journalism, I think accuracy is everything.” After transcription, “I will listen to it again to check accuracy,” while AI-generated information often required a “second prompt, third prompt.” His account shows that verification drag involves not only correcting errors but also managing uncertainty through repeated prompting, comparison, and manual review. AI therefore reduced time at the initial stage while increasing the number of judgment points later in the workflow.

Faiz at RTM took an even more cautious position. He explained, “I generally do not use ChatGPT. Even if AI were to draft an article, I would still need to review and verify all the information myself....At that point, it’s often more efficient to gather and process the information manually.” He also recalled ChatGPT mistranslating “President Trump” as “former president” in Chinese. For Faiz, the verification required could outweigh AI’s efficiency gains, making it unsuitable for routine editorial use and limiting its use mainly to low-risk pre-production tasks.

#### 4.3.3. Workarounds, Red Lines, and Practical Risk Management

Journalists did not rely solely on formal newsroom rules but developed informal workarounds and red lines to manage AI-related risks, particularly where organizational guidance was limited. These included routines around prompting, checking, rewriting, and withholding sensitive information. Two broad boundaries emerged: input red lines concerned confidential, unpublished, personal, or legally sensitive information; while editorial red lines reserved source assessment, ethical judgment, sensitive framing, and final publication decisions for human journalists and editors. These boundaries were maintained largely through individual caution rather than formal rules.

Kumar at TV9/Media Prima described this practical self-governance through his own “thumb rule”: “I tend to avoid putting [confidential things] into public and make sure the information is not out there.” He also limited AI mainly to the “early stage” of story development. At NST, Jason described another workaround: switching tools when ChatGPT or Gemini failed to produce the desired tone or headline structure. He turned instead to Ludwig Guru, noting, “When ChatGPT fails me or Gemini, I hopped on to...Ludwig.” Such practices show journalists actively calibrating tools rather than passively accepting AI outputs.

At Getaran, Hafiz drew a clearer boundary around automation: “AI is man-made. It cannot and should not take over work that requires a ‘human touch.’” Here, “human touch” referred to professional accountability in source assessment, contextual interpretation, ethical and legal judgment, sensitive framing, and final publication approval. It therefore marked the boundary between tasks that could be AI-assisted and those that journalists believed must remain under human control. Similar concerns appeared at RTM, where Faiz noted that checking AI outputs required “extra effort,” and at BERNAMA, where Daniel identified a hallucinated background claim only through cross-checking credible sources.

These red lines also carried practical costs. Avoiding sensitive inputs and retaining human control over higher-risk decisions required additional checking and editorial judgment. For some participants, such as Faiz, verification demands could outweigh AI’s time savings. Risk management could therefore protect editorial standards while also intensifying verification drag by shifting time and responsibility back onto journalists.

Overall, AI was normalized through bounded assistance, verification, and informal risk management rather than wholesale automation. Journalists incorporated AI mainly where it fitted relatively low-risk tasks while retaining human control over higher-risk decisions. Across these practices, three recurring orientations emerged: cautious minimalism, experimental pragmatism, and human-gated adoption. They differed in breadth of AI use, willingness to experiment, trust in outputs, perceived verification costs, and degree of human oversight. These are ideal-typical orientations rather than fixed classifications of individuals or organizations, as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Typology of journalistic orientations toward AI use.

| Type                     | Defining orientation                                                                                  | Classification criteria                                                                                 | Representative codes and evidence                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cautious minimalists     | Restrict AI to very limited, low-risk tasks or avoid it when verification costs appear too high.      | Narrow task range; low trust; preference for manual work; strong concern about errors.                  | Codes: AI avoidance; low trust; verification outweighs efficiency. Evidence: Faiz avoided ChatGPT because reviewing its output could take more time than completing the task manually.                               |
| Experimental pragmatists | Test different AI tools opportunistically to improve speed or solve practical workflow problems.      | Active experimentation; repeated prompting; switching between tools; task-specific use.                 | Codes: tool experimentation; repeated prompting; cross-tool switching. Evidence: Kumar used AI for research, question drafting, transcription, and summarization, but repeatedly prompted and checked the results.   |
| Human-gated adopters     | Incorporate AI more regularly while retaining strong human control over verification and publication. | Broader and more routine use; mandatory human review; clear editorial boundaries; human accountability. | Codes: routine AI assistance; human-in-the-loop; editorial verification. Evidence: Daniel used AI-assisted transcription and translation but redirected the saved time toward verification and narrative refinement. |

Notes: The categories are ideal-typical orientations derived from participants' accounts; they are not mutually exclusive, and journalists may move between them depending on the task, perceived risk, and organizational support available.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

AI in Malaysia has entered the current AI moment with visible national ambition. Government roadmaps, governance guidelines, and institutional initiatives signal that AI is being positioned as part of the country's broader digital future. Yet, as this study shows, the movement from national ambition to newsroom practice is neither direct nor uniform. Based on interviews with journalists across six Malaysian news organizations, the findings suggest that AI in Malaysian journalism is not unfolding as a simple story of rapid adoption or technological enthusiasm. Rather, it is being taken up unevenly through weakly institutionalized governance, patchy organizational capacity, and bounded forms of everyday use. These journalists' experiences suggest that Malaysian newsrooms are not simply "jumping on the AI bandwagon," but engaging with AI selectively and under continuing human gatekeeping.

The first finding shows that national AI momentum has not yet produced strong newsroom-level governance. Journalists were generally aware that AI had become a visible policy issue in Malaysia, but this awareness often remained symbolic rather than procedural. Internal rules were thin, informal, or still emerging, especially around disclosure, provenance, and the boundaries of acceptable use. This reveals a gap between macro-level policy legitimacy and meso-level institutionalization, leaving journalists to rely on professional judgment and editorial caution where formal guidance remains underdeveloped.

The second finding concerns capacity. AI uptake in these newsrooms was shaped not only by whether journalists were willing to use AI, but by whether organizations provided subscriptions, enterprise access, training, workflow support, and role-specific guidance. Some participants worked with free public tools and personal experimentation; others had access to paid systems such as Gemini Enterprise or

newsroom-supported platforms, but still lacked strong infrastructural support. This shows that adoption is mediated by resource inequality and organizational priorities rather than by technological availability alone. In line with research showing that automation in newswork is shaped by competing journalistic, managerial, and technological logics (Thurman et al., 2019), the Malaysian interviews suggest that AI is introduced where it can serve pressing institutional aims: meeting deadlines, producing more content, supporting platform-oriented workflows, or signaling innovation. What journalists described was not a wholesale reconfiguration of journalism, but a more practical push toward speed, efficiency, and calculability—though this push remains uneven because support structures often lag behind expectations (Broussard et al., 2019).

The third finding shows that AI is incorporated into journalistic craft through bounded and negotiated use. Participants employed it mainly for low-risk tasks such as transcription, translation, grammar correction, headline suggestions, and background preparation, while retaining human control over verification, editorial judgment, and publication. These uses did not eliminate labor but often shifted it downstream, as faster initial production required additional checking, rewriting, and validation. This verification drag made efficiency gains conditional on the effort required to make AI outputs professionally usable (Ting et al., 2020). Journalists therefore relied on workarounds, repeated prompting, and informal red lines to preserve editorial standards. What emerged was not frictionless automation but negotiated accommodation.

Importantly, governance, capacity, and craft did not operate independently. Where newsroom rules were weak or ambiguous and organizational resources were uneven, journalists compensated through craft-level safeguards such as repeated checking, manual comparison, re-prompting, restricted data inputs, and avoidance of higher-risk uses. This shifted responsibility for accuracy and acceptable AI use toward individual journalists and editors, intensifying verification drag. Conversely, access to paid tools or enterprise systems did not necessarily produce more mature adoption when disclosure standards, verification protocols, and accountability procedures remained underdeveloped. Responsible AI uptake therefore depended on the alignment of governance, organizational capacity, and professional craft rather than on any single dimension.

Theoretically, this study extends scholarship on AI in journalism by showing how adoption unfolds in a non-WEIRD media context through uneven governance, patchy organizational capacity, and bounded newsroom practice (Jamil, 2021). Compared with better-resourced Western cases, the Malaysian pattern differs less in the basic forms of AI use than in its degree of institutionalization and structural conditions: Aspirations for efficiency and innovation coexist with weak policy translation, unequal access to tools and training, and greater reliance on individual editorial judgment. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical study to examine the applications and current status of AI across Malaysian newsrooms, offering new insight from an emerging Southeast Asian economy. Building on emerging Malaysian and Southeast Asian scholarship, this study offers a multi-organizational account of how governance, capacity, and craft interact in the implementation of AI across Malaysian newsrooms. The case can therefore be understood as one of selective institutionalization under structural asymmetry, in which national AI momentum produces differentiated organizational responses—cautious minimalists, experimental pragmatists, and human-gated adopters—rather than uniform newsroom transformation. AI adoption is thus better conceptualized as a spectrum of negotiated responses shaped by the interaction of journalistic, managerial, and technological logics.

Practically, the findings suggest that the main challenge is not journalists' willingness to use AI, but whether newsrooms can support its use without shifting responsibility entirely onto individuals. Even resource-constrained organizations could establish a basic governance framework comprising an approved-tools list, prohibited data inputs, role-specific guidance, and clear escalation procedures. Newsrooms should distinguish low-risk uses, such as grammar checking and transcription, from higher-risk uses involving generated text, visuals, sensitive reporting, or public-facing content. Low-risk applications may require human review, whereas higher-risk uses should require source verification, editorial approval, and audience disclosure. Accountability should also be clearly distributed: Journalists should verify and document significant AI use, editors should retain final responsibility for publication, and management should provide guidance, training, and oversight. Periodic, sample-based editorial audits could offer a practical and affordable means of reviewing accuracy, disclosure, privacy, and compliance without requiring a dedicated AI governance unit. Training should move beyond tool familiarization to include editorial judgment, provenance awareness, privacy protection, and risk management. For policymakers, national AI agendas should be translated into practical, sector-specific guidance, because policy-level legitimacy alone cannot prevent newsroom AI practices from remaining uneven, improvised, and dependent on individual resilience.

## 6. Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. First, the relatively modest sample and limited number of Malaysian news organizations mean that the findings should be interpreted as analytically informative rather than statistically representative of the national media landscape. Although participants included reporters, editors, producers, and digital or multimedia staff, the study was not designed as a stratified comparison across occupational roles or organizational types. Uneven subgroup sizes and limited representation of technical specialists and senior managers mean that observed role differences should be treated as indicative rather than stable patterns. Future research could use matched, stratified samples to examine how editorial authority, access to AI tools, and publication accountability shape AI use across newsroom positions.

Second, the findings rely on participants' self-reported accounts rather than direct observation of newsroom practice. Reported practices may not fully correspond with actual behavior, particularly around disclosure, verification, privacy, and compliance, and social-desirability effects may have encouraged participants to emphasize responsible AI use while underreporting informal or risky practices. Future research should therefore triangulate interviews with newsroom observation, workflow tracing, tool-use diaries, or editorial documents to examine how AI is incorporated into everyday news production.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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