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EDITORIAL

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Beyond Technological Lag: Re-Centering Marginalized Media Markets in Global AI Journalism

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Abstract

Research on artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism has been built largely on evidence from well-resourced newsrooms in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic nations. This thematic issue focuses on media markets that are marginalized economically, politically, linguistically, or epistemically. Its 17 articles examine newsrooms, journalists, educators, developers, and public discourse across Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Europe, Latin America, BRICS (an international group currently comprising 10 countries: Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates), and the Caribbean. Read together, these studies show that AI adoption at the margins is selective, bounded, and human-gated, shaped by subscription costs, scarce local data, missing newsroom policies, state agendas, and dependence on platforms built elsewhere. Journalists respond with layered boundary work and what contributors call "defensive" forms of governance, protecting verification, judgement, and accountability as human domains. The issue also shows that AI is made meaningful through discourse before it is experienced, as hype, risk narratives, and representations position marginalized societies as recipients rather than co-producers of AI futures. We argue that marginality is relational and that it changes what AI does to journalism. We close with an agenda for comparative, locally grounded, and decolonial research on AI and news.

Keywords

AI governance; artificial intelligence; boundary work; Global South; journalism; marginalized media markets; platform dependency; technology adoption

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved from an experimental frontier into an inescapable infrastructure across global news ecosystems. However, academic scholarship into newsroom automation and computational journalism has historically suffered from a severe geographic and epistemological concentration. The vast majority of published research has centered on high-resource news organizations within Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) nations (Henrich et al., 2010). This structural imbalance has frequently generated universalizing theoretical models that assume technological adoption unfolds linearly, driven by corporate innovation capital and unconstrained technological capacity.

The arrival of generative AI (GenAI) in newsrooms has intensified this flood of scholarship concentrated in WEIRD nations. Most of what we know about automated news, AI-assisted verification, newsroom guidelines, and audience responses to AI disclosure comes from a small set of affluent media systems in North America and Western Europe (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Simon, 2022). Yet most of the world's journalists work in media markets marked by thin advertising revenues, fragile press freedom, limited infrastructure, under-resourced languages, and heavy dependence on technologies designed elsewhere (Mutsvairo et al., 2021). In these spaces, AI is not simply a tool that arrives late. It enters newsrooms through platforms whose terms local actors cannot negotiate, it is trained on data that rarely reflects local realities, and it is debated in public discourse that often frames these societies as followers in a race defined by others (de-Lima-Santos & Jamil, 2024).

This thematic issue directly challenges these Western-centric assumptions. Bringing together 17 contributions from Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the BRICS (an international group currently comprising 10 countries: Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates) alliance, and the Caribbean, this collection demonstrates that technological integration in the Global South and semi-peripheral media markets cannot be reduced to a narrative of simple technological lag or passive consumption. Instead, news organizations and media practitioners in such markets operate within complex matrices of material scarcity, infrastructural instability, platform dependency, political pressure, and Western algorithmic bias. In other words, journalists across these diverse geographies engage in what can be conceptualized as negotiated accommodation, defensive AI governance, and layered boundary work.

In this editorial, we first reflect on what "marginalized media markets" means. We then introduce the articles in four clusters and draw out the insights that cut across them. We conclude with an agenda for future research.

2. Rethinking Marginality in AI and Journalism

We use "marginalized media markets" deliberately instead of "Global South" or "Global Majority." The studies show that marginality is relational. It describes a position within global hierarchies of capital, infrastructure, language, and knowledge, not a fixed place on a map. A Southern African community newspaper (Ncube et al., 2026), a public broadcaster in Cameroon's Anglophone regions (Nfor, 2026), a newsroom in Kosovo (Gërguri et al., 2026), and a Caribbean outlet within the Kingdom of the Netherlands (de Cooker et al., 2026) share little in political terms. However, they do share a structural position: They adopt technologies they did not

design, under economic pressures they cannot control, while their perspectives remain largely absent from the scholarship that defines "best practice."

Marginality also cuts across scales. China hosts some of the world's most advanced AI deployment in news, yet its journalists negotiate AI under state-sanctioned boundaries that sit outside Western normative models (Kuai & Karlsson, 2026; Wei, 2026). Globo is one of the largest media organizations in Latin America, yet its journalists face uncertainties produced by an AI ecosystem governed from Silicon Valley (Paladino et al., 2026). Marginality, in other words, can coexist with scale and capacity. What defines it is the distance between those who build AI systems and those who must make journalism with them.

This connects the thematic issue to debates on data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019) and on the epistemologies of the South (de Sousa Santos, 2014). However, the contributors resist common easy narratives: that marginalized newsrooms simply "lag behind," and that AI will let them "leapfrog" structural constraints. Neither describes what they found. Instead, the articles document situated, uneven, and often strategic forms of adoption, in which journalists exercise bounded agency within asymmetric systems of power.

3. Overview of the Contributions

3.1. Structural Precarity, Platformization, and Defensive AI Governance

A foundational theme running across the thematic issue is the profound material and infrastructural disparity that distinguishes marginalized media markets from the Global North. While Euro-American newsrooms experiment with custom enterprise models supported by substantial capital investments (Simon, 2022), newsrooms in low- and middle-income countries navigate basic operational bottlenecks.

In their study of Cameroonian newsrooms, Nfor (2026) demonstrates how routine news production is routinely disrupted by unstable electrical grids, exorbitant internet bandwidth costs, and an absence of organizational software subscriptions. In this context, GenAI tools, such as ChatGPT and Gemini, are adopted not through top-down managerial strategy, but through bottom-up, individualized practitioner initiative. For Anglophone journalists in Cameroon operating within French-dominated administrative spheres, AI translation tools serve as an essential survival mechanism to bypass postcolonial cross-lingual information brokers.

Similarly, an examination of Ghanaian data journalism reveals that while reporters leverage AI for data visualization, web scraping, and transcription, their practices are severely constrained by prohibitive enterprise subscription fees and an acute shortage of localized datasets (Adjin-Tettey & Danso, 2026). In southern Africa, across South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, financial precarity compounded by the decline of international philanthropic funding has fostered widespread skepticism toward AI integration, as local newsrooms lack the capital to invest in technical literacy or secure software access (Ncube et al., 2026).

Beyond material scarcity, newsrooms in the Global South face an asymmetrical power dynamic with global technology platforms. Examining Al-Masry Al-Youm, one of Egypt's leading independent news organizations, Elsheikh and Jackson (2026) introduce the concept of "defensive AI governance." They document how

reliance on externally provided infrastructures, such as the FT Strategies and Google News Initiative AI Launchpad, embeds deep platform dependency into daily operations. As previous studies have shown, this dependency also extends beyond technological infrastructure to the funding and institutional relationships through which platforms shape newsroom innovation in the Global South (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2023; Mesquita & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; Munoriyarwa et al., 2025). Together, these dynamics suggest that the contemporary relationship between marginalized newsrooms and technology platforms is one in which access to infrastructure, expertise, and funding can deepen forms of structural dependency.

To counteract the risks of platformization and digital value extraction (where global AI crawlers scrape local news archives without financial compensation, inflating server bandwidth costs), Egyptian news managers and technical staff construct formal and informal organizational guardrails. Defensive AI governance operates through four core criteria: (a) restricting AI to low-risk operational duties while excluding it from sensitive political reporting; (b) enforcing mandatory human-in-the-loop review for all automated outputs; (c) institutionalizing explicit internal sanctions for undisclosed or unverified AI usage; and (d) implementing server-level controls and rate-limiting protocols to prevent unauthorized scraping of proprietary journalistic archives (Elsheikh & Jackson, 2026).

3.2. Platform Dependency and Defensive AI Governance

A second major pillar addresses the epistemological tensions generated by importing Western-trained AI models into culturally, linguistically, and politically distinct contexts. Mainstream commercial large language models are predominantly trained on Western data corpora, embedding structural blind spots regarding indigenous history, local governance structures, and regional dialects.

In an analysis of metajournalistic discourse across nine English-speaking Sub-Saharan African nations, Zirugo and Mutsvairo (2026) identified a pervasive fear of missing out driving regional AI hype. However, this is counterbalanced by an urgent demand for a decolonial, hybridized adoption framework. African media commentators emphasize that uncritical importation of Western AI systems risks perpetuating the "coloniality of knowledge and power" by imposing foreign values, misinterpreting local sociopolitical nuances, and failing to transcribe non-Western accents.

To counter these epistemic imbalances, African media actors advocate for homegrown AI systems trained on local data repositories and anchored in Afro-centric epistemologies. A multi-method evaluation of four locally built Nigerian AI tools (ChatJourno, Dubawa Chatbot, ChatVE, and MyAIFactChecker) combining walkthrough usability tests with 15 journalists and developer interviews assesses how homegrown models address this divide (Elega et al., 2026). While solutions like Dubawa Chatbot demonstrate effective WhatsApp integration for verification, others suffer from data limitations and feature instability, highlighting that overcoming the "AI divide" (de-Lima-Santos & Jamil, 2024) requires sustained technical functionality alongside decolonial intent.

The postcolonial critique extends into European media ecosystems. De Cooker et al. (2026) evaluate articles published across European-Dutch and Caribbean-Dutch newspapers between 2015 and 2025, revealing a structural asymmetry across these regions. European-Dutch media almost entirely ignore technological developments and local expertise in the Dutch Caribbean islands (Bonaire, Curaçao, Sint Maarten), treating

AI strictly as a product originating from Northern technology hubs. Conversely, Caribbean outlets frequently report on European policies, reinforcing a unilateral flow of epistemic authority.

In Latin America, Ferrer et al. (2026) examined the representation of social robots across 400 news items, demonstrating how embodied media portrayals act as cultural translators. In regions where direct public access to advanced robotics is scarce, news coverage heavily relies on corporate and scientific sources from the WEIRD nations, framing automated systems through narrative tropes of care, laboratory research, and technological assistance.

3.3. Journalistic Agency, Layered Boundary Work, and Bounded Craft

Despite structural and algorithmic pressures, the contributions in this thematic issue firmly establish that journalists in marginalized markets are not passive victims of automation. Instead, they actively exercise professional agency by constructing, defending, and negotiating professional boundaries.

Analyzing the Chinese market, Kuai and Karlsson (2026) proposed a layered model of boundary work operating across three dimensions: (a) task—confining AI to peripheral, low-risk routines (e.g., audio transcription, translation, copy-editing, video formatting) while strictly prohibiting machine involvement in core editorial judgment, investigative synthesis, and moral evaluation; (b) discursive—justifying selective adoption through narratives of productivity while framing human journalists as irreplaceable "meaning-makers" who possess affective warmth, political sensitivity, and ethical accountability; (c) structural—embedding AI as a governance infrastructure that automates compliance checks against politically sensitive keywords, thereby aligning newsroom workflows with state regulatory mandates.

This structured negotiation is echoed in Gërguri et al.'s (2026) multi-country study across Southeastern European and Mediterranean markets (Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey). They revealed a persistent conflict between market-driven demands for technological speed and professional logics centered on verification and autonomy. Balkan journalists deploy defensive boundary work when automated tools hallucinate or fail, reasserting that core journalism requires a "human touch," while utilizing adaptive boundary work to enlist AI as a subordinate writing and research assistant.

In Malaysian and Indonesian media contexts, evidence reveals that AI adoption leads to bounded journalistic craft (Prawira et al., 2026). In a comparative study of six Malaysian news organizations, journalists restrict AI to routine tasks, discovering that automated systems redistribute instead of diminishing newsroom labor (Gong et al., 2026). The manual labor required to cross-check hallucinated background claims, re-prompt algorithms, and verify synthetic text creates verification drag; an additional operational burden that consumes time otherwise saved by automation.

Similarly, an examination of 20 Indonesian television journalists demonstrates that broadcast professionals do not view AI news anchors or automated editing tools as existential threats. Instead, Indonesian TV journalists defend human authority over field reporting, emotional resonance, and investigative gatekeeping, framing AI as an auxiliary tool (Setianto et al., 2026). Similar findings were found in China, where AI is seen by journalists as a "walking stick," confining AI to routine, operational, and low-risk functions, such as audio transcription, translation, copyediting, basic data processing, and short-video formatting (Wei, 2026). In Brazil's major media

organization, Globo, GenAI tools induced uncertainties across macro (ecosystem), meso (organizational), and micro (identity) levels, illustrating how journalists deploy practical coping strategies to maintain professional stability amid technological disruption (Paladino et al., 2026).

3.4. Governance, Transparency, and Curriculum Reform

The final cluster addresses how newsroom policies, societal transparency expectations, and educational institutions adapt to the rise of AI. Investigating stakeholder perceptions of GenAI usage disclosure in Kenya through interviews across six stakeholder groups (audiences, journalists, policymakers, influencers, educators, and IT experts), Zhang et al. (2026) identified a "double-edged sword effect." While policymakers, educators, and news audiences strongly demand mandatory AI labeling to preserve public trust, practicing journalists express deep concern that explicit disclosure labels undermine the perceived authenticity and credibility of their reporting. Kenyan journalists fear that public mistrust of automation will cause audiences to dismiss human-guided, AI-assisted stories as "synthetic" or "less human," creating a complex governance dilemma for newsroom managers.

Addressing the pedagogical angle, Yang et al. (2026) analyzed how journalism education across ten leading BRICS universities (in Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) adapts to AI. Employing latent Dirichlet allocation topic modeling on university syllabi alongside 15 educator interviews, the authors identify two dominant curricular modes: (a) specialized AI tracks—standalone courses focusing on computational techniques, algorithmic analysis, and media automation; (b) embedded modular provision—integrating short AI modules into pre-existing data journalism, digital reporting, and media ethics courses. The study also highlights the implementation hurdles across BRICS institutions, including institutional and governance lag, severe faculty training deficits, and an absence of formal policies governing student AI usage. To address these disparities, the authors propose a non-WEIRD, future-oriented pedagogical model that front-loads AI ethics, emphasizes social justice, and prioritizes open-source, low-resource technical tools to ensure educational sustainability.

4. Conclusion

This thematic issue shows that studying AI in marginalized media markets is not a matter of filling regional gaps in a map drawn elsewhere. It changes the questions we ask. Where Western scholarship often asks whether AI will replace journalists, the contributors here ask who controls the infrastructure, whose data trains the models, who pays for subscriptions, who bears the cost of verification, and whose futures AI coverage imagines.

Several directions follow for future research. We need more comparative designs that move beyond single-country studies and connect individual attitudes to political economy, regulation, and sovereignty. There is a need for organization-level studies of governance, since many newsrooms still lack written AI policies (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2025). Audience and community research is also necessary, especially in local and community media ecosystems, where AI's implications for democratic participation are most direct. We also need studies of locally built AI and of the languages and datasets that would make such tools useful. Finally, journalism education deserves sustained attention, because curricula will shape how the next generation negotiates AI.

We hope this thematic issue helps decenter the study of AI and journalism, not by adding the margins as case studies, but by recognizing that much of the world's journalism is made there.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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